

# Inkshed

---

A Canadian newsletter devoted to writing and reading theory and practice.  
Volume 4, number 3. May 1985.

---

## Inside Inkshed

Rick Coe	The New Rhetoric: Subverting Linear Structures Once Again	1
Jim Reither	Notice	4
Rick Coe	The Process Approach: Some Negative Strictures	5
Murray Evans	Cohort Report	8
John Oster	COTE 1985: "Post-Secondary Stream"	9
Susan Drain	WIN: Year-end Wrap-up	10
Patrick Dias	On Writing Competency Testing-- Response to Susan Drain	11

---

It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions.

Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*  
(Princeton, NJ: Princeton U P, 1979) 12.

# *Inkshed*

43. May 1985

## Editor

**James A. Reither**  
St. Thomas University

## Copy Reader

**Russell A. Hunt**  
St. Thomas University

## Consulting Editors

**Chris Bullock**  
University of Alberta

**Richard M. Coe**  
Simon Fraser University

**Susan Drain**  
Mount St Vincent University

**Murray J. Evans**  
University of Winnipeg

**Michael Moore**  
Wilfrid Laurier University

**Anthony Paré**  
McGill University

*Inkshed* is published six times during the academic year, supported financially by St. Thomas University and the voluntary contributions of subscribers. As far as possible, its subscribers have free access to its pages. The following is a schedule of approximate submissions deadlines and publication dates:

20 January, for 1 February  
5 March, for 15 March  
20 April, for 1 May

5 September, for 15 September  
20 October, for 1 November  
5 December, for 15 December

A primary objective of this newsletter is to intensify relationships among research, theory, and practice relating to language, language acquisition, and language use—mainly (but by no means exclusively) at post-secondary levels. Striving to serve both informative and polemical functions, *Inkshed* publishes news, announcements, notices, reports and reviews (of articles, journals, books, textbooks, conferences, workshops); commentaries, discussions of events, issues, problems, and questions of concern to academics in Canada interested in writing and reading theory and practice.

Send materials, inquiries, and subscription requests to

**James A. Reither**  
Editor, *Inkshed*  
St. Thomas University  
Fredericton, NB E3B 5G3

## The New Rhetoric: Subverting Linear Structures Once Again

Jim Reither started *Inkshed* to create dialog--because he believes in dialectic, the eristic process whereby thinkers react to (and against) each others' ideas, thereby creating better ideas than any one of them would be likely to create in isolation.

Well, Jim, you've finally done it: you've published a Thesis that drove me up the wall to Antithesis. I refer to Douglas Brent's 'Composition Teaching: Subverting Linear Structures' (*Inkshed* 3.6 [December 1984]: 1-2). I only hope that my antithesis will not be the end of the dialectic, but that we will sublimate--what a useful word; too bad it isn't in more general use--the conflict between thesis and antithesis. For I believe there is a useful synthesis here (if only *synthesis* is not misunderstood to mean *compromise*, *middle ground*, or something comparably reductive).

I find much to agree with in Brent's negative statements, in his complaints, his antitheses. There is a contradiction between the reality that writing is not a skill which can be broken down into discrete subskills and the pedagogical necessity not to teach everything at once. Our theoretical models of the writing process are inadequate precisely because successful writing processes can vary so much--and the solution is to learn more about modelling complexity, not to stick our heads in the sand. I agree, moreover, that the most important thing I do as a writing teacher is the specific feedback I give students about particular pieces of writing; never have I believed that anything I do in front of the classroom accomplishes so much as the oral and written comments I make about students' papers. (But I accomplish far more in my classes than providing 'a forum for ideas to write about.') And it is assuredly true that most textbooks are filled with overgeneralizations, oversimplifications, and outright falsities (not to mention often being badly written)--and I have taught successful composition courses in which I used no textbook (as I have sometimes cancelled class for several weeks to create more time for conferencing--somehow without getting fired).

I rise to Brent's slogan, 'subverting linear structures,' because I have been attempting in practice to subvert them as long as I have been a professor of rhetoric/composition, and I have been arguing (rather unsuccessfully) against them in print as long as I have been writing about composition theory and pedagogy. (See, e.g., my 'Rhetoric 2001,' *Freshman English News* 3.1 [Spring 1974]; 'Eco-logic for the Composition Classroom,' *CCC* 26.3 [1975]; 'Closed System Composition,' *ETC., A Review of General Semantics* 32.4 [1975]; *Form and Substance* [New York and Toronto: Wiley, Scott, Foresman, 1981], esp. 290-310; and 'Teaching Writing: The Process Approach, Humanism, and the Context of 'Crisis',' in K. Egan, S. de Castell, and A. Luke, eds., *Literacy, Society, and Schooling: A Reader* [New York: Cambridge, in press].) I am, however, against blowing up linear structures without replacing them with something better: there is a significant difference between *supralinear* sophistication and *nonlinear* mystification. Willy nilly, Brent ends up arguing not against linear structures, but against structure. (Let me also make clear that the vigor of my response is not directed at Brent as an individual. On the contrary, I react strongly to Brent because I have heard similar arguments often before.)

Brent argues forcefully for totally individualized instruction. He advocates what seems at first glance a grossly inefficient pedagogy: dealing individually with each student, reducing teaching to *nothing but* response to something that student has written. Logically, this suggests several possibilities. (1) Perhaps it is impossible to make any useful generalizations about writing. (2) Perhaps it is possible to make generalizations about writing, but Brent is either ignorant of these generalizations or incapable of making them usefully to his students. (3) Perhaps Brent's students are either unmotivated or incapable of applying generalizations to their own writing.

The third possibility scares me. Is it possible that many students (including Brent's) have not reached the level of intellectual development that would allow them to apply generalizations learned in class to their own individual practice? If so, this is much more serious than mere "illiteracy." The entire intellectual enterprise collapses and theory becomes useless for those who cannot figure out the particular implications of generalizations. If this is the situation, it is essential that Brent (and other teachers) not surrender to it; rather we must demonstrate to our students how generalizations (i.e., theory) is made practically useful and teach them how to do it. And where better to demonstrate the practical usefulness of theory than in a practical course such as written composition. If this is the problem—that many students have never learned how to take general knowledge and apply it to their individual practice—then we can *and must* solve it. Unless, of course, we have no general knowledge we can articulate.

The second possibility scares me less. It is quite human to slip down the slippery slope from "I can't explain it" or "I don't know how to do it" to "It is inexplicable" or "It can't be done." As I will argue later, Brent would hardly be the first to slip thusly—and, indeed, his position is an advance over earlier versions of this slip. Still, this is a very serious slip for a teacher to make—and one that tends to promote anti-intellectualism by suggesting the uselessness of attempts to generalize (theorize).

Let us examine the first possibility—that it is impossible to make useful generalizations about writing. For, while Brent does not assert this in so many words, his argument collapses without this assumption. And let us remember that the original rhetoricians, the Sophists, have been long vilified over just this issue because Plato misrepresented their assertion of contextual relativity as a denial that significant general truths could be stated and communicated. (Read Gorgias with care and in context.)

Before seeking truth in composition textbooks we should remember I. A. Richards' distinction between mechanical rules, which he denigrates as "the usual postcard's-worth of crude common sense," and the basic principles of how language works, which he defines as the proper substance of rhetorical studies (*The Philosophy of Rhetoric* [London: Oxford, 1936], Lectures 1 and 2). Richards' distinction between reductive rules and valid general principles is to the point here because the run-of-the-mill textbooks many of us find useless—or worse, dangerous—are filled with false or oversimplified rules. One can understand how Brent might look at these rules, reject them, and conclude that generalizations about writing are useless.

As Joseph Williams has demonstrated, even E. B. White doesn't always follow the rules promulgated in *The Elements of Style*. Many textbook writers, as has often been noted, do not follow their own advice even in their textbooks; my favorite example is in *Barnet & Stubbs's Practical Guide to Writing* (rev. ed. [Boston: Little Brown, 1977] 216), which tells students, "Negative constructions are often wordy and sometimes pretentious," and provides these examples:

- wordy: Housing for married students is not unworthy of consideration.
- concise: Housing for married students is worthy of consideration.

On the very same page, in the sentence immediately following a second example, Barnet and Stubbs write, "The following example from a syndicated column is *not untypical*." ([*Italics added.*] Cited by Williams in a paper delivered at the 1980 Conference on College Composition and Communication. These and several other of Williams' examples are reprinted in Coe, *Form and Substance*, 272.) What Barnet and Stubbs do not tell students is how to distinguish contexts in which negative constructions are wordy and pretentious from contexts in which negative constructions create precisely the tone and connotation a writer may want.

Though composition has generally been taught by instructors with primary allegiance to humanistic disciplines, we must remember that the humanists who taught composition did not generally have enough interest in the subject to figure out what a humanistic composition pedagogy might be (unless that meant reading great literature as examples of good writing), and composition has generally been taught as a "mechanical," technical subject. Within this approach, composition is taught formally (i.e., as structure only, not also as process).

Perhaps as a consequence, those revolting against the dogmatism of these "humanists" often fell, as I suspect Brent did, into the antithetical error of denying "the general concept of teaching writing from a textbook, or in any other standardized fashion," of denying, in short, that one can make significant general statements about writing. Faced with textbooks that presented simplistic, decontextualized rules, they did not seek to articulate the complex, context-relative principles that explain, say, paragraphing; instead they argued for intuitive, "right brain" apprehension. They slipped from "We don't know [yet]" to "One cannot know," from "I can't explain it" to "It can't be explained." Not exactly humble.

In evoking this simple antithesis to mark the extremes that define the issue, I am juxtaposing those composition teachers whom James A. Berlin, following Albert Kitzhaber, calls Current-Traditionalists with those whom he calls Expressionists ("Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories," *CE* 44.8 [December 1982].) As Berlin makes clear, these pedagogical positions necessarily involve contrary assumptions about the very nature of language. The Expressionists are personified by Ken Macrorie, William Coles, Jr., Stephen Judy, D. Gordon Rohman, Donald Stewart, *et al.* The Current-Traditionalists are much less well represented in academic journals and on conference platforms, but they are very well represented in the textbooks and may still constitute a majority in the classroom.\*

Richard's distinction between rules and principles gets us off the horns of the dilemma. We need not choose between giving students simplistic Rules or leaving them with no guiding generalizations. Instead of arguing about whether we should teach students to write topic-sentence-first paragraphs, we should agree to help students think about communicating in writing, i.e., to think about persona and readers (which means about psycholinguistics) and about contexts. Writers who understand psycholinguistic principles, who understand how language works when readers read, have a framework for understanding paragraphing (among other matters). Within this framework, they can understand how topic-sentence-first paragraphs can help them keep their writing purposefully focused and why the people who read their writing often prefer such paragraphs. They will also be able to figure out when other paragraphing patterns might be preferable. A principled explanation of paragraphing will help students understand how paragraphs *signal* what Richard L. Larson has called "movements of mind" ("Invention Once More: A Role for Rhetorical Analysis," *CE* 32 [March 1971]: 666.)

Richards' distinction between rules and principles is totally germane to the general direction of knowledge in our century. Until this century, science in particular (and knowers in general) focused on problems that seemed to allow straightforward solutions. As the philosophers of science have it, they focused on problems that did not involve "organized complexity," thus allowing treatment of one variable at a time and unvarying "objective" solutions—facts and rules that did not vary from one context to another. Our basic mode of thinking is shaped by this positivism. But what is a better example of organized complexity than human beings writing? Where are the specific implications of principles more variable from context to context than in human communication?

It takes a certain developed intelligence and experience to understand "organized complexity" and apply a principle correctly. Although the basic principles of how language works are stable, knowable, and articulable, they are not simple and their application varies from

context to context. The latter is what is meant by saying that principles are context-relative. So a fully explicit statement of a principle stipulates how it will vary with changing contexts. A rule, by contrast, is more particular and rigid. So a fully explicit statement of a rule indicates the limited set of contexts in which it applies. Students should understand that any rule is a particular application of some more general and more flexible principle. Instructors should remember that humanism is founded on the egalitarian belief that individuals should understand the principles behind what they do—even if it is possible in certain limited contexts to train them to function efficiently without such understanding. (Cf. Coe, "Teaching Writing: The Process Approach, Humanism, and the Context of 'Crisis'," in K. Egan, S. de Castell, and A. Luke, eds., *Literacy, Society, and Schooling*, [New York: Cambridge, in press], and works cited therein.)

If we look for hard-and-fast rules about writing, we will not find them—because there is something wrong with that looking. If we look for lineal descriptions of the writing process, we will not find them—because the writing process is supralineal. We should not conclude, therefore, that generalizations about writing are impossible: the problem is with our hard-and-fast linear way of looking. Principled generalizations about writing are possible. Our students are capable of learning how to use such generalized principles, applying them appropriately in various contexts. And in teaching them how to do that we will be teaching them not only how to write and think about writing, but also how to think about complexities and contexts—and what could be more practical in our complexly interrelated modern world?

---

\*Berlin is quite right that the traditional approach embodies positivist assumptions about language, assumptions which few people with up-to-date expertise in language studies would accept. His classification of the Expressionists as neo-Platonists is, however, highly questionable (unless one wishes, as some do, to divide the entire intellectual universe into nothing but Aristotelians and Platonists), though his identification of the Expressionists with Emerson and the Transcendentalists more useful. Those whom Berlin calls neo-Aristotelians and New Rhetoricians are numerically less important. Considering the importance of the slogan "process approach," the critical division between Expressionist and New Rhetorical process pedagogies is remarkably rarely discussed or defined. Cf. Knoblauch and Brannon's *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing* (Boynton/Cook, 1983).

Rick Coe  
Simon Fraser University

## NOTICE

/// Jim Reither

This is the last issue of *Inkshed* for the academic year; publication will resume in September (deadline for materials for 4.4 is September 5th). Should you wish to contact me during the summer months, this is my schedule:

- Until 1st May: here in Fredericton.
- 9-14 May: Edmonton, for CCTE 1985 and *Inkshed* II.
- 1st June through mid-August: C/O General Delivery, Aitkin, MN 55431.
- Except 24-28 June: Wyoming Conference on Freshman & Sophomore English.

I can also be reached—and materials for *Inkshed* can be sent—"electronically" via Source ID STJ687.

## The Process Approach: Some Negative Strictures

Sitting before the fire, Kay Stewart, Chris Bullock, and I were musing about Inkshed II, trying to figure out how to make it as good as Inkshed I. Of course, simple reproduction won't work: what was good the first time must be sublated to be good the second time round. Inkshed I found commonalities and togetherness, but many of us left with a sense of unspoken disagreements—perhaps not even clearly articulated in thought—beneath shared vocabulary and commitments. Inkshed II, we thought, should have sharper definitions, reach closer to conclusions and consensus (if only consensus about just where and how some of us differ). Inkshed I ended with a set of questions articulated by Kay, questions most of us can only vaguely remember, but which might focus our task. We do need somehow to focus our efforts, perhaps by defining issues to discuss/resolve or questions to answer.

If I may without jumping the gun, I should like here to articulate some pitfalls to avoid. The terminology of process writing predominated at Inkshed I, and process writing became the topic of Inkshed II. But this terminology that binds us also confuses some issues and papers over some disagreements. Let us, as good rhetoricians, be wary of our words.

Error 1: Those who advocate the process approach often juxtapose it to the product approach. Well, there was nothing called a product approach until after process pedagogies arose. The term product approach is derogatory and shifts our attention to what that approach is not (i.e., not process) rather than defining what it is. Properly termed, the conflict is between the traditional *formal* approach and the recently renewed *process* approach. Although it dabbled occasionally (and inaccurately) in process—what else is outlining?—the formal approach primarily taught good form. It answered, formally, the question, "What is good writing?" Its answers had to do with structure: sentence structure, paragraph structure, essay structure—even the proper structures for term papers, business letters, resumes. The formalists attempted to describe formally the written products they were trying to teach their students to produce. If the proper forms could be defined, then students could be shown where their writing failed to match the forms—and, the formalists hoped, could then correct their writing to create a better match. Unfortunately, most students failed to do this (and consequently often failed to stay in school) because the formalists told them only *what* to do, not *how* to do it. Thus the opening for process approaches—once the declining dropout rate increasing postsecondary participation created a need to work with the students who used to disappear before Grade 11.

The formalists had a falsely static sense of form. They believed, for example, that form and content could be separated. (They ignored—rather than refuting—I.A. Richards' critique of this neo-Classical misconception in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*.) We need a notion of form fitting process. Let me suggest Aristotle's formulation: substance is created when [subject] matter is shaped by form. Information is data made meaningful by being put in formation, by being formed. Without form, there is no substance. Note that in this formulation, there is no content because form is not a container to hold content—it is a shaper. What the neo-Classical formalists called content is in its unknowable 'raw' formlessness titled subject matter; once it has been made meaningful by being formed, it is titled substance.

This *reformulation* allows us to avoid dichotomizing formal and process approaches. We can rather try to answer this question: what is the relationship between form and process? Let me suggest that the answer lies in defining the place of forms in the process so that we can teach students to use forms appropriately in their writing processes. Indeed, when I wrote a textbook, the first half discussed process, the second half discussed forms—and I teach from that book by following the order of the first half while making sidetrips into the second to

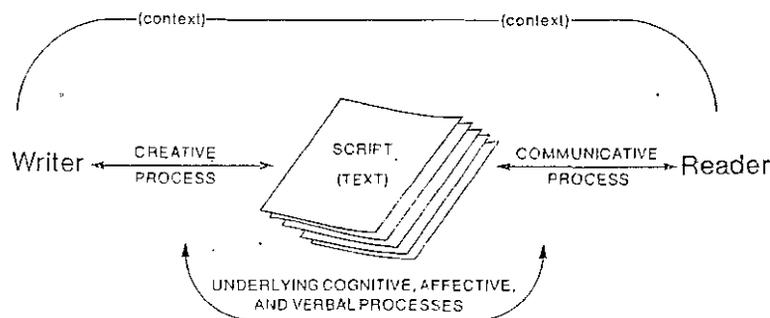
acquaint my students with such forms as they may need when they are likely to need them. But here my main concern is to formulate the question about the relationship of process and formal pedagogies in a way likely to produce meaningful answers. The issue is not form vs. process; the issue is how to describe the relationship between form and process.

Error 2: There is not one process approach; there are many. All process approaches share an emphasis on process. But there are various processes and various process goals.

At the 1984 meeting of the International Federation of Teachers of English, which included people concerned with all levels from elementary through university and from five English-speaking countries, I was struck by the unarticulated conflicts between those committed to process writing as a means of learning, i.e., process writing for its own sake, for its own rewards, and those committed to the process approach as a pedagogy that would more effectively teach students to produce more effective written products. Not surprisingly, the former were led by those concerned with elementary school, the latter by those concerned with postsecondary education. And while few would take either extreme to the exclusion of the other position, the relationship between process writing for its own sake and process writing for the sake of producing better products is a relationship that needs defining.

To define it, we must distinguish a number of processes. Let me suggest that, in addition to the creative process (whereby writers produce writing), there is also a communicative process (wherein writers communicate, effectively or ineffectively, with readers), and underlying mental processes (cognitive/affective/verbal). Those concerned with process writing as a means of learning tend to emphasize the creative and underlying mental processes. Those concerned with process writing for its worldly uses, tend to emphasize the creative and communicative processes (and, indeed, try to build an awareness of the communicative situation into the creative process). As humanist educators charged with teaching a practical subject, we need to consider the proper relationship of these emphases.

#### THE PROCESS APPROACH

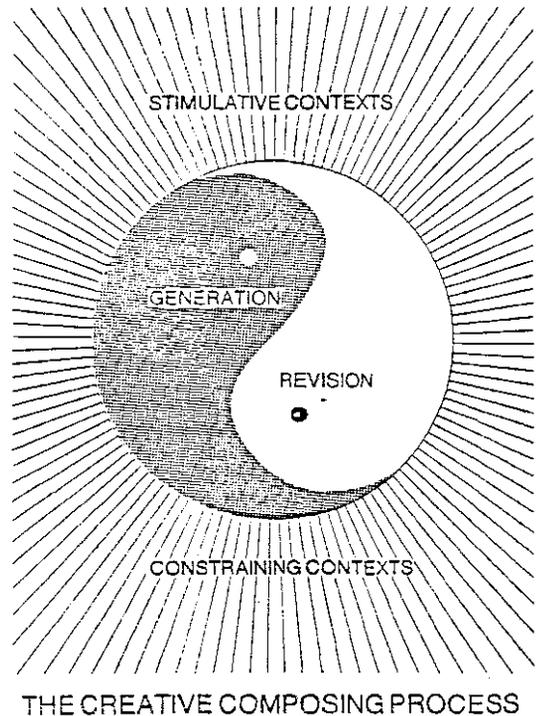
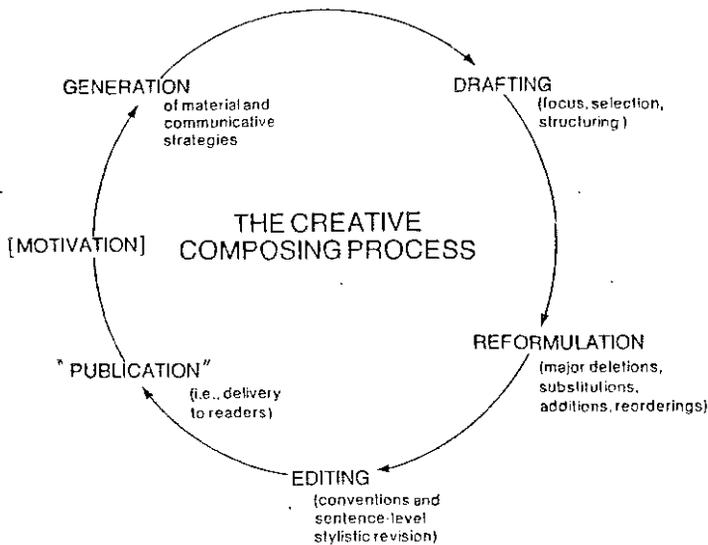


The teaching process involves *intervening* in the various processes surrounding and underlying the writing

Error 3: Let us not think that linear structures are easily subverted by those educated in our linear society. To say *nonlinear* is to beg the question. To say *supralinear* is a step in the right direction, so long as we can define and explicate supralinear processes. Even to say recursive may be to say nothing if it leads to diagrams that Douglas Brent aptly describes as reminding him "of an octopus eating a plate of spaghetti." (*Inkshed*, 3.6: 1.) For if recursive

means that writers may jump at will, to and fro, from any stage of the process to any other stage—then the stages are not really stages, just pedagogical conveniences, and recursive becomes a sneaky intellectual term that allows us not to admit we cannot describe the process. Let me suggest that supralineal processes cannot be described by lines, no matter how often the lines are allowed to loop back upon themselves.

The problem is how to describe a process that must conform to real constraints, but need not (so long as it does conform to the parameters defined by those constraints) occur in any particular order, a process that is equi-final and multi-final (i.e., one that can get to its goals by various paths and can achieve its goals through a variety of outcomes), a process that is stochastic (i.e., often goal-seeking rather than just goal-directed or even goal-oriented). This is considerably more difficult than writing a process paper about how to change a flat tire.



If we are to subvert lineal structures, we must radically reconceptualize process description. (And that is a task as radical for us as much of what we ask our students to do is for them.) I have attempted this radical reconceptualization in *Form and Substance* (New York and Toronto: Wiley; Scott, Foresman, 1981), pp. 290-310, and I still believe in the usefulness of my reformulation; but my point here is the broader point, that a radical reconceiving of process description is a prerequisite to successful description of the writing process(es).

Well, three is a magic number, so I'll quit. If I have been negative, it is because I believe in the positive uses of antithesis. Freedom, after all, is the recognition of necessity—and that's Hegel, not Orwell, speaking.

Rick Coe  
Simon Fraser University

## Cohort Report

/// Murray Evans

Over the last few years the University of Winnipeg English Department has offered two kinds of composition half-courses (usually a section each in at least fall and winter terms). English 0101-5 (Basic Composition) is in effect a remedial composition and grammar course which in certain circumstances counts as a credit toward a degree. English 2101-5 (Advanced Composition) varies in its content depending upon its instructor, from a course in advanced usage to one in rhetoric which explores writing in different modes for varied audiences.

This year a new course, "Writing across the Disciplines," has attracted thirty students with backgrounds in English, History, Religious Studies, Psychology, Education, Chemistry, and Business Computing. The course combines units of theory on different kinds of discourse (a la Kinneavy) with workshops and assignments slanted to the students' disciplines or prospective professions.

Recently our Dean of Arts, a psychologist interested in a larger writing programme at the university, has initiated the discussion described below by Maria Turner, administrative assistant in the Dean's Office:

The University of Winnipeg has been looking at various models of writing programs in response to growing concern for the need to improve the written communication skills of the university's approximately 7,000 full and part-time students. A colloquium in January, 1984, organized by English professor Murray Evans and entitled "Writing Across the Disciplines: Recent Trends in Teaching Composition and Technical Writing," attracted a sizeable and enthusiastic group representing the Humanities, the Sciences, and the Social Sciences. Subsequently, a Report on Writing Programs at North American Universities was prepared by the Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences and distributed to all departments for information and comment. The Report, which includes examples of writing programs at large and small, three and four year, public and privately-funded institutions in Canada and the United States, is the first step in providing University of Winnipeg faculty members with background information from which they can begin to discuss the type of writing program that best suits the university's needs and resources. An open forum on Writing Programs is planned for the Spring term.

I expect future Cohort Reports will outline some of the results of these discussions.

~ ~ ~

The process of discovering significance . . . has about it an inexhaustible energy that forever denies closure, while the texts that derive from it are static artifacts, complete but flawed, permanent but merely historical, left behind as the writer proceeds to further discourse in search of a more satisfying or more comprehensive rendering.

C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon,  
*Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing*  
(Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1984) 62.

## CCTE 1985: "Post-Secondary Stream"

John Oster, Program Chair for this year's CCTE Annual Conference (Edmonton, 9-11 May), has contributed the following list of "Selected Sessions of Interest to College and University Teachers." He points out that "In addition to sessions directed specifically toward college and university teachers, this list contains some general interest sessions and some sessions directed to senior high school teachers but of interest to college and university teachers.

### Thursday, 9 May

Donald Murray, "Hearing Unheard Voices"  
Nan Johnson, "Classical Rhetoric and the Teaching of Composition"  
Amanda King, "Critical Voices: Students' Reading Response Journals"  
Ina Remenda, "Voice of Research: Curriculum Implications of Research in Student Writing"  
Sally Shrofel, "Language and Argument"  
Anni Adams, "From Empathy to Dissection: What Are English Teachers Concerned About?"  
Andrea Lunsford, "The Theory and Practice of Collaborative Writing"  
Anthony Paré, "Speaking-Writing Relationships: Implications for the Classroom"  
Ken Watson, "Recent Australian Research in the Teaching of English"  
Elana Scraba, "Province-Wide Exams": What Have We Done? What Have We Observed?"  
W D Valgardson, "Creative Writing and Cooperative Education"  
Laurence Walker, "The Information Curriculum: A History of Grammar Teaching in Alberta"  
Anne Tayler, "Teaching the Long Poem: Author's Voice and Coherence"  
Deanne Bogdan, "Remedial Metaphor 1A: Literature as a Basic Skill of the Imagination"  
Nancy Carlman, "Topic Choice: There Failure Lurks"  
David McNeil, "Write More, Mark Less--A Practical Approach to Teaching Writing"  
Roy Bentley, "Finding Our Own Voices"

### Friday, 10 May

Anthony Adams, "Talking and Writing with Microcomputers"  
Ken Watson, "Mixed Ability Grouping in English: Research and Practice"  
Florence McNeil, "When Is a Poem?"  
Clive Jolly, "A Visual Approach to Literature"  
E Plattor, B Winn, & R Paulet, "Teaching Language Arts thru Teleconferencing with Telidon"  
Michael Martin, "Teaching Style: How You Teach, Grade, Interact"  
Tom Gee, "Grade 12 Drafting and Revising Processes"  
Stephen Tehudi, "Interdisciplinary Inquiry: The QUEST"  
Susan Drain, "But Is it Any Good?": Evaluating a University Writing Competency Test"  
Neta Dyck, "Historical Sources to Theatrical Event in Reaney's Donnelly Trilogy"  
Glenn Martin, "Symbol and Symbiosis: Why Funny Things Are So Serious and Vice Versa"  
James Marino, "The Personal Essay on Television"  
Alberta Nokes, "From Page to Stage: Teaching Shakespeare"  
John Martyn & William Boswell, "Workshopping: The Only Way to Go"  
Judy Segal, "A Rhetorically-Based Curriculum for Teaching Technical Writing"

### Saturday, 11 May

David Dillon, "Voices in Literature: Becoming Oneself"  
Monica Hughes, "Demystifying Science Fiction"  
Joe Belanger, "Revision and the Computer: Teaching Students to Ask Questions"

Marion Crowhurst, "Persuasive Writing by Sixth and Twelfth Graders"  
Anthony Adams, "Community Schools"  
C Bullock, M Kowler, & K Stewart, "Suggestions for Helping Students Write on Literature"  
James Forrest, "Some Problems in *Hamlet*"  
Robert Paulet & Thomas MacNeill, "Editors' Perspectives on Sharing Ideas in 1985"  
Patrick Dias, "Non-Directive Teaching in the Poetry Class"  
James A Reither, "Workshop on Evaluating Composition Textbooks [An Experiment]"  
Stan Straw, "Proposed New Directions for *English Quarterly*"

John would also like us to know that the conference will feature readings by Lorna Crozier, Monica Hughes, Patrick Lane, Florence McNeil, and W D Valgardson.

## WIN: Year-end Wrap-up

/// Susan Drain

The Writing Instructors' Network of Halifax (WIN), which first got together at Mount Saint Vincent University in the fall of 1984, has met for the last time for the present academic year. WIN's goal is to bring together teachers of writing in the Halifax area to share concerns, trade notes, and benefit from one another's expertise. Obviously, this task is the more difficult in that we represent many institutions, live under different schedules, and are separated by the peculiar geography of Halifax. Nevertheless, our fortnightly meetings have consistently drawn a keen group of participants, though rarely the same group twice running, as both meeting times and places have varied. Discussions have ranged from the general to the very specific, from the theoretical to the highly pragmatic. Very often, we just learned about what others were doing in the classroom, and about the institutional and theoretical contexts in which they were doing it. Our liveliest sessions were, perhaps, those in which we anticipated the theme of INKSHED II: "What do we mean when we talk about process?", and those in which we wrestled with the implications of audience in the sometimes make-believe world of the classroom.

Next year's meetings will be co-ordinated by Fred Holtz of the English Department of Queen Elizabeth High School, Halifax. Approximately twenty founding members are on our mailing list; anyone interested in participating is warmly invited to contact either Fred or me. We will ensure that you receive information forthcoming in the fall.

If WIN served others as well as it served me this year, it fulfilled its purpose. Being a good teacher of anything is a challenge; teaching writing must be among the hardest challenges of all. More than once I have used ideas from my WIN colleagues, drawn on their moral support, and bounced new ideas off them. I thank them all here. In addition, a special word of thanks to Denny Blouin, who never missed a meeting, always was enthusiastic, often shared his materials, and whose prodding, I think, was what got WIN going in the first place.

> > >

The natural tendency of discourse is to explore, to progress from what is known to what is not yet known.

C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon,  
*Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing*, 72.

## On Writing Competency Testing—Response to Susan Drain

I hope Susan Drain will forgive me if I use her discussion of writing competency testing (*Inkshed* 3.4: 5–7) to sound a gentle protest. Drain's discussion displays in some places the ambivalence many of us feel about the place of competency testing in Canadian universities. When I recall some of the arguments and the rhetoric that have led to the adoption of such testing, I cannot help thinking that such policies were intended primarily to placate vocal but unfortunately ill-informed proclaimers of an illiteracy crisis. Although there has never been enough public debate about the validity of such tests, we nevertheless seem occasionally to have bought into the notion that to have set up a screening mechanism is to have taken a vital step in stemming the tide against mediocrity, etc. Even among enlightened members of English departments the argument seems to be: Until "they" come up with better tests, we will have to make do with the writing competency tests we now have, no matter what.

Taking writing competency testing as a given propogates claims such as the one Drain cites: "Testing raises student awareness of the importance of good writing" (5). It is a claim that would justify any kind of testing. Shouldn't we be protesting loudly that students write badly for reasons other than that they don't value good writing?

Drain recommends that if standards are to be established they must relate to expectations students must meet at the first-year level and not to an outside reference point. Such a recommendation is commendable if one accepts the argument that standards need to be established. But surely there are standards! My own experience is that standards, if they are worth anything, are indefinable. One can point to instances of their being met, but when one proceeds to define them the definitions are inevitably reductive and trivializing. What we end up buying aren't standards but insistencies on format and surface structures. Susan Drain speaks of "evaluation based on real standards". I do not wish to be entirely dismissive; I believe we should ask ourselves where these "real standards" are to be found and what they represent within the context of admission tests. And contexts, we continue to be reminded, are powerful determiners of how language is used.

Patrick Dias  
McGill University

♪ ♪ ♪

Many writing teachers still believe, or at least appear from their practice to believe, that ideas exist prior to language, that the content of a discourse is wholly independent of its form, that knowledge is fixed and stable, the possession of a master who passes it on to students, and that writing is largely a ceremonial activity. The artificial progression of stages, which many teachers recommend, from selecting a subject to finding a thesis to building an outline to "fleshing it out" with prose, surely implies that writers first assemble and arrange ideas before clothing them in a suitable language—that ideas are found, somehow, outside language and then shaped into discourse.

C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon,  
*Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing*, 24.