A BASIC COURSE IN FRESHMAN COMPOSITION

Aims:

1. To increase the student's confidence as a writer,
   a) by at first rewarding whatever partial success his writing may show, then demanding gradually stricter and stricter adherence to the conventions of composition,
   b) by emphasizing training before writing rather than condemnation afterward

2. To enable him to write more clearly and correctly

3. To help him understand that in a composition he is addressing an audience and that by his choices he creates a speaking voice

Part I: The Sentence

Aim: To help the student learn to write sentences logical in structure, idiomatic in phrasing, clear in order. Emphasis in correction will be on the sentence.

First Week

Class 1: Each student to write and revise one sentence; discussion of these sentences from the board

Assignment: To find and bring to class several well-phrased sentences from books, magazines and newspapers

Class 2: Discussion of several sentences from the assignment

Practice in the reduction of tautological sentences

Class 3: Introduction to précis writing

Group work on a précis for practice

Assignment: A one-sentence précis of a short paragraph

Second Week

Class 1, 2, and 3: Discussion of assigned précis

Assignment of a short paragraph for the third week

Third Week

Class 1: Discussion of sentences in several of the assigned paragraphs

Discussion also of whether the sentences flow logically from one to another

Introduction of the sentence patterns of transformational grammar

Assignment: To each of the basic sentence patterns add words to make sensible, interesting sentences
Class 2: Discussion of student sentences

Class 3: A class paragraph using as many of the basic sentence patterns as possible but filling them out with qualifiers. This can be a workshop session with students getting advice from the instructor.

Fourth Week

Class 1: Return of student paragraphs for revision. Language problems to be solved by dictionaries; students to have dictionaries in hand and to practice using them.

Class 2: The chief mechanical problems of the class to be discussed from the handbook. Students to have handbooks in hand and to practice finding solutions and answers.

Assignment: Each student to receive a slip of paper with point named on it within a half mile of the university; he is to write the directions for getting from the Cathedral to that point.

Class 3: Each student to read his set of directions without naming the destination; the class will tell him where they think he has taken them.

Fifth Week

Class 1: Building sentences by the Christensen method (see College Composition and Communication, XIV (October, 1965), 155-51 or ask for a copy of the article in 501B).

Assignment: Five sentences written after patterns from the Christensen article.

Class 2: Discussion of student sentences

Assignment: Five sentences written with additions.

Class 3: The importance of word order in the English sentence; the relation of sentence pattern to meaning. Discussion of a variety of sentences from professional writing.

Assignment: A one-paragraph theme.

Sixth Week

Class 1: Discussion of student themes, especially of the relationship of various sentences in them to the context and the relationship of the structure of some sentences to the idea in them.

Class 2: Introduce the idea of a speaking voice in all writing. Consider the part of diction and sentence structure in creating the speaking voice.

Assignment: Two short papers on the same subject, each with a different speaking voice.

Class 3: Discuss students' themes.
Seventh Week

Class 1: Denotation and connotation and the speaking voice

Assignment: collect five or six words of differing connotations for each of five or six objects; example: mansion, house, home, shack, hut, pad

Class 2: Class writing to create a particular speaking voice - approximative, sarcastic, impersonal, tender, enthusiastic, and so on

Assignment: Study the dictionary and speaking voice in several advertisements; clip them and bring them to class

Class 3: Discussion of diction and voice in the assigned ads and of the words assigned for Class 1

Part II: The Paragraph

Aims: To develop in the student a sense of coherence; to improve his skill in developing the general by specifics and to bring him to an understanding of the relationship between the two

Eighth Week

Class 1: Analysis of sample paragraphs for coherence and specific development

Class 2: Presentation of the relation of the specific to the general; practice in adding specifics to the general and in stating the generalization for a group of related specifics

Class 3: Predis of a paragraph and discussion of the paragraph's flow of ideas as they move from general to specific and back

Assignment: A one-paragraph theme developing a general statement by specifics

Ninth Week

Class 1: Analysis of paragraphs by the Christensen method (See College Composition and Communication, XVI (October, 1965), 144-56 or get dittoed copy in 501E)

Class 2: Group composition (on the board) of a paragraph after the pattern of a paragraph sample in the Christensen article

Assignment: a one-paragraph theme

Class 3: Analysis of several student paragraphs by the Christensen method

Assignment: a multi-paragraph theme developing a generalization by specifics
To teach the student to develop a central point by related paragraphs and to keep the chief idea flowing smoothly by transitions and clearly related theme sections

Tenth Week:

Class 1: A tour of the library

Class 2: Group work in the library to investigate a common topic; the instructor present to help

Assignment: Summaries of two articles on the subject with a footnote and bibliographical item for each; for pattern, the student should check the research section of his handbook.

Class 3: Class writing of summaries of each other's themes from the preceding week

Assignment: A multi-paragraph theme based on further reading about the subject investigated in the library. At least one footnote and one bibliographical item required. Ask to have some of these themes written on dittoes and turned in early enough to be run off for the next class.

Eleventh Week:

Class 1: Class discussion of dittoed themes for coherence, especially for transitions; also for development of the general by the specific

Class 2: Class writing of the first draft of a multi-paragraph theme

Assignment: Revision of the first draft

Class 3: Discussion of several papers from the assignment

Twelfth and Thirteenth Weeks

Students will work from a set of writing assignments, moving from each one to the next only when he has satisfactorily revised. Class sessions will be workshops in which the instructor checks first drafts and revisions. Students should aim to complete as many of these assignments as possible. The subjects should require the development of the general by the specific and should progress from easy to more difficult.

Notes:

2. Consider the value of keeping basic English students reading as well as writing. A book list would be helpful to them. They might keep lists of what they read; no grade for this, but it will indicate their interest in improving.

3. Computer exercises in spelling, sentence completeness, and a few other mechanical matters are now being prepared (spring, 1969). By September, students weakest in spelling probably may be sent to the Learning Research and Development Center for practice on the computer and those with weakness in sentence recognition to the computers on the eighth floor. Please see me to make arrangements if any of your students need this help.

Virginia Elliott