Lit Link Re-thinking research

Helen Raica-Klotz and Gloria Lawler

I have taught freshman composition off and on since 1989. And each semester, I would dutifully accompany my classes to the "library instructional", in which an infinitely patient librarian would lecture the students about the research process, discuss ways to find books and articles, and conclude with a tour of the library.

During this hour, the students would doze, I would grade papers, and at the end, we would all smile gratefully at one another. The students would leave to do their research and, inevitably, when they gave me their papers, I would be shocked at the poor quality of their work. The research presented would be completely incorrect, horribly dated, or simply missing altogether. They would receive poor grades, and I would be discouraged. And so it went.

Until about three years ago. I had come back to teaching after a few years off, and scheduled a library tour for my first year students in composition. During that library instructional,

I found myself putting my papers aside and taking notes as quickly as I could. Firstsearch? Reference Center Gold? Conducting research from your home computer? I had missed a great deal of important information in those few years. And if this information was new to me, I was sure much of it was new to my students as well.

Then it occurred to me that perhaps I was actually going to have to learn new ways of teaching research, new ways that didn't rely solely on a one hour library instructional, but involved teaching evaluation, critical thinking, preparation, and careful note taking. More work.

But worth it. I am pleased to say after working with our librarians at SVSU to prepare my students for the research process, they are more able to find information--good, solid, critical information. And their papers are better too. Learning research strategies is a complex task, but an essential one for first year college students.

Last fall, I asked my freshman composition students after they had completed their research process,

"What do you wish someone had told you about the library research that no one ever did?" I've listed their answers below, along with the ways I have adapted my teaching to help answer some of these issues.

Gloria Lawler, Reference Librarian, has also added her perspectives in response as well. While some of these comments will not surprise you, they are worth considering because they speak to the students' need and desire for information; a need that any instructor should welcome the opportunity to address.

Helen Raica-Klotz's Response:

1. **"I wish someone told how important 'key words' are to finding anything in the library."**
Before the library instructional begins, I now ask my students to create an operational thesis and brainstorm at least six key words centered on their thesis. I use the "four strikes and you're out" rule: if you've tried three different terms and nothing has worked, try one more time. Then, and only then, give it up and ask for help.

2. **"I wish the library would make up a guide sheet for using all these different databases. They are so confusing."**
Yes, this would be nice. Unfortunately, because so many new databases come into the library every year, it is difficult to create a guide sheet for every one.

This is one reason why the library instructionals are so important for the students and the instructor. Students need to be prepared take notes, ask questions, and participate in the demonstration of the various
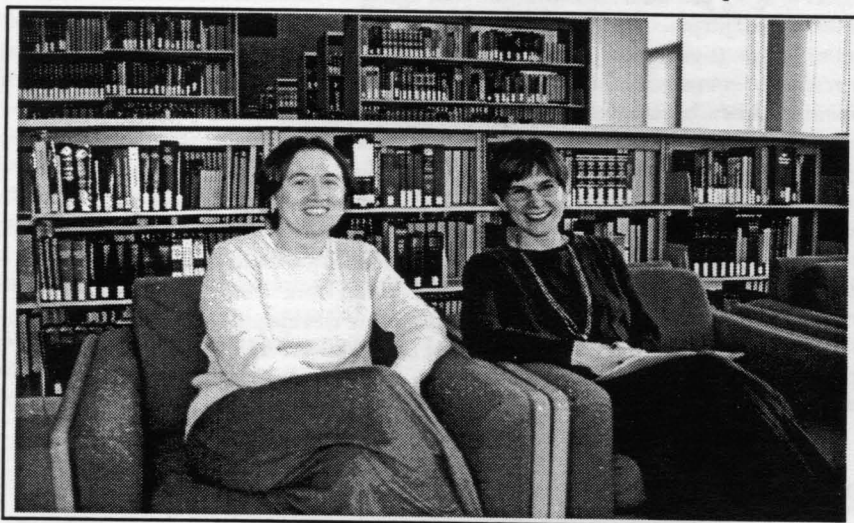
Lawler and Raica-Klotz take a break from discussing library research.

Evaluating writing assignments

Diane Boehm

*A*t a recent conference, you heard someone talk about an interesting writing assignment. You can't remember the details about the assignment, but decide to fit it into the course schedule. When the assignment is turned in, you are so frustrated and disappointed with the papers that you decide never to use assignments like this again.

Creating good assignments is one of the most vital elements of good teaching. When we create course writing assignments, we generally have two goals:

-deepen students'understanding of course content
-develop students' ability to write effectively in specific contexts.

Often, however, we cannot tell whether our assignments will accomplish these goals until we see the final results; then, if they have not, it's too late.

Many Writing Center conversations with student writers have convinced me of an obvious truth: the clearer and more engaging the assignment, the more writers will be motivated to do good work!

I find it helpful when I am constructing assignments to go through a mental checklist about the assignment:

1. How does this assignment help students achieve the goals for the course? And how will I communicate that purpose to the student writers so *they* know why they are writing?

When I assign a causal analysis paper, for instance, I explain how this paper is linked to a critical thinking objective in the course: *Causal analysis is a common mode of critical thinking, often used in problem-solving or decision-making (e.g., "If I do this, how will my parents react?" or "What could I have done differently to head off the dilemma I'm in?"). Subjects which lend themselves to causal analysis include social issues, legal questions, and ongoing debates within a field (e.g., does class size*

affect student learning?) Be careful to avoid overwhelmingly huge topics (e.g., the reasons the Cold War ended); also avoid oversimplification of causes or effects (e.g., raising the salaries of elected officials will result in higher caliber people in those offices).

2. How can I make this assignment "real" to student writers?

As one student writer recently reminded me, "Nobody in the real world writes term papers!" Assignments which are problem-based or situation-based, rather than topic-based, generate the best writing; they make the paper more interesting to write.

One way to make an assignment "real" and relevant is to have student writers write for an audience other than the teacher. If students were studying aging, for example, which assignment would more likely engage them?

a) *Choose some aspect of aging, analyze it, and write a 10-page term paper; 5 sources required.*

b) *Your grandmother is dealing with many aspects of aging; the extended family will gather in a month to make some decisions about her situation. Because you are studying this topic in college, family members have asked your advice about the situation. Your family's attorney has also requested a copy of your analysis and recommendations. Research an aspect of aging you would like to know more about, and prepare a recommendation to your family, based on your research. Inform your thinking with a minimum of 5 authoritative sources. (See syllabus for paper guidelines).*

3. Given previous assignments in the course, what abilities and experiences will student writers already bring to the assignment, and which writing strategies will I need to teach?

When I assign a researched Opposing Viewpoints paper, for instance, I know students will have

Boehm

learned previously how to evaluate sources; how to provide supporting evidence for points of discussion; how to cite references. I will need to prepare students to write this type of paper by teaching how to

-structure a paper with this purpose, and signal that structure to the reader
-present opposing viewpoints without bias
  -integrate source materials while maintaining the writer's voice.

Most often, I will design a class activity (e.g., an online debate, or a rebuttal to an argument) which allows students to "rehearse" the kind of thinking and/or writing which the assignment demands; this class activity is usually built on readings which investigate controversial issues.

4. What criteria will I use to evaluate the paper? Are those criteria clearly identified within the assignment?

Writers have a right to know how their work will be evaluated; clear criteria also guide student writers to present their information effectively. If students are writing a persuasive essay in which they must refute opposing arguments, I need to make that clear within the assignment--and be sure students know how to do it.

In the paper investigating an aspect of aging, evaluation could be based on required aspects of the paper:

-Review, in everyday terminology, the aging problem your grandmother faces
-Explain, based on research, the implications of this problem
-Make a recommendation, supported by research, about what the family should do.

5. What time line will assure adequate development for this type of assignment? How can I structure the assignment to be sure student

L it ink Linking ESL and writing

Sue Dyste and Jim Hamrick

Increased international enrollment at SVSU has resulted in increased linguistic diversity in our classrooms. Included in this diversity is a wide range of writing skills. Some international students are proficient writers in a number of languages, including English. Some are experienced writers in other languages, but relatively inexperienced in "academic English." Still others have very limited writing experience in any language. Given this diversity, how can faculty members assist students whose academic writing skills are limited?

This article will suggest four perspectives that have helped us frame our own instruction of non-native speakers of English. These four perspectives—purpose, contrastive rhetoric, coherence, and grammar—can provide a framework from which faculty of all disciplines can make informed decisions about assisting international student writers.

Writing with a purpose

Many international students arrive at SVSU with very limited academic writing experience—in English, or any other language. Furthermore, unlike in the U. S. academic community, many educational systems abroad neither expect nor require writing in which students voice their thoughts and opinions. Therefore, many international students need reinforcement as to the purpose for various writing assignments and direction as to how to achieve those purposes. Is the writing intended to explain a concept? Describe a process? Argue a point? A writer with a clear understanding of her purpose and a clear sense of direction is more apt to produce coherent, purposeful prose. The more explicit information students receive about the purpose, intended audience, and organization

Dyste

of an assignment, the better. Annotated model papers explaining the function of each component can provide the necessary framework for the ESL writer. Once the paper has been assigned, it is also useful to get periodic updates from students—not only to ensure that they are producing work that is consistent with the objectives of the assignment but also to ensure that they are able to break the assignment down into manageable parts.

Contrastive Rhetoric

We all tend to produce writing that imitates what we have read. Consequently, many international students are more familiar with the rhetoric of their first language than with the rhetoric of English, and that first language may have rhetorical patterns quite different from those of academic English. A student whose prose seems overly redundant or didactic, or whose tone seems overly modest or supercilious, may be "translating" rhetorical patterns from his first language into English. For example, when writing in English, Arabic writers tend to overuse coordination, causing their writing to seem redundant and to lack the sophistication gained through the use of subordination. Unfortunately, second language composition specialists propose no "quick-fixes" for this problem, yet providing students with specific composition models (see above) can point students in the right direction. It is important to note, however, that for the ESL writer the problem of contrastive rhetoric can create tensions that supercede the writing process. In some cases, international students find that shifting rhetoric coincides with shifting perceptions of

Hamrick

personal and cultural identity.

Cohesion/Coherence

Some writers produce writing which lacks coherence — writing that lacks adequate situational context or that lacks internal units to "link" concepts and ideas. The reader of an "incoherent" text may ask, "Where did that idea come from?" As do native English speakers, some international students produce writing that seems disconnected or that requires the reader to construct his or her own connections. Again, there is no quick-fix for this problem, but in discussing a student paper (or in marking a paper) it can help to ask "how does this point relate to the previous point?" It can also be useful to suggest using "connecting words"such as *however*, *but, although*, etc., but, unlike native speakers of English, non-native speakers need to know both the grammatical function of the word (e.g. sentence connector, coordinator, subordinator) as well as the word's meaning (e.g. signaling contrast).

Grammar

Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of reading international students' papers involves grammatical errors. Students who are proficient in their "spoken grammar" may struggle with the structures necessary for academic composition. Three factors make it difficult to assist students with grammar. First, for faculty who are native speakers of English, their implicit (as opposed to explicit) knowledge of grammar often makes it difficult to provide useful explanations. Second, the grammatical system of any language is complex, and the formalities and mechanics of written language only add to grammatical complexity. Third, there is the matter of acquisition order — at what

Making Comments Count

Carrie Doll

I often wonder if my students will ever think about the way I grade their papers. On one hand, it would be good if they didn't because it would mean that I am pleasing them. On the other hand, why should I spend so muc time grading papers if what I do isn't going to mean anything to the students?

I am currently student teaching and when my English Students hand in writing assignments, I want each of them to know that I read their work and put thought into it. I try to make comments on all of the papers even if it's as general as "Good idea, Bill." I write legibly and note places where they need improvement. Most importantly, I provide each paper with a personal touch along with a grade.

Doll

I took English 380 (Teaching the Art of Writing) during Summer semester 1999. I was given the opportunity to express my thoughts on grading in place of a final exam. I hope that my thoughts will be beneficial and help others to see the problems too often associated with grading.

"If you're going to teach writing, you need to learn to do it yourself first." This comment once appeared on a paper I received back from a professor. It doesn't seem an A- would accompany such a comment, but it did. A friend of mine had a similar experience when a professor made the overall comment of "duh" on her paper, and gave her an A. Comments like these are not only inappropriate, but completely worthless. They are also part of the reason I ignore, for the most part, the comments professors make on my papers.

In high school, teachers' comments mattered to me, but in four years of college I've learned only grades matter and comments aren't important. As an English major in the College of Education, I have been able to use many professors' comments mainly as examples of what I will *not* do when I am a teacher correcting papers. I realize that writing can be a difficult experience and I will not crush a student's self-esteem, or make them lose respect for me, by responding the way the two professors mentioned above did. I will write legibly. I will grade papers for content. I will get papers back in a reasonable amount of time. I will try to provide my students with comments that will help them and show that I gave their work the consideration it deserved.

The most useless comments professors make are those that students can't even read. Sometimes I wonder if professors make comments that are ineligible on purpose. Maybe they don't really know what they are talking about, but think it looks good to have writing on the paper when they hand it back. I have learned to dismiss such comments. I figure that if the professor really had something important to say about my paper, they would write so I could at least read it.

Another example of poor input is when professors comment about what isn't in the paper instead of focusing on what is. I don't need to read that I didn't mention a character's political side, when I obviously know that already because I wrote the paper in the first place. I would like to know that I am being graded for the way I compared two characters, not for the comparisons I didn't make. The only time a comment like this should be made is when specific details were to be included and some are missing. If the student was given free reign on the topic, these comments are usually unwarranted.

Another reason my attitude about comments changed drastically since high school is because of what papers meant then and what they mean now. In high school, writing was actually taught as a process: students wrote papers, handed them in, got comments from the teacher and could revise. Comments were important because they helped students make the paper better. In college, even though we are constantly reminded that writing is a process, it is not treated that way. Students write papers, get a grade and that's the end of it. Comments don't matter because students are probably never going to do anything with the piece again. Too often, papers aren't returned for two or more weeks. By that time, most students have forgotten what their papers were about, so they're probably not going to pay much attention to what the professor had to say anyway. All that matters is the grade at that point.

I did actually have a positive "red ink" experience in college. I had one professor who complimented students on their work and included their names in the comments. It sounds minute, but it made a big impact on me because it made the comments more personal and I felt the professor was actually taking the time to write to me, not just to scribble something on my paper that I couldn't read. I have adopted this technique when I correct student papers and have also received positive reactions from students.

Students like to know their papers are given consideration by professors, but scribbling something that can't be read or making comments that can't be supported are not the way to do it. Most students put a lot of time into their papers. The time can seem worthless when comments back that don't make sense.

Students have a lot of respect for their professors and they expect the professors to give their work due respect also. When students sense they're not receiving adequate respect, the quality of their work is sure to drop. This result, in turn, brings more negative comments from professors, and the whole process can turn into a vicious cycle. Professors don't appreciate low quality work when they know students are capable of better, and students don't appreciate professors letting them down either. I'm not saying that professors should

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Guiding student writing in the disciplines

Erik Trump

One of my graduate school history professors always opened his undergraduate classes by passing out a fifteen page writing guide — three pages more than the students would write all semester. His guide combined both stylistic and disciplinary ideas about effective writing. On the stylistic side, he recommended the use of short, direct sentences, claiming that "the most beautiful sentence in the English language is 'the cat sat on the mat.'"

On the disciplinary side, he admonished against using the present tense and the passive voice. Historical events, he pointed out, happened in the past and are not more "interesting" when described as though they're happening right now; historians must use the past tense to indicate the sequence of events. Similarly, he argued, because historians study agency (who did what to whom) they must avoid the passive voice, which has the effect of "hiding" actors and making it seem that history, like s___ , just "happens." To emphasize this point, he appended a "D" paper whose cardinal sin was the overuse of the passive voice.

These guidelines were necessary not because his students were bad writers, but because they were bringing to his class a variety of disciplinary writing experiences, many of which were in conflict with the rules for "good" writing in history. The literature major had learned to write about texts in the present tense. The chemistry major had spent two years perfecting the passive voice and scientific vocabulary. The creative writing major was dismayed by the professor's unrefined literary tastes (Hemingway via Dr. Seuss, she mused).

Many of us, I suspect, prepare writing guides for our students because experience has taught us that without such guides, students will write papers that fail to meet our expectations. Fewer of us, however, probably stop to consider how many of our ideas about "good" writing are discipline-specific. For example, the use of "I" is appropriate in some academic contexts, but grates in others. If we teach in one where it grates, we might command: "Do not use 'I' in your papers." We mean "in papers for this course/ discipline," but the student may read this as a universal rule and react with disbelief and disgust when a second professor, from a different discipline, <u>recommends</u> the use of "I" in a writing assignment. At this point the frustrated student is ready to give up on rules altogether.

For the student who does not recognize the disciplinary organization of knowledge and learning, these experiences with contradictory advice about writing can lead to the discouraging conclusion that writing standards are inconsistent and arbitrary, established only by the whim of individual professors. The student copes by learning to ask what a professor "wants," never seeing that those "wants" have patterns, which, if mapped, can help the student negotiate writing across the disciplines.

An effective guide places students' writing tasks for a given class within the context of writing in the relevant discipline. This kind of guide not only demonstrates *how* to write but also explains *why* to write that way.

> "Until we clearly articulate the how and why of writing for our disciplines, we will continue to get student writing that just 'happens.'"

Unfortunately, the guides we produce for our classes often neglect the why part.

One way to address the potential limitations of course-specific guides is to develop departmental writing guidelines for students. The Writing Center is encouraging departments to create such documents. This project began with a faculty workshop prior to the beginning of fall semester in which members of the Criminal Justice, English, Chemistry, Psychology, and Political Science departments began to examine writing in their disciplines. Significant differences quickly emerged. Some differences, such as preferred documentation style, were obvious. Others were more subtle and pointed to the narrow view of "good" writing that one can get from one's own discipline. For example, notions of appropriate evidence and judgments about clear style and language varied greatly among the departments. Even guidelines for an effective introduction differed from discipline to discipline. By highlighting the fact that we often work unconsciously within our own discipline's writing conventions, the workshop indicated how a guide could make those conventions visible for students.

To date, the Criminal Justice and Political Science departments have placed their guidelines on their departmental web sites and linked them to the Writing Center web site. The Writing Center hopes that other departments will recognize the potential value of such guidelines and develop their own.

Until we clearly articulate the how and why of writing for our disciplines, we will continue to get student writing that just "happens." And we don't need the bumper sticker to tell us what kind of writing that may be.

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Language crimes

Lit **L**ink

William Gourd

What follows is essentially a potpourri culled from my vast store of examples of felonious verbalization. A portion of it is a revision of an essay/memo that I wrote in 1997 to faculty members in the Department of Communication (uh, uh—don't touch that "n"; the word is not "Communications") and Theatre and the Department of English in my employing institution. My concerns are with pronunciation, with occasional forays into spelling, and with some of the grammatic larcenies that have gone unpunished in recent North American culture.

Gourd

I shall begin with some brief examples of pronunciation misdemeanors.

The word "parliament," a respectably authoritative word still redolent of the linguistic elegance exhibited by a number of British and American newscasters in the World War II era, has had its second syllable purloined, and has become merely "parlament" in its pronunciation. I have not yet seen printed evidence of the corruption, but I suspect that it is less than a half-decade distant. Similarly, the word "foliage" has become, in many mouths, "folage," and public figures of both political and journalistic stripe can no longer manage the word "subsidiary" without turning it into "subsiderary." (Perhaps I ought at least to be grateful that the five-syllable structure has been retained.)

Evidence of the progression from pronunciation pathology to written wrongs can be seen clearly in the word "caramel," which has nearly universally become "carmel" in both venues. That example is particularly sad, because it illustrates also an appalling general American ignorance of geography: that "Carmel" is a city in California. In one of September's weeks I had completed a brief lecture in my freshman classes on the subject of such linguistic symptomatology, painstakingly (when was the last time

that you heard anyone use the word "painstakingly?" Or the name "Mehitabel?") pointing out to the eager neophytes that it is redundant to say "ATM machine" because to do so is equivalent to saying "automated teller machine machine," and that the device in the cellar isn't a "hot water heater" because hot water doesn't require heating. (A very common local example can be observed in the frequency with which SVSU personnel refer to "the PPC Committee," rather than, correctly, "the Pee-Pee Committee.") I had also, in that memorable polemic, belabored the word that denotes the sweet sticky stuff into which apples-on-a-stick are dipped– the three-syllable word "caramel."

Back in my office, I opened my campus mail and found the menu for the Faculty Association Fall Banquet, the last line of which read "Cheese-cake with a Carmel Apple Sauce." Bravely collecting myself, I sent a tear-bespotted note to Erv Sparapani, knowing full well that the error was not his. Desperation can produce spontaneous and irrational measures.
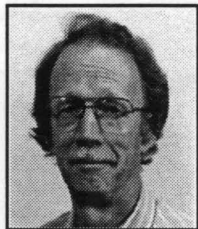
Still another three-syllable word has been lost–"diaper" has become "diper." Some of my students actually seemed thunderstruck (isn't "thunderstruck" a marvelous word? Think for a moment about the difference between "I was thunderstruck! and "He goes like diaper and I go like WO, man!" It renders one positively giddy.) to discover that they have been mispronouncing the word "diaper" for all of their banal and convention-bound lives.

"Multi-billion" has become "mult-eye-billion," as "semi" has become "sem-eye," "quasi" has become "quas-eye" or [ech!] "kwayz-eye," and "alumni" is now "alumn-eye." In that last example we have, of course, eradicated females, because the prospect of confronting the distinctions among (if there are two, it's

"between"; if more than two, "among") "alumnus" & "alumna," and "alumni" & "alumnae," is simply overwhelming for most advertising-conditioned Americans. We have thus far avoided similar conversion of "hemisphere" to "hem-eye-sphere" and of "pedicure" to "ped-eye-cure." Most students in the United States no longer undertake Latin in secondary school, so it becomes utterly futile for fossil professors to point out the Romance roots of many of our words. ("Will that be on the exam?")

We've wrenched the word "hopefully" from its rightful and proud position as an adverb, and made it instead a nonsensed substitute for such expressions as "I hope that . . .," as in "I hope that we'll begin to respect language." The nonsense contemporary version: "Hopefully we'll begin to respect language." We could, of course, in a hopeful sort of psychological mode, begin to respect language and with the insertion of a comma following the word "hopefully," might legitimate the sentence, but we all know that conceptualizing "respect for language in a hopeful mode" is far too complex a construct for the average advertising-conditioned American to entertain, and that the development of such a sentence is therefore most unlikely.

It has been a very long time since I have heard anyone use a sentence in which the word "hopefully" is employed correctly, as in "He gazed hopefully into her shining face." Perhaps we have forgot how to do that. Oops–". . .forgotten how to do that." Indeed, the frequency with which "hopefully" is currently used in American English language sentences is representative of a conspiracy engineered by commercial advertisers, which has as its ultimate aim the reduction of the language to a dozen or so expletives intended principally as enthusiastic product endorsements. It will take a considerable amount of time to achieve that objective, and several intermediate steps must first be accomplished. The first of these steps involves shortening the lan-

guage by employing a number of "umbrella" terms, each of which can be seen as having replaced a large number of previously-useful words.

The new construction of the word "hopefully" is one such "umbrella" term, as is the word "whatever," whose contemporary usage in our language stems primarily from two sources: (1) the television program *All In the Family*, Norman Lear's production which first was broadcast in January, 1971, and in which the character of Archie Bunker popularized the expression "whatever" as a sort of universal dismissive response to utterances by his "dingbat" wife Edith and his "meathead" son-in-law Mike; (2) a popular song entitled "Love Will Keep Us Together," recorded by The Captain and Tennille (Daryl Dragon and Toni Tennille) in 1973, which employed the expression "whatever" as a barely articulate substitute for a spectrum of words and sentences that might more explicitly have represented outpouring of sentimental affection.

Perhaps the clearest example of "umbrella" terms replacing previously-useful words and thereby seriously inhibiting our linguistic facility is the three-word construction "come up with" and its past and future permutations, as in "She wanted to come up with a solution to the problem." That expression has become remarkably ubiquitous in a very short time–its existence in popular parlance is estimated as occupying only the past decade or so– and it has virtually stricken from the lexicon a wonderfully variegated and serviceable assortment of words, as represented by the following minuscule sampling: acquire, align, amass, arrange, assemble, breed, build, cast, collate, collect, compartmentalize, compile conceive, concoct, conduct, configure, construct, create, delineate, denote, deploy, design, determine, develop, devise, direct, display, erect, establish, evince, exhibit, fabricate, fashion, forge, form, found, garner, gather, get, glean, harvest, hatch, institute, introduce, invent, make, make up, manufacture, marshal, mobilize, muster, originate, organize, prepare, procure, produce, provide, raise, rear, register, reveal, round up, scrape up, set up, shape, show, spin, stage, systematize, and trump up.

In these compulsive efforts to

shorten, eliminate, and otherwise diminish the worth of the communicative cornucopia that is our language, we also manage to erode euphony, as in the instance of the conversion of the light and lyrical "Yah-ta-ta" to the ponderous and plodding "Yadda." The expression's original form entered the language with the March 9, 1945 recording by Judy Garland and Bing Crosby of the popular song, "Yah-ta-ta, Yah-ta-ta, Yah-ta-ta (Talk, Talk, Talk)" and remained relatively unsullied until it was abruptly aborted in the 1990s by the introduction, on television's *Seinfeld*, of the corrupt and cacaphonic "Yadda, yadda, yadda."

"It is illegal to help someone kill themself" is a sterling example of another construction that has insinuated itself into American English (is that an oxymoron?) since the mid-1960's when we began to develop awareness of the gender-specificity of our pronouns. In mid-twentieth-century we abandoned the practice of using exclusively masculine pronouns in discourse. We had come from a tradition that had assumed that females were included whenever masculine pronouns were used in contexts that seemed to include both sexes: "It is illegal to help someone kill himself" (and "herself" is assumed). We began to realize that females were not nearly as "included" in the masculine constructions as we had thought. We began to understand that such usage privileged the male sex and established masculine norms as the standard against which both sexes were measured. Research demonstrated clearly that when small children heard such male-exclusive constructions, their imagery was indeed male, and that it did not "assume" or "include" females. We began to understand the fascism of normalized values.

Accordingly, we began to use "him or her," "hers or his," "(s)he," and similar constructions that were purposefully inclusive of both sexes, and we went so far as, in rare instances, acknowledging the traditional male-superior orientation even of "he or she," and so we experimented briefly with "she or he." The latter efforts inflamed the Religious Right, however, and the rest is herstory. We know the extent to which Pat Robertson's minions have infiltrated

local Boards of Education which, in turn, of course, control the extent to which generations of the hoi poloi are exposed to language currants. currents. The result of such fundamentalist fulmination? Americans abruptly abandoned any pretense at making their pronouns gender-egalitarian. In a fraudulent form of self-defense, people began to murmur that gender-egalitarian constructions are "awkward" or "difficult," and as the murmurs increased in both numbers and volume, becoming virtual shouts in selected southeastern industrialized bedroom communities, even Professors of English joined the quisling ranks, alleging that gender-egalitarian constructions are "tedious" –a critical stratagem, as it turned out, considering that "tedium" had, in the late 1950s, been roundly condemned by the MLA and other responsible learned societies.

The extinction of gender-egalitarian pronouns was completed with the election to the U.S. Presidency of Ronald Reagan, and Americans settled in to utter sentences such as "Each person is responsible for monitoring their language usage." I am not they; you are not them; hers is not theirs; yet we hear them constantly, and our students write them, with great regularity and with absolutely no awareness that they make absolutely no sense.

I shall close this paragon of erudition with a fleeting glimpse into a form of grammatical paralysis whose insidiousness derives largely from the difficulty of stopping the progression of speech, once the juggernaut has overcome inertia with its momentum. In order to remedy the following condition, it is indeed necessary to stop, at least briefly, in mid- sentence, so that one can fully recognize the catastrophic consequences of what has just occurred.

I refer, you will shortly see, to the practice of eliminating the word "that" from a variety of sentences, the result of which elimination is that noun forms in those sentences suddenly become direct objects of the sentences' verbs, instead of remaining, as they should, components of adverbial phrases serving to modify the verbs. A judicious selection of examples will illustrate the point.

In the sentence "Several reports

Research

databases during the instructional. I emphasize to my studentsthat, while a guide sheet would be helpful, good notes from the library instructional work just as well.

3. **"How important it is to read through the article before just copying it off. A few nights before the paper was due, I pulled out my research and found out three of my articles weren't even about my topic, even though the title seemed to relate to what I was writing about."**

Teaching critical evaluation is part of doing research. I now ask students to follow four basic guidelines: consider the source, the date, the author's credibility, and the author's use of evidence in deciding whether or not the information is useful.

However, before evaluation can occur the student has to determine whether or not the source is useful and related to their thesis. To evaluate a source's usefulness, a student must read the source first. To facilitate this process, I now require students to turn in a summary of each source they plan to use, along with a brief critical analysis addressing the points listed above before each paper is due.

So many students find their keyword in a title, and look no further than the "print" button. Research is more than gathering information: it is assessing it as well.

4. **"It takes so much TIME! I thought computers were supposed to make research easier, not harder."**

Ah, the magic of modern technology. Most of our first year students have little experience with the joys of finding articles on microfilm, working a fiche reader, or searching through the small text of a paper index, processes that were standard only ten years ago. The computer gives students different ways access find information, yet not all of these ways are quick and easy.

I now emphasize to my students that research--good careful research--takes time, regardless of the search mechanism.

5. **"That you really have to go into the library sometimes to do research - you can't do it all from your computer."**

Most instructors, myself in-cluded, like to emphasize how technology has made this process easier. And yet the computer cannot do everything. It cannot check out a book, find a magazine on a shelf, and browse through the reference section. I ask all my student to conduct their basic research in the library. It is here, not simply on a computer screen, that information exists as well. And so do people who can help.

6. **"The librarians really do help, and you shouldn't feel stupid asking for help."**

Most students agree our librarians are skilled, helpful, and committed. And while it is important to encourage students to askquestions before becoming too bewildered and frustrated, it is also important to clearly outline steps for the students to work on independently, so they can find answers to their own questions.

I now ask my students to complete a library worksheet, which lists the main indexes and databases they should consider in their research process. Only after their own work is exhausted should they ask for help. But then, ask away!

Gloria Lawler's Response:

1. The research process is emphasized in library instruction sessions. A very important part of this process is generating a list of possible search terms. Because various resources use controlled vocabularies, it's imperative that the students have several terms, that way if one doesn't work, they can try another. Also, we discuss cross references, thesauri, and the Library of Congress Subject Headings.

2. The library currently has over 100 databases. We understand that this can be overwhelming. Although we do not have a guide sheet for each and every database, we do have a handout available listing most of the databases and a brief description of what each covers. In addition, when the database option is selected from the Library Main Menu, an alphabetical listing and brief description is displayed for each database.

During the library instruction sessions, we demonstrate how to conduct a search in the databases most appropriate for the class assignment. We make sure that the students realize that although the search strategies are used in most. And, don' t forget to read the "Help" screens!

3. One portion of the Research Process is evaluation. During Library Instruction sessions, we discuss some important criteria for evaluating the information located by the student. A Powerpoint presentation provides students with some tips for evaluating information in various formats (print, electronic, Internet). Also, handouts are available on the evaluation process.

4. Where it's true that computers allow access to a tremendous amount of information, sometimes this can overwhelm students new to researching. Differentiating between online databases, CardCat and the Internet can be confusing. During Library Instruction sessions we discuss the differences between each and what type of information each locates. We also stress the importance of not procrastinating.

In addition to regular Library Instruction, we also offer Internet Instruction. During these sessions, students learn valuable techniques for navigating the web for research purposes. Various search engines are demonstrated and evaluative criteria are provided so that students can retrieve quality information.

5. Most of the services available on our Library Main Menu are accessible from remote locations. We realize that many students prefer to do research from home. However, doing research in Zahnow Library provides the students with various resources not available to them from remote locations. And, nothing can replace the valuable help of a Reference Librarian!

6. Reference Librarians are available to assist students with their research. We realize that students benefit from knowing how to do the research themselves. We do not do their research for them, but we try to help them gain skills necessary for conducting quality research. We suggest, inform them about unfamiliar resources, provide tips for better searching techniques, and, perhaps most importantly, try to reduce their anxiety and frustration.

LL

Evaluating

writers follow a time line likely to create good writing?

If I organize my assignment on the course calendar to reflect the steps students need to take to complete the assignment, writers new to this kind of document can "see" the process they will need to follow. Especially with underclass students, I may require a proposal, a working bibliography, then a draft outline, followed by a brief conference. This allows me to intervene during the process of writing, to coach aspects of writing when students can apply it-- rather than merely commenting as I grade about what I wish the writer had done.

I have learned that when student papers are disappointing, the first place I need to look is the design of the assignment. Only when I am sure *I* have created a clear, cogent assignment am I ready to look at what might have gone wrong with the *student writer* who did not complete the assignment successfully.

Linking

point is a learner of the language ready to acquire a new grammatical structure? These factors have led many language teaching professionals to question the utility of traditional instructional methods (e.g. explanation & drill; error correction).

Our recommendation is to avoid marking all grammatical errors in a student's paper. Instead, consider mentioning a few grammatical problems (perhaps frequently repeated) and draw the student's attention to those errors. Furthermore, linking the error to some functional or semantic aspect of the student's writing is beneficial and instructive.

It is also useful to know that most non-native speakers, unlike native speakers of English, have a measure of familiarity with grammatical terminology — words such as *participials, gerunds, noun clauses*, etc. These terms can be freely used when correcting students' errors or drawing their attention to particular problems.

There are considerable difficulties associated with international students' compositions. International students bring a new set of variables to the matters of designing written assign-

ments, and grading and correcting those assignments.

Considering international student writing from the perspectives of purpose, rhetoric, coherence, and grammar can assist faculty in making better judgments while helping students manage the writing process.

SOME SUGGESTED READING ON ESL IN ZAHNOW LIBRARY:

Fox, Helen. Listening to the World: Cultural Issues in Academic Writing. Urbana: NCTE, 1994. (Call number: PE1405.U6 F69 1994)

Kroll, Barbara, ed. Second Language Writing : Research Insights for the Classroom. New York: Cambridge UP, 1990. (Call number: PE1128 .A2 S33 199)

Leki, Ilona. Understanding ESL Writers : A Guide for Teachers. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1992. (Call Number: PE1128.A2 L385 1992)

Comments

quit making comments, only that they should start making them in more meaningful ways. It may be helpful for professors to try and respond to the author rather than worrying so much about correcting the paper. I commend the professors who are typing out a paragraph to each student and handing it back with papers; this practice is a start in the right direction.

Professors need to work more on grading for content, not for what's missing. Professors need to get work back in a reasonable amount of time, two class periods at the most. Students need to be given the opportunity to redo their papers, not only for a better grade, but for practice in correcting errors. Professors could at least make comments that will be helpful in future papers if they don't allow a revision. I understand that it is difficult to do all of this when there are so many papers to get through, but if that's the case maybe fewer papers need to be assigned with more concentration on each one as part of

the writing process. I hope that professors can learn from their comments just as I have. It would be nice if comments could be put to better use than just examples of what not to do.

Crimes

indicate tall males are perceived as more competent on the job," the absence of the word "that" following the word "indicate" seems to make "tall males" the direct object of "indicate." The sentence does not mean, of course, that "reports indicate males"; it means that "reports indicate that tall males are perceived . . . ." You get the point, I'm sure. When the word "that" is excluded, the auditor or reader of the sentence does a sort of quick "double take" when (s)he recognizes, at or near the end of the entire construction, the actual intent of the sentence. It is a jarring experience.

Another example–perhaps a more critical one, because of the sexual implications that can occur before the auditor or reader arrives at the sentence's conclusion and has experienced that jarring "double take," is the following: "She constantly feels the man next door [Is this woman really forever groping her neighbor? Is this an instance of compulsive sexual harassment of the person across the driveway?] isn't a very congenial neighbor." [By the time we get to the end of the sentence, having again gone through that "jarring double take," we are aware of the sentence's intent to express only her opinion of his neighborliness, and we can be gratefully relieved that she is not a sexual predator.]

And a final example, which I sincerely hope serves to illustrate the mortal danger inherent to such an ostensibly unimportant word as "that": "The high school principal felt all the female students [We should fire this principal immediately!] deserved equal access to athletic facilities." [Oh– OK. Never mind.]

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