

We meet many, in and out of class, who say they hate to write. Of these, a good number will, if pressed, evidence defiance or shame, which they substantiate by saying, "I hate grammar," or, "I don't really know any grammar" (this, often enough, from fluent speakers who are referring to their native language).

In writing classes, we expect to find that "grammar" is a word loaded with confused anxiety. We also know — first from experience and then from statistics in the copious professional literature — that those taught rules well enough to complete grammatical exercises without error do not therefore write either better or more correctly.

So, while we can't by-pass grammar, which our students in one way and we in another perceive as useful information, we know we can't put our hopes for conveying it on rules taught by textbook exercises.

Yet we do not think handbooks of rhetoric or grammar are useless to teachers of writing who have formulated their thoughts on these matters:

- of what whole the handbooks are part;
- in what way they are part of it;
- what other elements constitute the whole;
- what relation handbooks have to the skill and practice of writers;
- and
- what relation their part in the practice of writers has to the work of a writing class.

Ideas or information about these essential matters are not explicit and not always implicit in the many traditional handbooks to which we have had access. Nor, among the many interesting twentieth-century works in linguistics, including grammar, have we found these matters explored for their usefulness to writers or teachers of writing. The first are often remote derivations of nineteenth-century excerpts from Renaissance models; the second are philosophic views of the nature of the mind.

The situation is odd. More and more people reach young adulthood naively ignorant of grammatical systems and nomenclature; more and more sophisticated grammatical systems and philosophies attract the interest of linguistic specialists. The middle ground is fogged. We

must, for now, clear ourselves a workspace on that ground. We survey it as writers and teachers of writing. What we see is not final but primary.

Because grammar is a subject about which few people can assume they agree, let us start with some calming definitions. They are well-known to many, but for many more, unexamined assumptions. We set them forth for the part they have played as we have tried to think through our notions about the place of grammar in the way we teach writing.

1) A grammar (like a rhetoric, a poetic, a logic) is a set of abstractions about a language, drawn from observation of many written and spoken examples of that language. The set of statements is drawn from the unity of a language already flourishing. The language, in the verbal acts of its speakers and writers, comes before the grammar. Grammars may be normative or descriptive or historical. Teachers of writing usually observe some version of normative grammar.*

The abstractions of normative grammar make statements — cast as rules and definitions — about syntax, inflection, and lexicon.

- A. The rules of syntax show the way words are placed to form sentences.
- B. The rules of inflection show the ways the forms of words are changed to exhibit their relation to other words.
- C. The lexicon defines the meaning of words and idioms.

All the statements are about what normally occurs in sequences of English sentences. Correctness, in normative grammar, calls for adherence to this norm.

2) The word grammar is also sometimes used to indicate the power of a speaker or writer to produce at will language structured into meaning, in a variety of sentences that have all the attributes grammarians have found in the language and analyzed out into syntax, inflection, and lexicon. Grammar, construed as this prolific power, is not rulebound but the origin of the material from which grammarians draw their rules and classifications.

*This may be traditional grammar. Or it may be a derivation of one of the speculative descriptive grammars of contemporary linguistics; these differ somewhat, in content and nomenclature, both from traditional grammar and among themselves, and some versions appear also to include hypotheses about the neurology and psychology of those who use language. Our nomenclature is drawn from that traditional grammar which is still in the most wide use in print, in and out of the classroom. What we have to say about the relation of grammar to writing will, we trust, have some application to any set of normative grammatical abstractions.

To teach grammar, it is essential to keep in mind these two very different meanings and their implications. The second meaning, of grammar-power, corresponds to a strength our students have. On it we base our teaching.

In either of the two meanings, grammar is clearly not remedial. Like baking powder, it can't be stirred into the cake after the batter has been poured into pans. We can tell students they have all, or almost all, the grammar-power they need in order to write correct English. We can extol the good use they make of it; we can free their appetite by easing their anxiety about it; in the context of their own writing we can clarify their awareness of it. We can offer them a cookbook of healthy things to do with the language they have. We can also scrupulously distinguish their ignorance of someone's set of abstractions or conventions from their authoritative knowledge of grammar in the sense of power to use language.

Fortunately for us, it's not necessary to know the abstractions of any system of grammar to write or speak English well. Students who are native speakers have mastered in practice all but a few minor details of syntax and inflection and a large part of the lexicon. What many have not mastered, and what is usually miscalled grammar, is use of all the graphic signals, or reader's marks, of punctuation with which a writer's mastery of a language can be confirmed in writing for the benefit of the reader. (They did not learn graphics, as they did speech, at their parents' knees — any more than they did spelling.) So we must also distinguish between graphics and grammar-power.

Unfortunately for us, the usual way to teach the graphics competent writers need is by reference to a normative set of rules for grammar, which few students have mastered. Their ignorance is a handicap both for that reason and because they have become persuaded that their ignorance makes them incompetent in grammar and in writing.

It is also unfortunate that few have learned to write a foreign language well, for historically the mastery of a second language has had as one of its benefits a deepened consciousness of the linguistic structures

underlying correct English forms and syntax and their evidence in punctuation.*

It is from meeting many embodiments of a structure that we intuit knowledge of that structure. Given such knowledge, rules and definitions may at last show their true usefulness, as handy formulations for what is already known intuitively. This applies to the grammar of a language as well as to the shape of a fable.

So, as we decide what to teach writers, we investigate the structures normative grammar proposes and choose the ones that are essential. It is those structures we write and read in class, in the context of writing our literary structures. We produce and listen to them until we develop an intuitive sense of their workings. By then, it's safe to formulate norms and rules which, rising out of writers' grammar-power, are also located in the body of normative grammar. It is in this way that we can mediate in behalf of writers, between their power to generate writing and the demands for control of traditional grammar from other instructors, editors, and the world of business letters, memos, and reports.

To begin with, in class, we try to say a few brief words to confirm our belief in the grammar-power students bring to their writing. Usually, we say something about the order the mind generates through language. Language presents meaning inseparable from structure; that is its property or characteristic quality. When the mind generates its meaning-full structures of language, we may look at the results and perceive, by analysis, elements of a grammar. When the mind uses its imaginative power to generate meaning-full structures of language, we may look at the results and perceive, by analysis, elements of a literature. It is not grammar which is generative, but the mind. What the mind generates is order. The order which the mind generates in language may be discovered, under analysis, as simply grammatical or as at once grammatical and literary. It is with these ideas in mind that we watch for moments in class when we can address ourselves to students' work and, in simple terms, assure them of our confidence in them as potential writers.

*It is bizarre that some people view those whose English is a second language not as gifted but as handicapped by shameful ignorance. Because not all professors of English can write error-free and eloquent papers in Latvian (or Latin) on even the undergraduate level, we admire those few who can. We therefore approach ESL students with the praise due the multilingual. Such respect does not solve, but may keep us from worsening, their problems. It is always inappropriate to assume that others' ignorance is more culpable than our own.

Since ours are courses in writing, not grammar, we limit what we will teach. We have had to decide which elements of syntax, inflection, and lexicon most need to be brought to writers' conscious attention.

We distinguish what we will teach into two parts: one, the conventions of English themselves; the other, the graphics which conventionally convey them in writing.

We teach both together, but make the distinction clear. It's practical, because it's both limited and encouraging. Writers who realize that they have considerable mastery of the hard part are more ready to master the few remaining odds and ends and to learn the graphic system of punctuation according to American conventions. Besides, there are always some who produce graphically correct work before they grasp the abstract rule which governs it.

We want all our students to control all of grammar with authority no less than that of J. Donne, J. Swift, J. Austen, and J. Joyce. That means we must show them how to hold firmly to what they do correctly and to expand their power to do more. As always, we start with what students have shown in writing that they know. We do not teach from rules. We teach from repeated production and enjoyment of whole structures, which students produce, then discern, identify, and define. Correctness is a result of elegance.

Sentences

Since to define something — say, a horse or a house — does not enable anyone to produce it, we can in a writing class stop fretting about the impossibility of defining a sentence. The sentence is to a language what a live myth is to a culture, too pervasively essential at the foundation level to be up for inspection on all sides. A rough, short, working definition will do, for the times when we need it. What we say at those times is that we confirm the presence of a sentence when we see an un-subordinated subject and its verb.

It is as a whole structure that we work on the sentence. At the start of the semester, we announce that since we expect our essays will be written in sentences, we will work toward mastery of that ability to do so which is an exit criterion for our writing course.

We begin paying heed to the whole sentence structure when we are writing aphorisms for fables. We use our recognition-guide phrase, "A

sentence needs an un-subordinated subject and its verb," in looking at the aphorisms we have classified on the blackboard. "Hate is heat without light," Angela has written, and read in her turn. We admire it as a metaphoric sentence, and add that we know it for a sentence because it shows a verb — "is" — and its subject — "hate" — with no subordinating word, like "if" or "when" or "because" in front of the subject. Students who have watched us day after day write up their own sentences, underlining subject and verb and putting a caret to show the absence of a subordinator, have taken one step toward conscious control. They have somewhere to look and something to do, to find the identifying marks.

The marks are further affirmed by our rapid sorting, into boardsful of simple sentences and sentences with coordinate and subordinate clauses, of the aphorisms or other sentences students read aloud. To show coordination of clauses, we identify the parts that could be independent sentences according to the definition. To show subordination of clauses, we call attention to the subordinating words in our samples, and demonstrate both the sense and the graphics of connecting the incomplete enclosure of a subordinate clause to the complete enclosure (or main clause) which orders it. With a few subordinated sentences on the board, we can amplify what our little recognition-guide means, by compiling a list of "subordinating words" from examples of clauses on the board.

We start at this basic level of grammar in classes at all levels. If everyone practices and knows the conventions already, so much the better; we can go on more quickly. But since we require papers to be written in sentences, we need to lay the groundwork for understanding that abstract word, sentences, by concrete exemplification.

All of these efforts are repeated biweekly when we rewrite (see Chapter 10). Where we think it suitable, remarks written on papers we are about to return will include pointing out and naming the parts of successful examples of un-subordinated subject and its verb.

We work primarily to show the strength of the sentence. That is the whole structure we want writers to sense, admire, understand, and make prolific. We do not note its identifying marks in a void. We call attention to them in students' good sentences in the context of students' good writing, since we find that the quickest road to correctness is the roundabout one of aiming for literary excellence. Perhaps in some fabled golden age when all college freshmen wrote well, their instructors used literary anthologies to provide plenty of experience of wonderful

sentences. Today we start close to home and find — in part by expecting them — wonderful sentences in material students can pay attention to because they have written it.

Given the words of such good sentences, we then look to their graphics. All the graphics of punctuation are intended to enhance the reader's sense of whole structures, sentences as well as essays. Graphics we require writers to use correctly are those which point up the wholeness of sentence structure. They are four. Most writers practice and know the first two:

- begin the sentence with a capital letter;
- end it with a period; and
- coordinate independent clauses either by a semi-colon, or by a comma + a conjunction.

We are able to say that, for our course, this comma before the coordinating conjunction is **THE** comma in American English, since it alone announces a fact about the sentence as a whole; it tells the reader that the syntactic weight of unsubordinated subject and verb is the same on either side of the comma + conjunction. Writers who must learn to observe one use of the comma, and know which one and why, can usually learn it not only as a rule but in practice and in relation to their sense of the whole sentence structure.

This limit on discussion of commas is tactical. It defines one sentence-related use which we know from experience we can expect everyone to grasp by the end of the course. True, we haven't dealt with prepositional phrases or compounded verbs, or with many other pleasures of syntactic analysis. Instead, first and most often, we work on the big thing — sentences, those whole structures which, when informed by imagination, are the breath of literature. Surety about the basic shape of a sentence prevents some lesser error. It also begins to free those writers whose imagination has been stilled by fear of making mistakes.

Governing Pronouns

The next noticeable element of the whole structure of an essay which affects grammatical choice — and which many students have not noticed — has to do with the hierarchy of pronouns, which show who the speaker of the piece is and perhaps show to whom the piece is

spoken. We find the parable, which turns on point of view. a good place to look at pronouns and how they shift but remain coherent because one of them governs the writing. In classes which have aims other than composition itself (writing about the law, for instance) we might omit the parable. Working with writers of some experience, we follow the fable, which establishes the essentials of our critical vocabulary, with an essay. We advise them to choose a governing pronoun as they begin the rough draft. This pronoun identifies the stance of the speaker of the piece. We look back to fable aphorisms they have written, to see the effects of the person, sometimes reflected by the presence of a pronoun, in which the sentence is cast.

Then we write nonstop, to discover what we know about the implications of each of the nine possible governing pronouns. Here are some of the implications:

I is a natural in the essay which always expresses what the speaker of the piece has in mind. Some fear it as egotistical, though it is in fact an accurate, and so a modest, limiting of the author's claim to authority. It is proscribed in — almost excised from, by anonymous consent — essays which seek to appear objective or formal. (There is something unsatisfying about this state of affairs; it may be in the process of changing.) "I" is a way of taking direct responsibility for the data and ideas the essay presents. It allows a convenient shift to "we."

We suggests commonality of the speaker with others. It can mean the speaker and the reader, or the speaker and like-minded others (or even the editorial "we," or what our grandmothers called, "we, queens regnant and pregnant"). Where no community exists, it may seem to presume too much. It allows a convenient shift, in the course of the essay, to "I".

You (we have lost "thou" as a practical option in ordinary discourse) advises, admonishes, exhorts, encourages; can produce a nagging tone; implies that the speaker knows the reader or understands his welfare. It occurs often in advertising, propaganda, and sermons, as well as letters.

One has never been fully acclimatized. It is distant, formal, even artificial. Since it is rarely used in conversation, it is awkward and generates error in the work of writers who rely on their "ear" for correctness. Only very experienced writers can sustain it for long without error when a shift is called for, especially in sentences with subordinate clauses.

She/He conveys that the writer has knowledge of others' actions, relationships, or states. "He," once taken for granted as the generic pronoun for person, is now rightly and painfully visible as expressing the dominance of one half the human race over the other. Since the conventions of language do not create but reflect the state of affairs, "he" will probably continue in use as the generic pronoun for human being, for a time at least. Those who prefer to use "she" are welcome to do so. It admits of a convenient shift to "they."

It is properly suited to discussion of objects, ideas, and nonhuman beings. (Its use in the United States to designate non-human creatures has declined; use of gender-specific pronouns not only for domestic animals but for most animals and birds is less neat but rather common. Plants and insects are still usually "it" in the singular.) It is often forced into play to give an air of objectivity; some think it more authoritative to say, "It has often been observed that" instead of, "I think." This abuse often evokes passive verb forms with their veiled subjects. (However, as we remarked about "I," we sense a tendency to change away from the depersonalizing use of "it" toward a willingness to let authors speak more directly, in some nonfiction prose. We think, for example, of *New Journalists* and of specialists addressing a general public.)

They, like the third person singular, conveys the writer's knowledge of things or others. It implies difference between the speaker and some or all others. It may suggest that the writer is detached from the subject. It shifts readily to the singular. It lends itself to a tone of objectivity. When paired with a speaker "we," it gives the tone of debate or argument.

These perceptions, drawn from many bits of prolific writing done in class, on what pronouns suggest, are summarized in the following little table:

<i>singular conveys:</i>	<i>plural conveys:</i>	<i>for writing about:</i>
1st person expression of personality	assumption of community	attitudes, ideas, and their origins in experience
2nd person invitation to listen	assumption of intimacy with reader	choices, values, and reasons for these
3rd person information	assumption of impersonality	facts about persons, things, and their relationships

Clearly, these distinctions are relative, and no pronoun is in itself either more or less correct or desirable. But since the governing pronoun is the carrier of the very voice of the author, it is worth choosing

with care. Such choice organizes the essay in which it operates; it is a literary choice. Having made it consciously, writers can trust to it to help them keep their references and focus clear. It will even give them something practical to check over, to assure coherence and agreement of pronouns, when they copyedit their work.

Governing Tense

The second continuous and sustaining member of the whole structure of an essay is the tense of the verb. We ask writers, when they have chosen a governing pronoun, to choose a governing tense. We remind them that verbs convey not only the action or state of the subject; they have another essential task: verbs tell what time it is. They locate the time within the essay as past, present, or future. Writers will use several tenses in most prose, but of these tenses one or another will indicate the location in time of the speaker of the piece. Consciousness of that time will keep the writer from defusing the essay by inconsistent tenses. Firm choice of, say, a past tense even revives, now and then, in copy-edited versions, that useful though fading stalwart, the pluperfect.

A little stint of running-writing will evoke from students their impressions of the uses or effects of various tenses. We may list on the board forms which are largely self-explaining, to show what the choices are. With more experienced classes, we include subjunctives for the options they offer. When setting forth these paradigms, we mention the least time-limited form, the infinitive. Even today a few students will have had experience with it in foreign language courses or in using the dictionary. It shows, by contrast, what we mean when we say that the verb tells time through its tenses (or times). In many essays, the tense seems almost dictated by the structure; even so, we ask that students be conscious of their choice of tense. We want them not to alter it but to recognize it. Then, if the common time of an essay is the past, and this is expressed by a governing perfect tense, students who recognize it will have one more major structural member of their essay in place. And when they come to proofread, they have a standard time from which to ascertain if all their time-telling verbs are properly regulated.

The idea of attending to a governing pronoun and a governing tense is not ours. We learned it in seventh grade from Mrs. Atkinson, whose battle cry for young writers was: a governing idea, a governing pronoun, a governing tense! It is one of her many usable truths, and we thank her for it. The strength of continuous verb and continuous pronoun supports the continuing idea. Especially in first or early drafts, well-chosen tense and pronoun will — without calling on Roman numerals or otherwise impeding the integrating power of imagination — give the essay coherence of grammar and matter which people call organization. When we write with a grasp of these three elements, and can refer back to them as we go, our first drafts are more intelligible. Many tangles of error in syntax will be avoided. So we teach the battlecry; it names what writers can do — *instead of* making mistakes. Specifying for students a manageable number of things to do, that they can do, expands their repertoire in unpredictable ways. It also prevents many errors we cannot tolerate but are hard put to it to correct in their causes.

The Paragraph

Still another graphic readers' aid, conventionalized in printed works, is the paragraph. Its very name tells us that it is not inherent but external to the composed text. No wonder students "get it wrong" and feel in constant danger of improper paragraphing, for this useful device has no long or definite standing in grammar, rhetoric, or literature. Yet paragraphs are useful. Their strongest use is to point out for the reader the parts of the essay's whole structure. We avoid asking students to write paragraphs when what we mean is to ask them to write briefly. We do ask them to compose paragraphs intended to do what paragraphs can do — serve as definite parts of the whole structure (e.g., beginning, middle, end); or emphasize, by extra visibility, some significant element of the whole. Here again the author's authority gets full play. Only the writer will know which elements should be isolated and which clustered, in paragraphs, to produce the rhythm of the whole structure he has in mind. There is no paragraphing in Herodotus or Cicero, and no common formula for paragraphing in Bacon, Milton, Swift, Wollestonecraft, N.O. Brown — or in the actual practice of some of the very handbooks which teach something called Paragraph Units.

By tending to the shape of the whole, and by describing paragraphs as devices to enhance a reader's grasp of the whole structure, we eliminate a needless fear of error and restore the paragraph to its original useful function. To fault "paragraphing" and "organization" is hopeless; only by insisting on a return to looking at the whole structure can the parts be reordered under the governance of the writer's idea.

Handbooks and Workbooks

Well, we're at the end of what we have to say about teaching grammar in writing classes, and we still haven't said much about using handbooks or workbooks. Here are the uses we've put them to.

Though we depend on bringing to conscious control that sense of grammar which is a power inherent in writers, we think many students can profitably refer to a handbook which depends on stating and exemplifying the rules of normative grammar. Handbooks are dangerous only when people try to use exercises and rule-memorizing as substitutes for writing and for what teachers can teach about writing, or as weapons against those who make mistakes.

Handbooks and workbooks are useful to writers whenever — having produced many concrete pages rich in the varied possibilities of language — they want to turn to a text or two to explore others' abstract systems.

They are useful to writers who have a paper to copyedit before its publication (perhaps to a class or a teacher) and who want a reference book to confirm their notion of, say, the serial comma or the MLA method of entering an article from an encyclopedia in a bibliography.

They are useful to some of the writers we meet who are confused or crippled by previous experience in "getting the grammar wrong." ("I used to like to write," said Marva, "but I can't stand getting the grammar wrong.")

We think their usefulness is greater after we have demystified them by treating them like any other text to come before our writing class. We treat them, that is, exactly as we treat our own written assignments. We choose a chapter or part of one, of an appropriate length (say, of two or three pages, perhaps on pronouns or on indirect objects). We read the pages aloud to each other in class, taking turns paragraph by paragraph, in small groups; we write down our observa-

tions; and we read our observations aloud. In other words, we practice together how to read literature — even if it is a grammar handbook.

We want to defuse fear of nomenclature and enable writers to open a text for themselves, at will and unassigned, in order to see if it may serve their needs. We want students to know that because they are intelligent, any book is intelligible and accessible to careful reading. We've learned that (for all but the rare omnilect who trains by reading the backs of medicine bottles and cereal boxes) people do not think of composition handbooks as readable. So, in most writing classes, we read bits of handbooks together, as we've described. We often recommend that writers visit secondhand bookstores, collect some grammar texts of any vintage, and read them. If they know other languages, they can compare texts written for Americans with, for example, texts written for English classes in a French lycée. It's gratifying for native speakers to see how much they know — irregular verbs! — that others must memorize. It's provocative to learn how much nomenclature was expected of fourth-graders in 1920.

When we assign a common text, we expect it to be used as a reference book and to be as handy as a dictionary. We neither require students to fill in blanks in exercises nor forbid them to do so. They may, when they are ready, find such exercises instructive or at least calming. Any text, including programmed workbooks, can be treated the way we treat our assigned writing, reading and making observations, to make it more helpful.

We want to repeat that we teach grammar every day, but seldom from a text, and always as subordinate to the writing from which grammatical abstractions are drawn.

Two parts of handbooks which interest some students are those presenting items concerning the lexicon, or usage, and tables of inflections, chiefly of pronouns and verbs.

Usage

Most writers are more ready to entertain niceties of usage than of syntax. When they can read handbooks and workbooks without discomfort, they often choose to read about usage first. Since usage is particular — not a whole system, like syntax — it is well suited to voluntary solo reading and study.

Many handbooks are thought unreadable because they in fact contain no sentence anyone would be glad to have written; to propose a contrast, we often suggest that writers read Fowler. *Modern English Usage* is full of splendid sentences. We naturally think people will gain more, in more ways, from Fowler than from other writers on usage, both because he writes lucid explanations and because many of his entries are exemplary brief expository essays. He is prolific of pleasure and instruction. (For a good view of his genius, try the exercise described above, of reading a text aloud and writing observations about it, with both Fowler and any other text dealing with one of his subjects.)

In responding to students' papers, we treat usage as we do spelling, discreetly pencilling in correct forms, so as to offer the writer the visual stimulus of seeing them correctly written.

Inflection

Writers' need for help in developing accurate usage varies unpredictably among them. Usage is as individual as vocabulary, and like it is much improved indirectly by wide reading. Inflection — the ways the forms of words change to exhibit their relation to other words — is another matter. Questions of inflection are few but thorny. For various legitimate reasons of clarity (and perhaps most often for illegitimate causes related to racial or class prejudice) many readers who come upon the two common deviations from standard inflection leap to absurd and fierce conclusions. An "s" missing from a third-person singular verb form in the present tense, and a past participle lacking its final "d," come between such readers and the text before them.

We can warn writers against this handicap. We advise them to copyedit attentively for the "s" and "d" when preparing final drafts, and encourage them to patient persistence in teaching themselves to use the correct forms habitually when writing.

The rules are simple, of course; anyone can learn them in a few minutes. But following them habitually is difficult. Here instructors have something to learn — about what grammar is most teachable. Young adults come by these tiny points of inflection with great difficulty. It's a warning instance of how hard it is to teach a language: It encourages us to be glad our students already speak English all but

perfectly, when we realize that this one small aspect of difference — whatever its origins — can be changed to standard form only slowly and with effort on the part of the writer.

Written comments on papers can help sharpen the writers' awareness, if we are careful. Most papers of those who habitually omit the "s" and "d" will occasionally include them. Pointing with praise to correct instances is far more effective and economical than marking and commenting on incorrect ones. Where we find the letters missing, we neither circle them in red nor let them stand. We simply and discreetly add them, as if it were a question of spelling (which, in a sense, it is), then in the margin write again the subject plus the verb, to give the writer one more moment of meeting the standard form.

Some students who need to develop the habit of using the final "s" and "d" will do so before the semester is out; others will take longer to acquire consistent control. We need to remember that spending class weeks on this question alone has been tried and does nothing to speed up a change in habit, though it does tend to teach the writer to write haltingly and hate writing, and to madden those in the group who do not happen to make these errors. Probably the first thing we must do is to identify these tiny bits of language, and show the student what difference they make to the reception of his work. Then we must tell him that though we cannot teach it, he can learn it, not just as a rule but in practice. After that, we can notice his successes.

Here is a summary of the few essential matters of grammar and graphics on which we always work with students:

- I. a sense of the whole structure of the sentence
 - A. as an un subordinat ed subject and its verb;
 - B. shown graphically by starting with a capital letter and ending with a period;
 - C. as a whole structure including subordinate and ordinate parts;
 - D. as a whole structure coordinating two or more parts which might syntactically stand alone as wholes; the parts may be joined either
 1. by a semicolon, or
 2. by a comma plus a coordinating conjunction.
- II. what a grammar is and how it relates to the graphics of punctuation.
- III. the choice of a governing pronoun and a governing tense as structural members of the whole essay.
- IV. the use of paragraphs to punctuate (i.e., point up) the whole

structure of the essay.

- V. the ability to read a reference work useful in copyediting.
- VI. the conventional inflections of the third person singular in the present tense, and of the past participle.

Though in the course of comments in class and on papers we may address other notions of grammar as well, we choose to work consistently on these six carefully limited points. The range of grammar and grammars is vast; time is short; we must focus on what is most necessary. Our students need a place, however small, of sure standing; they need to know both what and that they know.

Always we work from correctness, from strength, from what is well-known or well-done, toward extension of the writer's power. We no longer find time to deliver the session-long lecture on verbals with which we once dazzled students; they loved it, for it was College English undefiled, but it did not effect change in their writing. We have taught a course for those who hope to write professionally, in which a third of the semester was spent mastering the skills of copyediting; in that course those highly motivated students learned to digest and put into practice the fine points of conventions governing grammar and its graphics, all the way down to compounds hyphenated according to position. Even then, with the very bindings of their manuals of style showing the effects of their efforts, their mastery of commas was not a coefficient of their ability to write.

We began this book by avowing that it would discuss the teaching and learning of a universal set of skills necessary to writing. At moments in our long work of identifying that set, we have simply asked others what skills they would nominate. (To many, the question itself was absurd or distressing.) Most of those questioned suggested grammar, meaning a normative grammar, as one of the essentials. None omitted it. Not a few suggested only grammar, or only grammar, spelling, and vocabulary.

It is plain that we do not share their views. Grammar (normative) is not a member of our universal set. The time we give it by itself is short. But it is frequent, and in the context of student writing. The matters we think essential are few.

Yet we praise and value the workings of sentences and the powers of syntax. We recognize, too, that unless inflection and graphics are correctly observed, the writing will often evoke not interest in itself but a rash judgment that the writer is an idiot. We work against that danger as we must. But we save our best time for tasks which forestall error by

calling on writers' human capacity to use whole structures, making many levels of intellectual order out of a worldful of random data. Of those levels, one will be grammatical.