

To The Teacher

As teachers, our joy is to see students succeed in their studies. Success in the area of academic writing, however, seems particularly challenging for both teacher and student. Therefore, I wish to share with you a few of the strategies I employ that have proven successful with my students.

Over the years, I have adjusted my teaching plans and goals in order to help students produce well-written materials. I used to require students to produce an essay a week, for example. However, I have found that the quality of their work is better when given a bit more time. Moreover, the addition of edit weeks seem to help my students take the course more seriously. Rather than just completing essays and never giving the compositions another thought, they must correct whatever problems I have found when grading their papers. Doing this has helped them make greater progress during the year. As an additional incentive, any student who receives 94% or above does not have to edit the essay. I want my students to do their best. Of course, skills and abilities vary from student to student, but I want to see them reach their potential.

Another strategy change has been to require submission of a planning outline within forty-eight hours after I have taught the lesson in class. Not only does this prevent procrastination, it allows me to put significant effort into correcting and giving feedback on the planning outline. It is at this planning stage that I can catch flaws in reasoning, identify parts that need further research, point out poor organization, and recognize unsupported contentions (underdevelopment). I have found a critique of the planning outline often to be less demoralizing than “shredding” an entire essay. This is because students have not yet laboriously struggled to put their ideas into words. When correcting the outlines, I am very direct and make my expectations as clear as possible. Students know that if they do not understand any textbook material or my pointers, they are to contact me so that I can explain expectations. If they ignore suggestions or corrections, they receive the work back for revision.

My desire is that you, too, will succeed in your teaching endeavors. Toward that end, I have attempted to build as much of my teaching strategy as I could into this curriculum. Reading through the answers to the following questions should help you better understand how this course is structured as you prepare to teach.

What are the goals of this course?

The goal of *Level Two* is still the mastery of academic essay writing. The overall objectives for this course include:

- Creating several types of introductions and conclusions;
- Creating 5-paragraph essays;
- Creating classically structured essays;
- Collecting thoughts when writing under time constraints;
- Responding appropriately to essay questions, prompts, and articles;
- Researching and documenting using APA style; and
- Editing essays thoroughly.

What is the targeted grade level of this course?

This course builds upon the concepts taught in *Put That in Writing - Level One*. Just as with the *Level One*, it is not aimed at a grade level. Rather this book targets the student who has mastered paragraphs and is capable of grasping the concepts of essay structure. Generally, students learn essay writing of this course's level during the high school years. However, you, as the teacher, are the best judge of your student's capabilities. Mastery of the essay is the goal.

What are the prerequisites for this course?

Students embarking on this course must be strong in grammar basics and standard paragraph structure. Units 1-3 review the content of *Level One*. If your student struggles with these concepts, return to *Level One* for further review and practice. Since writing rudiments should be solid by now, I have not included daily drills beyond Unit 3. This frees the student to concentrate on writing strong compositions.

What length of paragraphs should my students produce?

When I teach this class, I tell my students that they must move beyond minimum content expectations (meaning "just enough to get by"). They must write in a manner that fully explains the concepts in their minds. Since most students under-explain by leaving "unsupported contentions," I work to make them conscious of those. If I receive a paper filled with unsupported contentions, I will put stars by the under-explained assertions and return the work for complete development.

Failure to develop content thoroughly is usually the result of not thinking methodically through the topic during the planning outline process. You may have to walk your student through the outline process if this is a problem. When evaluating the planning outline, ask yourself about every assertion, "Based on what is this true?" "How does my student propose to prove this?" If you do not see a listing of actual evidence in the outline, the essay is going to have serious problems. Encourage your students to fully explain concepts at the outline stage.

What length of essays should my students produce?

The assigned length of essays is given in most units. As the course proceeds, each section of an essay may vary in length, depending on the amount of information needed by the audience. Carefully check the units and daily assignments for specific directives.

How is this text to be used?

This text is a non-consumable. All answers and exercises will be written on separate paper. Additionally, you will need to make enough copies of the following items to use during the course:

Appendix A.....General Paragraph Evaluation Form for Unit 3.

Appendix D.....Research Information Chart for any units requiring research

Appendix F.....Essay Edit Checklist for Units 6, 8, 11, 14, 19, & 21.

Appendix G.....Advertising Evaluation Form for Units 8 and 16.

Appendix H.....General Essay Evaluation Form for Units 6 & 8.

Appendix IEssay Evaluation Form for Units 11 & 14.

- Appendix J.....Classical Essay Evaluation Form for Units 19 & 20.
- Appendix K.....Edit Evaluation Form for Units 9, 12, 15, 17, 22, & 23.
- Appendix L.....Precis and Abstract Evaluation Form for Units 16 & 17.
- Appendix M.....Response Writing Evaluation Form for Units 9, 12, 15, & 16.
- Appendix N.....Response Writing Evaluation Form for Units 22 & 23.

Substituting your own essay topics, questions, and prompts in place of those in this book is absolutely fine. If you are working through another course that contains essay questions, ask your students to respond to those. The same is true of the prompts. If you want to take some actual prompts off the SAT website for practice, do so. I have also included additional prompts in Appendix O should you want to schedule more practice. Make this course your own. All topics and assignments should be workable within your own goals.

Along with the responses to essay questions and prompts, this course introduces responding to articles or essays. I have included one sample essay and a response to it. You will need to find other articles for use with Units 22 and 23. I usually look for a one-to-two-page, current events or issue article. For instance, last year my students responded to an article from boundless.org on the rise of poker playing among college students. I choose essays from such varied sources as our local newspaper, Yahoo News online, Mother Jones magazine, Time, Newsweek, World Magazine, boundless.org, or any other thought provoking article that I can find. Sometimes friends even save articles for me that they think might work in my classes. I like to find articles with which the students agree and others with which they disagree. The articles or essays must be short enough to be read and discussed briefly in class. Then, students pick a response option, make a brief outline, and write.

I also find it important to say here that the sample essays in this text may or may not reflect our personal opinions. As with addressing any debatable topic, my students must choose one side of an issue and develop an argument for that. Thus, that is the pattern of the sample essays. The samples simply demonstrate what is to be or can be done when crafting an essay.

How do I prepare to teach this course?

First, you should read each lesson's content and be certain that you understand the concepts and that you brainstorm some possible ideas in case your student cannot generate any. In fact, I have found no faster way to get teenagers to generate their own ideas than to try to give them mine. ;~)

Second, familiarize yourself with and make copies of the Evaluation Forms in the Appendix section of the book. Week 12 of *Level One* explained how to evaluate standard paragraphs. That knowledge will help you now since the body paragraphs of most academic essays are the same as those learned in the paragraphs book. The difference from *Level One* is that all body paragraphs are scored together in a single section on the essay grading form. Therefore, you will need to mentally assign points according the amount of content and then award points. For example, if the essay has two strong paragraphs and one weak

paragraph, the third of the points attributed to that weak paragraph will be diminished to whatever degree you deem appropriate.

Finally, be certain that you understand options for introductions and conclusions. Familiarity with each choice is a must in order to evaluate your student's work. I have tried to include strong samples to help you see how each strategy might be used.

What is the recommended teaching schedule?

The lessons of this course build upon one another to equip students with many writing tools. Thus, I do not recommend skipping portions of the material. See the suggested teaching schedules in Appendix P. Each major essay assignment in this course progresses in a three-unit cycle. For example, the first essay cycle follows this pattern:

- Unit 5: Student studies essay type and follows steps to construct a thesis and the body of the essay
- Unit 6: Student studies introduction and conclusion types and follows steps for completing the essay
- Unit 9: Student edits and improves the graded essay from Unit 2 and practices types of response writing - answering essay questions, responding to prompts, and responding to articles or essays

Subsequent essays are taught over similar three week cycles.

This text is set up so that students begin the next writing assignment before they edit the first. In college, students must often produce additional assignments before knowing what score they received on the first, so this delay does not particularly bother me. However, you may have the ability to correct assignments and return them more rapidly than I. If you want your student to edit an essay before proceeding to the next assignment, follow the Alternate Schedule in Appendix P.

In closing, I believe this to be an ambitious yet doable course. It is a unique mix of contemporary alongside classical formats, academic combined with some creative strategies, and research papers and extemporaneous assignments. Consistency is the key to success in writing (or any other subject). Every year, my students work so hard to accomplish the goals set forth here. Then when the year ends, they express pleasure at how far they have come. I say this to encourage you if your students find this material challenging. That is normal. Take it a day at a time.

If you or your students have comments or questions, please contact me through our web page at www.barrettsbookshelf.com. I would love to hear from you.

Shari Barrett
August 2006