

Writing Without Reading: The Decline of Literature in the Composition Classroom

John C. Briggs

Department of English
UC Riverside
Riverside, CA 92521

(909) 787-5301, X 1930

John.Briggs@ucr.edu

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Summary

Thousands of subjects are offered in our colleges and universities. Of these subjects only one is so highly valued as to be universally required: freshman composition. Increasingly, composition is the one course almost every student (several million each year) will take regardless of major. For many, it will be their only course dedicated to the study of English. At the same time, many composition programs are separating from English departments, in outlook if not in administration. This survey examines a representative sample of these offerings to determine the present state of the requirement. It focuses on the role of literature in the composition curriculum, looking into the ways in which that role has diminished, and the consequences of that change.ⁱ

Composition is not a transitory responsibility of departments of English. They have taught it for four generations, since the birth of large composition programs in American higher education. Our study suggests that the relationship between composition and other parts of the English curriculum is changing in ways that limit the effectiveness of composition instruction. What happens to the millions of students in these courses is a matter for serious public concern. This document describes what is being taught, evaluates some of the results, and recommends a number of modifications in the way instruction should be carried out.

The conclusions of this inquiry can be reduced, by way of introduction, to a description of a typical or average freshman composition course. Across the country, thousands of English faculty teach composition. But the typical instructor is a graduate student or part-time instructor who meets with twenty or more students two or three times a week for a quarter or semester. The students write short papers, sometimes to be revised and resubmitted. On occasion, usually toward the end of the course, they compose longer essays. They are usually expected to consult a grammar handbook and a rhetoric that combines brief readings and assignments. Ordinarily, they must also buy a novel or anthology of essays to supply ideas about which to write. There is almost no pattern in these selections. In our surveys, the most popular whole works were Woman Warrior and Frankenstein, but these titles appeared in only 3% of the sample.

ⁱ If literature is to have meaning as a category, its definition must be both capacious and specific. For the purposes of this report, literature consists of a) masterworks, predominantly in the genres of poetry, drama, fiction and essay whose reputations have survived for two generations or more, and b) new works in those genres that give evidence of lasting quality. Certain types of prose non-fiction would qualify as well. Within these bounds, literature is writing we keep and reread.

Readings that serve as models for writing are usually brief illustrations of rhetorical strategies. Class time is typically devoted to discussions of self-expression, structure, style, audience, and purpose as they relate to student papers, or to debates about contemporary issues. The grade is based on immediate measures of how well the student writes. Skill in writing, and the techniques to train and exercise that skill, are the subject matter that determines the content of the course. Reading takes on a subordinate, often incidental role. Students are “writers.” They are almost never referred to as readers.

Concentrated on a specific skill rather than a body of knowledge that can be studied deeply and independently, the teaching of composition typically succeeds or fails according to the resourcefulness and intelligence of individual instructors. The teaching of writing strategies is often the only substantial expectation (beyond training in mechanical correctness) that campus administrations and academic senates have for instruction in composition. A preoccupation with the immediate exigencies of instruction -- how writing is to be taught and learned -- tends to define more and more narrowly what is taught, obscuring the wellsprings of literate expression. Accomplished writings — those that have been most worth saving and rereading — are neglected. Approaches that combine literature and composition, which for generations have presented composition students with practical, inspiring, and challenging literary models, have fallen into disuse.

Although no study that we know of proves, using control groups, that instructors who combine literature and composition in these ways are more successful than those who do not, research documenting the connection between reading and writing is voluminous. That connection in the classroom can be sustained, we contend, only with the rediscovery of literature’s power not only to hold students’ attention but to attract and guide their efforts to master written English. The conclusions of this report derive from surveys, professional lore and tradition, and reflection upon the nature of the discipline of English and the art of composition. On the basis of these inquiries, it recommends a reconsideration of the role of literature in the composition classroom.

In order to learn to write well, can students do better than to learn from the best writing that already exists and to understand its qualities? The learning of any skill -- athletic, artistic, or intellectual -- requires study and imitation of the best models. Properly incorporated into the composition course, literature gives students access to the precision and capaciousness of well-written English. It presents admirable and provocative ways of handling ideas. It can raise students’ expectations for their own educations even as it encourages reflection on the human condition.

If literature enhances the teaching of composition, let us not impose an unwanted and unwise divorce upon them. Reunited with literature, freshman composition can be an exciting course. It can become a discipline of letters: an art and a subject matter that support one another. And it can better justify its status as the one course required of all students.

The Long Debate

This profession [of grammar] then, distinguished as it is, most compendiously, into two parts, the art of speaking correctly, and the illustration of the poets, carries more beneath the surface than it shows on its front. For not only is the art of writing combined with that of speaking, but correct reading also precedes illustration, and with all these is joined the exercise of judgment.

-- Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory* I.iv.2-3¹

Almost from the beginning of American higher education as we know it today, literary study and composition have been close and contentious partners within departments of English. Five generations of academics have argued over whether they are radically different pursuits. Yet despite the early divisions between teachers of writing and scholars of literature, and the fault lines that have developed between the MLA, the Speech Association of America, and the Conference on College Composition and Communication, most American undergraduates continue to learn composition within English Departments.

In his 1911 article in *Harper's Monthly*, the literary scholar and compositionist Thomas Lounsbury, who had taught a renowned and much-imitated course in composition and literature for twenty-five years, gently satirized the defenders and critics of composition's place in the English Department:

Two dangers loom up in the path of reform. First, that of exalting pedagogical method at the expense of the teacher's personality; second, that of placing mere training in composition superior to familiarity with good literature. The country is suffering at the present from an acute attack of pedagogical psychology in its most malignant form; so that some zealous teachers spend more time on the study of method than on two things vastly more important -- their speciality and human nature.²

Lounsbury takes aim at wayward methodologists, but not at composition itself. The dry humor of his criticism does not question the basic enterprise to which he devoted decades. He goes on to describe the "hard study" of literary models that must be part of a composition instructor's preparation for teaching. Hard study is not grim review. It involves recognition and imitation of literary models (masterworks of poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction prose), and hence an openness to consideration of how one can compose variations and departures from their inspiring and challenging precedents.

Lounsbury is not set on teaching his students to be poets; the keys to his unmethodical method are forms of inquiry and imitation that foster discipline and the satisfaction of encountering the best possible examples of written expression. He concedes that the work is not always pleasant, but adds, "[H]e who devotes himself to this faithfully and intelligently is taking the most efficacious method of strengthening his mind just as steady exercise strengthens his body." The dedicated study of some great author -- any great author -- is superior to the mastery of isolated rhetorical rules:

Different minds ... will exhibit preference for different authors. The choice is not a matter of moment, provided the one chosen is worthy and appeals to the chooser, not

because the study of him is a duty, but because it is a delight. To become thoroughly conversant with the work of a great writer, to be influenced by his method of giving utterance to his ideas, to feel profoundly the power and beauty of his style, is worth more for the development of expression than the mastery of all the rhetorical rules that were ever invented.

For Lounsbury, whether one's students are elite or unprepared is beside the point. The power of literature is evident in the lives of "numberless" students "who have never seen the inside of an institution of learning" yet have learned to be writers by emulating admired literary models.³ The selection of particular readings is not so important as access to literary magnitude.

Lounsbury's course was not a survey of great literature. It was a course in composition interacting with rich literary models. A well-known contemporary of Lounsbury, the Amherst scholar John Franklin Genung, showed how such a principle could work in the classroom. Genung expected his students to write something first, then study examples of description, narration, and exposition in literary examples, and then compare (for example) Hawthorne's and Irving's descriptions of a commonplace incident. He designed his classes to conduct the student "into the very workshop of the world's literature," where the literary models would introduce "the interest of genuine instruction." The goal was to teach composition "by communicating an impulse, kindling a love for literature, inducing an author's attitude, and criticizing details."

Genung did not direct his efforts toward training poets or playwrights. He supposed that the attractions of literature were indispensable to the development of an abundance of enlivened writing, both fiction and non-fiction, without which composition could not properly be learned or taught. Since "only vigorous growth responds to the pruning-knife with desirable results,"⁴ the writer had to be a reader of literature. Extensive exposure to admirable writing – writing that was chosen to enliven and guide the apprentice writer – was assumed to be the best means of cultivating that growth.

Competing with these defenses of literature in the composition course were doubts about the efficacy of any pedagogy that was not unwaveringly devoted to the teaching of writing skills. To many, literature seemed to displace the teaching of literacy. As enrollments in American colleges and universities doubled and redoubled and the entire curriculum became more specialized, the task of teaching composition seemed to demand more efficiency and expertise. The tradition Lounsbury and Genung helped inaugurate – the careful combination of composition with literature – did not prevail, though its influence has persisted.

The professional discussion of the relationship between composition and literature and how they might be combined to best advantage extended into the early 1980s, then all but disappeared.⁵ In the 1950s, workshops devoted to the question were common at national conferences. A few decades later, the leading professional organization of scholars in the modern languages resuscitated the debate in several studies and publications.⁶ But that work has been eclipsed by two competing and sometimes complementary aspirations: the desire to make composition an independent

discipline, and to the movement to merge composition into cultural criticism and identity politics.

The habits of a century continue to combine literature and composition in a sizable fraction of writing classes; but many of the intellectual underpinnings of that approach have fallen away. Deans, provosts, or boards of regents are often more likely than departments and academic senates to determine the direction of the composition curriculum. English departments have not been inclined to reopen discussions of curricular goals and methods that do not seem to offer immediate solutions to local problems. In the words of Gary Tate, the once robust discussion of the place of literature in composition has almost expired. We are witnessing, he writes, “the dying of a conversation.”⁷

The issues involved in these matters are not simply administrative or political. We cannot consider them adequately by focusing only upon admission standards or by distinguishing between remedial and advanced academic work. Although judgments concerning these topics must sooner or later enter our deliberations, they are not likely by themselves to settle an issue embedded in the origins of English departments and longstanding debates about the goals of higher education. For more than a century, students have entered college in need of becoming much better readers and writers. Exclusive admissions policies did not remove that need at Harvard in 1885, at UC Berkeley in 1920, at Haverford in 1948, at Earlham in 1956, or at the majority of selective schools in the 1990s. Elite and non-elite institutions share the burden, and the opportunity, of responding to that need in new generations of students.

The purpose of this report is to reopen inquiry into the relation between literature and composition as academic endeavors on American campuses, and then to offer some suggestions about the organization of disciplinary, pedagogical, and administrative priorities. Just how are composition and literature related in contemporary classroom practices? What are the substantial curricular and intellectual grounds, if any, for their partnership within the discipline of English, and within the humanities? What are the hazards of that combination?

Background and Surveys

Today composition courses comprise from three to six percent of the total undergraduate course offerings in many colleges and in most state universities. At many of these institutions, English departments offer far more classes in composition than they do in literature. In the community colleges of the California system, various forms of composition typically make up over ninety percent of each English department's enrollment. The annual enrollment in composition at a number of large university campuses exceeds ten thousand students. The national enrollment in composition runs into the millions. On some campuses, mathematics and (more recently) foreign languages have become dispensable to general education. Composition is different. Flanked by placement tests and arranged in sequence, composition is typically the only universally

required course on campus -- the only one without alternatives. Where there exist options for passing composition, there is a machinery of rules found nowhere else in the curriculum. Often students must take placement tests, enroll in composition courses early in their undergraduate careers, and pass those courses with a "C" or higher.

The case of literature is far different. Studies of general education requirements in the mid 1980s indicate that only 20% of colleges and universities expected their graduates to take a particular literature course. On a third of the sample's campuses, students could skip the study of literature altogether.⁸ These trends have influenced the composition sequence. A century of curricular specialization, combined with retreat from universal requirements, has made the two-year composition course -- and the integration of composition and literature its spaciousness afforded -- an historical curiosity. In the 1990s, a full year of composition is almost always the maximum requirement, with many campuses requiring only one semester, or one or two quarters. With notable exceptions (California's community colleges providing some examples), courses explicitly listed as "Literature and Composition" are now likely to be optional -- if they are available at all.⁹

A recent study has revealed that between 1968 and 1974, the second-semester composition requirement disappeared in 33% of all four-year colleges. Many of these courses did not involve literature, but comp-lit combinations were more likely to be cut than other composition courses.¹⁰ If the experience of the California State University system is typical, some second-semester requirements were reinstated in the late seventies, only to be displaced by courses in critical reasoning taught by philosophy departments. A recent increase in the teaching of composition within introductory literature courses may be a hopeful sign, but it might also indicate the increasing vulnerability of literary study to skills-based instruction, cultural criticism, and new theories of representation.

If we do not concern ourselves with the quantity of comp/lit instruction, we can find figures that seem to indicate that the percentage of composition courses that combine literature and composition has remained approximately the same since the 1920s. Although such courses were outnumbered by writing courses in which literature played little or no part, surveys taken in 1929, 1963, 1970, and 1991 indicate that combined courses (making significant use of literature to teach writing) have made up approximately a fourth to a third of all composition instruction for the last eighty years. In 1929, Warner Taylor reported that 107 of 225 institutions explicitly linked composition and literature, with 51 making use of literature in one third or more of the instruction in their composition classrooms.¹¹ In 1963, Albert Kitzhaber discovered that a quarter of his sample of several hundred institutions centered writing instruction in courses that combined composition and literature.¹² From Thomas Wilcox's 1970 study of over one thousand institutions, we can infer that literature played a substantial role in approximately 25% of the second-term courses, and was a subordinate component in perhaps another third of the total courses surveyed.¹³ In a study completed in 1992, Richard Larson found that perhaps 30% of the courses in his sample combined

composition and literature, though the extent and precise nature of their mixture was not specified.¹⁴

Taylor's 1929 survey indicated that composition and literature were considerably more likely to be combined in the East and South than in the Midwest and the West. In the East, around 70% of the colleges and universities of all types had such a course; in the South almost 50% did. In the Midwest and West, the home of a much larger proportion of public colleges and universities, the figure was around 23%. In general, older campuses in more established parts of the country included literature in their lower-division writing courses. In regions of relatively recent settlement, which were dominated by land-grant institutions whose original charters mandated practical and technical education, literature and composition were less likely to exist on common ground.

Though it is today less clearly a regional phenomenon, this pattern has not disappeared. Many small liberal arts colleges, the majority of which are east of the Mississippi, have no designated composition courses. When these colleges do not offer composition, they teach writing in the context of the study of literature or other works. Writing instruction is often part of a required but non-standardized seminar. In contrast, many large state universities, especially those in the Midwest, Southwest, and West, teach composition without literature, or with a tenuous link to a few literary readings. There are notable exceptions, but these seem to entail the conversion of introductory literature courses into comp/lit formats. Indiana University now offers a two-quarter comp/lit sequence as an alternative to a one-semester composition course, and the University of Illinois has added a second semester requirement that has the potential for extensive use of literary readings.

Faculty resistance has sometimes kept literature a part of the composition curriculum. But as Kitzhaber's exhaustive survey suggested forty years ago, the composition curriculum tends to be amorphous, without the definition of a traditional discipline. Formed to teach writing to entering classes, it is usually adapted to the highly changeable abilities of incoming students and novice instructors. Larson found the same lack of pattern twenty-five years later.¹⁵ Our review of reading lists and syllabi in 1998 supported these observations. Literature, very broadly defined, continues to be a part of many composition classes. But its use in the classroom usually seems to be incidental or eccentric. Despite the remarkable variety of literary titles in the syllabi we examined, there was a little evidence of consensus concerning what texts were of most value, or how literature might be used to good effect in the teaching of writing.

Our data for these observations came from the ALSC surveys, an extensive search for composition-related web pages, a ten-year record of book orders at a major public university, a recently published study of canonical essays in composition textbooks, and our own review of several dozen of the most popular rhetorics (and a few readers) published since 1945. The on-line research turned up 534 syllabi and program guides representing 198 courses taught at 107 institutions: 27 private research universities, 18 private colleges, and 62 public institutions, most of them research universities. These

records contained a remarkable variety of works: 956 assigned titles (not including textbooks), of which approximately 60% (572) were very broadly identifiable as literature (drama, poems, novels, literary prose), as well as 272 films and 18 television shows.

Although there was some overlap in instructors' choices (sixty-three of the literary titles appeared three times or more), the list records no significant consensus. Agreement was even rarer in the case of titles not readily identifiable as literary: just five out of 384 appeared three times or more. At least in the on-line data, there was a strange lack of interest in anthologies of literature. Only a few dozen of the on-line sections -- less than 3% of the total when we added textbooks to the list -- included a literature anthology on their syllabi.

Of course, the on-line sample may have been skewed in favor of instructors and programs with atypical interests. Not all campuses have extensive archives of syllabi on the web. On the other hand, our sample yielded information from a wide variety of institutions and classrooms -- information which is doubly valuable because of the difficulty of gathering it by other means.

Twenty-one literary titles appeared in the sample five times or more, but none more than fourteen times. Although most of the titles on the survey were contemporary, many of the more popular ones were not:

Most Popular Titles

<u>Frequency: Title</u>	<u>Author</u>
14: <i>Woman Warrior</i>	Kingston
13: <i>Frankenstein</i>	M. Shelley
12: <i>Beloved</i>	Morrison
11: <i>Heart of Darkness</i>	Conrad
11: <i>The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass</i>	Douglass
10: <i>Maus</i>	Spiegelman
9: <i>The Tempest</i>	Shakespeare
8: <i>Othello</i>	Shakespeare
8: <i>Dracula</i>	Stoker
8: <i>The Aeneid</i>	Virgil
8: The Bible (selections)	
6: <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	Atwood
6: <i>Huckleberry Finn</i>	Twain
6: <i>The Odyssey</i>	Homer
5: <i>City of Glass</i>	Auster
5: <i>As I Lay Dying</i>	Faulkner
5: <i>The Yellow Wallpaper</i>	Gilman
5: <i>The Iliad</i>	Homer
5: <i>On the Road</i>	Kerouac
5: <i>Dr. Jeckyl and Mr. Hyde</i>	Stevenson
5: <i>Beowulf</i>	

Among titles appearing three or four times were works by Angelou, St. Augustine, Chopin, Cisneros, Morrison, Shakespeare, Silko, Sophocles, Austen, Hawthorne, Hurston, Henry James, Thomas More, O'Brien, Plato, Romane, Smiley, Stoppard, Tan, Thoreau, Chretien de Troyes, and Walpole.

On its surface, the list is a hopeful sign of literature's persistence in the composition classroom. Indeed, forty percent of the literary titles we collected were written before the end of World War II. But the appearance of plenitude is misleading. The older titles tended to cluster in lists from private and highly exclusive public institutions, which were three times as likely to assign pre-1945 texts as other four-year institutions.¹⁶ Taken as a whole, the list reinforces the impression that literature's role in the composition classroom is idiosyncratic, or subservient to the teaching of something else, such as popular culture. The number of film titles in our web survey exceeded the number of pre-1945 literary works.

A second survey (involving ninety chairs, composition directors, and interested faculty from colleges, universities, and California community colleges) added to the impression of fragmentation. In response to our request to list up to ten titles of fiction and non-fiction works ordered in recent years that had been found to work well in the classroom, approximately ninety institutions gave us a total of 302 titles (the majority not found on the on-line survey), with only fifty appearing on more than one campus's list, and none on more than five. Fiction was the overwhelming choice of the community colleges, but not the four-year campuses. Some non-fiction on the lists fell within our broad definition of literature, but again there was a remarkable lack of consensus concerning particular titles, as though nothing had caught on forcefully enough to be recommended and adapted as a superior basis for instruction. Only two non-fiction books appeared as many as five times: Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary*, and Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*.

In the on-line survey, the differences among four-year campuses were dramatic. The literary component of campuses such as Georgetown, Haverford, UC Irvine, The University of the South, Middlebury, William and Mary, the University of North Texas, Penn, and the University of Richmond stood in contrast to most other programs in the sample. Georgetown's composition syllabi, each with a different reading list, managed to convey a sense of serious engagement with authors such as Frederick Douglass, Anne Frank, Mary Shelley, Orwell, E. B. White, T. S. Eliot, Morrison, Walker, Stoker, Hemingway, Faulkner, Atwood, Ellison, Delillio, Dostoevsky, Woolf, Austen, Hawthorne, Wells, Lee, More, Conrad, Stevenson, Kuchner, Sophocles, Shakespeare (a different play in each of the eight sections that assigned him), Miller, Shaw, Hansberry, Virgil, Homer, Whitman, Salinger, Gilman, Alison, the Beowulf poet, and a dozen more contemporary novelists. Another dozen instructors assigned literary non-fiction by authors such as Primo Levi, Sartre, Pico Della Mirandola, Kozol, Coles, and others. In contrast, the University of Florida, which posted far more titles on-line than Georgetown, listed syllabi with a dozen films, eight television shows, half a dozen contemporary autobiographies, and dozens of topical essays.

Composition Readers: The Elephants' Graveyard

Our third source of information about composition readings was Lynn Z. Bloom's study of the essay canon in composition, which reveals publishers' and instructors' fragile attachment to the literary essay. On the surface, the anthologies seem to promote the literary essay. Bloom identifies a largely unchanging list of essays that textbook publishers have thought worth rereading, and so have reprinted for fifty years. Just 174 authors (out of 4,246 in Bloom's huge sample) account for over 42% of all the essays published in readers with four or more editions between 1946 and 1996. Eighteen of those authors have been reprinted at least 100 times. By far the most popular is George Orwell, whose most widely published works are "Politics and the English Language" (118 reprints) and "Shooting An Elephant" (113). Yet of the top fifty essayists (including authors whose work has been compressed into brief form), the work of only six (Thoreau, Swift, Twain, Jefferson, Plato, and Bacon) pre-dates the twentieth century.

To be included in this "contemporary" canon, Bloom observes, "canonical essays, on the whole, have to sound contemporary -- in language, syntax, relative briskness and brevity."¹⁷ Publishers and instructors must be concerned with the work's accessibility to instructors as well as students; but their concern for pedagogical convenience is remarkably unambitious: "How much do teachers have to know or learn in order to teach this work (a particular concern for administrators of courses with multiple sections, new TAs, or teachers assigned to sections on short notice)?"¹⁸ The deep and broad utility of challenging students with literary readings and exercises is not here a concern. Bloom wonders whether the publishers' narrowly utilitarian requirements explain the "conspicuous" absence of once-canonical nineteenth-century essayists such as Lamb, De Quincey, Ruskin, Carlyle, Mill, Arnold, and Pater. Only Newman, she notes, has joined the pantheon of 174 authors in the years since 1945.¹⁹

Bloom's voluminous study concentrates on the politics of publication. She does not explore the relation between the genre of the essay and the teaching of literature, nor the question of why the canonical essays are worth reading. For its own part, the professional literature does not pay much attention either. Identity and culture are the controlling considerations for inclusion of new work in the collections. A sign of the times in the publishing trade is the ninth edition of the venerable *Norton Reader*, whose editor introduces sixty-four new essays with the explanation that the major categories for the new entries are personal (containing "short essays that deal directly with students' interests and needs") and examples of "Cultural Critique."²⁰ In this context of silence over what makes essays worth reading, the venerable anthologies that Bloom analyzes stand on the shelf like ranks of emeriti -- respected in life, yet bound to be replaced sooner or later by someone with different interests.

Rhetorics: Literature Fading into Specialization

A survey of thirty-five popular rhetorics published between 1929 and 1965 indicates that until recently, non-contemporary literary works were indeed a valued part of composition instruction. To illustrate principles of style and organization, and to suggest approaches to various subjects, the authors of these textbooks used passages from Victorian poetry, Hardy, Meredith, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Irving, Keats, Macaulay, H. G. Wells, Shakespeare, Whitman, Milton, Herbert, Conrad, Crane, Chekhov, Thackeray, Dryden, Homer, Dickens, Emerson, and Samuel Johnson, as well as contemporary authors. Most assumed that literary examples from a variety of periods helped make lessons teachable. In this they were not far from the philosophy of Harvard's English faculty of the 1890s, the majority of whom taught introductory composition. In those classes, they expected new students to draw from their reading of such texts as *Macbeth*, *Twelfth Night*, and works by Defoe, Milton, Pope, Coleridge, Dryden, Tennyson, and Daniel Webster.²¹

In the earliest editions of many of the twentieth-century collections, we see the authors' efforts to interest their students in numerous and challenging literary examples. After World War II, although the pressure to adjust textbooks to a new and massive market is frequently in evidence, the older attachment to literary examples persists. Authors no longer take for granted that students will be interested readers of literature, but their adjustments show their conviction that literature is not dispensable. For the purpose of imitation as well as for the invention of subject matter, they include poetry by Sidney, Dylan Thomas, Keats, Shakespeare. In one remarkable instance, the authors defend their decision not to include literary masterworks but then assemble short stories and essays about childhood and early adulthood by Baldwin, Hemingway, Saroyan, White, Moore, Goethe, and many others.²²

In 1959, when Donald Davidson made adjustments in the readings of his fourth edition of *American Composition and Rhetoric*, he felt compelled to explain his editorial decisions as an effort to adapt to the new "context" of instruction without compromising the value of the literary readings. In his preface, he made the traditional and provocative assumption that rhetorical instruction in composition has deep roots in the study of literature: "[R]hetoric," he wrote, "is no mere 'tool subject,' as is often speciously argued, but has a general educational value beyond all calculation both in its discipline and in the rich cultural content that, through the ages, has been inseparable from the discipline."²³

Since 1965, this pattern has rapidly changed. Writing about literature, if it is done in the composition course, has come to be understood as a discrete academic skill, to be addressed in special sections of rhetorical textbooks and readers. Or it has been dropped as inappropriate for general instruction in composition. Lost is the expectation that students need to encounter lines, sentences, passages, and whole works of literature that stimulate imitation and inspire originality.

Classroom Practices: Consensus and Division

By themselves, of course, neither booklists nor textbooks give us an adequate picture of how literature is being used in composition and other writing-intensive introductory courses. In an effort to gain a better understanding of the purposes and patterns of freshman English in American colleges and universities, we reviewed five thousand pages of web material related to composition and other lower-division writing-intensive courses in ninety-six campuses across the spectrum of American higher education. Some of this material was so sketchy it could not be interpreted. Some, we discovered in our follow-ups, was out of date, though only a few years old. Still, much of what we found helped to illustrate other sections of this report. Several striking patterns emerged.

First, we noticed the impressive volume of assignments in all kinds of syllabi. Instructors assigned numerous papers, and generally expected their students to write five thousand words or more during a quarter (or over seven thousand during a semester), considerably more pages of closely evaluated writing than they would write in most classes of their academic careers. Strict policies for handing in work on time, participating in peer review, and attendance were the rule. Conferences with the instructor were often required. Instructors were clearly devising numerous ways to make their courses intensive, not only in the amount of what they assigned but in the ways they formatted their classes' activities. Such uniform and demanding requirements seemed to indicate the instructors' and directors' dedication to the task. They also suggested an impressive potential for innovation if such programs were to take advantage of the literature's pedagogical power in the composition classroom.

On the other hand, we encountered a deep division between campuses that assigned a great deal of reading and those that assigned relatively little. We expected a host of stereotypical courses in composition that relied upon numerous readings in a Norton anthology of literature, or some other literature collection. We found only a few organized in that fashion. Although a number of courses fell in between, we saw a dramatic difference among syllabi regarding the amount and difficulty of required reading. Many instructors understandably chose not to use voluminous literary readings in order to focus on the teaching of writing. But some of the on-line material suggested the attitude that literary readings were dangers to originality and unarmed critical thought.

What are some of the principles and attitudes behind these data? We tried to find answers by sending a list of questions to approximately three hundred persons: English chairs, composition administrators, and a few additional faculty. One hundred of these surveys went to California's community colleges. We heard from English faculty from fourteen four-year colleges, forty-nine universities, and twenty-nine community colleges, a return of approximately 30%.²⁴

According to the surveys, literature continues to be an important part of the teaching of composition in half the four-year colleges and all but one of the California

community colleges we surveyed. Half the respondents said their institutions combined composition and literature in a single course, though they differed in whether they required the course or made it an option. Only two of the ninety-two campuses reported that a literature course (not, presumably, a seminar or a core course) could take the place of a composition requirement. In response to our more general question as to whether reading was an important part of instruction, a third of the respondents indicated strong agreement with the statement that reading and discussion of reading were "as important as writing." (In this finding and in what follows, respondents from the community colleges generally agreed with colleagues from four-year institutions and universities.) Almost two-thirds (55) agreed that reading was "very important," though subordinate to writing instruction. Only five indicated, with varying levels of enthusiasm, that reading was "incidental" to the course. Only one respondent said there were no outside readings, adding that the prohibition was an attempt to focus students' attention on their own writing.

Eighty-six out of ninety-two chose not to endorse, even in a lukewarm way, a survey item's assertion that "reading and discussing printed texts [in composition classes] is not as important as learning about sign systems and decoding the circumstances under which printed and non-printed texts are produced." A majority (76 out of 92) seemed to be content with the role that literature played in their programs. Many welcomed the combination of literature and composition, but did not rank as important the assertion that "composition courses should devote more attention to the teaching of literature." That is, almost no one thought that composition instructors should turn their attention to teaching more literature in their classes. Only twelve campuses noted some level of agreement with the statement that "reading and discussion of reading are of fundamental importance in the composition classroom, in some ways more important than writing." In one way or another, our respondents were indicating that the composition course should concentrate on the teaching of writing even if the students are reading literature.

But how is literature used in the composition courses where it has a place? We asked respondents to rank twelve approaches. The item receiving by far the most positive support (ranked number one by sixty-eight of ninety-two) was the use of literary texts "to stimulate discussion of ideas." The number rejecting this option entirely was the smallest for any item on our list of questions. The least popular option was the use of literary works "as entryways into authors' psychology." One third of those surveyed said that readings should be "deconstructed" in the freshman course; however, two-thirds did not rank deconstruction anywhere on our twelve-point scale of enthusiasm. A semiotic approach drew a similarly tepid response: only a third gave it any ranking, though half of that group placed it among their first three priorities. Similar results emerged for the use of literature as "examples of difference," a phrase we used to elicit indications of interest in focusing the course's reading on diversity in ethnicity, gender, and so on.

Other responses were mixed. Thirty-four out of ninety-two gave a primary ranking to the reading of literature for "examples of outstanding literary merit," and as "artifacts of intellectual history," while forty-four favored some use of literary texts as models for imitation. It was gratifying to see that half of these respondents placing

imitation at or near the top of their priorities. Two thirds of our sample endorsed the use of literary sources as "samples of successful argumentation and organization."

On the other end of the spectrum, most respondents -- almost as many as chose not to rank deconstruction -- preferred not to rank mimetic approaches anywhere on the preference list. In other words, a significant portion of the sample did not see a use for literature as a stimulus for imitation in the composition classroom. This group tended to reject the "great books" approach as well. More than half of all respondents strongly endorsed the use of literary works in the composition classroom "as enactments of power relations or societal problems."

To review: In our limited sample of comments from chairs, program heads, and a few additional faculty members, there was an overwhelming preference for using literature as a source of ideas, and somewhat less enthusiasm (though still a preference) for some form of literary imitation. Deconstruction and the politics of difference found few champions; neither did a "great books" approach. On the other hand, many respondents rejected imitation completely, and slightly more than half of the sample strongly favored interpreting literary works in terms of power relations and social issues. Around one in six of the departments and programs we surveyed stressed semiotic readings of literature in courses that combined literature with composition.

Professional Literature: The Disappearance of Literary Reading

Although grammar handbooks continue to be a staple of the composition curriculum, professional studies of grammar, style, imitation, and the relation of literature to composition are now rare in the flagship journals of composition and rhetoric. Up to the mid 1960s, they were fairly common. As the professional literature has grown more sophisticated, grammar has become associated with the specialized study of linguistics or with troublesome disputes over the status of non-standard English. Mina Shaughnessy's pioneering 1977 study of the grammatical and rhetorical intricacies of basic writers' prose is steeped in literary reference, and draws from her thinking about literary composition. Yet in recent years the annual Mina Shaughnessy prize has gone to professional articles on a wide range of subjects unrelated to much of the spirit or content of her work.²⁵ Style has taken on its own stigma as an elite literary subject, though the textbooks and professional scholarship of Joseph Williams (*Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*) and Richard Lanham (*Revising Prose*) continue to be cited with respect. Despite the substantial contributions over the past fifty years of major scholars and teachers who have bridged the gap between literature and composition — Wayne Booth, Kenneth Burke, Frederick Crews, E. D. Hirsch, James Murphy, and James Kinneavy, to name a few in addition to Williams and Lanham — discussion about the relation between composition and literature as academic pursuits, not simply as conflicting institutions, is now remarkably rare.²⁶ What follows is a brief review of some of the philosophical reasons for this change in the professional literature.²⁷

To understand what is happening today to composition and English, it is useful to put the new professional literature in the context of the influential Dartmouth Conference of 1966, in which fifty prominent academics (half from Britain and half from the U. S.) met for a month to discuss the state of English education in schools and colleges. Participants included faculty from British schools of education, American scholars of literature such as Wayne Booth, Charles Muscatine, James E. Miller, Benjamin DeMott, and Arthur Eastman, and several academics who played major roles in the study and teaching of composition: Albert Kitzhaber, James Squire, James Moffett, and others. Walter Ong was among several dozen visiting consultants.

According to the two book-length reports published immediately afterward, the seminar's participants endorsed literature as one of the most valuable parts of the English curriculum. But they also failed to reach a consensus about literature's function in the English classroom, specifically with regard to the teaching of writing. One report on the conference, written by a British participant, places literature deep in the background. Students' own writings are the more prominent points of interest, as are pedagogical methods that help cultivate many kinds of writing. Yet the function of literature is evident at every point. It enhances students' creativity by giving them ways to think about and express their interests and experiences: "[L]anguage is learnt in operation, not by dummy runs. In English pupils meet to share their encounters with life, and to do this effectively they move freely between dialogue and monologue — between talk, drama, and writing; and literature, by bringing new voices into the classroom." This process "adds to the store of shared experience. Each pupil takes from the store what he can and what he needs."²⁸

From the American side, the historian Herbert Muller argued that literature was crucial to students' intellectual and emotional growth. It was the lynchpin of all areas of English study. "Proficiency" in reading was not enough; "a lasting desire to read books" was what was needed. Teachers needed to foster a "love of literature" in the earliest grades. An attachment to reading — not mere proficiency — would need to become one of the goals, if not the main goal, of English instruction.²⁹ Students learning to write needed to draw from, and add to, this desire for literate experience.

The irony of Dartmouth legacy is that even though there was a good deal of consensus on the place of literature in the general curriculum, the occasion marked, in the memory of many American compositionists, a turning away from external models and inspiration, and toward forms of personal experience in which reading plays only an implicit (if not incidental) role. The British assumed that reading would continue to have a deep influence on students learning how to write, but many Americans concluded that students' writing, without regard for its relationship to reading, must determine the focus of instruction. Reading was still considered to be important, but it was left to drift. Students were supposed to choose books for themselves. Reading was an instrument for extending their curiosity and their drive toward self-realization; it was not to be prescribed, or made a focus of instruction. It was certainly not to be used to make organized exercises in imitation and variation.

The new approach to writing did not clearly exclude, at least in principle, the use of literature in the teaching of writing. James Moffett and Peter Elbow were interested in the ways in which individual works and genres could stimulate imitation and originality, as long as the focus of instruction remained on students as writers.³⁰ Inspired by the example of the British, these and other American compositionists wanted to encourage students to seek out literary examples that would help them deepen and polish their work. But such shifts of emphasis did not reverse the overall narrowing of literature's role in the composition classroom. In fact, the dominance of such views in the sixties and seventies, when literature's role in composition became increasingly problematic, made composition instruction more vulnerable to conflicting demands for self-expression and for training in mechanical skills and technical writing. As less attention was being paid to the particular ways in which particular kinds of literature could contribute to the mastery of written English, composition increasingly became a field apart from literary studies – not only in terms of its methods but also in its attitude toward letters.

Of course, this philosophical resistance to literature in the composition classroom has had much to do with academic politics. Since the end of World War II, when unprecedented numbers of students began entering American colleges and universities, the sudden demand (and need) for instruction in composition has strained the financial and intellectual resources of English departments, divisions, and entire campuses, increasingly dividing English departments into those who teach lower-division composition and those who teach (and pursue scholarship in) literature and other fields the department deems worthy of specialized study. Typically composed of part-timers and graduate students, and so not a faculty in the strict sense, the first group is responsible for teaching the majority of English classes but rarely receives the recognition and professional advancement that they believe they deserve. On the other side of the divide has been the literature faculty, which has periodically expressed a distrust of financial and intellectual investments in composition when those investments seem to threaten the integrity of established studies. Many English faculty have resisted an obligation to teach what they consider to be a remedial or merely practical art. Or conversely, they have taught composition courses in such a way that they became literature or theory courses unconcerned with students' progress as writers.

In the often stratified society of higher education, what seems to be disciplinary excellence to one group smacks of elitism to the other; what seems to be deleterious to serious education at the college level is, in the eyes of the second group, a chance to learn a skill without which higher education must fail. Each side suspects the other of lacking rigor. The presence or absence of literature in the composition classroom has often become a sign of instructors' sympathy for one view or the other.

Aggravating this conflict is the division among non-composition scholars over the literary status of non-fiction, which is a staple of instruction in writing courses. For literary scholars inheriting the legacy of the New Criticism, non-fiction tends to be suspect. On the other hand, for faculty who see themselves as teachers and scholars of cultural criticism, the question of non-fiction's status seems to be settled by broad new definitions of text. Caught in the middle, compositionists defend the teaching of non-

fiction but are divided over the pedagogical value of esoteric or politicized approaches to textual studies. The professional literature of composition has unfortunately not taken up the question of what makes a particular kind of non-fiction – literary non-fiction -- worth teaching.³¹

Amid such disagreements, Stephen Witte's prize-winning 1983 study of student writing focused attention on the connection between students' ability to write and their capacity to read their own writing for the gist of their thought:

How students decide to revise a text is largely dependent on their understanding of the text. ... [Unskilled writers] have never learned how to read and evaluate texts in their entirety, to respond to the overall semantic structure of texts, or to evaluate semantic structure against their intentions.³²

Unskilled writers are frequently poor readers. Lacking experience with the ways other writers shape ideas, they cannot revise their work because they cannot read it for significance. Since literature draws readers into these worlds of meaning more fully and effectively than other kinds of texts, it would seem that some form of literary education is crucial to the task of learning to write, especially for struggling students. These findings are probably no surprise to college faculty who work with incoming students, but their implications are difficult for many advocates on the various sides of the composition debates to accept.

New forms of composition instruction have weakened students' ability to gain access to literature by reading sympathetically and identifying with views other than their own. Virginia Anderson has observed that an emphasis on a confrontational style of cultural critique diminishes their ability to see complexity, to sense the predispositions of their audiences, and to understand the purposes of their opponents. Students, she says, are sometimes pressured to identify with the instructor as an "embodiment" of a "political agenda" rather than as a coach or a model for the educated person.³³ A similar hazard awaits inexperienced students when the apparatus of critical theory, in the hands of unpracticed teachers, transports undergraduates into the matrix of a graduate seminar. Under the pressure of such theoretical and political imperatives, the professional literature pays less and less attention to finding useful literary texts, or engaging in the practical and intellectual challenge of teaching the analysis, imitation, and variation of sentences, paragraphs, and entire passages.

Nevertheless, despite these negative trends, our surveys suggest that a deep-seated antagonism toward anything resembling traditional literary education, though it is occasionally supported in the professional literature, is still far from the norm in most composition programs. The great majority of composition courses seem to be taught along quasi-traditional lines, though often without sufficient grounding in an intellectual tradition or literary studies. Erika Lindemann, writing in the March, 1993 issue of *College Composition and Communication*, expresses a broader, more deliberate consensus among many compositionists: the view that literature's role in the composition classroom is problematic, and ought not to be endorsed without thoughtful consideration. The following schematization attempts to identify her main assumptions.³⁴

1. As a required course sanctioned by the full faculty, composition is uniquely suited to preparing students to write in the various discourses of the academy, not just in response to literature.
2. Writing about literature is a specialized activity. Students should be taught to write a variety of specialized discourses, not just one. Therefore their work should not be restricted to the humanities. The course should help them learn how to interpret data as well as texts.
3. The literary essay is not the best kind of writing to teach in the academy. It is not sufficiently specialized to be a genre of academic discourse.
4. A focus on “Great Ideas” associated with the traditional study of literature wrongly deflects attention from learning to write, which requires the class to concentrate on working out the students’ own ideas, arranging them effectively, and other aspects of the writing process. Since students must learn to write by writing, a significant portion of that process must be the subject of instruction in the classroom. Theme-based coursework in composition, which the study of literature encourages, is often dilatory for the same reasons. Moreover, literature-based courses that rely upon lecture rather than groupwork and workshops lack the practical intensity of good composition instruction. Most importantly, literature-based courses “focus on consuming texts, not producing them.”³⁵ They do not teach style except as a thing to be appreciated.
5. Students do not need to read literature in a composition class to benefit from critical theory’s insights, which can be applied to a wide variety of texts.
6. Aesthetic appreciation, which literary reading tends to encourage, should not be a high priority in the composition classroom. Practical goals should rule.
7. Literature faculty say “too much” while their students write “too little.”³⁶

To one or more of these objections, Gary Tate, Wayne Booth, E. D. Hirsch, Frederick Crews, Richard Marius, and others have provided parts of the following responses³⁷:

1. The mandate given to English departments to teach composition does not dictate that literature should be excluded or minimized. Greater attention should be given to teaching writing with the help of literature, including non-fiction prose works that have literary magnitude.
2. Writing about literature in a course that combines composition and literature is not necessarily specialized, and indeed should aspire to be something more than the specialized writing for a major or a job. The writing in such a course ought to have something to do with what it means to be human, including what it means to seek out the varieties of human excellence.
3. Indeed, the essay is not a specialized form of discourse. It often borders on literature, and combines many kinds of writing in its malleable form. Paradoxically, it is one of the best ways for specialists to communicate with generalists (the public), and with specialists in other areas.³⁸

4. Is thinking a passive state? Might not an appreciation of good writing be a crucial factor in learning to write? The desire to imitate, answer, and write variations upon certain types of writing would seem to be enhanced by an admiration of the best qualities of those types, particularly when the encounter with literature is linked with appropriate exercises and assignments.
5. Why should critical theory be more important than the encounter with literature? The productive combination of composition and literature does not seem to need sophisticated theories for its success in the classroom.
6. Is it accurate to characterize the study of literature as an exclusion of ethical and political ideas and concerns? On the other hand, can we claim to teach writing well if we do not cultivate the literary imagination?
7. Students will not learn to write if they do not write, or if their writing finds no careful reader who can help spur them on. But are we right, then, to deny those students access to literature as a means toward that end of learning to write – especially if, as many believe, carefully chosen literary texts can help their efforts more than anything else? The question is how we organize and teach classes in which students learn to be better writers with the help of literature.

Paths Toward Reform

To recombine composition and literature for the sake of improving the teaching of composition, faculty and administrators have a number of options. The paths of various reforms may join and diverge as new initiatives proceed. Some reforms may be philosophically preferable to others, or more practicable, or both. Some may require the action of faculty senates and the cooperation of deans; others might need only departmental or personal effort. It is worth recalling that our survey of faculty attitudes indicated widespread interest in using literature in the composition class, but not in a wholesale conversion of composition into the study of literature.

There must be a renewal of discussions of curriculum that do not depend upon a complete resolution of the ancient quarrel between composition and literature. The stakes are too high, and the opportunity to benefit millions of students too great, to countenance delay. None of the following proposals depends upon or presupposes the abolition of the composition course; all of them are ways to change the status quo. They expand the current conception of literature to include powerful and lasting non-fiction, and include ideas to strengthen the teaching of writing in literature classes.

Recommendations:

1. It is time to rediscover literature's power to contribute to the teaching of composition, not only as a stimulus for ideas but also as a model and point of departure for the organization and presentation of those ideas. Literature

- should inform the study of invention, organization, syntax, and style -- the matter and form of articulate thought.
2. Judiciously chosen literary texts, including admirable non-fiction, should serve as models for emulative and creative imitation, from the composing of sentences to the crafting of entire arguments, descriptions, narratives, and analyses. Upon this basis, such texts can stimulate the development of a literate voice, and the practical appreciation of the kinds of writing by which that voice can find expression, reach understanding, and secure assent.
 3. To pursue these goals, the selection of literary works now used in composition should be enlarged in terms of literary period, level of difficulty, and depth of appeal – with particular attention to works that have stood the test of generations.
 4. Graduate training should consider literature’s contribution to the effective teaching of writing.
 5. Where common core courses or freshman seminars take the place of conventional composition, assigned writings should be substantial, and students should be given access to assistance from faculty, discussion leaders, and Writing Centers.
 6. English departments should prepare their students, by force of example, for teaching composition and literature together in the secondary schools.
 7. A review of previous generations of textbooks, as well as current works that feature a mimetic and creative approach to literary models, should help guide the creation of new curricula.³⁹

At stake, whatever reforms are pursued, is the prospect for effective instruction in composition. An incipient and correctable deafness to the written and printed page increasingly limits many of our students’ prospects. Yet literature, as we have defined it here, offers them what is probably the most powerful guide to literate expression. The composition curriculum cannot in itself supply the literary education these students need, but it can incorporate carefully chosen literary works, particular lines, sentences, and excerpted passages that repay students’ attention, helping them -- in ways that other readings cannot do so well – become independent writers.

Wayne Booth may well have been right when he wrote, “As a stimulus for thinking and writing, as a source of subject matter, and as a model for style and grammar, imaginative literature is, as the students say, the best thing with which they can come in contact.”⁴⁰ We are obliged to act, again and again, upon the idea that literature, properly combined with composition, offers our students an indispensable means of getting an education. For without the life-blood of literature, the teaching of composition becomes a form of rule-driven linguistic engineering.⁴¹

¹ Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory: Education of an Orator*, trans. John S. Watson (London: George Bell and Sons, 1887), 29.

² John C. Brereton, ed., *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925: A Documentary History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 239.

³ Brereton, 278-79.

⁴ Brereton, 144-45.

⁵ See, for example, Wayne Booth, "Imaginative Literature is Indispensable," *College Composition and Communication* 7 (February, 1956), pp. 35-38; Richard Lanham, *Style: An Anti-Textbook* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Winifred Bryan Horner, ed., *Composition and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Gerald H. Thorson, "Literature in Freshman English," *College Composition and Communication* 4 (May, 1953): 38-40; Randall Stewart, "The Freshman Course Needs a Current of Ideas," *College English* 17 (1955): 16-19; Kenneth Eble, "The Freshman Composition Course Should Teach Writing," *College English* 17 (1956): 475-477.

⁶ Helen Moglen and others, "Report of the Commission on Writing and Literature," *Profession* 88: 70-76; Ben W. McClelland and Timothy R. Donavan, eds., *Perspectives on Research and Scholarship in Composition* (New York: MLA, 1985); John Clifford and John Schilb, eds., *Writing Theory and Critical Theory* (New York: MLA, 1994).

⁷ Tate, Gary. "Notes on the Dying of a Conversation." *College Composition and Communication* 7 (March, 1995): 306-308. This article includes Tate's history of the 4C's workshops. See the preliminary exchange in *CCC* 55 (March, 1993): 31-321 and the follow-up articles in *CCC* 57 (March, 1995): 265-333.

⁸ Huber, Bettina J. and David Laurence, "Report on the 1984-85 Survey of the English Sample: General Education Requirements in English and the English Major," *ADE Bulletin* 87 (1989): 30-43.

⁹ Taylor reports that in the late 1920s when many campuses required two years of composition, only 38% of the freshmen had significant contact with literature in their freshman composition courses. The literature component of the requirement seems to have resided in the second year (Brereton, 533).

¹⁰ Ron Smith, "The Composition Requirement Today: A Report on a Nationwide Survey of Four-Year Colleges and Universities," *College English* 35(1974): 138-154.

¹¹ Warner Taylor, *A National Survey of Conditions in Freshman English* (1929) in Brereton, 545-562.

¹² Albert R. Kitzhaber, *Themes, Theories, and Therapy: The Teaching of Writing in College* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 21-22.

¹³ Thomas W. Wilcox, "The Varieties of Freshman English," *College English* 33 (1972): 690-691.

¹⁴ Richard L. Larson, "Enlarging the Context: From Teaching Just Writing, to Teaching Academic Subjects with Writing," in *Defining the New Rhetorics*, ed. Theresa Enos and Stuart C. Brown (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993), 115.

¹⁵ Larson, 114.

¹⁶ On the other hand, private institutions were as likely as public institutions to assign films, many of which were made in the '30s and '40s.

¹⁷ Lynne Z. Bloom, "The Essay Canon", *College English* 61 (March, 1999): 426-427, 413.

¹⁸ Bloom, 413.

¹⁹ Bloom, 414-415.

²⁰ *The Norton Reader*, ed. Linda H. Peterson (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), xix-xx.

²¹ For the raw statistical evidence that a majority of the faculty taught composition, see Brereton, 39-44. For the literary titles, see p. 36.

²² In the 1962 edition of one popular text, the authors' preface makes his concessions explicit:

In an effort to reassure the beginning student, the editors of this reader have chosen *not* to confront him with the frequently overwhelming 'best that has been thought and said.' Instead we offer him a group of works expressing the points of view of many men and women who write about the kinds of problems and experiences the student has met, is meeting, and hopes or fears to meet. It is our hope that, by examining the accounts of childhood produced by professional writers, such a student will begin to see that his problems and experiences are paradoxically both general and unique, that he too can build significantly upon his recollections of things past. Then, perhaps, he will write with some realism and conviction. (Raymond C. Palmer, James A. Lowrie, and John F. Speer, *Experience and Expression* [New York: Scribner's, 1962], ix.)

²³ Donald Davidson, *American Composition and Rhetoric*, 4th edition (New York: Scribner's, 1959), v. The remainder of the passage is worth quoting:

[A]s to the discipline ... rhetoric cannot be mastered apart from grammar or grammar fully understood except in its living rhetorical function; . . . the study of language is, of course, an integral part of this three-fold discipline. . . . [T]he student deserves to have before him models of enduring merit, impressive in their substance as well as in their execution. . . . [M]erely provocative models, whatever their immediate interest, have no place in the standard course in composition and rhetoric. . . . [T]he progress of the students, as in all other fundamental disciplines, must be from the simple to the complex, but . . . since rhetoric is an art, combining all elements in one act, practice in writing whole compositions is essential at every stage.

[Finally,] the 'positive' approach should dominate; otherwise, correction of error is fruitless, and tends to subvert, not elevate. . . . My conviction is that the authority of the subject in both its traditional aspects and its contemporary application is best maintained if such principles are followed

²⁴ Seventy-one of out of ninety-two institutions reported that their campus's composition program was housed in the English Department. Of the remaining twenty-one, only seven specified that the composition program was totally independent. On the other fourteen campuses, writing programs had presumably found homes with connections to English, or to interdisciplinary programs in which departments of English had an influence.

²⁵ Mina Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1977).

²⁶ Christopher Gould, "Literature in the Basic Writing Course: A Bibliographic Survey," *College English* 49 (1987): 558-574; Marie Ponsot, "Total Immersion," *Journal of Basic Writing* 1.2 (1976): 31-43; Marie Ponsot, *Beat Not the Poor Desk: Writing: What to Teach, How to Teach It and Why* (Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton, 1982). A popular textbook that combines literature and composition is Robert Scholes' *Textbook* (New York: St. Martin's, 1988). But Scholes is extremely careful not to seem to distinguish literature too much from other forms of discourse. Discourse and "texts," he argues in *The End of English* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), should be the real subject of composition and the discipline of English. *Textbook* remains a useful source of ideas for incorporating literature into the composition course, even though it is directed toward the introductory literature course.

²⁷ For a prescient analysis of the hazards and possible benefits of this trend, see David Bartholomae's address as 4C's chairman to the 1988 CCCC convention: "Freshman English, Composition, and CCCC," *CCC* 40 (February, 1989): 38-50. The danger of ignoring the departmental structure of the modern university is amply documented in John Heyda's study of the post-war communications movement: "Fighting Over

Freshman English: CCCC's Early Years and the Turf Wars of the 1950s," *CCC* 50 (June, 1999): 663-681.

²⁸ John Dixon, *Growth Through English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), xii and 13.

²⁹ Herbert J. Muller, *The Uses of English* (New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967), 78-79

³⁰ James Moffett, *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968); Peter Elbow, *Embracing Contraries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

³¹ For a broad survey of post-Dartmouth attempts to combine critical theory with composition theory and pedagogy, see John Clifford and John Schilb, "Composition theory and Critical Theory," in *Perspectives on Research and Scholarship in Composition*, eds. Ben W. McClelland and Timothy R. Donovan (New York: MLA, 1985), 45-67. The 1994 MLA anthology of essays edited by Clifford and Schilb shows how the interests of many leading compositionists have shifted decidedly toward new theory, which unlike the 1985 studies avoids poetics and the rhetoric of persuasion and eloquence. Robert Scholes' essay in that collection, "My Life in Theory" records a similar transition: from a desire to ameliorate the conflict between literature and composition to a conviction that only a theoretical and pedagogical revolution can join them. John Gage, an early questioner of this trend, warned of the regrettable influence of deconstructionism on composition pedagogy. See his essay, "Conflicting Assumptions about Intention in Teaching Reading and Composition," *College English* 40(1978): 255-263. Another moderate view can be found in James C. Raymond's analysis of publication patterns in "College English: Whence and Whither," *College English* 49 (1987): 553-557.

³² Stephen P. Witte, "Topical Structure and Revision: An Exploratory Study," reprinted in *On Writing Research: The Braddock Essays 1975-1998*, ed. Lisa Ede (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1999, 132-155.

³³ Virginia Anderson, "Confrontational Teaching and Rhetorical Practice," *CCC* 48 (May, 1997): 200 and *passim*.

³⁴ Erika Lindemann, "Freshman Composition: No Place for Literature," *CCC* 55 (March, 1993): 311-315.

³⁵ Lindemann, 313.

³⁶ Lindemann, 316.

³⁷ Wayne Booth, "Imaginative Literature is Indispensable," *College English* 7 (1956):35-38; E. D. Hirsch, "Remarks on Composition to the Yale English Department," in *The Rhetorical Tradition in Modern Writing* (New York: MLA, 1982), 13-18; Frederick

Crews, “Composing our Differences: The Case for Literary Readings” and Wayne Booth, “LITCOMP,” both in *Composition and Literature*, ed. Winifred Bryan Horner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 159-167. (See the entire collection.) See also Richard Marius, “Composition Studies,” in *Redrawing the Boundaries*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: MLA, 1992), 466-481. A 1973 study by Thomas W. Wilcox indicates that many similar opinions were being heard a generation ago. See *The Anatomy of College English* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1973), 82 and 62-102. For other treatments of the topic, see James J. Murphy, *The Rhetorical Tradition and Modern Writing* (New York: MLA, 1982), and James Kinneavy, *A Theory of Discourse* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971).

³⁸ William C. Rice has noted that when writing instruction focuses on mastery of the specialized discourses of various disciplines in the academy, it ignores the absence of highly specialized writing in the composition anthologies. The literary essay, which appeals to the general reader as well as the specialist, does a better job of winning and keeping an academic audience. See his *Public Discourse and Academic Inquiry* (New York: Garland, 1996), especially pp. 66-72.

³⁹ Old textbooks, as this report has noted, frequently draw from literary materials. The power and flexibility of the mimetic approach at the sentence level is amply evident in Robert Miles, Marc Bertonasco, and William Karns, *Prose Style: A Contemporary Guide* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1991); P. J. Corbett and Robert J. Connors, *Style and Statement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Richard Lanham, *Style: An Anti-Textbook* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974); Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994).

⁴⁰ Booth, “Imaginative Literature is Indispensable,” 35.

⁴¹ The research for this study was facilitated by a modest grant from the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics, with the condition that the study be under my supervision. For their help in gathering and ordering materials, I would like to thank Richard Hismeh, Dean Papas, John Stamp, and Sharon Tyler.