LOOKING FOR BOOKS?
TWO "ADVANCED COMPOSITION" TEXTS
AND ONE DRAFTEE

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The primary difficulty in reviewing advanced composition texts arises from the vagueness of the working definition of "advanced composition": a writing course beyond the freshman level. An informal survey of ATAC members that I made in the winter of 1980-81 resulted in a list of titles of advanced courses that included every variety of writing from "Advanced College Grammar and Composition" to "Writing for Business and Industry." The year before, I updated Michael P. Hogan's list of texts used in advanced courses: the variety here was as astonishing as in the list of titles. As *The Journal of Advanced Composition* undertakes the reviewing function, we will have to qualify judgments of each text according to the kind of course for which it is apparently intended. The texts under consideration here are general texts useful in almost any guise under which advanced composition might occur except "technical writing" and "creative writing." Two are designated for advanced composition; the third is for beginning college students, but it has many features that may make it attractive to instructors whose "advanced" students may not have had a "straight" composition course in their first year.

Professor Maxine C. Hairston (University of Texas at Austin) intends *Successful Writing: A Rhetoric for Advanced Composition* "for students who have mastered the basic writing skills and are now ready and motivated to learn more about the writing process," including generating and organizing ideas, adapting to "various audiences and purposes," revising, editing, polishing, and expanding their "skills..." In "To the Student," she assumes that the reader is "at least a functional writer, but... would like to become a competent and confident writer" (p. xiii). Occasionally Hairston indicates the sorts of things the readers must have learned in earlier writing classes: definition as an organizational principle (p. 70); the existence and uses of *The Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* (p. 206). For the most part, however, the text does not refer extensively to specifics the readers might have learned.

*Successful Writing* proceeds as many texts intended for first-year
writing courses do: the readers are led from a consideration of what “good” writing is (Chapter 1) through an examination of the writing process and “situation” (Chapters 2 and 3) to definition and exemplification of rhetorical techniques, with stress upon the connection between rhetorical and thought patterns (Chapter 4). Chapter 5, “Holding Your Reader,” resumes discussion of audience; Chapters 6, 7 and 8 deal with words, sentences, and paragraphs; Chapter 9 moves on to revision. In this standard material are included what might be called “advanced” concepts such as Toulmin logic (pp. 65ff.) and closure (p. 93), and discussion of kinds of writing students might confront once they are outside academe: grant proposals, reports, abstracts, and oral presentations (Chapter 11). Chapter 12, “A Brief Review of Grammar,” is undoubtedly useful for students but may seem to some to belie the initial assumption that the readers are already “functional” writers in command of “basic skills.”

Professor Hairston is conversant with the theoretical underpinnings of the teaching of writing: she cites James Britton, Francis Christensen, Harry Crosby, E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Donald Murray, James Sledd, and Strunk and White; she incorporates their contributions solidly into her advice to the readers. The writing samples are largely from advanced composition students, but good professional writers and commentators on writing also appear: Jacques Barzun, Malcolm Cowley, Benjamin DeMott, Joan Didion, John Kenneth Galbraith, Ellen Goodman, Arthur Koestler, George Orwell.

The good advice in Successful Writing is augmented by diagrams of the writing and thinking processes, especially in Chapters 1-5. However, there are some cases where the placement of a box is intrusive. For example, the questions related to one sample writing task on p. 20 interrupt a similar list geared to a different writing task. On p. 27, a page-long diagram intervenes before the last four lines—on p. 28—of a paragraph about the value of a thesis sentence. Students might well be distracted by such lay-outs.

The exercises Professor Hairston has designed include “Prewriting Activities” and “Suggested Writing Assignments.” The instructions are clear and ample. In Chapters 3-8 and 11, the writing assignment section includes the following prefatory instructions (with some variation from chapter to chapter):

As a part of each writing assignment write a detailed analysis of your
audience and specify the characteristics they would have that you need to keep in mind as you write, the problems such an audience might present, and what the audience would expect to get from reading your paper. Also analyze your purpose in writing, specifying what you hope to accomplish with the paper. If appropriate, include an accurate and descriptive title for your paper. (p. 128)

For Chapter 9, "Revision," the samples offered for practice in revising "are [all] taken from the papers of students in advanced writing classes"—although the type of class is not noted—and present a broad range of topics (pp. 192ff.).

One other feature of Successful Writing requires comment: In Chapter 12, "A Brief Review of Grammar," Professor Hairston presents the results of a September 1979 survey of 101 professional people in which she requested that they "respond to lapses from standard English usage and mechanics in each of 63 sentences [as] if those sentences appeared in a business document" they had to read (p. 244). The eight­four responses yielded reactions that Professor Hairston categorizes as "Extremely serious lapses from the standard," "Serious lapses. . . ," "Moderately serious lapses," "Lapses that seem to matter very little," and "Lapses that do not seem to matter. . ." (pp. 245-46). The use of "Incorrect verb forms," including errors in agreement and in the participles of strong verbs, is "Extremely serious"; the use of "data" as a singular noun does "not seem to matter" (which may explain Professor Hairston's use of the word as a singular noun in her own prose). Students may either take comfort from this list or find it confusing if they have been trained by relatively conservative teachers.

Generally, Successful Writing contains much sound advice presented clearly, supported by adequate examples, and reinforced by thoughtful exercises. But reading the text is not a challenging experience: students who have had a standard first-year writing course based on a composition text and a reader will probably not find Professor Hairston’s book to be "advanced" in a significant sense.

By contrast, reading Professor Richard M. Coe's Form and Substance was like listening to someone talking passionately about his craft, intent upon reaching his audience and helping them in more than a perfunctory way.
Professor Coe (Simon Fraser University) describes his *Advanced Rhetoric* as “presumptuous” and “highly practical...” He opens with a clearer portrait of the intended user than does Professor Hairston:

[This book] does not start from scratch. It does not assume that you know nothing. On the contrary, it presumes that, although you probably still make some mechanical errors, you already know most of the so-called “basics.” It presumes that you can write more or less clear, correct sentences and coherent paragraphs most of the time. It presumes that you can already write 500-word essays well enough to pass an ordinary first-year college English course. It also assumes you have moderately competent college-level reading and thinking abilities. [pp. iii-iv]

The usership and the tone established here are consistent throughout the text: they appear in Coe’s comments on “writing as a humanistic discipline” (p. iv), his annotated citation of materials for additional reading, and—most of all—his insistence that his aim is the self-sufficiency of the reader-writer. For example, after introducing the concept of heuristics, Coe assures the reader that “You can make up question-heuristics to meet your own special needs” (p. 64); he encourages the development of individual “revision-heuristics” and provides samples, always adding the following statement:

*Remember:* This is only a list of suggested questions. Choose from it only those questions which match your individual needs. Rephrase them more specifically, if possible, to focus your attention on your own particular weak points. Add any questions you need to. Use this list to develop your own revision-heuristic. And do not rely on this list alone: read the sections of the text which explain the concepts behind these questions. [pp. 100, 123, 134, 146, 154, 168, 179, 197]

Indeed, my most positive reaction to the book came from the emphasis on the users’ acquiring and increasing analytical skills that will carry over into their command of the craft of writing, and especially from the section in the final chapter where Coe demonstrates “A Heuristic for Analyzing Writing Tasks” in any setting (pp. 359ff.).

In many ways, *Form and Substance* moves through the writing process much as *Successful Writing*—and dozens of other texts—does: it discusses why people write and how they do it; it deals with the thought processes that underlie what happens when people write and with the
conventions they use as they write; it discusses and illustrates the "forms" in which much writing appears (description, comparison-contrast, classification, division, definition, analogy, exemplification; narration, process-analysis, causation; persuasion [including Rogerian persuasion], and "specialized forms"). Coe carefully demonstrates the relationship among the types.

The positive impact of Form and Substance stems not only from Coe's insistence on the readers' individualizing the techniques presented but also from his belief that good writing and the conventions "matter" and from his assumption that the readers who themselves care about their writing will make the effort to stretch up to the text's demands. In other words, whereas Professor Hairston's text struck me as sound but ordinary, Professor Coe's work came across as sound but also thorny, ornery, and therefore compelling.

Like Professor Hairston, Professor Coe is conversant with and includes the ideas of major theorists in the teaching of composition: Aristotle, Kenneth Burke (whose Pentad Coe recommends), Noam Chomsky (whose name is not in the index), Edward Corbett, Frank D'Angelo, James McCrimmon, Donald Murray, Kenneth Pike, Alton Becker and Richard Young, I.A. Richards, Nancy Sommers. And Coe's quotations and examples come from an equally wide range of writers—Aristophanes, Byron, Coleridge, Thoreau, Elliston, Tillich, Twain—that indicates the extent to which Professor Coe believes in writing as a "humanistic discipline" as well as a craft (p. iv). (I must add that I should have liked more conscientious documentation of some of the citations in the body of the text.)

Professor Coe's advice is, like Professor Hairston's, made graphic through tabulations of guidelines, reproductions of pages of writing-in-progress (pp. 76ff.), the suggestions for self-generated heuristics mentioned earlier, and substantial examples, usually from student writers. However, the nature of the courses from which the papers come is not indicated.

The "Exercise" suggestions at the close of each section invariably ask the users of the text to turn to their own writing and assess it in the light of the material just presented. (Professor Coe explains in "How to Use
This Book" that he calls the section "Exercise" "to revitalize a dead metaphor and remind you of their function: . . . to help you exercise your mind and develop your ability to use what you have learned from reading that section" (p. xii.) In most places, the readers are encouraged to examine written material from their own field: "Analyze some piece of writing you admire from your own area of special interest by numbering levels of generality" (p. 104); or "Read an article in your area of special interest and write a 200-word abstract" (p. 234).

So far, Prof. Coe's book probably does not seem particularly ornery or thorny: however, the qualities are there, partly in the level of abstraction to which the readers must rise in order to understand the humanistic emphasis (hardly a concern of first-year or even most upper-level undergraduates); partly in the manner in which the author presents topics that are probably new to the student readers (e.g., the material on "levels of generality" on pp. 96ff.). Professor Coe assumes a greater degree of sophistication and experience in many areas—writing included—than does Professor Hairston.

One characteristic of Form and Substance that may seem more than merely ornery to some teachers and students is the care with which Professor Coe refers to non-Western ways of perceiving the world. For example, in a comment on "the proper relationship among levels of generality," he observes that "These rules derive from empirical scientific thinking, but they are generally enforced in modern Western discourse. . . ." The footnote to the sentence comments that:

This textbook does not necessarily endorse these rules (certainly not without qualifications). They are common to certain cultures—particularly modern Western cultures—and they reflect the dominance of empirical science. . . . Almost anyone trying to learn from this textbook . . . is presumably operating in a modern Western culture and so should be aware of the rules. (p. 96)

Similar observations accompany discussion of the "Procedures for verifying observations" (p. 220), the usual concerns of "Western philosophers" (pp. 266-67), the concept of cause-and-effect (pp. 303-4), and the art of persuasion (p. 341). It seems to me that the persistent reminders of others ways of perceiving will be difficult but stimulating for most users of the text.

Generally, Form and Substance is a challenging text that should, if
used in a course or on one's own (as Professor Coe seems to hope it will be), reward the readers with a deeper understanding of the craft of writing as it relates to the humanistic concerns of educated adults. Better than that, the readers who truly *use Form and Substance* should earn the reward of improvement in their written work no matter what the situation in which they confront the writing task.

*Writing in the Arts and Sciences*, by the Beaver College (PA) team of Elaine P. Maimon, Gerald L. Belcher, Gail W. Hearn, Barbara F. Nodine, and Finbarr W. O'Connor, is clearly designed for first-year students: the authors address student readers who face four more years of college during which "instructors...will ask you to look at the world in diverse...ways..."5 The collaborators inform the instructor using the text that it "is an introduction to academic writing, reading, and studying" and "an introduction to 'cultural literacy,' a phrase used by the National Endowment for the Humanities to mean a literacy that enables one to participate fully in the life of our civilization" (p. xi). The principles that govern the book and therefore the course that uses it are these:

1. Writing like learning is not an entity but a process.

2. Writing is a way to learn, not merely a means of communicating to others what has already been mastered.

3. Writing and learning are connected interactive processes... .

4. Writing in every discipline is a form of social behavior in that discipline. Students must learn the particular conventions of aim and audience within each discipline... [p. xiii]

Occasionally the authors give a nod to advanced students: for instance, in describing scientific periodicals as source materials, they observe that the journals named "are adequate...for most freshman classes. More advanced students should consult actual research reports" (p. 93). On the next page, they identify the *General Science Index* as a "reasonable starting point especially for freshman or sophomore searches" (p.94). But for the most part, Maimon and Company direct their advice and comments to beginning writers—to first-year students.

Unlike the relatively conventional Hairston and Coe texts, *Writing in the Arts and Sciences* moves from discussion of what writing is...
Then, under "Learning to Write," the authors consider the kinds of writing peculiar to the Humanities (Chapters 6-8), the Social Sciences (Chapters 9-11) and the Natural Sciences (Chapters 12-14). I do not mean to suggest that the general concerns of writing texts are overlooked: they are simply dealt with in the contexts of the three disciplines. In other words, this text is not for instructors on any level who want the traditional rhetorical approach—even though analysis, description, definition, comparison and contrast, analogy, argumentation, narration, and cause and effect appear in the book along with scattered discussions of paragraphing and sentence structure. Punctuation and diction receive passing mention, a fact that suggests the advisability of requiring students to buy a handbook as an adjunct. However, much attention is given to advice and demonstrations in connection with the writing of first drafts and with revisions—topics that are too often left under-developed in writing textbooks.

To return to the disciplinary approach: it seems to me that the involvement of colleagues from departments other than English makes Writing in the Arts and Sciences a particularly useful text for beginning and advanced students. The illustrations—student notes, outlines, drafts, and "finished" papers—are from the disciplines of Professor Maimon's collaborators (history, biology, psychology and philosophy) and from sociology. There is careful instruction in the approach to and carrying out of assignments characteristic of each discipline: for example, Chapter 8 (in the Humanities section) deals with "Papers of Contemplation"—the criticism or defense of an author's point of view; comparison and contrast; puzzle or problem papers; speculative papers. In each case, the students learn about "Getting started," "Writing the first draft," and "Revising," just as they do for "Term Papers in the Social Sciences" (Chapter 9) and "The Laboratory Report in the Natural Sciences" (Chapter 13).

Maimon and Company have not composed their text in a vacuum: like Professors Hairston and Coe, they mention the people in the field of writing to whom they owe most: Mina Shaughnessy ("Her generous intellectual spirit was the earliest inspiration for this project"—p. xiv); James Kinneavy and Kenneth Bruffee as the other chief theoreticians of influence; Frederick Crews, Richard Larson, Harvey Wiener, Edward P.J. Corbett; Monroe Beardsley, Young, Becker and Pike, Kenneth Burke, Linda Flower, Janet Emig. The instructor is not burdened with the
background: it is carefully and quietly worked into the materials.

Illustrations abound in *Writing in the Arts and Sciences*, and many of them are carefully annotated so that the student users cannot miss the point. Occasionally, as in Hairston's and Coe's books, there are odd placements: for no discernible reason discussion of a color reproduction of a Blake watercolor on p. 165 refers the readers to the plate opposite p. 176. There are a few places where the text is awkwardly interrupted by an illustration (e.g., pp. 119-120), but on the whole the book is nicely designed.

Each chapter concludes with a section of "Questions" (mainly intended to focus the students' attention on the main points of the commentary) and of "Exercises." Only in a few cases can an instructor lean on the authors for paper assignments, although there are suggestions for paragraphs, logic and organizational exercises (Chapter 2); practice in writing an "Acknowledgments" page or in checking the quotations in a published article (Chapter 5); the analysis of a poem (Chapter 7); the development of a case study paper on a current event (Chapter 10); a prose narrative of a laboratory experiment (Chapter 12); the summary of a published article (Chapter 14). After I had read the book, made notes toward this review, and then decided to use the book in my current Advanced Composition course, I realized the full force of the lack of lengthy writing assignments—but at length I appreciated being forced to devise my own.

On the whole, and partly on the basis of the reactions of my class, I find *Writing in the Arts and Sciences* a challenging text with a perspective that will make me learn along with the students—about the differences between the disciplines and about the ways a writer must adapt techniques to the expectations of the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences. Perhaps in a later review I can report on whether my enthusiasm endured and whether the text succeeded with my students.

I feel compelled to express my concern over the typographical errors in all three texts and, in *Successful Writing* and *Writing in the Arts and Sciences*, over an avoidable inconsistency between the discussion and the practice of documentation.

It is lamentable that any typographical errors should appear in texts intended for writing courses: most teachers write "Proofread!" in margins
until they feel like broken—and unheeded—records. It is disconcerting, even dismaying, to find egregious typos in composition texts: for example, in *Form and Substance*, the repeated error in Jeremy Bentham's name—"Betham"—on pp. 172 and 176; the apparent misspelling ("occurrence") on p. 178; the inconsistency in the spelling of "Judgment/judgement" (pp. 327-352, *passim*). In *Successful Writing*, I noted such oddities as a colon after "are," p. 206, and after "be," p. 55; commas omitted in city-state designations, as on p. 204; a comma between subject and verb, p. 52; in *Writing in the Arts and Sciences*; an omitted question mark (p. 28), an omitted opening quotation mark (p. 34); an omitted opening parenthesis (p. 140).

I was most puzzled by the footnote situation in the Hairston and Maijmon et al. texts. In discussing the format for footnotes, Professor Hairston writes, "The MLA-endorsed form for the most common kinds of documentation are [sic] as follows"—and then gives a sample that places the number at line-level and introduces a period following the number (in fact, this is the form used for Professor Hairston's own footnotes throughout the text; pp. 210 ff.). Furthermore, Professor Hairston refers the readers to the *MLA Style Sheet* even though the *MLA Handbook*, which is much more complete than and considerably different from the last *Style Sheet*, had been available since 1977.

In *Writing in the Arts and Sciences*, the sample footnotes for student instruction conform to MLA style (pp. 111-116) and to APA style (pp. 116-119). However, the footnotes to the text do not: the numbers appear at line-level and the footnotes begin at the margin (see, for example, p. 105). I also find it mildly curious that no mention of the *MLA Handbook* appears and that the APA format receives only the following comment: "Several of the above citations have been adapted from the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 2nd ed., 1975" (p. 119).

Typos and inconsistencies are not issues that will or should "fail" a text, of course, but sufficient care might be taken so that students will not be needlessly puzzled as they confront the demands of any writing course.

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NOTES

1 "Who Takes Advanced Composition and Why?" presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Dallas, March 26, 1981.


3 Maxine C. Hairston, Successful Writing: A Rhetoric for Advanced Composition (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1981), p. [ix]. Subsequent references will be identified by page number in the body of the review.

4 Richard M. Coe, Form and Substance: An Advanced Rhetoric (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1981), p. [i[i]. Subsequent references will be identified by page number in the body of the review.