A Shape a Writer Can Contain

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What a beginning writer wants is a form to occupy the blank distance of his eye, some shape he can contain as he goes outward and inward in his naturing.

I UPON BEING TOLD TO, BUT NOT KNOWING HOW

A few years ago when I was coaching junior high basketball, I asked a squad of seventh graders to scrimmage during the opening day of practice. I wanted to know who knew the rules of the game and who moved easily within those rules. Shortly after the opening tip, a boy who came from a country school caught the ball, ran the length of the court without dribbling, and arched the ball over the backboard into a defiled tumbling mat. It was not an auspicious beginning.

Five years later, the same boy helped his team win the state championship. Having mastered the rules, he didn't have to concentrate upon traveling, double-dribbling, three-second lanes, or ten-second lines. For by reducing the rules of basketball to a semi-consciousness, he could attend to picks, feints, and favorite spots from which to shoot. And the years of practice paid off handsomely in letter sweaters, all-conference awards, inches of publicity, a legion of feminine admirers, and twenty-three pounds of chicken eaten at local service clubs.

I only wish those of you who become skillful writers of the prose essay could acquire the same fame when you are young. Of course, you can't. People in your home town may say they admire good writing, but they will not turn out for noun-and-verb contests with the same enthusiasm they display for basketball games. If, however, you become conscious of an elementary form of prose and if you practice it often enough, you may acquire two values which are more lasting than local fame. First, you may learn to think logically. Second, you may learn to satisfy the psychological expectations of your readers. Now I know how meager these values may appear in the age of your eyes; but if you try them on, I guarantee you head wear more attractive than the gunny sacks of poor thinking.

And I also know how drab the printed page may appear to some of you. In this stereo-cinema world of yours, you are bombarded with red sounds and loud sights. A book may not have the shock power of Cinerama or an amplified guitar. So you shout, STOP THE BOOK, I WANT TO GET OFF! Yet others, and the number seems to be increasing, are now crying, EASE UP ON THE ACCELERATOR, I WANT A CLOSER LOOK! Here is where writing meaningfully enters your life. The printed page still gives you the closest of all possible looks at words, those mysterious and subtle mirrors which reflect and create you simultaneously. For when you write, you live in a world of word-look. As a writer, you, too, respond to music, films, and television; but writing about a pop lyric, a movie with a message, or a bad TV series adds a significant dimension to your responses. For you not only describe your physical sensations for the reader, you also tell him why you have responded in the ways you have. In other words, you use the essay to justify your choices.

So let's say you want to write, or try to write, or are asked by your teacher to write. You sit there in the desk. Throughout your elementary school years, you have sawed, squared, and planed that oak which is the English sentence. And you have stored those sentences in your mind. But now you don't know what to do with the lumber in your attic. What you need is a blueprint, some shape you can contain while you go on and inward with your thinking. For it's one thing to want to write an essay, but another to know how.
This booklet tells you how. It is addressed to those of you who have never or rarely ever looked at the larger forms of a prose essay, paragraphs for example. I have reduced these paragraphs to skeletons by changing sentences into lines. These lines ask you to concentrate upon how shapes look instead of how words sound or sentences mean. For once you become aware of how big blocks of prose function you can relate shapes to meaning. But although I have simplified the form of the essay, I have not oversimplified the concepts which give significance to the essay’s parts. This booklet, therefore, offers you an elementary technique in essay writing. You can read it in approximately one hour, but you can discuss almost endlessly its theories and applications.

After all, every writer is ultimately faced with a problem which is greater than that of identifying the functions of prose blocks. His final worth is determined by how imaginatively he fills up his white space.

II

WORKING UP SOME PLEASANT FRETS

When my daughter tells me teenagers use certain dance steps but are free to “hang loose,” I know there is a similarity between dancing and certain types of writing. And when I ask her how to “hang loose,” she says, “Just go, dad, go!” So I go. As my mountainous age trembles across the dance floor, I discover a special woe which greets the uncoordinated who must spin beauty from themselves. When they fail, despite their inspiration for the dance, nothing is there to rescue them.

So I advance this idea: When you as a writer fail, an awareness of form comes to your rescue. Although you may be able to grope yourself to beautiful discoveries without any help, your chances of success are slim unless you are very bright. For if you force yourself to discover as you write and if what you discover becomes the shape as well as the content of your essay, as a beginning writer you assume a great burden. You never really know where you are until you arrive. And in writing this way, you turn every essay into a totally new risk.

Why not place yourself in a helpful harness? For surely an essay possesses us as we possess it, and to know these things which possess us beneficially is to be a little smarter than those who never know how they are possessed. Even the essays which you have always written have been harnesses. In one case, you may have put the needle of the mind on the record of memory and played back what your teacher or your textbook said. In writing this way, you were not especially concerned with logic or interpretation. You wanted to be factually accurate. You wanted to repeat well and be grammatically correct, and you assumed you would be rewarded with an acceptable grade if you were. Or you may have gone to the library and copied ideas into your own words. If you gave credit to the author from whom you borrowed the ideas and if you once again were neat and grammatical, you thought you would receive a passing grade. But in emphasizing accuracy and good grammar, which are certainly indisputable assets of any writer, you may have developed microscopic eyes which magnify that little country called the sentence. Now when you look at your writing, you see much between the capital letter and the period.

I want to introduce you to the Asia of the essay. And I want you to use not only a bigger eye; I want you to respond more imaginatively to your worlds. In writing the following type of essay, you should express your opinions rather than simply repeat what your teachers or books say. For our memory, however greatly we prize it, is a lower power of the mind. But risking the dare of wrestling an interpretation from a piece of literature makes you uniquely human. No computer can ask why, but you can. And certainly no computer can learn to know itself by looking into the mirrors of prose.

So I urge you to look. What you discover about your essays may not please you at first, but I hope it will eventually eliminate some of the risk from writing essays which displease you.
III
THE THING A SKELETON DOES

What does a skeleton do? Among other things, it humanizes you. How many dates
do you think you could get if you had the skeleton of an anteater? Or the bone
structure of a woolly mammoth? Those whom you most desire would shun you as if
you had a quadruple case of skin blemishes. Yet there are students who write as if
they are not human.

Here is an example of subhuman prose.

These lines represent the shape of an essay which some students write. It is a
glob of words, a prose amoeba. Each sentence appears to be equal in value to
every other sentence, for there is no attempt to divide the essay into paragraphs,
each of which might develop a separate but related idea. Thus the prose amoeba
is as simple and flabby as the mind which created it.

To avoid writing globs, write paragraphs. The advice seems simple. Yet when
some students write paragraphs, they produce essays which look like this.

This is the skeleton of a very human essay. Does it make any sense? That is, do the
shapes of its parts tell you of processes the writer used to communicate with the
reader? If not, don’t be dismayed. Students rarely look at an essay’s skeleton. No red-
blooded young man has trouble identifying Raquel Welch. Nor does any astigmatic
young girl fail to recognize John Denver (or the latest folk singing rage if John
Denver has succumbed to the fleeting fate of pop singers by the time this is printed).
People usually see what they are compelled to see. And since many of you have never
been asked to look at the larger shapes of an essay, you have never really seen them.

Furthermore, does the essay above, for example, have what appears to be an
introductory paragraph? Does it have a conclusion? Are the paragraphs between
the introduction and conclusion shaped differently? What might the single-spaced,
indented material of paragraphs two and four represent? Why are paragraphs two
and three longer than the introduction and the conclusion? These are questions for
your big eye. And since it is difficult to see the proverbial forest because of its trees, I
shall discuss each part of the essay separately.
If you write the introduction of your essay carefully and perceptively, you assure yourself of greater success in the remainder of your paper. But you doom the essay by racing into it or not knowing how to begin. About all you can say for the pole vaulter who speeds toward the bar carrying a chopstick is that he has a stupid zeal. Of course, the other fellow who will never make the height is the contestant who lies dawdling in the grass at the end of the runway. He’s lettering in suntan. When he’s finally called, he gets up, races down the runway, vaults, and misses. His whole attitude is wrong.

What would you say were the chances of success of students who wrote the following sentences as introductions to their essays based on The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn?

Mrs. Loftus is knowing. Knowing is Mrs. Loftus.

Superstition changes your senses. By I mean it may entertain you, it may make sorry for something and it may make you both of these.

Boggs was a man of many kinds.

Pap decided Huck shouldn’t be better than he, like a slave most thought shouldn’t be better than his master.

To make the expected height, a vaulter needs a willingness to try, a fiber-glass pole appropriate to his weight, and a period of methodical warm-up. A similar series of steps is necessary for writing an introduction to an essay. Unfortunately, none of the writers of the sentences above shows an awareness of these steps. And so the first bit of valuable advice you can drum into your own ears is this — I AM NOT READY TO PERFORM UNTIL I AM CAREFULLY PREPARED. This is equally true for the writer, the cheerleader, and the athlete.

One mark of your preparation is your purpose sentence. This sentence is the most important sentence in the introduction. It is a proposition set down or put forward for the consideration of the reader. Here is a purpose sentence:

Mary Jane, a minor character in Huck Finn, shows the reader Huck’s inborn morality.

A purpose sentence results from thinking about what you have read or experienced. It is an interpretation or value judgment. It is not a simple statement of fact or memory. To say that, “Mark Twain wrote Huck Finn” is to say what is obvious You would find it impossible to write two or three pages developing that idea unless you brought into your discussion how, where, or why he wrote the book. Again, to write that, “Mark Twain piloted a steamboat on the Mississippi” also repeats a fact. A statement of fact is not a proposition to be developed for the careful reader. A purpose sentence is.

One way to obtain a purpose sentence is to ask and answer a question. Why did Twain include Mary Jane in Huck Finn? If your answer is, “Mary Jane helps us to understand Huck,” you are on your way to writing a purpose sentence. Or you may choose to ask what? In Twain’s Huck Finn, what precisely is the watchman’s sin? If you respond, “The watchman is unprincipled,” you have made another good response.

Or your interest may be in the art or craft of the writer. If so, you may choose to ask how? How does Twain introduce Huck to the unknown? One specific answer might be, “He forces Huck to go ashore.” Of course, the value of any question almost always rests in your additional responses to it. But by beginning with a question (even one which you may not be able to answer as well as you wish), you force yourself to write purpose sentences which are not statements of fact or simple memory. As such, you will also force yourself to explore new thoughts while you are defending or illustrating your point-of-view. And exploration is what this kind of essay is all about.

After you have written your purpose sentence, you may be tempted to plunge immediately into the body of the essay. Don’t! Ask yourself this question: Do I know the precise meanings of the words in my purpose sentence? For example, in the sentence, “Mary Jane, a minor character in Huck Finn, shows the reader Huck’s inborn morality,” what precisely does morality mean? Be brutally honest with yourself. If you can’t write a sentence defining morality, your essay will reflect your fuzziness. And, then, once you have a specific idea written down, are you sure the word means that and only that? For example, is morality concerned with the judgment of the goodness or badness of human action and character, or is morality concerned with an inborn sense of right and wrong? It means both, and each meaning can be applied to the Mary Jane episode. But if you assume that Huck is immoral because he is smoking, drinks, and lies; you badly miss Twain’s use of morality and the scope of his book.

The key words of your purpose sentence will help you think, but only if you let them. To use them as avenues into new thinking, you must define them carefully. Don’t be afraid to go to the dictionary. You may not be able to woo Webster’s the way you do John, but grudgingly admit that the dictionary has a better vocabulary than he does. Knowing well the key words of your purpose sentence will help you get to the heart of its meaning.

Once you have definitions to the key words, you are ready for the first draft of your introductory paragraph. It might resemble this:

Mary Jane, a minor character in Huck Finn, shows the reader Huck’s inborn morality. Through this relationship we become more aware of Huck’s sense of right and wrong. For when Huck joins with Mary Jane to build a defense against the King and the Duke, we realize the depth of Huck’s honesty, courage, and compassion. Yes, Mary Jane helps us to understand Huck.

This introduction is neither long or short. It contains more than the purpose sentence, but it does not ramble as if the writer were searching for an idea. Skeletalized, the paragraph looks like this:
introduction. It is designed to tell you how close you are to your subject. Why not take advantage of its requirements?

If you choose this strategy in writing your introduction, you tell the reader what you wish to support, you define the key words of your assertion, and then you tell him again what you wish to defend. Unless he is sound asleep or dreaming about vaulting twenty-one feet, he should not miss your point.

After you have written a few of these introductions, you may want to experiment with the order of the sentences. For example, you may wish to write the purpose sentence as the last sentence in the introduction.

Of all the minor characters in Huck Finn, Mary Jane is one of the most important. For when Huck joins with Mary Jane to build a defense against the King and the Duke, we realize the depth of his sense of right and wrong. Thus Mary Jane shows the reader Huck’s inborn morality: his honesty, his courage, his compassion.

In writing this type of introduction, you withhold the purpose sentence in the same way a teller of a joke builds to his punch line. When it finally occurs, the snap “snaps.” The reader has been “psyched” and “logicked.”

Whichever introduction you choose, you should be aware of the factor common to each. You cannot write a good essay until you are thinking specifically. No boy tries to kiss a girl at 50 paces unless he has superhuman lips. Yet, there are writers who try to write when they are that far from a specific idea. Of course, they would get closer if they knew how far away they were. But that’s just the point of a good introduction. It is designed to tell you how close you are to your subject. Why not take advantage of its requirements?

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Value almost always comes from concentration. If, for example, you limit yourself to one of Hawthorne’s short stories and then limit yourself further to one character, you may discover that a woman is the central figure about whom the men cluster. Then you might ask a valuable question like this: “Why are the men drawn to her?” One answer might be, “Each man is drawn to her because he wishes to control her.” This is certainly a more valuable purpose sentence than, “Hawthorne was one of our first short story writers.” The first sentence is an interpretation; the second, a statement of fact or memory. And if you are waging an academic argument with me now, be saying, “Yeah, I’d write interpretations if I had the time,” take the time. I know that you’re involved in Pep Club and track meets. Perhaps you’re even working in Women’s Lib groups and Male Chauvinist cells. But take time to interpret. It’s still a curricular activity, I think.

For without a good interpretation, your essay will fail to the degree it lacks limits, precision, and value. Since the essay is a process whereby you test the worth of your purpose sentence, you may very well write yourself into something better than a good grade. You may write yourself into a superb education, but only if your purpose sentences are limited, precise, and valuable.

VI

THE PREVENTION AND CURE OF WALDO’S DISEASE

Waldo Iverson was a good athlete and an even better student of English. In junior high, he excelled at football and descriptive essays. When he wrote, he miraculously described what he saw, heard, felt, tasted, and smelled. Teachers praised him for his abilities, especially his vocabulary, because it gave Waldo a more precise knowledge of his world. But as he began to think abstractly, he fell in love with long, big words. He never said anything; he made prodigious pronouncements. Nor did he write long sentences; Waldo’s sentences were sesquipedalian. And the more he wrote his big ideas in his big ways, the more he fell in love with his dances of pure mind. Eventually he became ill. Certain symptoms appeared. First, he lost his verbal sight, the most frequently used sense in writing. Then he lost his verbal hearing. When he lost his taste, touch, and smell, his friends and teachers mourned their passing. Of course, Waldo looked upon his sickness as pure health. And as he strove mightily to reach new verbal heavens, he continued to remove himself times five from the physical world. When he finally disappeared into a cloud of neon, everyone called him the flying mouth.

Waldo might have saved himself had he not taken such an either-or attitude toward thinking and sensing. A good writer needs his eye and mind, not one or the other. In fact, one of the most common ways to write a good paragraph in the middle of the essay involves the use of both mind and eye. Its pattern looks like this:

Statement
Example
Explanation

A statement is an idea. An example is evidence discovered by the physical senses (eye, ear, etc.). An explanation is the relationship between the world of the senses (the example) and the world of thought (the statement). So instead of opposing the worlds of mind and eye, the good writer arranges different kinds of information in a progression which permits him to say more about his world and the literature he reads.

For this reason, many paragraphs move from general to particular, or from statement to example to explanation. If I say, “Cosmetics destroy the innocence of a twelve-year-old face,” you should expect me to refer you to a face which is shadowed, lashed, or gussied in some way. Then you should expect to read an explanation of why this face is less beautiful than a natural or relatively natural one. For what chance have I to convince you of my point-of-view if I do not illustrate and explain it. But if I follow the steps outlined above, you should know how I reason even if you do not agree with me.

Thus a paragraph in the body of an essay shows a writer’s mind in the process of reasoning. The more he delves into the opening statement, the clearer and more significant he should make it. Let me show you step-by-step how this occurs.
First, I begin the paragraph by writing

Cosmetics destroy the innocence of a twelve-year-old face.

This statement, often called the topic sentence of the paragraph, introduces you immediately to my opinion. Then I cite this example:

Mary Smith, for example, wears green eye shadow, false eyelashes, and the latest *au naturel* lipstick.

To comment upon the way she wears these cosmetics, I say,

Although these cosmetics applied moderately might heighten certain attractive features of her face, Mary overdoes what she thinks her parents underdid when they created her.

As you can see, I have already begun to explain why Mary feels compelled to wear cosmetics. But I’m also obligated to develop the other reasons she wears them and to argue that she should not. So I continue:

Perhaps she thinks a heavily made-up face will attract the boys in English 7. If such a face does distract them from noun-and-verbing, what does this say about the intelligence of seventh grade boys? And shouldn’t Mary think about the ads in women’s magazines which promise instant love affairs for those who buy such curious colors? If you think about it for a moment, age is a time which comes too soon. How many women do you know who are trying to regain their youthful complexions? Why not wear the face of natural wonder while it’s yours to wear? Then perhaps you won’t desperately try to regain your innocence as a friend of mine is doing. She’s 17.

If I skeletalize the paragraph I’ve just written, it looks like this:

Statement
Example
Explanation

Notice that this paragraph is structurally different and longer than the introductory paragraph. It forces you to ask questions and then answer them, to think of possibilities and explain them. The more questions you ask and answer, the greater the depth of your inquiry. Sometimes you may not be able to ask or answer questions. Yet this is precisely why you should try to write an explanation. It forces you into greater awareness. And even if your awareness is one of saying, “I don’t know,” you have at least confirmed your ignorance. This is tragic only if your face can’t stand a loss.

I hope you now understand that writing a paragraph of the body is a skillful and methodical exercise in groping. When you write it, you don’t simply record your impressions. You make sense of your responses by illustrating and explaining them. And since the paragraphs of the body are the most crucial parts of your argument, I hope you find helpful the following tips in writing them. Remembering just a few of them will help you avoid Waldo’s disease.

### VII

**TIPS ABOUT STATEMENTS**

It’s easy to make statements. As you glide over the surface of ordinary conversation, there is little friction between you and your impressions. Speech is a rapid skating. But writing a statement or topic sentence of a paragraph is a different process. It almost always involves less ease and more analysis.

What then is a statement? If the purpose of your essay is compared to a whole number (as in arithmetic), a statement is a fraction of a whole number. To form fractions, you break down whole numbers. To form statements, you factor the purpose sentence into lesser ideas. For example, if I write the following purpose sentence:

Mr. Grangerford, a poor example of a good father, taught Buck the things that killed him.

I might factor it into the following statements:

He taught his son hate.
He taught his son hypocrisy.
He taught his son disrespect of law and order.

Each of these statements is a crucial idea in the development of my essay. If any one is illogical or imprecisely worded, it will hinder the effectiveness of my argument.

You can check the logic of your factoring process by using the *because* method of proof. A friend of mine introduced me to this simple scheme which works very well if you are thinking from a cause to its effects. First, write the purpose sentence: “Mr. Grangerford, a poor example of a good father, taught Buck the things that killed him”; then insert *because*. Next write the first statement factored from the purpose sentence; “He taught his son hate.” The entire sentence now reads this way: “Mr. Grangerford, a poor example of a good father, taught Buck the things that killed him *because* he taught his son hate.” By using the *because* method of proof, I have isolated and established the logic between the purpose sentence and the first statement. Because the logic is established I am safe in using, “He taught his son hate” as my first statement. To test your skill in factoring and your readiness to write, why don’t you apply the *because* method to the other two statements above.

Games of this nature may appear rinky-dink in some eyes. But if you factor the purpose sentence before you begin to write, you will have a valuable and brief outline from which to work. Since it is brief, it will quickly help you check the logic of your statements. You can see in a moment whether a complicated organism, such as your essay, has its bones together—or whether a Martian kneecap is hanging around an otherwise human leg. For example, would you use all statements of the following outline in an essay?

**Purpose sentence:** Although Miss Watson appears to be a religious person, she is a hypocrite.
Statement No. 1: She considers slavery moral.
Statement No. 2: She also treats Jim like an animal.
Statement No. 3: Finally, she tries to teach Huck table manners.

Even if you have not read *Huck Finn*, you should feel uneasy about statement No. 3. Huck's table manners are not a direct effect of Miss Watson's hypocrisy.

The relationship between the purpose sentence and the statements of your essay may not be one of cause-and-effect. It may be question-and-answer, for example. But whatever it is, you should remember that each statement should relate to the purpose sentence as pepperoni, hamburger, and shrimp relate to pizza. If you discover apples among your meat and fish, get them out of the pizza and into other pies.

VIII
TIPS ABOUT EXAMPLES

In writing *examples*, force yourself to support your statements by asking the following questions. **Who** specifically illustrates my interpretation? **Where** in history, literature, science, or government is the character, passage, formula, or incident which suggested my opinion? **What** sight, sound, or combination of lookiesmelly touchytastyhearies provides evidence for my belief? Asking these questions forces you down the abstraction ladder. The more specifically you write, the more clearly you communicate.

If you are writing an essay about a piece of literature, you can make sure you have used an example by quoting a passage from the piece. If the passage is two sentences or less, put quotation marks around it and continue your normal spacing. If it is longer than two sentences, indent and single-space it. Your skeletalized paragraph should resemble this:

```
.............(Statement).............

.............(Example).............

.............(Explanation).............
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The quotation marks or the indented, single-spaced lines give you eyeball proof that you have tried to support your statement. Once you realize this value of quoted lines, you can quickly check the presence or absence by running your eyes down the page. If you find no quotation marks or indented, single-spaced lines, you should read the paragraph very carefully. You may be able to defend the absence of quoted material. Or you may discover you have paraphrased a passage (written it in your own words). But then again, you may have omitted examples entirely. This omission, an act of simple haste or unawareness, will seriously weaken the clarity and the persuasiveness of your argument.

If you use indented, single-spaced examples, you should be aware of two conventions associated with the practice. First, you should write the passage exactly as the author has. If you are quoting lines from a poem, write the lines as they appear in the book. Do not break the poet's lines into lines of your own. If you can't get all of his line into your space, indent your second line two or three spaces. This will usually show the reader that your two lines are one continuous line of print. Second, furnish a lead-in to the indented, single-spaced matter. Some elementary
lead-ins are these: “According to the playwright Arthur Miller:” or “In his novel *Catch-22*, Joseph Heller describes Yossarian in this way:” Note that each lead-in ends with a colon. The colon is a mark of formal introduction.

Lead-ins, of course, vary in their sophistication. After you have written a few, you may discover that you are writing longer and more complex ones. For example, you may write something like this: “Although Huck’s honesty is sometimes obscured, it is evident he is honest when he says:” But in the essays of beginning writers, the sophistication of the lead-in is not as important as its presence. A lead-in is necessary because as a bridge it smoothly transports your reader from the statement to the example. Without lead-ins, the reader may slip into a trough of white-space and bark his verbal shin. And you wouldn’t really want him to do that, would you? Oh, I admit that your occasional reader is a frump, but almost all other readers are not. They are kind fellows who want you to win for their sakes.

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IX TIPS ABOUT EXPLANATIONS

If I could make you aware of the nature of explanations and the necessity for writing them, I’d give up teaching composition and race homing pigeons or hunt ducks, two of the sports I love most. An explanation, however, is not as tangible as a homing pigeon or a duck. But it is, in fact, far more crucial to our lives than either of the birds I like. Perhaps I can show you why in the following example.

If I choose two objects, a football linebacker and an armadillo, can you guess what I think they have in common? If you guess *animal*, you’re wrong. If you guess *tough hide*, you’re still wrong. But if you guess *a love of ants*, you’re right, although you may have to change the spelling of *ants* to know what kind satisfies nephews who are linebackers. Then you may wish to argue that not all nephews who are linebackers love their mothers’ sisters. Or you may wish to wonder about the absurdity of my relationship. But this is just the point: Without an explanation of how two things are related, readers end up second-guessing or quarreling with writers. By writing good explanations, you eliminate much guesswork and academic bickering.

For when you explain, you pinpoint the relationship between the statement and the example. One way to do this is by asking these questions: Why have I used this example to support this statement? What does this passage of literature mean for my purpose (is there one part which I should point out and discuss to show the reader why I have used it)? How does the writer convey his ideas (is there some element of style or technique which helps him more than another element)? Asking these questions will force you to read the example very carefully. And if you read it two or three times before you begin your explanation, you may discover precisely why you used the example for support. Besides, knowing the example this thoroughly gives your imagination more play. Thus you not only stop the reader’s guesswork and possible bickering; you also extend your thinking into new space. You educate yourself by discovering relationships of which you were not initially aware.

I won’t minimize the difficulty of writing good explanations. It’s tough to think yourself into them and even tougher to word your way out. Nor can I exaggerate their rewards. Viewed through the lens of a lifetime, they are awesome. Yet despite my telling you this, I know that the biggest obstacle in writing good explanations will be your simple unwillingness to try. The proverbial person who is licked before he starts has no chance to write an explanation. Nor has the slug who sleeps in the back row or over by the windows. But believe me, the explanation is the best part of the essay to show how willing and awake its writer is. It is his best test of himself.

For this is what the word *essay* means. It comes from the French *essayer*, which means to test or weigh. *Essayer*, in turn, comes from the Latin *exagere*, which means to drive out of. If you test or weigh your evidence, you should be able to drive out of it that meaning which establishes a clear relationship between your statement and example. Now I hope you can see why good explanations are crucial to your success as a writer.
DON'T GO DOWN WITH A KISS THAT'S ONLY A PUCKER

If you fail to write a final paragraph or conclusion to your essay, you leave your reader logically and psychologically dissatisfied. A satisfying essay moves full circle. It frequently begins with a purpose statement and ends with a re-statement of that purpose statement. Just imagine your discontent if your girl friend puckered up to kiss you—then remained puckered for the rest of your life!

Of course, she might be teasing you (having in the back of her dream a better kiss once it's consummated), but students who fail to write conclusions are never in a teasing mood. They are simply forgetful. I once said this to a bright student who had omitted a conclusion from his essay. He replied wittily that an essay should have an open-endedness, which he compared to the lovers on the marble frieze in Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn." As you remember, they, too, are permanently puckered. They never die, but also never kiss. So I praised the student for his cleverness, but then said what I say above: Unkissed lips are sweet, but those that are kissed are satisfying ends—as mortal as those ends may be.

Your conclusion should neither be too brief nor too long-winded. You can usually gain all the information you need to write it by re-reading the purpose sentence and the statements (or topic sentences) of the paragraphs of the body. Before you write your conclusion, mull these sentences over to see if you can extend your thinking to last bit of insight. You rarely say all you can say in an essay. The conclusion gives you one final opportunity to think imaginatively.

If you can't extend your thinking, summarize the purpose sentence and the statements by re-phrasing them. Use new words to avoid monotony and to package your ideas more attractively. And don't write a one-sentence conclusion which simply repeats your purpose sentence. In this case, brevity is the soul of witlessness. But don't go to the other extreme by re-writing the entire essay in one last paragraph. Nothing wearies the reader more than a conclusion which runs on for lines re-playing every tittle and jot, every cramp and soothe, every mental crest and trough, pimper and puckle, boy and girl in the entire town of Omnibus in the country of Texas in the years of our wars 1917-1972. Excess soon loses its impact.

So finish the essay, but don't underdo or overdo it. If you must repeat, concentrate upon the style (the wording and the sentence patterns) of your summary. Your conclusions may then resemble the structure of the one I'm now writing. A few sentences—all to the point.

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IF I SPEAK WITH SINCERE VOICE AND SIMPLE TONGUE, WILL YOU WALK WITH ME THROUGH THE UPPER PASTURE OF THIS BOOKLET AND OGLE A VERBAL SHAPE ONE LAST TIME?

If you won't, I may have to ask your teacher to coerce you. And I've disliked force since that adolescent day my mother made me wear my overshoes to school. Only a mother or a sadist, I reasoned, would send a basketball captain to school with black bushed feet. As I walked out the door, anger formed on my teeth like crud. No matter how much I spit, I couldn't curse it away. For six blocks I kept this up until I walked into the lower hall of Vanity High School and saw Sue Walker, the reigning queen. Sue looked at me as if to say, "What makes you so notable, Welch?" and being desperate, I mentally replied "dry feet."

Sue looked at me as you may be tempted to look one last time at a skeletalized essay. But if you resist the temptation to scorn the simple, you may discover that your verbal eye has become bigger and less innocent. You can test it by identifying the numbered parts of the essay.

1. Introduction 6. Lead-in
2. Purpose Sentence 7. Example
3. Definition(s) 8. Explanation
4. Purpose Sentence Re-phrased 9. Body
5. Statement (Topic Sentence) 10. Conclusion

If you have all these words (or approximations of them) in this order, you have scored well.

If you haven't done well, don't be dismayed. As I said earlier, few people look upon an essay with this kind of eye. And even fewer ask you to.
SOME FINAL FRETS

When I think back to my high school and college days, I remember that I, too, was inclined to look upon essay writing as an obstacle between graduation and me. But I think (although I have no way of certainly knowing this) that if someone had shown me the relationship between writing an essay and just living, I might have written with more eagerness and understanding. For this reason, I have entitled this book A SHAPE A WRITER CAN CONTAIN.

In writing, we put our thoughts into shapes; yet we simultaneously hold those shapes within us. In other words, a shape contains us as we contain it. But isn’t this true of so many acts of ours? A guard on the football team must learn to “pull” from the line in order to block on end-sweeps. He practices the form of “pulling” over and over until his reactions are split-second and his motions fluid. The form has him long before he has the form. Or consider the college student who buys a GTO. Does he have the car or does the car have him? Probably both. Each determines what the other does. Then, finally, take the matter of time. We know we are held by time’s long gray continuum; yet on this line of years we hold one moment (a life-time) by our breath. Time has us, and we have it.

So if I can convince you that essay writing involves a general process which is not fundamentally different from so many things you do, I will tell you something I don’t remember reading in my textbooks. And then if I can clearly describe the rewards you receive by giving yourselves to a verbal shape, I will be even more pleased.

To get something you must give something. This is a cliche especially true of love. But if you think I’m too sentimental, I’ll argue that it’s also true of fortune cookies. Payment is required in either case. Of course, you can steal both love and cookies. But what I’m arguing is this: If you are willing to give up something of value, such as time or money, you may discover that your rewards are greater than your investments. A writer gives himself to an essay’s form to obtain the knowledge he derives by filling up the form. Without the form, knowledge diffuses about him like the air. He knows it’s there, but it has no impact. But an essay at its best is black and white concentration. And a writer never concentrates without some type of form.

Why then such a simple form for beginning writers? I know some students and their teachers will argue that the form presented in this book is too narrow. It is not. An infinity exists within the apparently narrow walls of this verbal shape. And if this box has a shallow bottom in your eyes, I simply ask if it is the box which is shallow or the writer attempting to fill it. There are a million high school basketball players in any given year, but only one Kareem Jabbar, Wilt Chamberlain, or Jerry West. Does anyone want to argue that these pros don’t play within the same boundary lines, ten-second lines, three-second zones? What makes them so successful is the ease and virtuosity with which they play the game within the rules. The same figure holds for writing.

One final fret. A harness is never chafing to an imaginative writer: It tests and liberates him. And for the unimaginative writer, a harness is a godsend.

ESSAYS FOR STUDY

The following essays were written by college and high school students. I have tried to entitle them so that you will have a rough idea of the assignment and the amount of time the students spent in writing them. The questions which follow the essays are designed to help you identify the strengths and weaknesses of these samples. I urge you to write answers to these questions because writing will make your thinking precise and better reinforce the ideas in the preceding chapters.

I also ask you to grade the essays, and I’m fully aware that you might like more information describing the assignments and the writers. But I want you to concentrate upon the strategies these writers use in their papers, not upon any personal or environmental influences which may have determined the products. For in grading essays, you should discover those meaningful criteria which help you assess the worth of what you read. If these criteria are applied primarily to the essays and not to the writers who produce them, your grades will hopefully be sensible responses to the shapes these writers contain.

In addition, analyzing and grading these essays will let you wear your teacher’s shoes. And you may discover that these shoes are as uncomfortable or as difficult or as rewarding to wear as student’s.

NOTE: The errors in capitalization, punctuation, and spelling in each of the following essays are reproduced as written in the student’s original copy.
AN ESSAY WRITTEN BY A HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR AFTER TWO DAYS OF LIBRARY RESEARCH

I want to defend the teaching of pop poetry in high schools. Paul O'Neil recently wrote that the pop poet derives pleasure from using a word. This pleasure is not necessarily supposed to be transmitted to the reader of the poem. The pop poet is self-centered and writes of his personal complaints. Therefore, he makes no attempt to explain himself to the public. This writing is his way of protesting against what he believes to be wrong. So if the high school student can read and try to understand the pop poet's message, perhaps he will wonder if the poet has a reason for his lashing out at society.

* * * * * *

QUESTIONS

1. Run your eyes down the essay. Is it a prose amoeba?

2. What is the purpose sentence? What key word or phrase in the purpose sentence needs to be defined?

3. Should the definitions of these words in the purpose sentence occur in a paragraph of their own?

4. How many unsupported statements can you discover? Are some apparently contradictory? Do you suppose the writer made a brief outline before he began to write?

5. Where would you ask the writer to divide his essay into paragraphs?

6. Do you find statements which indicate that he was vaguely conscious of an introduction, body, and conclusion?

7. Grade the essay 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5. Perhaps your teacher will ask how many students gave it a certain grade so that you can see into what category your grade falls.

8. Why not wage a lover's quarrel with those whose grades differed from yours? Perhaps you can have a class discussion in which students have the opportunity to defend the grades they've given this essay.

AN IMPROMPTU ESSAY BY A COLLEGE FRESHMAN

English is a composition course needed by everyone. The person's writing background should be sufficient, though, before attempting the course.

The teacher should plan his study around the poor students. It is ruthless to say, "Write adequately on this or receive an F." That statement in itself is enough to keep the thoughts for an adequate paper from working.

The student does not have a chance for an equal grade if his teacher is harder than another teacher of the same course. It sets up a feeling of "I've been ruped."

The grades should reflect on the abilities of the one person instead of a set standard for all students.

It is unfair to give a bad grade because the student cannot grasp the idea for a good paper when the only thing at fault is his background. Perhaps if the same course were offered in the high schools and the same proficiency for the course made mandatory, there might be some basis for having the grading as it is now. As of yet there is not an equal chance, and I do not feel that day is visible in the future.

* * * * * *

QUESTIONS

1. Move your eyes quickly down the page. What are your immediate reactions to the form of the entire essay?

2. What is the purpose sentence of the essay?

3. Is the purpose sentence precise?

4. What does the word sufficient mean in the introduction?

5. Are the paragraphs of the body "skinny parameciums"? What do they lack to be fully developed?

6. Are the ideas in paragraphs 2, 3, and 4 logically factored from the thesis?

7. Do you think the writer's lack of a definite purpose can be traced to the introduction?

8. Grade the essay 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5. Be prepared to defend your grade.
Sherburn thought himself a god. By god I mean he thought he had control over everyone's lives. Sherburn thought he had control over everyone's lives.

Sherburn knew how to judge people and how far they were able to go in their acts. He suggests this when he says the following to the mob:

Average men don't like trouble you're afraid to back down afraid you'll be found out to be what you are cowards.

Sherburn knew the people were such cowards that they would never lay a hand on him. After showing them their own faults he hoped to make his own faults seem less immoral.

Sherburn was experienced, because he'd lived in many different parts of the United States. He'd been around and thought he knew all the different types of people. He expressed this to the mob when he said:

I know you clear through I was born and raised in the South, and I've lived in the North, so I know the average all around.

The people thought that from all experience he knew all their thoughts, in this way he thought himself a god.

Sherburn was very vaunty toward the people and their ways. He thought himself the best man around even after the crime he'd committed. He shows this when he says:

The idea of you lynching anybody! It's amusing. The idea of you thinking you had pluck enough to lynch a man! Because you're brave enough to tar and feather a poor cast-out woman that come along here, did you think you had grit enough to lay your hands on a man.

These things show that Sherburn was a proud, vaunty man. Think he was the best man around just as if he were god.

All these things show that Sherburn thought highly of himself as if he were a god who had control over everyone's thoughts and actions.

QUESTIONS

1. Move your eyes quickly over the essay. How is its shape different from that of the first two essays?

2. What is the purpose sentence of the essay? Is it precise, limited, and valuable?

3. Does the writer define the key word in the purpose sentence? How well is this word defined?

4. Would you want the introduction more fully developed? How?

5. Using the because method of testing topic sentences, show how each topic sentence relates to the purpose sentence.

6. Do the examples support the topic sentence?

7. Do the mechanical errors in quoting the examples hinder their effectiveness?

8. Are explanations present? How well has this writer written them? What would you suggest to improve them?

9. How might the writer improve the conclusion? Does it contain the same weakness as the introduction?

10. Grade the essay 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5.
To Huck, the river is a home. By home I mean it is his dwelling place. It is also a place where he can get food, a place where he can find safety, and a place where he can find peace and relaxation at his own leisure. Yes! The river was a home for Huck.

The river provides a source of safety. When Huck and Jim were floating down the river and the steamboat ran into them, the river provided safety for Huck and also for Jim. Here is an example of what I mean:

There was a yell at us, and a jingling of bells to stop the engines, and pow-wow of cusing, and whistling of steam—and as Jim went overboard on one side and I on the other, she come smashing straight through the raft.

I dived—and I aimed to find the bottom, too, for a thirty-foot wheel had to go over me, and I wanted to have plenty of room.

This example shows that the river provides Huck with safety, just as a regular home would provide safety for him.

The river provides a source of food. When, for example, Huck wanted to have supper all he would have to do would be to drop his fishing line into the river. Here is an example of what I mean:

I got my traps out of the canoe and made me a nice camp in the thick woods. I made a kind of tent out of my blankets to put my things under so the rain couldn’t get at them. I caught a cat-fish and haggled him open with my saw, and towards sundown I started my camp-fire and had supper. Then I set out a line to catch some fish for breakfast.

This example shows that from the river Huck would obtain food just as he could from the widow’s house or anyone else’s house. Yes! The river proved to be a valuable asset to Huck’s diet.

The river offers a peaceful surrounding. When Huck was describing the steamboat going up the river, it was a beautiful passage to read. Here is how it went:

Once or twice of a night we would see a steamboat slipping along in the dark, and now and then she would belch a whole world of sparks up out of her chimbleys and they would rain down in the river and look awful pretty; then she would turn a corner and her lights would wind out and her powwow shut off and leave the river still again.

This example shows very beautifully that Huck, although, on the river finds peace as he might up in his room smoking at the widow’s house.

These three examples I have chosen are but a few of the many things that make a good home. The three examples I chose, the river provides a source of food, the river provides a source of safety, and the river offers a peaceful surrounding tie in greatly in making a good home. And these examples which once again are just a few of the many things that make a good home, made a good home for Huck.
AN ESSAY WRITTEN BY A HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMAN AFTER TWO DAYS OF PREPARATION

When Colonel Sherburn condemned the townspeople with his gallant roof-top oratory, Mark Twain was actually stepping into the story and calling society cowardly. Twain uses Sherburn as a puppet, and by manipulating the strings of literary composition, Twain has Sherburn talk to the unperceiving reader.

Colonel Sherburn rebuked the crowd for arriving on the scene in the form of a mob. In his speech he says:

The pitifulest thing out is a mob; that's what an army is—a mob; they don't fight with the courage that's in them, but with the courage that's borrowed from their mass.

Mark Twain uses this speech by Sherburn to illustrate the cowardice of a society that seeks safety in numbers. They dispatch an army, and expect the army to defeat the foe; if the army fails, they are the group labeled cowardly. Even if the army performs its duty correctly, which is killing the enemy, the countrymen raise a scream because someone lost his life. The next thing to do, of course, is to find a scapegoat (most likely a prominent government official, or in this case, a prominent man within the town like Sherburn himself).

Colonel Sherburn also remarks about the slack use of juries. He relates the following:

Why don't your juries hang murderers? Because they're afraid the man's friends will shoot them in the back, in the dark—and that's just what they would do.

Here Twain has Sherburn say that society is afraid to take a firm stand on anything, for fear of a retaliation. If the society's army followed the example of the society itself and refused to take a stand and fight, the army would be condemned to the lower regions. The truth of the matter is that if society did stand up and support its position, the opposition would most probably be stifled. But the masses are afraid to try.

Lastly, Sherburn talks about the weaknesses of the average man. He devotes the following part of his speech to this idea:

The average man's a coward...he lets anybody walk over him that wants to, and goes home to pray for a humble spirit to bear it.

Twain has Sherburn appear to ask what is the average man's relationship to society. In reality aren't individuals the drops that compose the larger pools in society? If so, then can't one individual alter society if he's strong enough? But if one individual is a coward, then the entire trait tends to spread like a cancer. And like a cancer, it cannot be seen until it takes the form of a massive sickness.

So what Mark Twain says through Sherburn is this: Society is cowardly, and it should be changed. The solution lies in the very heart of the matter, which is the individual. For if the apple is rotten in its core, what chance does the whole fruit have to be good?

QUESTIONS

1. After having read this essay once, do you sense that it is better than the preceding two?
2. If so, now is the time for a closer look in which you make greater sense of your initial response. What is the first feature you remember which makes this essay superior?
3. Why is the introduction more imaginative?
4. Are the topic sentences not only factors of the purpose sentence but transitions as well (a transition is a bridge between paragraphs)?
5. Look at the length of the explanations. What is this writer doing in his explanations that the preceding two writers did not do?
6. Does the essay progress from the illness of cowardice to a possible treatment for that illness? What type of conclusion might you expect then?
7. Do you like to read papers relatively free of mechanical errors (misspellings, errors in punctuation, etc.)?
8. Do you feel the style of this paper (sentence structure, word choice, metaphors) is simply ornamental (making it read slick and well), or is the style functional (necessary to the writer's development of his ideas)?
9. Grade the essay 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5.
10. Now compare the grades of the three essays. Are there any inconsistencies in your grading?
In studying essays and paintings, I have found that they are very similar and therefore can be studied in basically the same manner. There are characteristics that prove to be important to both. These are unity, transition, and form.

In both a painting and an essay, unity proves to be an important characteristic. Unity in an essay can be defined as the grouping of facts, reasons, incidents, or examples around a basic idea to concentrate the reader’s attention on this idea. By organizing these elements in various ways, such as location, order, importance, and comparison, a writer can unify his work and thus make it easier to comprehend. In Einstein’s first essay on science and religion, he arranged his three major examples in an order of importance. His cosmic religious feeling, used as the third example, is felt to be the most important one. Therefore, we can see that Einstein’s essay possesses unity as a result of organizing and grouping his examples. In a painting, unity can be defined as the grouping of the various art elements to focus the observer’s attention on the functional whole. By using line, space, value, color, and texture to unify his work, an artist can create an eye-catching composition. Da Vinci used line to carry the eye across the canvas, space to break up the masses, value and color to distinguish between shapes, and texture to please the eye. In his painting, the Mona Lisa, we see that he created unity in his composition by grouping these elements.

Another characteristic that is essential in a good essay and painting is transition. Transition in art can be defined as the change from one place, color, or direction to another. A line, tone, or shape between two opposing lines is a means of attaining transition. In Michelangelo’s painting of Jeremiah, the horizontal line made by Jeremiah’s robe lying over his two bold knees lies between two vertical lines made by his head resting upon his hand and the dark stripe running down the front of his clothing. This horizontal line between two vertical ones creates transition in Michelangelo’s work. Transition in an essay involves passing from a phrase, sentence, or group of sentences smoothly. The use of transitional words, “but,” “however,” “yet,” or “therefore,” and the use of transitional phrases, such as “in the first place” or “as stated before,” are ways of attaining transition in an essay. “But,” “nor,” “therefore,” “except they be bounded in by experience” and “so if a man’s wit be wandering,” are but a few of the transitional words and phrases found in Of Studies, an essay by Francis Bacon. While linking Bacon’s ideas together, transitional phrases and words create a very smooth composition.

Form, which is also present in both art and literature, is the third characteristic important to an essay and a painting. In speaking of an essay, the arrangement of various parts to make an organized composition defines form. Usually form is obtained through an established pattern, as in an expository essay’s introduction, body, and conclusion. Thomas Huxley’s essay, A Liberal Education, written in a formal and organized style, compares life to a chess game in the introduction and goes on to factor the rules of this game of education. Devoting the body of his essay to natural and artificial education, their similarities and diversities, Huxley concludes that one needs both types of education to live harmoniously. In arranging and organizing his ideas sensibly, Huxley maintains good form in his composition. Form in a painting is the external appearance of shapes and masses. Most masses are basic three-dimensional ones, such as cubes, spheres, cones, and cylinders, while shapes are two-dimensional, as in circles, squares, rectangles, and triangles. “Alba Madonna,” a painting by Raphael, contains many excellent examples of form. The distinct oblong face of Mary and the softened round face of Jesus appear to oppose the rectangular shapes of the distant hills and plains. In varying his shapes and masses, Raphael created a unique form in his Madonna.

Although transition, form, and unity in an essay don’t mean exactly the same thing as they do in a painting, they are tools of comprehension common to both. These tools can be used to dig up latent information and organize it accordingly. I have found that I can better understand an essay or a painting if I can understand unity, transition, and form, three essential characteristics for writing and painting.

QUESTIONS

1. Run your eyes down the page. What are your initial guesses about the possibility of the essay’s having an introduction, body, and conclusion? Do you think it has examples?
2. What is the purpose sentence? Is it limited and precise? Is it valuable?
3. Are the key words in the purpose sentence defined? Where?
4. If the words are defined at the beginning of the paragraphs of the body, is each paragraph of the body an essay in miniature?
5. Does the writer treat unity, transition, and form as specifically as you would like her to?
6. If your answer is “No” to question 5, how could she obtain greater limits to her essay? Would these limits possibly make her write more specifically?
7. Pick out her best example and explanation. Why do you think they are her best?
8. In her conclusion, has she reasoned on to new knowledge or does she summarize by re-wording her statements?
9. Grade the essay 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5.
AN ESSAY WRITTEN BY A COLLEGE SOPHOMORE AFTER TWO WEEKS OF INDEPENDENT READING

In Thoreau's writings, Nature is continually emphasized as the one place to find inspiration and new ideas. This philosophy is likewise found in the essay Walking. Thoreau is arguing for the West, the land of fertility, freshness, space for growth, and for capturing new and better ideas to expand the mind. Thoreau states that the East is full of decay, worn out soil and thought, and there is no where for man to migrate to find new, fertile, unmarred land. In a territory such as the West, nature has not been disturbed, making it an ideal locality to kindle new ideas and to rise to higher aspirations. Nature is essential for this inspiration, and if nature is corrupted with houses, trains, business places, and industries, then new thoughts are much harder to realize, if not impossible. The West was not yet inhabited by this type of corruption, so Thoreau was advocating movement to the West.

Thoreau was probably one of the greatest encouragers of the settlement of the West and was one of the most avid readers of Western exploration. Walking was Thoreau's attempt to explain why the West was so important to himself and man and to impress the importance of the part Nature played, for Nature's role was to inspire and give man the opportunity to contemplate. The title Walking fits the essay quite well, for it is through the intermingling with nature that man can be awakened to good, fresh thought. When man is walking in nature, he becomes more intimate and can concentrate on what nature is actually providing in terms of waking up the individual's senses. If man rides a horse or on a train, there is more distraction of the mind than there is when walking, for man lets his mind run to the movements of the horse or the rapid movement of the train. He is not thinking of nature in the way that he can best be inspired. When man walks, he is neither relying on the instincts of the horse nor the rails of the train to take him where he is going, but he is relying on Nature to guide him. Thoreau does say, however, that many times man does not let Nature guide him, but chooses his own direction. Thoreau feels that this will lead invariably to the East or to what he classifies as the looking back on history and not looking ahead to new thoughts and ideas. Thoreau suggests that Nature, if man lets her, will give the individual inner instinct to go towards the West, for this is where the future for the individual is fresh and undisturbed. J.A. Christie describes Thoreau's feeling for the West this way: "The real challenge of the West in Thoreau's eyes was that of the potential fulfillment of the will, of the self-will, the sturdiest test of man's freedom." This explains how much weight Thoreau laid upon the self-will; the self-will actually being, in Thoreau's mind, an unconscious guidance from Nature upon the will. Without letting Nature become a part of man, the individual would take the wrong road and never reach the West.

As Thoreau emphasizes the West and the need for man to go to the West for spiritual inspiration, he indicates certain ideas in Walking that he did in Walden. In the chapter "The Ponds", Thoreau is quite explicit about his dislike for the landscape being marred by railroads, the cutting down of trees, the wearing out of the soil, etc. In Walking, Thoreau also shows his displeasure for destroying the true nature when he says: "Nowadays almost all man's improvements, so called, as the building of houses, and the cutting down of the forest, and of all large trees, simply deform the landscape, and make it more and more tame and cheap." This indicates that Thoreau was very conscious of how esthetic the qualities of nature were; but only if these qualities were undisturbed. Thoreau wants to keep Nature in her most wild state, for to Thoreau, wildness is what is good. From the chapter "Where I Lived, And What I Lived For" of Walden, Thoreau displays another idea which is similar to one in Walking. In "Where I Lived, And What I Lived For", Thoreau assures the reader that "The morning, which is the most memorable season of the day, is the awakening hour." There is no doubt within Thoreau that new ideas transpire in the morning. In Walking, Thoreau explains that the best man is one who lets no moment go by in recollecting the past; the individual is constantly aware of the present. Thoreau explains the individual as one who "has got up early and kept up early..." Again, Thoreau has suggested that morning is the time for grasping new, unspoiled ideas. Perhaps in both of these instances Thoreau is using morning, since it is a time for awakening, as a metaphor to explain that new ideas should also be an awakening or a time of realization of the mind.

The West was much like the morning to Thoreau. The West was where the best and most vigorous was produced. Thoreau cited Michaux as saying America had the widest range of trees, and they rose to a much greater height than those trees in Europe. Thoreau is trying to express, through Michaux, that he is not the only one that believes that America has the greatest possibilities. Thoreau uses the trees to emphasize the uniqueness and peacefulness necessary for thinking that the West could provide. Just as the morning was a time in which Thoreau could best be spiritually inspired so the West could be inspiring for every man. Thoreau resembles Emerson in this respect. Emerson, in the American Scholar, was against the young student always looking to the Old World of Europe for his ideas. Emerson felt as Thoreau that man could have just as good ideas or even better ones, if the individual just kept his mind in America, so to speak, and not drift to the Old World's thought and tradition. Only when man looked to America or within himself would there be true progress in man's thinking. These two authors sharing this similar idea is understandable if one remembers that both of these men were advocates of transcendentalism.

There has probably never been a man who was as much for settling the West for reasons other than economic ones than Thoreau. He was relying very heavily on what nature could do for the individual to inspire his thinking. Thoreau felt that instead of looking to Greek mythology, the American man who went West could aspire to such heights in his new ideas that there would be American mythology to look to in the future. Thoreau saw the West as wild, fertile, productive, abundant with nature, and forever presenting new discoveries and experiences. The West, to Thoreau, meant a wildness which he felt was essential to good literature, for he says: "In literature it is only the wild that attracts us." The wildness and newness of the West was the very thing Thoreau was searching for. Undoubtedly Thoreau had tried various methods of transcending his mind, and certainly when he went to Walden Pond, he became ever increasingly aware of how being close to Nature and letting Nature become a part of him gave him the opportunity to grasp further insight into the realm of thought. The West to Thoreau was the only place left where men, like himself, could find the closeness and intimacy with Nature that Thoreau felt was so very vital to the pure, raw thought that was yet to be discovered.
QUESTIONS

1. In writing the introduction, does the student write his purpose sentence first or last? To answer this question, identify the purpose sentence and describe the function of the other sentences in the introduction.

2. After quickly looking down the page, would you say the paragraphs of the body are well-developed? Why? Why not?

3. If the statements or topic sentences of the paragraphs of the body are factored well from the purpose sentence, the essay has one element of coherence. Underline the topic sentences of the paragraphs of the body. Do they relate well to the purpose sentence?

4. In paragraph 3, identify the lead-ins to all quotations and paraphrases (Thoreau’s ideas written in the words of the student). Could the student obtain more variety in his lead-ins? What would you suggest?

5. Is the supporting evidence strong in this essay? Has the student cited examples from writers other than Thoreau?

6. Is the explanation at the end of paragraph 3 a good one? How would you evaluate the explanations throughout the essay?

7. Prose blocks, of course, are only a part of the entire essay. Some smaller, but important elements of successful essays are appropriate word choices, smooth and accurate phrasing, and a pleasing variety of sentence patterns. Where do each of these appear in the essay? Where do they not?

8. Grade the essay 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5.