

Grammar: Who Needs It?

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A number of years ago (along about 1970), my “Teaching English in the Secondary School” professor startled our class with the following pronouncement: “All the studies agree: grammar instruction does not improve student writing. If you really want your students to learn to write, you might as well just forget about teaching grammar.”

The studies my professor was referring to, it turned out, had been brought to light in a comprehensive review of composition research published in 1963, *Research in Written Composition* by Richard Braddock, R. Lloyd-Jones, and L. Schoer, in which this statement famously appeared:

The conclusion [of this review] can be stated in strong and unqualified terms: the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible, or because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing.

The Braddock study’s findings received forceful confirmation some twenty-three years later in George Hillocks’ similarly named *Research on Written Composition*, in which Hillocks declared, “None of the studies reviewed . . . provides any support for teaching grammar as a means of improving composition skills.”

Well. The evidence certainly seemed to be in, and it was “strong” and “unqualified.” Not a single study—not nowhere, not no how, it seemed—showed that grammar instruction had a positive effect on student writing.

This was thrilling news to me. I was determined to teach English somewhere, whether in high school or college, and in my mind “English” meant literature. I imagined myself whiling away the semesters bringing Twain, Hemingway, Frost, Dickinson, Dickens, and other standard authors to the masses, with (of course) term papers and personal responses and *haiku* and limericks and other creative and academically stimulating written exercises mixed in. In grade school and high school, I doggedly performed the usual Englishy tasks of the time—grammar worksheets, spelling quizzes, memorization of grammatical terminology (I can still see in my mind’s eye vividly colored posters with perky illustrations of the Imperative, Indicative, and Interrogative Moods), even some sentence diagrams—and I hated, or at least grudgingly tolerated, all of it. Grammar seemed to be the evil-tasting pill that had to be taken before getting to the literary dessert. The idea that I might be able to spend an entire career as an English teacher without ever having to jam this particular pill down students’ throats came as welcome news.

Following Braddock and Hillocks, in my early years as an English teacher I succeeded in keeping the grammar pill jar on the shelf. A teaching assistant at Northwestern’s Intro Studies program, I taught freshman English from a literary base, talking about thematic complexities and symbolism and literary theory while dutifully marking grammatical and usage errors on papers, but saying little about them in class. It seemed to work reasonably well, or so I told myself.

The years rolled on, and with the years came new enthusiasms--“writing as process,” the social construction of knowledge, a variety of postmodernisms, peer editing, multiple drafting, portfolio assessment—yet in all this welter of innovation and change grammar instruction seemed to remain the unloved stepchild. In fact, it was practically viewed as the leprous outcast whom the villagers thought should be driven out of town. Grammar was something students intuitively knew, and it just had to be allowed to

ooze out of them—naturally. Here’s typical present-day advice on how students should make use of their “tacit knowledge of grammar” by the eminent composition specialist Peter Elbow:

Start off writing as naturally and comfortably as possible. *Don’t* think about grammar or about any minor matters of phrasing or spelling. Think only about what you want to say

Next . . . get your text to say exactly what you want it to say—but still without worrying about minor matters of phrasing, grammar, or spelling. . . .

Now turn your attention to phrasing, spelling, and grammar. . . . [R]ead it aloud to yourself . . . and read your piece aloud to one or two listeners. . . .

Give your final, typed version to another person to copy-edit. [italics mine]

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In other words, forget about grammar until near the end of the process (these are “minor” matters, after all), and then rely on your own intuitive sense of what sounds right to make corrections. *Then* just hand it over to some poor sap who’s willing to do the mechanical scutwork.

Such a deal! For a time, I was perfectly willing to believe (hope?) this approach would work, but as the years went by, it became clear to me that it just didn’t. Student editors were just as clueless as student writers when it came to revising for correctness, partly because their knowledge of grammatical terminology and grammatical concepts was, shall we say, slight, and because in an environment where correctness is devalued (dismissed as “minor matters” or “mere surface error”) they had little motivation to expend

much effort on such things. So I started teaching grammar. More precisely—perhaps, more outrageously--I started teaching copyediting (that thing that somebody *else* is supposed to do). I believed that certain conventions of Standard Edited English, such as where to put apostrophes, how to fix comma splices, what to do when subjects and verbs didn't agree, could be taught and could be learned. I further believed that writers (including student writers) had to take the final responsibility for revising and editing their own work. If others could assist them and were willing to do so, well and good. If not, the ball remained squarely in the writer's court.

I put together a series of tests—a diagnostic test to be taken at the beginning of the semester (with no effect on the student's course grade), a second test over the same material to be taken at midterm, and a final test taken on the next-to-last class of the semester. Each test was followed by a review of each item and a discussion of the various rules/conventions that applied; little additional class time through the semester was taken up with questions of grammatical correctness. (Critics of grammar instruction are certainly right on at least one count: once you begin entering the thickets of grammatical information—and try to account for the myriad exceptions to every rule—the concern for correctness tends to take over, and the many other aspects of good writing don't get adequate coverage.) Over time, I refined the tests, removing items that seemed trivial or that appeared infrequently in student writing, and including items I saw over and over again in student writing, whether some considered them “minor” or not. Thus, “different from/different than” was removed and “everyday/every day” included. “Who/whom” never made the test at all, since the distinction just didn't seem to be a frequent issue in my students' writing.

I sensed that my instruction was making a difference, but I couldn't be sure. I could absolutely document that students did better on the objective tests in the course of the semester (a receptive, motivated student could move from, say, a score of 17 out of 50

to a 43 or 44 in the final test), but it wasn't entirely clear to me that these improvements were making a significant dent in the writing itself. And that, of course, was just the point that the authors of the Braddock and Hillocks studies had been making for years: that grammar instruction has no demonstrable positive effect on the actual task of composition (unless it is done only in the context of the student's own writing).

So I spent a semester's sabbatical leave assessing whether or not my tests made any difference in my students' writing. In six sections of English 101 (four taught by me and two taught by my colleague Anthony Wisniewski), we compared essays written at the beginning of the semester (prior to any copyediting instruction) to essays done at the end (after the three copyediting tests and test reviews). A total of ninety students completed all of the tests and essays under the same conditions of test-taking, test-reviewing, and composing. Much of my sabbatical was spent simply counting errors in both sets of papers and then charting them to see how the objective test results correlated with error rates in actual student writing. Full results follow. As will immediately become clear, I concentrated only on quantifiable error (and only on those errors Anthony and I covered in class); I made no effort to assess holistically the quality of the written work. This was partly because my own interest was more limited—I really just wanted an answer to a simple question: are my students reducing the number of errors (of the errors we've examined together) in their essays? It was also partly due to limitations in time and resources: to do a full-bore refutation of the Braddock and Hillocks research reviews (if I were so inclined), I'd need entire panels of outside readers, some very systematic and extensive controls on the project, including a control group of students who did not receive copyediting instruction, and so forth. Even if we had all these things, I confess to harboring a deep skepticism over how useful those results would be. I know from experience the complications and complexities of holistic writing assessment.

Thus, for whatever it might be worth, here's what I found. For my own overall conclusions concerning what these data suggest, please scroll to the just past the data grids. For an annotated listing of some of the secondary-source materials I consulted during this project, scroll to the very end.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Total Number of Students Who Completed All Assignments (3 copyediting tests, entrance and exit essays): 90
Number of Sections of English 101 Surveyed: 6

Overall Results:

	<u>Number of Students</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
OBJECTIVE ENTRANCE AND EXIT COPYEDITING TESTS		
(All sections: 94 students)		
Students with Significantly Higher* Scores on Exit Copyediting Test (15+ points):	27	29%
Students with Moderately Higher Scores on Exit Copyediting Test (4-14 points higher):	57	61%
Students with Negligible Change in Scores on Exit Copyediting Test (+/- 0-3 points):	10	10%
Students with Moderately Lower Scores on Exit Copyediting Test (4-14 points lower):	0	0%
Students with Significantly Lower Scores on Exit Copyediting Test (15+ points lower):	0	0%

(*If **double-digit increases**—10 points or higher—are considered significant, the number climbs to 56, or 60%)

ENTRANCE AND EXIT ESSAYS

(All sections, 90 students)

Note: Error rates listed below apply only to errors identified and discussed in relation to the objective copyediting tests shown above. They do not include all writing errors found in the completed essays.

Students with Improved Error Rates on Exit Essay (i.e., fewer errors per 500 words):	69	77%
Students with Unimproved Error Rates on Exit Essay (i.e., unchanged or more errors):	21	23%
Students with Significantly Improved Error Rates on Exit Essay (10+ fewer errors per 500 words):	23	26%
Students with Moderately Improved Error Rates on Exit Essay (3-10 fewer errors per 500 words):	30	33%
Students with Negligible Change in Error Rates on Exit Essay (+/- 0-3 errors per 500 words):	25	28%
Students with Moderately Worse Error Rates on Exit Essay (4-9 more errors per 500 words):	11	12%
Students with Significantly Worse Error Rates on Exit Copyediting Test (15+ points lower):	1	1%

Note: For all students, the error rate per 100 words breaks down as follows.

Entrance Essay: 4.49 (2045.0 total errors per 500 words for 91 students)

Exit Essay: 3.37 (1548.5 total errors per 500 words for 92 students)

(Additional Note: If the extremely high error rates for Students 11, 24, and 86 are excluded, the rates would go down to 4.14 errors per 100 words for the entrance essay, and 3.09 per 100 words for the exit essay.)

Compare to the Lunsford and Lunsford (2008) study of freshman error rates from much larger writing samples over nearly a century:

1917: 2.11 (Johnson)

1930: 2.24 (Witty and Green)

1986: 2.26 (spelling errors not included) (Lunsford and Connors)

2006: 2.45 (if spelling errors not included: 2.30) (Lunsford and Lunsford)

*Results for Motivated Students Only (as Identified by Instructors in **Boldface Type**)*

OBJECTIVE ENTRANCE AND EXIT COPYEDITING TESTS

(All sections: 33 students)

Motivated Students with **Significantly Higher** Scores on Exit Copyediting Test (15+ points): 17 (51%)

Motivated Students with **Moderately Higher** Scores on Exit Copyediting Test (4-14 points higher): 13 (40%)

Motivated Students with **Negligible Change** in Scores on Exit Copyediting Test (+/- 0-3 points): 3 (9%)

Motivated Students with **Moderately Lower** Scores on Exit Copyediting Test (4-14 points lower): 0 (0%)

Motivated Students with **Significantly Lower** Scores on Exit Copyediting Test (15+ points lower): 0 (0%)

ENTRANCE AND EXIT ESSAYS

(all sections, 33 students)

Note: Error rates listed below apply only to errors identified and discussed in relation to the objective copyediting tests shown above.

They do not include all writing errors found in the completed essays.

Motivated Students with **Improved Error Rates** on Exit Essay (i.e., fewer errors per 500 words): 24 (73%)

Motivated Students with **Unimproved Error Rates** on Exit Essay (i.e., unchanged or more errors): 9 (27%)

Motivated Students with **Significantly Improved** Error Rates, Exit Essay (10+ fewer errors/500 words): 6 (18%)

Motivated Students with **Moderately Improved** Error Rates on Exit Essay (3-10 fewer errors/500 words): 12 (36%)

Motivated Students with **Negligible Change** in Error Rates on Exit Essay (+/- 0-3 errors per 500 words): 11 (33%)

Motivated Students with **Moderately Worse** Error Rates on Exit Essay (4-9 more errors per 500 words): 4 (12%)

Motivated Students with **Significantly Worse** Error Rates on Exit Essay (10+ points lower): 0 (0%)

Error Rates: Sabbatical Project--Trygve Thoreson

English 101-027 Fall 2009 (boldface = motivated students) (Note: Error counts apply only to errors discussed in class.)

Student #	Copyediting Test Diag. (Midterm)	Copyediting Test Final	Copyediting Test Point Change (out of 50)	Entrance Essay Errors/500 Wds	Exit Essay Errors/No. Wds (/wds) (/500wds)	Essay Errors Point Change (per 500 wds)
1	13 (15)	16	+ 3	(31/570) 27.2	(30/655) 23.0	4.2 fewer
2	18 (24)	29	+ 11	(25/740) 16.9	(32/830) 19.3	2.4 more
3	6 (17)	22	+ 16	(46/650) 35.4	(31/750) 20.5	14.9 fewer
4	32 (37)	35	+ 3	(25/600) 20.8	(43/860) 25.0	4.2 more
5	19 (18)	26	+ 7	(24/500) 24.0	(13/620) 10.5	13.5 fewer
6	17 (30)	36	+ 19	(33/870) 19.0	(14/690) 10.0	9.0 fewer
7	20 (20)	32	+ 12	(27/470) 28.7	(20/600) 16.7	12.0 fewer
8	19 (25)	31	+ 12	(28/800) 17.5	(20/800) 12.5	5.0 fewer
9	23 (30)	31	+ 8	(18/1060) 8.5	(13/810) 8.0	0.5 fewer
10	28 (35)	41	+ 13	(13/500) 13.0	(8/480) 8.3	4.7 fewer
11	14 (15)	14	No change	(59/480) 61.5	(59/470) 62.8	1.3 more
12	22 (30)	31	+ 9	(25/490) 25.5	(10/460) 10.9	14.6 fewer
13	15 (19)	19	+ 4	(19/565) 16.8	(20/460) 21.7	4.9 more
14	18 (24)	27	+ 9	(13/780) 8.3	(19/700) 13.6	5.3 more
15	22 (38)	41	+ 19	(9/450) 10.0	(7/940) 3.7	6.3 fewer
16	19 (24)	26	+ 7	(36/660) 27.3	(21/480) 21.9	5.4 fewer
17	18 (28)	34	+ 16	(33/790) 20.1	(22/620) 17.7	2.4 fewer
18	21 (27)	35	+ 14	(22/640) 17.2	(14/670) 10.4	6.8 fewer

Exit Essay Overall: Students who made fewer errors: 13(72%) Students who made more errors 5(28%) Total Tracked Students: 18

Broken Down: Significant improvement (over 10-point gain per 500 words): 4 (22%)
 Modest improvement (3.1-9.9 higher point gain per 500 words): 7 (39%)
 Negligible change (plus-or-minus 3.0 points per 500 words) 4 (22%)
 Modest negative change (3.1 or more errors per 500 words) 3 (17%)
 Significant negative chance (10 or more errors per 500 words) 0 (0%)

Error Rates: Sabbatical Project--Trygve Thoreson

English 101-079 Fall 2009 (boldface = motivated students) (Note: Error counts apply only to errors discussed in class.)

Student #	Copyediting Test Diag. (Midterm)	Copyediting Test Final	Copyediting Test Point Change (out of 50)	Entrance Essay Errors (/wds)(/500wds)	Exit Essay Errors (/wds) (/500wds)	Essay Errors Point Change (per 500 words)
19	14 (22)	19	+ 5	(43/600) 35.8	(49/700) 35.0	0.8 fewer
20	15 (12)	18	+ 3	(34/370) 45.9	(29/860) 16.9	29.0 fewer
21	16 (20)	26	+ 10	(63/640) 49.2	(47/780) 30.1	19.1 fewer
22	14 (33)	34	+ 20	(15/740) 10.1	(10/560) 8.9	1.2 fewer
23	19 (24)	29	+ 10	(34/940) 18.1	(29/860) 16.8	1.3 fewer
24	17 (16)	27	+ 10	(84/710) 59.2	(95/690) 68.8	9.6 more
25	23 (42)	43	+ 20	(15/590) 12.7	(15/900) 8.3	4.4 fewer
26	22 (42)	47	+ 25	(25/780) 16.0	(1/650) 0.8	15.2 fewer
27	16 (23)	33	+ 17	(30/780) 19.2	(15/600) 12.5	6.7 fewer
28	24 (35)	33	+ 9	(28/680) 20.6	(17/610) 13.9	6.7 fewer
29	14 (18)	18	+ 4	(29/300) 48.3	(31/750) 20.7	27.6 fewer
30	17 (26)	28	+ 11	(31/750) 20.7	(33/790) 20.9	0.2 more
31	22 (17)	26	+ 4	(48/800) 30.0	(27/565) 23.8	6.2 fewer
32	30 (37)	40	+ 10	(28/760) 18.4	(12/505) 11.1	7.3 fewer
33	14 (22)	(incomplete)	(incomplete)	(31/560) 27.7	(25/595) 21.0	6.7 fewer
34	27 (38)	42	+ 15	(25/550) 22.7	(16/710) 11.3	11.4 fewer
35	14 (39)	34	+ 20	(11/560) 9.8	(19/515) 18.4	8.6 more

Exit Essay Overall: Students who made fewer errors: 14(82%) Students who made more errors : 3(18%) Total Tracked Students: 17

Broken Down: Significant improvement (over 10-point gain per 500 words): 5 (29%)
 Modest improvement (3.1-9.9 higher point gain per 500 words): 6 (35%)
 Negligible change (plus-or-minus 3.0 points per 500 words): 4 (24%)
 Modest negative change (3.1 or more errors per 500 words): 2 (12%)
 Significant negative change (10 or more errors per 500 words): 0 (0%)

Error Rates: Sabbatical Project--Trygve Thoreson

English 101-090 Fall 2009 (boldface = motivated students) (Note: Error counts apply only to errors discussed in class.)

Student #	Copyediting Test Diag. (Midterm)	Copyediting Test Final	Copyediting Test Point Change (out of 50)	Entrance Essay Errors (/wds) (/500wds)	Exit Essay Errors (/wds) (/500wds)	Essay Errors Point Change (per 500 wds)
36	17 (21)	31	+ 14	(39/640) 30.5	(17/700) 12.1	18.4 fewer
37	12 (20)	38	+ 26	(18/640) 15.4	(16/710) 11.3	4.1 fewer
38	12 (23)	26	+ 14	(30/495) 30.3	(31/830) 18.7	11.6 fewer
39	22 (31)	42	+ 20	(19/840) 11.3	(11/770) 7.1	4.2 fewer
40	24 (37)	40	+ 16	(5/500) 5.0	(5/640) 3.9	1.1 fewer
41	19 (29)	31	+ 12	(52/685) 38.0	(41/680) 30.1	7.9 fewer
42	23 (29)	34	+ 11	(17/505) 16.8	(9/625) 7.2	9.6 fewer
43	22 (39)	41	+ 19	(12/630) 9.5	(18/685) 13.1	3.6 more
44	25 (37)	41	+ 16	(7/555) 6.3	(8/580) 6.9	0.6 more
45	25 (28)	43	+ 18	(18/570) 15.8	(11/670) 8.2	7.6 fewer
46	16 (24)	31	+ 15	(not available)	(30/690) 21.7	N/A

Exit Essay Overall: Students who made fewer errors: 8(80%) Students who made more errors : 2(20%) Total Tracked Students: 10

Broken Down: Significant improvement (over 10-point gain per 500 words): 2 (20%)
 Modest improvement (3.1-9.9 higher point gain per 500 words) 5 (50%)
 Negligible change (plus-or-minus 3.0 points per 500 words) 2 (20%)
 Modest negative change (3.1 or more errors per 500 words) 1 (10%)
 Significant negative change (10 or more errors per 500 words) 0 (0%)

Error Rates: Sabbatical Project--Trygve Thoreson (*bottom line cut off—obtain and recalculate)
 English 101-093 Fall 2009 (boldface = motivated students) (Note: Error counts apply only to errors discussed in class.)

Student #	Copyediting Test Diag. (Midterm)	Copyediting Test Final	Copyediting Test Point Change (out of 50)	Entrance Essay Errors (/wds)(/500wds)	Exit Essay Errors (/wds) (/500wds)	Essay Errors % Change (per 500 words)
47	19 (27)	25	+ 6	(20/260) 38.5	(30/550) 27.3	11.2 fewer
48	21 (29)	38	+ 17	(31/420) 36.9	(18/570) 15.8	20.1 fewer
49	18 (21)	41	+ 23	(30/590) 25.4	(18/410) 22.0	3.4 fewer
50	22 (33)	38	+ 16	(13/950) 6.8	(16/940) 8.5	1.7 more
51	19 (35)	36	+ 17	(28/560) 25.0	(22/690) 15.9	9.1 fewer
52	21 (36)	29	+ 8	(29/530) 27.4	(27/790) 17.1	10.3 fewer
53	16 (20)	25	+ 9	(33/515) 32.0	(7/390,pg miss.) 9.0	23.0 fewer
54	31 (41)	36	+ 5	(16/730) 11.0	(8/880) 4.5	6.5 fewer
55	23 (27)	36	+ 13	(7/420) 8.3	(9/630) 7.1	1.2 fewer
56	23 (32)	34	+ 11	(17/570) 14.9	(8/880) 4.5	10.4 fewer
57	15 (20)	24	+ 9	(18/715) 12.6	(13/865) 7.5*	5.1 fewer
58	22 (18)	32	+ 10	(54/900) 30.0	(14/620) 11.3	28.7 fewer
59	16 (24)	29	+ 13	(26/710) 18.3	(22/610) 18.0	0.3 fewer
60	17 (24)	29	+ 12	(20/585) 17.1	(26/760) 17.1	no change
61	13 (23)	35	+ 22	(22/560) 19.6	(17/575) 14.8	4.8 fewer
62	15 (28)	38	+ 23	(30/660) 22.7	(31/660) 23.5	0.8 more
63	14 (29)	28	+ 14	(19/620) 15.3	(29/690) 21.0	5.7 more

Exit Essay Overall: Students who made fewer errors: 13 (72%) Students who made the same or more errors 4 (17%)

Total Tracked Students: 17

Broken Down: Significant improvement (over 10-point gain per 500 words): 6 (33%)
 Modest improvement (3.1-9.9 higher point gain per 500 words): 5 (28%)
 Negligible change (plus-or-minus 3.0 points per 500 words) 5 (28%)
 Modest negative change (3.1 or more errors per 500 words) 1 (6%)
 Significant negative change (10 or more errors per 500 words) 0 (0%)

Error Rates: Sabbatical Project--Trygve Thoreson (Wisniewski sections)

English 101-018 Fall 2009 (**bold** = motivated students) (Note: Error counts apply only to errors discussed in class.) *2 pp. missing

Student #	Copyediting Test Diag. (Midterm)	Copyediting Test Final	Copyediting Test Point Change (out of 50)	Entrance Essay Errors (/wds)(/500 wds)	Exit Essay Errors/No. Wds (/wds) (/500wds)	Essay Errors Point Change (per 500 wds)
64	31 (24)	34	+ 3	29/655 22.1	12/680 8.8	13.3 fewer
65	27 (36)	32	+ 5	14/455 15.4	23/665 17.3	1.9 more
66	26 (29)	30	+ 4	16/630 12.7	13/640 10.2	2.5 fewer
67 (retraced)	12 (16)	23	+ 11	49/430 57.0	34/640 26.6	30.4 fewer
68	37 (41)	44	+ 7	10/705 7.1	7/750 4.7	2.4 fewer
69	21 (30)	29	+ 8	15/430 17.4	19/615 15.4	2.0 fewer
70 (Kim)	27 (26)	34	+ 7			
71	18 (14)	22	+ 4	23/365 31.5	18/230* 39.1	7.6 more
72	12 (17)	25	+ 13	16/505 15.8	37/680 27.2	11.4 more
73	45 (43)	48	+ 3	18/600 15.0	9/810 5.6	9.4 fewer
(Lopez)				27/375 36.0	35/440 39.8	3.8 more
74 (Nelson)	21 (26)	24	+ 3			
75	26 (29)	33	+ 7	15/430 17.4	4/400 5.0	12.4 fewer
76	18 (20)	30	+ 12	18/385 24.7	23/535 21.5	3.2 fewer
77	19 (30)	35	+ 16	27/565 23.9	9/430 10.5	13.4 fewer
78	25 (43)	34	+ 11	24/630 19.0	12/520 11.5	7.5 fewer
79 (missing pg?)	11 (12)	22	+ 11	21/330 31.8	17/540 15.7	16.1 fewer
80	25 (30)	33	+ 8	27/600 22.5	21/665 15.8	6.8 fewer
81	34 (28)	35	+ 1	4/520 3.8	13/670 9.7	5.9 more

Exit Essay Overall: Students who made fewer errors: 12(71%) Students who made more errors : 5(29%) Total Tracked Students: 17

Broken Down: Significant improvement (over 10-point gain per 500 words): 5 (29%)
 Modest improvement (3.1-9.9 higher point gain per 500 words): 4 (24%)
 Negligible change (plus-or-minus 3.0 points per 500 words) 4 (24%)
 Modest negative change (3.1 or more errors per 500 words) 3 (18%)
 Significant negative change (10 or more errors per 500 words) 1 (6%)

Error Rates: Sabbatical Project--Trygve Thoreson (Wisniewski sections)

English 101-069 Fall 2009 (boldface = motivated students) (Note: Error counts apply only to errors discussed in class.)

Student #	Copyediting Test Diag. (Midterm)	Copyediting Test Final	Copyediting Test Point Change (out of 50)	Entrance Essay Errors/No. Wds (/wds) (/500wds)	Exit Essay Errors/No. Wds (/wds) (/500wds)	Essay Errors Point Change (per 500 wds)
82 (retraced)	10 (16)	24	+ 14	37/870 21.3	32/920 17.4	3.9 fewer
83	19 (28)	31	+ 12	20/630 15.9	15/560 13.4	2.5 fewer
84	25 (26)	29	+ 3	22/435 25.3	24/495 24.2	1.1 fewer
85	23 (21)	30	+ 7	n/a	n/a	n/a
86	14 (18)	26	+ 12	50/630 39.7	49/565 43.4	3.7 more
87	21 (38)	37	+ 16	22/590 18.6	20/560 17.9	0.7 fewer
88	16 (23)	21	+ 5	n/a	n/a	n/a
89	14 (20)	23	+ 9	24/690 17.4	unreadable	n/a
90	29 (32)	39	+ 10	24/420 28.6	20/595 16.8	11.8 fewer
91	21 (29)	39	+ 18	8/460 8.7	17/740 11.5	2.8 more
92	24 (39)	44	+ 20	14/350 20.0 (missing pp.?)	21/610 17.2	2.8 fewer
93	27 (20)	27	No change	28/560 25.0	35/790 22.1	2.9 fewer
94	39 (46)	48	+ 9	13/840 7.7	2/675 1.5	6.2 fewer
95 (retraced)	15 (18)	23	+ 8	54/660 40.9	59/780 37.8	3.1 fewer

Exit Essay Overall: Students who made fewer errors: 9 (82%) Students who made more errors: 2 (18%) Total Tracked Students: 11

Broken Down: Significant improvement (over 10-point gain per 500 words): 1 (9%)
 Modest improvement (3.1-9.9 higher point gain per 500 words): 3 (25%)
 Negligible change (plus-or-minus 3.0 points per 500 words) 6 (54%)
 Modest negative change (3.1 or more errors per 500 words) 1 (9%)
 Significant negative change (10 or more errors per 500 words) 0 (0%)

Grammar Project: Abbreviations for Tabulated Errors *[Note: An identical error consistently made throughout—e.g., “Foster” for “Forster” or “it’s” for “its”—was identified and circled in the margin, but was counted as a single error for the entire essay.]*

a = apostrophe error (incl. missing apostrophe where one is needed)

agr = misc. agreement errors aside from sv or np (e.g., “These women want to be a good mom”)

c = comma error (other than comma splice—restrictive/nonres. element counts 1 error; also, this notation is used for longer introductory elements that require commas)

cl = improperly used or missing colon

cm = faulty comparison (“is when,” “is where,” “Tom’s breath is worse than Jane”)

cs = comma splice

d = incomplete or incorrect documentation

f = sentence fragment (unjustifiable)

e = misuse of “every day” or “everyday”

h = unnecessary or missing hyphen (incl. hyphen used as a dash)

i = unjustifiable shift to imperative (“command”) mood

fs = fused (run-on) sentence

la = incorrect use of “like” or “as” (or “like” used in place of “that”—e.g., “I feel like . . .”)

m = modifier error (dangling, misplaced, or squinting)

mw = missing word(s) (or words mistakenly added but not removed in proofreading)

n = numbers presented contrary to class style sheet (numerals for three or more words)

np = noun/pronoun agreement error

p = faulty parallelism

q = improperly placed or misused quotation mark (or improper/incorrect quotation)

s = spelling error (incl. missing letters, incorrect compounds: e.g., “house hold,” and misspelled plurals: e.g., “Many live were lost”)

sm = improperly used or missing semicolon

sv = subject/verb agreement error

t = improperly cited title (italics or quotation marks)

v = inappropriate shift in verb tense

wo = in running (i.e., non-statistical) text, write out numbers expressed in two words or less (class policy)

The following errors or unconventional usages were not directly discussed in class copyediting sessions and so were not included in the error counts:

1. Elementary case confusion (e.g., “Me and my mom were . . . “)
2. Failure to use possessive pronoun with gerunds (“me wanting to go . . . “)
3. Failure to use subjunctive mood (“If I was a better athlete . . .”)
4. Faulty capitalization
5. Missing direct or indirect articles (a, an, the)
6. Faulty or questionable word choice (diction)
7. Prepositions that don’t fit standard idiomatic usage (“With the Forster essay, the author”)
8. Incorrect or missing end punctuation
9. Use of 2nd-person “you”
10. Quotation marks placed directly above periods or commas
11. “Firstly, secondly, lastly” etc.
12. “anyways”

Conclusions

What does all this add up to? We can safely say that, in their written work, **a clear majority of students (78%) showed some degree of improvement in their ability to edit out the errors covered by classroom instruction.** About a quarter of all students (26%) showed significant improvement if by *significant* we mean a reduction in the error rate per 500 words of ten or more—an admittedly arbitrary definition of “significant.” One could argue that Student #15, whose objective score increased from 22 out of 50 to 41 out of 50 and whose essay error rate went from 10 per 500 words to 3.7 per 500 words, showed significant improvement. After all, having made just ten mistakes in the first essay, prior to any instruction, this student started from a position of strength and then was able to reduce his or her error rates to a level of near perfection, yet statistically we are counting this as only “modest” improvement. On the

other hand, Student #67 improved “significantly” by reducing his/her error rate by more than thirty points in the final essay, but the student still committed 26.6 errors per 500 words, a high rate by almost any standard. Also not factored in is level of motivation for these particular assignments. The first essay was diagnostic and thus was perceived by some students as a low-stakes project. The exit essay had consequences for the students' grades, and thus could be considered high-stakes.

Overall motivation was examined, based on subjective judgments of the instructors. The boldfaced data shown above indicate students who were identified by the instructors to be exceptionally motivated students. (This derives from my hunch, from before this study was undertaken, that my most motivated students tended to benefit the most from this instruction.) The data, however, did not consistently bear this out. While 73% showed improved error rates on the final essay, a relatively high number of these were still in the “negligible” range, so that only 54% showed moderate or significant improvement, and fully 46% were in the “negligible” or “moderately worse” range. At least, none of them did significantly worse, which I suppose is a blessing.

So what does my sabbatical experiment prove? It may prove nothing. But it does, in my view, suggest something. Martin Luther King, Jr., is associated with a famous statement: “The arc of the moral universe is long,” he said of the civil-rights movement, “but it bends toward justice.” I’m well aware of my bold presumption in applying King’s elegant formulation to something as mundane as grammar/copyediting instruction. Yet an inelegant variant does express my impression of what the results say: in teaching student writing, the arc of grammar instruction may be wavy, but it bends toward correctness. Take *that*, Peter Elbow!

Selected Bibliography (Loosely and Idiosyncratically Annotated)

Belanoff, Pat. “The Myths of Assessment.” *Journal of Basic Writing* 10.1(1991). Rpt. in DeLuca et al., 299-310.

Asserts the inescapable subjectivity and inexactness of all writing assessment. Identifies four myths: 1) We know what we’re testing for, 2) We know what we’re testing, 3) Once we agree on criteria, we can agree on whether individual papers meet those criteria, and 4) It’s possible to have an absolute standard and apply it uniformly. “The skills which are easiest to measure are the ones least important to the development of good writing” (301). She suggests coming together with colleagues to “begin to try some things” that don’t “bastardize what you teach in your classrooms” (309). I.e., you do the best you can with what you’ve got, and look to make your assessments better, in consultation with colleagues. Belanoff also says we should be proud, not ashamed, of our inability to agree on standards: “it is a sign of strength, of the life and vitality of words and the exchange of words” (306).

Bettelheim, Bruno. “The Unconscious at Work in Reading.” In Hillocks, *The English Curriculum*, 73-86.

Claims that when children learn to read, misreadings often take place because they subconsciously “block” out disturbing material. Hence, rather than “correct” their misreadings by pointing out “errors,” we should encourage them to read texts creatively according to their own emotional, non-rational selves. Once we allow this to happen, the psychological blocks will magically disappear, and these children will eagerly read the texts as written. Cites three or four cases from his learning center in which just such magical transformations supposedly occurred. Ridiculous neo-Freudian nonsense. How did this guy get away with such stuff for so long?

Bishop, Wendy. “Teaching Grammar for Writers in a Process Workshop Classroom.” In Hunter and Wallace, 176-87.

Argues for a continuous place for grammar in a deeply process-oriented, feminist-friendly, workshop setting, based largely on Winston Weathers’ concept of “Grammar B”—constructs that subvert or play with traditional “Grammar A” forms (“crots, . . . labyrinthine sentences and fragments, lists, double voice, repetition and refrain, orthographic schemes, synchronous time, and collage/montage”) (181). I.e., grammar can become part of the exploratory play of revision. Bishop never really explains how much of Grammar A needs to be known before students can venture forth on the tempestuous and thrilling seas of Grammar B, though she does pose this as an unanswered question (“When do they need to break with convention? [Can they? Do they have ideas about how to?]”).

Blakesly, David. “Reconceptualizing Grammar as an Aspect of Rhetorical Invention.” In Hunter and Wallace, 191-203.

Following Vygotsky, Blakesly defines grammar as the “relational principles that direct [the] ‘living process’ of the mind forming connections” [of thought to word] (192). He even suggests extending Hartwell’s “five grammars” to include a sixth: “forms bound by relational principles that people use to convey meaning . . . grammars [that] aren’t limited to words/sentences but also include larger units of meaning—paragraphs, passages, even philosophies” (195). As these quotes suggest, Blakesly isn’t especially lucid on just how this would work (or, to be frank, on what he thinks grammar is), though he does single out Winston Weathers’ and Francis Christensen’s rhetorics as means of using grammar in invention. I presume he means students can play with things like fragments and lists and weird typography (Weathers) or build sentences with variously located free modifiers (Christensen) as invention strategies. But it’s a little hard to tell what he means in terms of actual classroom practices.

Booth, Wayne C. “Rhetoric, Mere Rhetoric, and Reality: Or, My Basics Are More Basic Than Your Basics.” In Hillocks, *The English Curriculum*, 11-27.

Imagines a public, fed up with the incoherent and faddish approaches of English instructors, saying, “OK, *you’ve* given up on the job. Let *us* tell you what to do . . . make a list of elementary standards of literacy, . . . teach each standard, drill by drill, then . . . make up competency examinations to test each standard, and then we’ll be sure that everybody you graduate is literate.” [My note: Doesn’t this sound a lot like the current Bill Gates’ approach?] Booth’s response: “[I]f we think hard enough about our own notions of the basics, and then teach with full devotion according to these notions, we will find the competencies following quite naturally” (15). Most of Booth’s essay is a defense of the study of rhetoric (surprise!) as crucial to the preservation of our most valued cultural needs (political freedom, etc.). Rhetoric, he says, *makes* our realities—past, present, and future. Toward the end, he takes an Peter Elbowish position toward teaching “the basics”: “[W]hen teachers and students are fully engaged with the world’s rhetoric, including their own, competence in handling the elements will follow as naturally as the performance knowledge of grammar follows the child’s desire to learn to talk” (25). However, he also says this: “When and where to deal directly with comma splices cannot be decided in a general way, though each school should surely make clear decisions about which grades are to be responsible for which minimal skills.” So, it seems, there *is* a time and a place to teach comma splices.

Boyd, Richard. “‘Grammatical Monstrosities’ and ‘Contemptible Miscreants’: Sacrificial Violence in the Late Nineteenth-Century Usage Handbook.” In Hunter and Wallace. 54-70.

Uses Rene Girard’s theory of mimetic desire (i.e., we desire things in emulation of an Other that desires a given object, which ultimately leads to violent conflict) to explain the late 19th-century American obsession with mechanical correctness (a representative text excoriates “impure” English in order to keep the “aliens” out of the established social hierarchy and preserve the current order). Not helpful.

Braddock, Richard, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer. *Research in Written Composition*. Champaign, IL: NCTE, 1963.

This is the major comprehensive review of research that declared grammar irrelevant to the teaching of writing. The (in)famous lines: “In view of the widespread agreement of research studies based upon many types of students and teachers, the conclusion can be stated in strong and unqualified terms: the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing” (37). Consists of essentially three sections: a discussion of research methods, with plenty of attention to why numerous studies don’t measure up; an overview of composition research (which includes the infamous statement above); and a detailed look at five studies (Buxton, Harris, Kincaid, Smith, Becker) dating back to the 1920s that the researchers view as models of well-constructed research. Some highlights:
p. 32: Loban study (1952) showed that grade-school kids who exhibited greatest power over oral language use were those who “most frequently used language to express tentativeness.”

Some studies mentioned by Braddock appear to contradict (or at least call into question) the infamous statement: Butterfield (“significantly superior results in punctuation are obtained by direct methods” 37—for an explanation of “direct methods,” see Harris, p. 71 and p. 78, where “Direct Method” allows for “points of usage”), Buxton (35), Lyman (35), and Fellows (35). These last three all show that either extensive theme correction or “learning how to correct errors before submitting their papers” has a positive effect on grammatical and mechanical errors.

The Harris study (1962) is discussed in detail on pp. 70-83, and deals directly with the issue of formal grammar. It is the central study many cite in arguing the ineffectiveness of grammar instruction.

Brosnahan, Irene, and Janice Neulieb. “Teaching Grammar Affectively: Learning to Like Grammar.” In Hunter and Wallace, 204-12.

Posits that many students reject and resent grammar instruction because it tends not to fit their learning styles. In particular, English majors prefer “personal and social exchanges” with texts rather than “systematic studies of language and learning,” and so they dread “cold, cerebral” linguistic instruction filled with abstract rules but devoid of “life.” Traditional methods of teaching grammar just make this worse. These instructors, by contrast, begin by having students work with “unconscious grammar” to persuade students “that they ‘know’ grammar and to give them confidence in generating, analyzing, and making judgments about language data” (209). The emphasis here is on structuring exercises so that students feel good about grammar, which leads to this surprising statement: “Whether in actual practice these students do apply their conscious knowledge of grammar or not seems irrelevant. The important point is that they **feel** that way, and this is what would motivate them to continue to be interested in understanding grammar” (210). This seems more a hope and a dream than an observable reality. Also, early in the essay, the authors promulgate another all-or-nothing statement based on Hillocks (1986): “Students make almost no connection between traditional grammar and the editing of their texts, and they make no connection at all between grammar instruction and the production of text” (205).

Brown, Stuart C., Robert Boswell, Kevin McIlvoy. “Grammar and Voice in the Teaching of Creative Writing: A Conversation.” In Hunter and Wallace, 159-75.

Three writers/creative writing instructors discuss the place of grammar in their teaching. In essence, they see an understanding of the fundamentals of grammar as inseparable from precision of expression in writing. Says Boswell, “Separating grammar from voice [is] something like separating the desire for respiration from the necessity of lungs. Good writers often work against the conventions of grammar, but they never ignore them” (171). It’s clear that these teachers struggle with the grammatical deficiencies of their students and the sometimes dismissive attitudes the students exhibit—as when students submit carelessly written stories and ask the teachers to “fix it.” Also, a valuable point from Stuart Brown: “The *OED* indicates that *grammar* initially denoted the ‘methodical study of literature,’ including aesthetic criticism, investigation of literary history and antiquities, explanation of allusions, and the study of Greek and Latin languages. We’ve lost that sense of inclusiveness . . .” (161).

Buck, R. A. “Marginalizing Grammar.” *English Today*. 15(1999): 31-35.

Laments the decline of grammar instruction from a linguist’s point of view. Argues for inclusion of grammar in the “How will any student understand individual parts of [his or her writing] experience if we do not at the same time equip them with a foundational base in the ‘content material’ of grammar?”

Bushman, Donald, and Elizabeth Ervin. “Rhetorical Contexts of Grammar: Some Views from Writing Emphasis Course Instructors.” In Hunter and Wallace, 136-58.

A faculty group at the University of Arizona was assembled to discuss issues of writing across the curriculum. Among the items discussed: what to do about grammar? The article doesn’t give any real answers (much of it is concerned with identifying different kinds of faculty responders--“The Advocate,” “The Confirmed Non-Expert,” The Editor,” “The General Rhetorician,” “The Contextual Rhetorician”), but it does generally support Robert Connors’ statement that “we cannot escape the fact that in a written text any question of mechanics is also a rhetorical question” (qtd. 140) and quotes with approval Mina Shaughnessy’s view of mechanical errors as “unprofitable intrusions upon the consciousness of the reader” (qtd. 143). One interesting datum: in a survey of writing-emphasis instructors, 40% declared that grammar instruction was the responsibility of the English department (144).

Clark, Irene L. *Concepts in Composition: Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Writing*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003. [NU 808.04207 C593c]

Claywell, Gina. “Reasserting Grammar’s Position in the Trivium in American College Composition.” In Hunter and Wallace. 43-53.

Like Glenn, makes case for including grammar in a larger sense, as was done in the medieval trivium. Most interesting point made here is that the image of highly prescriptive grammar until recently is wrong—only beginning in the 1870s (with Harvard’s A. S. Hill) was it so narrowly defined, and even then, many teachers used peer criticism, drafting, etc. in their pedagogy. In the 1890s, Claywell says, grammar fell into disfavor once again. Many commentators from the beginning have recognized the tentative and ever-changing nature of usage conventions.

Cook, Devan. “The Location of Error: Reflections on a Research Project.” *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*. 38.1 (September 2010): 22-33.

Cook takes up the challenge of Lunsford and Lunsford and does her own research project on student error. She finds essentially the same error rate as in the Lunsford study, but expresses increasing skepticism and uncertainty over the concept of error itself, finding the “coding” of error an ambiguous and misleading enterprise. She lists several recommendations at the end of her essay, most of which have to do with acquainting students with the “social and cultural contexts for error”—i.e., to locate error within a rhetorical frame so that they understand some errors may be acceptable in some contexts and for some readers. She cites Joseph Williams several times in making this point, and also Gary Sloan’s study comparing error rates of student writers (2.04 per 100 words) to those of professional writers (1.82).

Connors, Robert J. “Mechanical Correctness as a Focus in Composition Instruction.” *College Composition and Communication*. 36.1 (Feb. 1985): 61-72.

Useful historical overview of the varying degrees of emphasis on mechanical correctness from the early nineteenth century to the present. He even has a precise date for the mass infusion of mechanics instruction into college composition: 1874, when Harvard first required a writing exam for admission and horrified teachers reacted to the mistake-ridden works that were submitted (more than half of the students failed to pass). From roughly then till the 1940s, rhetoric took a back seat to grammar and correctness (also partly due to the immense teaching loads of instructors, who were required to teach as many as 150 students in a lecture class-- and do all the grading). Connors clearly disdains this emphasis; he calls it an “obsession with mechanical correctness” (61) and refers to “mere mechanical correctness” (70). He further tips his hand with this statement: “On the one side are the theorists, the rhetoricians, the proponents of writing as discovery or communication; on the other are the traditionalists, the front-line teachers, the proponents of writing as vocational skill” (70). However, to his credit, Connors then indicates that “both sides make valid points” and acknowledges that “striking a balance in our teaching between formal and rhetorical considerations is the problem we now face . . . a difficult question, but one heartening to see asked” (71).

Daniel, Neil, and Christina Murphy. “Correctness or Clarity? Finding Answers in the Classroom and the Professional World.” In Hunter and Wallace, 225-42.

Notes the permanence of “the literary crisis” and acknowledges that the “crisis” will never end. As a partial answer, the authors offer a solution based on “reader expectation theory” that Joseph Williams and others have embraced, an approach emphasizing patterns that control sentences in a paragraph and paragraphs in extended discourse while shifting “the writer’s and the teacher’s attention from avoiding error to achieving clarity” (230). Ultimately, these authors see composition instruction as preparation for professional writing, and so they propose a kind of apprenticeship model, with extensive writing instruction coming from instructors in the students’ chosen disciplines. That way, grammar is taught in terms of what matters to a particular discipline. In essence, this is a writing-across-the-curriculum-proposal, with freshman composition jettisoned altogether and a greatly increased role for writing centers.

DeBeaugrande, Robert. “Yes, Teaching Grammar Does Help.” *The English Journal*. 73.1 (Feb. 1984): 66-69.

Proposes a “learners’ grammar” built on students natural “talk grammar” rather than on grammatical terminology. E.g., to identify *subject* and *predicate*, ask a who/what question: the predicate is all the words you used again; the subject is everything else (“Martha eats potatoes.” “Who eats potatoes?”) . To identify

clauses, ask a yes/no question: only an independent clause will yield a reasonable question (“The knave stole the tarts.” “Did the knave steal the tarts?”). The same yes/no technique can be applied to fragments. [Check to see if DeBeaugrande is the one who renames subjects as “agents,” verbs as “actions” and complements as something else—renamings that I doubt students would find helpful.]

DeLuca, Geraldine, et al., eds. *Dialogue on Writing: Rethinking ESL, Basic Writing, and First-Year Composition*. Mahwah, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002.

Edlund, John R. “The Rainbow and the Stream: Grammar as System Versus Language in Use.” In Hunter and Wallace, 89-102.

Cites Bakhtin (language may be viewed as an ever-changing stream or a static, unchanging rainbow) and Saussure’s concepts of *langue* (universal system of rules and structures) vs. *parole* (language as used in individual utterances) to see what relevance formal grammar study has in such a binary linguistic universe. Seems mostly to say grammar is not useful (he likes Krashen’s language acquisition theory--we master grammars unconsciously, so any attempt to impose conscious learning will have minimal effect), but at the end seems to say we have to acknowledge some role for grammar instruction: “We cannot deny *langue*; neither can we simply follow our own linguistic current” (102). [Edlund is guilty of a typical post-Braddock overstatement: “A substantial body of research . . . shows that teaching grammar does not improve writing, and *no* studies exist which show that teaching grammar *does* improve writing” (89). He’s also the guy who gave up on marking “alot” on student papers when he found over 50% of his “quite literate” English majors writing it that way.]

Glenn, Cheryl. “When Grammar Was a Language Art.” In Hunter and Wallace. 9-29.

An endorsement of Corbett’s approach of applying classical rhetoric to modern writing instruction. Glenn traces the development of grammar from the Greeks through Corbett, with emphasis on contextualized grammar instruction: *ars* (rules and precepts), *imitatio* (imitation of model writers, and *exercitatio* (sequenced writing exercises)

Glover, Carl W., and Byron L. Stay. “Grammar in the Writing Center: Opportunities for Discovery and Change.” In Hunter and Wallace, 129-35.

These writers argue that the Writing Center offers the best opportunity for delivering grammar instruction as an “empowering” tool. That is, they worry terribly about the power relationships of traditional grammar instruction, and suggest that one-on-one tutors can present grammar as something the student can control and manipulate. This leads to some fairly tortured circumlocutive advice-giving. E.g., they suggest a peer tutor, instead of citing a rule, could say, “I understand what you mean here, but your readers may make some assumptions about you and about your subject that you don’t want them to make” (132). Later, they offer this gem: “Rather than teach students that commas never function as sentence boundary markers, we might teach them that punctuation is a dynamic, negotiated signal between writer and reader that establishes expectations that are either followed through or thwarted” (134-35). Wow! I had no idea commas were this exciting—or this complicated (and mysterious)! To their credit, these authors do understand that grammar instruction can be seen largely in terms of Hartwell’s “Grammar 3,” or linguistic etiquette.

Hartwell, Patrick. “Grammar, Grammars, and the Teaching of Grammar.” *College English*. 47.2(February 1985): 105-127.

Comprehensive discussion of the uses of grammar in writing instruction, by one who embraces the Braddock et al. statement on its essential uselessness. Identifies five “grammars”: Grammar 1 (the linguistic patterns and structures we acquire unconsciously), Grammar 2 (linguists’ attempts to describe those patterns, “scientific grammar”), Grammar 3 (“linguistic etiquette” or usage), Grammar 4 (“school grammar,” a loose amalgam of tradition, supposed logic, and Latin grammar), and Grammar 5 (“stylistic grammar” that attempts to use grammatical terms to teach prose style, as Kolln, Strunk and White, and others claim to

do). Hartwell argues that Grammar's 2, 4, and 5 have virtually no effect on writing ability (e.g., explaining what a fragment is to a student is almost impossible unless it is COIK--"clear only if known"). Interestingly, he says almost nothing about Grammar 3, assuming "that this issue has been discussed elsewhere and that my readers are familiar with those discussions" 110).

Hillocks, Jr., George, ed. *The English Curriculum Under Fire: What Are the Real Basics?* Urbana: NCTE, 1982.

Six papers presented at a conference at the University of Chicago in response to the "back-to-basics" movement of the 1970s. (The conference itself was organized in 1978.) This volume consists of essays by six heavy-hitters in the profession: Hillocks himself, Wayne Booth, E. D. Hirsch, James. R. Squire, James E. Miller, Jr., Bruno Bettelheim.

Hillocks, George. *Research on Written Composition*. U. S. Department of Education. ERIC Reports. 1986.

Landmark review of composition research that attempts to update the Braddock report of 1963. Chapter 5 deals with "Grammar and the Manipulation of Syntax," with much of the latter half of the chapter devoted to studies of sentence combining and Christensen's sentence-construction approaches. (both of which seem to have positive impacts on syntactic maturity). The key passage on grammar echoes the Braddock message: "None of the studies reviewed for the present report provides any support for teaching grammar as a means of improving composition skills" (138). However, some of the studies reviewed could be seen as contradicting this blanket statement: Bateman and Zidonis (1966) found significant gains for students who studied generative grammar over a two-year period (136); the Elley et al. study (1976) showed that "after the second year, the traditional grammar group's essay content was better than that of the . . . group that did not study grammar" (137) and, after the study was completed, "the grammar groups *did* outperform the no-grammar classes on a test of usage and mechanics" (138); Kennedy and Larson (1969) "report pretest scores which show that traditional grammar groups scored one full point higher than the experimental groups" (135); and Bennett (1976) "counted errors in samples of writing from primary students and found that those taught by informal methods which stressed free writing and creativity made significantly more errors in punctuation than did students taught by formal methods" (139). Part of the problem here, as Hillocks acknowledges, stems from the confusion of "formal grammar" with "mechanics" or "correctness" (133). Both Braddock and Hillocks occasionally—if grudgingly—indicate that sentence mechanics can be taught (Hillocks on the Elley study: "They found that the differences appeared in items on the use of capitals, commas in lists, the apostrophe, possessives and contractions, commas for appositives, and so forth—all of which appear to be amenable to direct, discrete instruction" [138]). Perhaps a more accurate, or less misleading, statement would be this one: "The teaching of grammar and mechanics has had, at best, mixed results even for teaching correctness. We do not know how much grammar or what grammatical knowledge writers must have to copyread with accuracy" (140).

Hirsch, Jr., E. D. "Some Principles of Composition from Grade School to Grad School." In Hillocks, *The English Curriculum*, 39-52.

Establishes that writing is a complex task that induces "cognitive overload" in practitioners of all ages—one just can't possibly attend to all the aspects that impinge on the writing process as one engages in composition. Somewhat surprisingly, this leads him to embrace teaching "correctness" to students, starting at an early age. These things should become "automatic" as one writes, so one can focus on other things. "The more these scribal conventions are automated," he says, "the more the mind is free to devote itself to fluent writing. That is why correctness is no enemy to fluency and self-expression, but rather their close ally and bosom friend" (49). He goes on to say extensive reading makes "explicitness and correctness" second nature to the writer. Thus "literature, and reading, and writing are a single subject rather than three subjects" (52). [*My note: Do we see the seeds of Hirsch's cultural literacy campaign here?*]

Hobson, Eric H. "Taking Computer-Assisted Grammar Instruction to New Frontiers." In Hunter and Wallace, 213-24.

Reviews the state of computer-assisted grammar instruction to date (mid-1990s). Finds it wanting—most programs consist of traditional prescriptive drills and workbook-style exercises or spellcheck/grammarcheck programs that are of limited value in actual writing situations that necessarily involve complex contextualized writing tasks. Hobson notes that programs are becoming more sophisticated, however, and sees the possibility of much more interactive and creative grammar instruction in the future. He points out that many of these new programs have discarded traditional prescriptive grammars in favor of transformational grammars since "transformational grammars are more consistent, and consistency is essential when programming a binary system" (223). Interestingly, he further notes that Black English Vernacular (BEV) would be easier to program into these systems since BEV is more consistent than Standard Edited English.

Hudson, Richard. "Grammar Teaching and Writing Skills: The Research Evidence." *Syntax in the Schools*. 17(2001): 1-6.

Brief summary of the evidence to 2001. Cites several studies that suggest the value of grammar instruction. "The idea that grammar teaching improves children's writing skills is much better supported by the available research than is commonly supposed."

Hunter, Susan, and Ray Wallace, eds. *The Place of Grammar in Writing Instruction: Past, Present, and Future*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton-Cook, 1995.

Kennedy, L. D., and A.D. Larson. "The Influence of Structural and Traditional Grammatical

Instruction Upon Language Perception and Writing Ability." *Illinois School Research*.

5.2 (1969): 31-36.

[Unable to locate—unavailable through JSTOR]

Krashen, Stephen D. *Writing: Research, Theory, and Applications*. Pergamon Institute: Oxford, England, 1984.

Important little book that summarizes research thoughtfully, briefly, but comprehensibly. Key points: "Writing competence . . . comes only from large amounts of self-motivated reading." "[There is] some evidence that writing frequency relates to writing ability . . . that formal grammar study does not contribute significantly to writing, and that good and poor writers have different composing processes and concerns" (20). Krashen's main idea is that good writing is largely the result of language acquisition through extensive reading, but he also notes that "[c]onscious knowledge of rules of grammar and usage helps only at the editing stage and is limited to straightforward, learnable aspects of grammar" (27). He also notes that motivation is essential—one has to have an expectation of success and also want to belong to the "club" of good writers to improve noticeably (25). Not having these things creates an "Affective Filter." Krashen also notes that improvement in writing through reading is a long-term proposition—we should not expect miraculous results in one semester.

Lunsford, Andrea, and Karen Lunsford. "'Mistakes Are a Fact of Life': A National Comparative Study." *CCC* 59.4 (June 2008): 781-806.

Compares large-scale error studies from 1917, 1930, 1986, and 2006. Key points: assignments are now longer, more argument- and research-based (e.g., less personal narrative and descriptive), and error rates have remained largely consistent over time (about 2.2 errors per 100 words).

Menand, Louis. “Bad Comma: Lynne Truss’s Strange Grammar.” *The New Yorker* (June 28, 2004): 102-4.

Review-essay on Truss’s best-selling *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*. Menand points to numerous unintended punctuation errors in Truss’s book, arguing that her book “is really a ‘decline of print culture’ book disguised as a style manual.” He writes, “Though she has persuaded herself otherwise, Truss doesn’t want people to care about correctness. She wants them to care about writing and about using the full resources of the language.” Yet she confuses the “technological” (mechanical) aspects of writing with the “aesthetic”; punctuation has to do entirely with the former, not the latter. Menand goes on to consider the elusive subject of “voice” in writing, and along the way gives this useful “ultimate test of good writing: it is more painful to stop reading . . . than it is to keep going.” The first part (Menand’s listing of Truss’s boo-boos) neatly complements Joseph Williams’ error experiment in “The Phenomenology of Error.”

Micciche, Laura R. “Making a Case for Rhetorical Grammar.” *College Composition and Communication* 55.4(June 2004): 716-37.

"Teaching the 'ordinary' use of language—grammar—is often constructed as ineffective because, it is widely believed, grammar knowledge out of context doesn't translate to grammatical correctness in context" (717). Micciche essentially makes a case for grammar as a means of cultural critique—i.e., students keep "commonplace books" in which they examine famous writers for ways in which their language signals or reveals their intentions. E.g., They may look for signs of patriarchal bias in the masculine nouns and pronouns male writers use, or they may examine Gertrude Stein's grammatical inversions to demonstrate her refusal to join the dominant culture. She gives instances of this kind of critique and others (e.g., Washington Irving's use of dashes to show Rip Van Winkle's disoriented state of mind) to show how students can come to understand the rhetorical purposes behind grammar. She, like so many others, has no patience for traditional, root-out-all-the-errors grammar pedagogies.

Miller, James E., Jr. “The Basics and the Imagination.” In Hillocks, *The English Curriculum*, 53-71.

Essentially a conventional defense of the place of literature in English curricula, as the central means of educating the “linguistic imagination” (69), which Miller regards as of fundamental importance. Of “the basics,” he says, “This is not to say that grammar, spelling, and punctuation—and much more of a related nature—cannot find a proper place in the curriculum, but in a subordinate, not a basic, position” (71).

Mullin, Joan. “The Use of Grammar Texts: A Call for Pedagogical Inquiry.” In Hunter and Wallace. 103-13.

Mullin, a writing center administrator, has difficulty squaring current thinking on grammar (it has little instructional value) with the insistence on students at all levels--and some faculty--that grammar instruction is what they need. (Mullin says, “I found it difficult to undermine students’ tendencies to equate good papers with good grammar.”) In part, she blames textbooks—we continue to pretend handbooks are mere “reference tools,” but we do still require them and expect our students to master much of what’s inside them. I.e., our practice doesn’t match our theory. She doesn’t really offer a solution; she just wants us to think about this. She herself started doing recorded paper comments and was “horrified” at how much emphasis she put on correctness. [My note: she quotes Barthelme: “It is easier to teach the limited skill than the larger art of composition”—implying that teaching grammar and mechanics is *easy*, not impossible (110)].

Mulroy, David. *The War Against Grammar*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton-Cook Heinemann,

2003.

Neulieb, Janice. "The Relation of Formal Grammar to Composition." *College Composition and Communication*. 28.3(October 1977): 247-250.

Views with skepticism the broad generalizations concerning grammar instruction based on a handful of widely cited studies: Harris (1962: in 10 classes, formal-grammar groups did less well on essays), Braddock, Schoer, Lloyd-Jones (1963: review of all research with the grammar "has harmful effect" passage), Bateman-Zidonis (1964: students trained in transformational grammar did better than those trained in a non-grammar class), Mellon (1969: students trained in sentence-combining did better—at sentence-combining), Elley et al. (1976: New Zealand students in 3 groups—transformational grammar, traditional grammar, no grammar—showed no difference in writing skills or mastery of grammar). Neulieb argues that these studies are not conclusive: e.g., in Bateman-Zidonis, the "significant improvement" occurred in just four students; the Elley study only tells us something about grammar instruction at lower grade levels ("fifth through seventh form").

Noguchi, Rei R. *Grammar and the Teaching of Writing*. NCTE: Urbana, IL, 1991.

Major, and nuanced, defense of the teaching of grammar that acknowledges the shortcomings of grammar instruction, as earlier research has shown. Key passages (by page):

2: defines "formal grammar instruction" as the traditional grammar taught in schools, "the set of categories, functions, and rules (both descriptive and prescriptive) that teachers commonly employ to describe a sentence and its parts."

4: offers 3 reasons for ineffectiveness of grammar instruction: 1) not adequately learned by students, 2) not transferred to writing situations (Noguchi points out this may also be true of other areas of instruction, such as content, organization, tone), 3) not transferable to writing situations.

16: Grammar does belong in the school curriculum, but only in areas where it overlaps with genuine composition elements (such as style). We should teach less, not more, grammar, thus freeing up time to spend on other things.

18-19: Grammar instruction can't do much about spelling errors or "semantic/pragmatic" errors (diction, wrong tone), but can apply to morphological (tense, agreement), syntactic (fragments, parallelism), and some graphological (punctuation). Should spend our time dealing with the most frequent errors of these types (based on the Connors/Lunsford study).

31: Suggests we focus on those errors that occur with high frequency and evoke strongly negative responses (e.g., frags., run-ons, s-v agreement).

29: Makes the important point that if we're asking students to create "reader-based prose," then we need to pay attention to what readers think of errors (cites Hairston's study of reactions of professionals to errors). I.e., readers do think "surface errors" matter.

32: "[T]o state it somewhat simplistically, usage errors involve the wrong choice of word, not the wrong choice of syntactic structure or relation." He thinks most usage errors don't require much formal grammatical knowledge, whereas syntactic do.

33: Start with four concepts: sentence (independent clause), subject, verb, and modifier.

41: Distinguishes between rules *of* language (descriptive, the unconsciously learned systems of language) and rules *about* language (prescriptive, or usage, rules). The problem with true (i. e., descriptive) grammar is that it depends on relationships among sentence elements; hence, students have difficulty "since categories are often defined in terms of other categories."

43: Suggests we use "operational" definitions of grammatical terms (define elements by what they do, not what they are. For example, if you can substitute a pronoun for another word or word group in a sentence, then that word/word group functions as a noun. In "Eating cabbage is good for you," you can substitute "It" for the gerund "Eating cabbage," so "Eating cabbage" is a noun phrase and can be the subject of the sentence. A complete sentence can be identified by adding a "tag question" at the end ("didn't he?") or turning the sentence into a yes-no question ("Did he . . ."). He recommends a similar method for identifying presentence modifiers.

64 ff.: Applies the same practice to eliminating comma splices and fused sentences. Native speakers do possess unconscious knowledge of what constitutes an independent clause. They can test this knowledge by applying the tag-question and yes-no question formula to two or more word groups in a sentence. (E. g.,

“Sarah, a slow learner, nonetheless picked up the basics of volleyball quickly she beat Hollywood with a wicked spike.” [Add “, didn’t she?” or “Did Sarah . . . ?” and the student can see there are two separate statements here.]

86: Study by Sloan (1979) found higher incidence of misspelled words (e.g., “alot”), fragments (by a ratio of roughly 3:1), comma splices (4:1) in roughly 1000 student themes from 1973-76 as compared to a similar number from 1950-57, reflecting, supposedly, the impact of oral culture.

88: The good news: fragments used by native speakers are syntactically sound, and speakers know that intuitively (e.g., they would never write: “Arthur missed the quiz because. He skipped class.”) Fragments show just how much students do know about the internal logic of sentence boundaries.

90: Once again, Noguchi recommends the question-tag and yes-no formula for identifying fragments. (I’m not sure this would work for “The reason being” or relative-clause fragments.)

92 ff.: Following Danes et al., Noguchi introduces the concept of sentences containing “given” (understood by prior mention or background knowledge) and “new” (previously unshared) information as a way to approach sentence order (given first, then new), pronoun referents, restrictive/nonrestrictive, *a/an* and *the*, diction, emphasis, and coherence, etc.

105: Traditional grammar has focused too much on syntax and not enough on how simple grammatical (semantic-pragmatic) concepts can help with larger issues of meaning—content and organization. The “given-new” idea allows students a way into these larger issues.

113 ff.: In final chapter, Noguchi poses a series of questions (or “paradoxes”): 1) Why are minor surface errors major errors to so many of the educated public? (ans.—they don’t know better, and errors are linked to status); 2) If surface errors are really minor and superficial, why do teachers find it such a major undertaking to eliminate them? Etc. The key one, for me: Why do teachers continue formal grammar instruction when most research indicates that it does not produce significant writing improvement? Noguchi gives three answers:

1. Teachers are unaware of current research.
2. Teachers are aware of current research but don’t really believe it.
3. Teachers are aware of current research and believe it but have nothing better to offer in the place of formal grammar instruction.

120: Bottom line: “Teachers do not have to abandon grammar, but if the chief goal is writing improvement and not grammar for its own sake, grammar instruction will have to be much more selective and much more cost-efficient than in the past.”

Olson, Jon. “A Question of Power: Why Frederick Douglass Stole Grammar.” In Hunter and Wallace. 30-42.

Points out that Douglass (and Booker T. Washington and Malcolm X) sought empowerment through laborious mastery of grammar (broadly understood). By using this enlarged definition and focusing on the ends of language (empowerment), we can rediscover the proper place of grammar in composition.

Patterson, Nancy. “The Role of Grammar in the Language Arts Curriculum.” Ph.D. Doctoral Exam. Michigan State University, 1999. <http://www.npatterson.net/grammar.html>>
[Read full text and add comments]

Raimes, Ann. “”Errors: Windows into the Mind.” In DeLuca et al., 279-87.

An ESL instructor, Raimes accepts the need to teach grammar: “When looking at a piece of writing, teachers have to respond to grammatical errors as well as to rhetoric” (279), but only if “we give [students] the chance to make them, fix them, and discuss them” (286). She also gives several helpful suggestions as to how to mark errors in student work through various drafts.

Ross, Garry. "The NCTE Commission on the English Curriculum and Teaching the Grammar/Writing Connection." In Hunter and Wallace. 71-86.

Reviews NCTE Commission, which was established in 1945, and which published multiple volumes through 1963. Criticizes all reports as offering only platitudes and unhelpful generalizations about how to link grammar and writing, mostly because almost all participants were literature instructors who saw literary studies as the primary focus of English departments.

Shaughnessy, Mina P. *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*.
New York: Oxford UP, 1977.

Landmark study of how to deal with the multitude of writing problems displayed in the work of Basic Writers (BW). This includes numerous sequential exercises to strengthen various student deficiencies (and not always in the "context" of the students' own writing). Shaughnessy's guiding idea is that the errors basic writers make usually have some identifiable underlying patterns that need to be understood and worked with. Some key passages:

28: Punctuation should not be set apart in the "mechanics" section of textbooks "for the process whereby writers *mark* sentences is related to the process whereby they *make* them."

30: Terms such as "non-restrictive" can confuse; how about calling this an "extra" clause that therefore gets extra commas?

34: "Discussions about why a writer has used a semicolon in a particular situation must become discussions about the relationships between ideas, and, this, finally, is what analytical writing is intended to clarify."

39: English teachers should not expect students to learn punctuation conventions quickly

73: Identifies "**three pedagogies**" that are often separated from one another: a "grammar pedagogy" that uses explicit formal instruction and extensive sentence-level practice; a "process pedagogy" that assumes students already know the necessary forms but cannot produce them until they've been encouraged to *behave* as writers do (moving through the various stages of prewriting, composing, revising, proofing, etc.); and a "confidence pedagogy" that tends to "dismiss concerns with form or process as incidental to the students' discovery of themselves as individuals with ideas, points of view, and memories that are worth writing about." As Shaughnessy notes, "A teacher should not have to choose from among these pedagogies" but may use all of them.

77: It's much easier for students to grasp semantic concepts if they understand the meaning of terms like subject, verb, modifier, etc.

98-99: Rules sometimes mislead basic writers into hypercorrection—following a "rule" even when it results in something that sounds wrong.

110: An example of the above: following the "rule" for a final *-s* in *hers, ours, theirs*, students sometimes write *mines*.

115: In the sentence "Take a stenographer or a secretary that don't need to go on . . ." the student sees two subjects and applies the rule for a plural verb because he/she doesn't know the rule for compound subjects joined by *or*.

122: Asserts that most academic readers are likely to tolerate five or six basic errors in an essay of 300 words; basic writers, she says, will make between ten and thirty. [Note: for 500-word essays, this would translate into an acceptable rate of eight or ten errors, an unacceptable rate of between seventeen and fifty.]

156: It's OK for teachers to depart from linguistic theory and construct "Rube Goldberg" grammars of their own to find whatever works. "What is most useful is a repertoire of approaches to a relatively small number of problems rather than an allegiance to a school of grammar."

159: It's reasonable to expect a student to go from fifteen to thirty errors per 300 words [25 to 50 per 500 words] to eight [13 per 500 words], though "the rate of error reduction, while useful to know, is not as important as other less measurable kinds of behavior—for example, a growing inclination to scrutinize sentences in order to observe the forms of words . . ."

160: Punctuation is contextual: "A particular mark of punctuation or an inflection . . . is neither right nor wrong until it appears in the context of a sentence."

178: Offers a (fairly complicated) set of spelling rules students should know.

199-209: Distinguishes between characteristics of the prose of basic writers, intermediate writers, and advanced writers in freshman composition classes. See handout sheet titled "shaughnessy basic intermed adv writers."

230: In a closing chapter on the larger issues of student writing, Shaughnessy notes two typically deficient methods of essay development basic writers fall back on: platitudes/generalizations and personal reverie.

273: Useful brief statement of a usable device for teaching the structure of the freshman essay:

<i>Listener</i>	<i>Writer's Response</i>
1. What's your point?	Thesis Statement
2. I don't quite get your meaning.	Restatement in Different Words
3. Prove it to me.	Illustration, Evidence, Argument
4. So what?	Conclusion

On the same page, Shaughnessy offers this useful cautionary note on the importance of *time* and *effort* for intellectual growth: "Tempted as writing teachers are to take on the entire responsibility for their students' intellectual growth, they would probably be wise to assume that a few years of steady reading, writing, talking, and listening in an academic setting are certain to increase the intellectual tenacity and spanning power of their students. For the struggle to bring about instant intellectuality by direct intervention will take time away from more profitable albeit less ambitious types of instruction."

Shuman, R. Baird. "Grammar for Writers: How Much Is Enough?" In Hunter and Wallace. 114-28.

Sensible discussion of the essentials students should, and can, be taught: punctuation and usage conventions and some basic grammatical terminology. Shuman briefly reviews these fundamentals (e.g., commas, apostrophes, pronouns, verb forms, parallelism) and gives some tips on how to incorporate them (e.g., sentence combining). He doesn't offer any real proof that these methods *work*; he simply claims that they are helpful. (I actually think he overdoes it: how many students will find useful the "rule" governing verb expansion: "T + (Modal) + (have + -en) + (be + -ing) + MV [main verb]"?)

Squire, James R. "The Collision of the Basics Movement with Current Research in Writing and Language." In Hillocks, *The English Curriculum*, 29-37.

Squire, a senior vp with Ginn and Company, makes some pedestrian suggestions for how to combine the basics movement with current research (e.g., increase time on task). He does, however, note that we misinterpret grammar research when we remove editing from the curriculum—i.e., he says that editing skills can be taught and even mastered, though it should not be confused with "composing."

VanDeWeghe, Richard. "Research in Written Composition': Fifteen Years of Investigation." Research Prepared at New Mexico State University. 1978.

Examines research from 1963-1978 in light of the twenty-four questions the 1963 Braddock report identified as in need of further research. Notable is the large number of studies that reported inconclusive results on various forms of instruction (e.g., p. 29: instruction in rhetorical concepts of invention, arrangement, and style showed little relationship between teaching these concepts and improvement of written composition in grades three through six). Also notable: in commenting on a study showing that linguistics instruction fared no better than grammar instruction in improving student writing, VanDeWeghe quotes Braddock on the harmfulness of grammar and then says, implausibly, "The need for further research in this area is unlikely" (27)

Wallace, David Foster. "Tense Present: Democracy, English, and the Modern Wars Over Usage." *Harper's Magazine* (April 2001). Web. <http://instruct.westvalley.edu/lafave/DFW_present_tense.html>

Lengthy, clever, smart-alecky, but surprisingly comprehensive consideration of the descriptivist/prescriptivist controversies of the past half-century or so. The occasion for the piece is the publication of Bryan Garner's *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage*, a guide that Wallace warmly praises. Wallace places himself firmly on the side of the prescriptivists by arguing for SWE (Standard Written English) as one among many legitimate dialects but the one that, whether one likes it or not, must be mastered in order for a person to function effectively in modern society. In essence, awareness of "correct usage" (or SWE) should be seen as a necessary part of a larger rhetorical effort to inform and persuade.

Weaver, Constance. "Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing." *The English Journal*. 85.7

(Nov. 1996): 15-24.

Argues for context-based and experiential grammar instruction (based on constructivist cognitive psychology) instead of traditional rule-giving (based on a reductive behaviorist model). Gives examples of prewriting and drafting exercises that have worked in both middle-school and university classes.

Williams, James D. "Grammar and Usage." In Clark, 313-37.

Williams, Joseph M. "The Phenomenology of Error." *College Composition and Communication*. 32 (1981): 152-68.

Williams muses about *why* commentators get so worked up about grammatical errors, for example, when they condemn certain errors in extreme terms ("disinterested" vs. "uninterested," "media" as a singular noun). He then suggests that even such critics routinely make the kinds of mistakes they so ruthlessly attack. The key lies in the mistakes readers actually *notice* when they aren't explicitly looking for errors. Williams himself deliberately makes 100 errors in the essay, and at the end, asks readers which ones they noticed as they read. The upshot: teaching grammar is OK, but we should focus on those errors that readers will notice as they read for meaning.

Note: the list that follows contains articles on the subject of grammar instruction drawn from the NCTE's Assembly for the Teaching of Grammar website

Articles about Grammar

Beason, Larry. "Ethos and Error: How Business People React to Errors." *College Composition and Communication*, Vol. 53, No. 1; Sept. 2001. 33-64. An article exploring the negative images about writers that 14 business professionals derived from examples of different errors.

DeBeaugrande, Robert. "Forward to the Basics: Getting Down to Grammar." *College Composition and Communication*. October 1984. Vol. 35. Pp. 358-367. An early essay arguing for simple methods based on students' existing language ability to help them identify the grammar essentials. Brief, practical, and comprehensive.

Devet, Bonnie. "Welcoming Grammar Back into the Writing Classroom." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, 30.1 (2002): 8-17. Cited as a "notable article" by the editor of *TETYC*; included by NCTE on a "to-be-read" list.

Dykstra, Pamela. "The Patterns of Language: Perspective on Teaching Writing." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, May 1997, 136-144. Phrases and clauses: We use them when talking, when writing, when listening, and when recalling information. This article summarizes the research indicating that we both process and produce language in phrases and clauses. The article then focuses on how we acquire language: by internalizing patterns. We learn, for example, the subject-verb-object pattern, not the subject-verb-object rule. These two insights can inform what we teach and how we teach it. The article can be found [here](#).

Dykstra, Pamela. "Say It, Don't Write It: Oral Structures as Framework for Teaching Writing." *Journal of Basic Writing*, Spring 1994, 41-49. Writing and talking have different structures and involve different situations. Understanding these differences helps instructors teach and students write. Basic writers learn, for example, that if they are writing fragments and run-ons, they are writing the way they talk. They learn that the conventions of writing are not meaningless academic regulations but integral to communicating meaning to a reader, who is absent. They learn, in short, the logic of their error. This article gives instructors all they need to discuss these differences with students.

English Journal. November, 1996. Vol. 85, No. 7. An issue of the NCTE journal devoted entirely to grammar. Twenty useful articles on teaching grammar.

Wallace, David Foster. "Tense Present: Democracy, English, and the Wars over Usage," *Harper's Magazine*, April 2001. An extensive--and very entertaining--argument for the teaching of Standard English and against the linguist's descriptive approach to usage.

Wheeler, Rebecca S. "From Home Speech to School Speech: Vantages on Reducing the Achievement Gap in Inner City Schools," *Virginia English Bulletin*, Vol. 51, No. 7, pp. 4-16. Discusses "a culturally and linguistically informed pedagogical vantage and approach which holds promise for helping students transition from home speech to school speech." Available online in PDF format [here](#).

Wheeler, Rebecca S. and Rachel Swords. "'My goldfish name is Scaley' is what we say at home: Code-switching -- a potent tool for reducing the achievement gap in linguistically diverse classrooms," submitted to *Language Arts*. Advocates contrasting rather than correcting to foster students' code-switching. Available online in PDF format [here](#).

Additional Materials on Grammar Instruction

The Five “Grammars” of Patrick Hartwell (1985)

Grammar 1. The set of formal language patterns all native speakers unconsciously learn to convey meaning.

e.g., young four girls the French

Grammar 2. The branch of linguistic science that describes, analyzes, and identifies the formulas in formal language patterns.

Consider: After Grammar 1 comes Grammar 2—the scientific attempt to understand and systematize how language works

Grammar 3. Usage Grammar or “linguistic etiquette.” Principles of usage that the larger world of business and publishing finds acceptable or unacceptable--what recognized arbiters of taste call Standard Edited English.

e.g., Everybody should mind their own business.

That ain't my idea of a good time.

Grammar 4. School Grammar. The traditional, non-scientific, Latin-based grammatical approach that schools have taught for generations.

E.g., Rule: Indicate possession by adding 's or s' to nouns

“The feathers of the duck over there”

“The duck over there’s feathers”

Grammar 5. Stylistic Grammar. Grammatical terms used to teach prose style.

*e.g., The president died on Saturday. Aides informed the First Lady two days later.[ACTIVE VOICE]
e.g., The president died on Saturday. The First Lady was informed two days later.[PASSIVE VOICE]*

Research Statements on Grammar Instruction

From Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer, Research in Written Composition (1963):

“In view of the widespread agreement of research studies based upon many types of students and teachers, the conclusion can be stated in strong and unqualified terms: the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing.”

From George Hillocks, Jr., Research on Written Composition (1986):

“None of the studies reviewed for the present report provides any support for teaching grammar as a means of improving composition skills.”