

Dear Les,

Here is a direct and uncluttered version of the "format" that I affirm:

1. Required for graduation (with no possibility of "placing out"): Six hours of freshman English, which is a year-long sequence of "great books" (not confined to merely belletristic writings) that requires substantial expository writing about the works read. Students read-and-write-about the "great books," and the students get most of their instruction in "rhetoric" in the margins of their papers, in conferences about their papers, on hand-outs describing the assignments, and on occasional class days devoted to past and future assignments. The course has a clear, well-defined, and substantial intellectual content apart from the principles of writing per se.

2. Required for graduation: Three to six hours of upper-division English electives, of which no more than three hours might be in a course explicitly devoted to rhetorical principles as a subject matter (something like our 325M).

For unfortunate students who suffer from problems in language usage that are very severe (inability to write "complete sentences," severe vocabulary deficiencies, inability to punctuate reasonably), I would urge a computer-taught or self-paced course to bring them up to a given, testable level of competency.

I welcome some version of collective grading, but I haven't thought about it enough yet. I certainly don't want such matters to be imposed in any crude form.

In general, I distrust the panaceas that come and go and come again. I think that good writing, if we could agree what we mean by it, probably does not have much to do with our technical dickerings, but more to do with slowly acquired intellectual maturity—which is bred by lots of reading and lots of writing for an attentive and critical teacher, over years.

Therefore, my approach to writing is to aim for the mind and essence of a student, rather than to teach skills and coach performances. Develop the mind and mature the person, I tend to believe, and the "good writing" will tag along as a byproduct.

Cordially,

Chuck Rossman

CC:

Format I (Gribben)