

## To The Teacher

This course was birthed out of a need for a text that matched and supported my teaching goals. Whatever I teach, my goal is to see my students think and communicate clearly so that they have the greatest positive impact on those around them. While many good curricula are available, none seemed to combine all the elements I felt were necessary to achieve my goal. Therefore, I began to document the principles and materials I was teaching. Many of my former students have returned to tell me how the basics learned through this paragraphs course, and through my essays class, have benefited them both academically and professionally. With the encouragement of others, I have now drafted my teaching approach into a formal format which I hope will be beneficial to other instructors as well.

### **What are the goals of this course?**

This course strives to give students:

- The ability to write with formality;
- The ability to develop properly-structured, logical paragraphs;
- The ability to edit a composition and enhance style;
- The ability to properly research and document;
- The ability to write for any academic or employment setting;
- The ability to write under the pressure of time.

### **What is the target grade level of this course?**

This course is not targeted to a specific grade level as much as it is intended for the student who is academically ready to move on to full paragraphs and is capable of grasping the concepts of paragraph structure. Generally, the learning of paragraph writing at the level taught in this course should occur during seventh and eighth grades as this is usually when students acquire the necessary cognitive skills. This course may be appropriate for an advanced fifth or sixth grade student if the pace is slowed to allow the student to comprehend and master the concepts. High school students, and many of them fill my classes, would also benefit from this course if they need a greater understanding of what constitutes a good paragraph. This is a “skill level” rather than a grade specific course. Mastery of paragraph development is the goal.

### **What is the prerequisite for this course?**

Students embarking on this course should be strong in grammar basics. Traditionally, grammar basics were mastered by the end of eighth grade; thus, the student should have already completed a thorough grammar program in order to be prepared to begin this course. Just as a mechanic must know the parts of an engine and their functions, the writer must know the parts of speech and their functions within the sentence in order to create effective paragraphs and essays.

### **What length of paragraphs should my students produce?**

Lengths of paragraphs will vary; however, as a rule, junior high age students should start with a target of seven sentences per paragraph and progress beyond this length as they go through the course. High school students should start out producing about ten sentence

paragraphs, increasing the number as they progress. For most students, this will come easily if they will faithfully prepare good planning outlines and logically present the topic. Beyond these general guidelines, the instructor must determine an appropriate expectation for each student according to ability. The principle to employ is to ensure that students consistently strive to improve rather than become comfortable with meeting some minimum standard.

### **What does it mean to “drill” the grammar components included in this course?**

Drill means training by repetition. In this course, students will be introduced to lists of items to memorize and rehearse orally or in writing. These rehearsals should be done every day in order to cement the ideas in the student’s mind. The analogy I use for this in my classes and seminars is that water wears away stone one drip at a time. In the same manner, the drills “wear” lasting patterns in the mind.

### **What comprises the Formality Drills and Style Drills in this text?**

Formality Drills come from the points detailed in Unit 2 on pages 9 through 13. Style Drills train the student to identify structures taught in Unit 7 on pages 51 through 55. In both of these drills, the student identifies the error and rewrites the sentence correctly.

### **How is this text to be used?**

This text is designed as a non-consumable. Thus, the student will need to write exercise answers on separate paper. Additionally, you will need to make enough copies of the following items to use during the course.

1. Appendix B - Reference lists of prepositions, style points, formality and grammar items.
2. Appendix C – Paragraph Checklist: to be completed and submitted with assignments specified on the form.
3. Appendixes E through I – Evaluation Forms: for teacher and student use when evaluating student work and sample paragraphs in the text. These are designed to be used in specific weeks, and are marked accordingly.
4. The paragraphs on pages 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 107-108, 120, 133, 147, 159, 172, and 185, so the students may mark the errors as they do the evaluation exercises.

### **How do I prepare to teach this course?**

Naturally, familiarity with the material is essential. You should read the content and be certain that you understand the concepts. The information presented in Week 12 will be crucial to study since it explains the General Paragraph Grading Form (Appendix E) and how to evaluate a paragraph. Familiarize yourself with the basic questions listed in this lesson and do several practice evaluations so that when you correct student work, you will have developed a basis for evaluation. Turn to the lesson frequently when you are grading and ask yourself if your student followed the requirements. Do not be afraid to grade critically if you know your student to be capable of doing better. Learning to write well is hard work, and students may not perform without nudging. Writing with skill will develop if there is consistent encouragement to write at the level of capability. When your students resubmit work after the edit week, I recommend that you work back through the grading form to be certain that they did all that you asked them to do. If anyone did not, turn assignment back for another correction. Preparation for teaching this class, then, centers on

becoming familiar with the material and preparing yourself to correctly evaluate the student's work.

Additional preparation is needed for Unit 10, when students practice recording research as explained on page 78. The Unit 10 Daily Exercises require use of encyclopedia and other source books on an assigned topic. The solar system, Samuel Clemens, and George Washington Carver are suggested topics, but you may certainly use others. You will need to have resources on the chosen topics available when needed.

You will also want to plan to have your students read a good novel or biography prior to working on the Character Analysis Lesson in Unit 32.

### **What is the recommended teaching schedule?**

This text is set up for a thirty-six week course, that is, one school year. In following this schedule, one unit is completed each week. Once basic information about paragraphs is covered, different types of paragraphs are taught in three week cycles. During the first week of each cycle, students create original paragraphs. In the second week, they prepare to write a paragraph under time constraints per the instructions in Exercise 5 of that week's unit. In the third week, pupils receive the graded paragraphs written in the first week. During this third week, students edit their graded paragraphs per instructions in the Daily Assignments and resubmit them for a second grading in Exercise 5. I have found that requiring students to correct their work is critical in helping them make genuine progress. Otherwise, students tend to repeat errors over and over until they no longer recognize them as errors. Also, a practice I have employed as incentive to get my students to perform well is to give them the edit week off if the score on their first paragraph submission is 94% or above.

The teaching cycles may be expanded to fit a slower pace, or abbreviated for a shorter schedule. Suggested teaching schedule options are listed in Appendix G. Regardless of the schedule you choose, be sure to allow sufficient time to evaluate papers and return them to the students.

In closing, it is my hope that this course proves beneficial for you and your students. In order to prepare students for starting this course, they should read the "To The Student" section on the next page. If you or your students have comments or questions, I can be reached through our web page: <[www.barrettsbookshelf.com](http://www.barrettsbookshelf.com)>. I would love to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Shari Barrett