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Reviewed work(s):
Published by: National Council of Teachers of English
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40172286
Accessed: 31/05/2012 13:14

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Eradicating AWK or Grammar on the Firing Line: Its Relationship to Composition

Alice Heim Calderonello and Thomas Klein

Once again, the debate over the role of grammar in the teaching of writing has reached national prominence. The question, What effect, if any, does the teaching of grammar have on students' ability to write? is not a new one, and it is still unanswered. The research is, for the most part, inconclusive. Teachers have widely divergent attitudes. Some are convinced, as were others almost twenty years ago, that teaching about language, via a course in grammar, is the answer: "the voices have often been confused but the general sense (is) unmistakable: the study of grammar has been neglected and should be restored."1 Others look at the current "back to basics" movement with something close to horror and refuse to teach grammar at all. Many teachers take a middle ground, urging that grammar be taught in the context of writing because it will help students communicate more clearly and forcefully. Yet, too often they flounder, haphazardly assigning drills from the handbook and failing to clarify structural problems by doing no more than marking sentences with "awk" and offering their own wording or asking for student revision.

What seems to have happened is that teachers have developed the two excesses and the middle ground described above into a set of misleading assumptions like the following:

1. Students are writing poorly. To remedy this, teach them a course in linguistics, especially a formal description of language systems, i.e., grammar. When persons have learned this, they will be prepared to write.

2. Most students do not come to class with language competence; therefore, they must be taught a language system (phonology, morphology, syntax, etc.).

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Alice Heim Calderonello and Thomas Klein emphasize the importance of understanding various grammatical systems for use in the context of writing programs. Both teach in the Department of English at Bowling Green State University.
3. Teachers can write because they had at least five years of traditional grammar drill and diagramming. It can be assumed that the same cause-effect relationship will hold for students.

4. Transformational grammar is the most recent grammatical theory: therefore, it is the one that must be exclusively used in the classroom. Traditional grammar is outmoded and discredited; therefore, it is useless and, perhaps, dangerous.

5. To study grammar is to discipline the mind. Two decades of permissiveness and self-indulgence have spawned a nation of undisciplined, subjective writers who need drill and terminology to help them improve.

6. Study after study has disproved the contention that grammar study improved writing; therefore, students need no grammar.

7. Writing is what improves writing, so turn students loose to write. Stimulate them with reading and talking. The rest will happen automatically.

8. Teachers don’t need to study English structure because most of them are educated native speakers and they know it anyway. Their intuitive ability will help students improve their writing.

9. If teachers teach any sort of grammatical structure or use any grammatical terminology, they will stifle the students’ creative impulses and destroy the pleasure of writing.

These falsehoods are probably responsible for a great deal of the poor writing as well as much of the confusion teachers of writing are experiencing. They can be clarified by examining these major concerns: I. Who, if anyone, needs to know grammar? Students, teachers, or both? II. How much and what kinds of grammar do teachers need to know? III. How much grammar do students need to know? IV. Once teachers and students know grammar, what is it good for? What are its uses?

1. Who should know grammar? By now, most of us have read that the average child acquires language competence necessary to produce adult colloquial speech by the time he or she is four or five. So, all of us enter school already “knowing” the grammar of our native language. The question really is, Who should have a conscious knowledge about the structure of English? The answer is unequivocal: the teacher must have this formal knowledge of language structures.

The reason teachers need this knowledge becomes clear as we examine the falsehood that one who is a competent native speaker is sufficiently prepared to teach writing. It is true that educated speakers are often capable of editing a piece of writing; they can recognize sentences that are not well-formed or grammatical, and
usage that is nonstandard. However, they cannot offer remediation: explanations of the nature of the problems, suggestions for improvement, and referral to or creation of appropriate structure drills. At a recent state-funded institute, many teachers had difficulty identifying the nature of the problem in sentences like these: “A fraternity should be joined by a person if he/she wants a good social life to be enjoyed.” “It’s a good feeling when I go to my old high school and kids remember me those who were seventh and eighth graders.” Presumably, they did what so many English teachers do; they wrote AWK next to the sentence, and possibly rewrote it so that it wasn’t AWK anymore. Some of the teachers at the institute realized for the first time that writing AWK and rewriting the sentence for the student neither help him understand the problem with the structure of the sentence, nor help him avoid those kinds of problems. One teacher who had been writing AWK, FRAG, RO, and the like for years (offering no explanation as to why the sentence was AWK, FRAG, or RO) said that this was a “revelation” to her, and that she was going to pull out and read her books on English structure.

Thus, an “intuitive” knowledge of grammar is inadequate, and insofar as teachers are “repairers” of language breakdown and promoters of syntactic fluency, they must have a conscious knowledge of English structure. The stickier question is, How much conscious knowledge does the student require? This is where the research has few answers. What we can say is that students need not have conscious knowledge in the way the teacher should. On the other hand, students must have command of certain essentials, which we will describe later. The parallel to auto mechanics, first described by Wayne O’Neill, is most useful here: the auto mechanic needs as much knowledge as he can get; the ordinary driver would understandably find some knowledge useful (how to change a flat, for instance), although little more than starting the car, braking and steering are minimum essentials. In a similar sense, the teacher needs fairly extensive grammatical knowledge, while the student, like the driver, needs less—as much as is required to accomplish the composition tasks he or she undertakes. The next section will make clearer what grammatical knowledge the teacher needs and why.

II. How much and what kinds of grammar do teachers need to know? When we work with prospective or practicing teachers, it’s not hard to convince them that they need some conscious knowledge of formal grammar. Frequently, however, we come into difficulty when they ask, Which grammar do we need to know, traditional, structural, or transformational? The answer, very likely, is all of them. There are
several reasons for this, the most practical one being that a teacher ought to be able to use any writing text or handbook which is adopted by the school. For instance, *Warriner's Handbook of Grammar and Composition* is enjoying a boom in sales; many teachers complain either that it offers too heavy an emphasis on grammar drill or that they are unfamiliar with traditional grammar ("All we got in our college linguistics course was transformational grammar."). Clearly, the effectiveness of the text depends on how it is used: in the context of courses where writing takes a central place accompanied by reading, speaking, and listening, *Warriner's* can be quite functional—but only as an aid, a means to the end of improved writing.

Another reason a teacher should have command of the three major English grammars is that students respond differently and each grammar provides a different way of explaining English structure. The work that is being done in cognitive mapping has showed us that different people learn differently; some of us learn more rapidly if we are provided with visual stimuli; others learn best by doing. It is not surprising, then, that some students respond more successfully to certain presentations than others. To illustrate this, let's examine a rather common kind of sentence fragment:

The actor who does his own stunts, who leaps off tall buildings, and who always gets the beautiful women.

Without arguing for or against the virtues of traditional grammar and terminology, we know that some students who can understand and recognize adjective clauses would find this explanation quite satisfactory: "who does his own stunts," "who leaps off tall buildings," and "who always gets the beautiful women" are adjective clauses which modify the subject ("The actor"), and the subject has no verb. Therefore, it is a fragment. On the other hand, students who have difficulty with the clause concept or who have trouble consciously understanding how sentence-like entities can act like modifiers, often respond better to a more "transformational approach":

I. Kernel sentences: The woman laughed hysterically. The woman has buck teeth.

Combined sentences: The woman who has buck teeth laughed hysterically. *The woman who has buck teeth. (This is not a sentence because the verb part of one of the combined sentences has been deleted.)*
II. Kernel sentences:
The actor got another contract.
The actor does his own stunts.
The actor leaps off tall buildings.
The actor always gets the beautiful women.

Combined sentences:
The actor who does his own stunts, who leaps off tall buildings, and who always gets the beautiful women got another contract.

*The actor who does his own stunts, who leaps off tall buildings, and who always gets the beautiful women. (This is not a sentence because the verb part of one of the combined sentences has been deleted.)

Sometimes students require several slants on the problem before they perceive the nature of the structure being explained.

Of course, the view being presented here is idealistic, but at the very least, teachers should be thoroughly familiar with at least one grammar of English. Otherwise, they are likely to be of little help. To illustrate this point further, another example. Many teachers of English have encountered sentences like the following:

I would advise my younger sister to join a sorority because I feel that participate in a sorority is a rewarding experience.

Of course, no teacher would have difficulty recognizing that there is something wrong with the form of participate. Teachers usually suggest changing it to “participation,” to “to participate,” or to “participating.” Why? “Because it sounds better” is hardly a satisfactory answer, and yet less than half of the teachers we showed it to could figure out that “participate” is the subject of an embedded sentence, and, thus, must be in a “noun” form (-ing as in gerunds, to + v as in infinitives, and -ion, a common noun derivation as in locate, location) rather than a verb form. Similarly, many teachers have difficulty explaining why “happen” should have an “ing” ending in the following sentence:

We drove around town just to see what was happen.

The answer is that a form of BE as a helping verb must be followed by a verb in the -ING form (unless the sentence is passive, in which case the helping verb BE is followed by a verb in the past participle form: The song was SUNG by the carolers.). The auxiliary phrase
structure rule of a generative transformational grammar provides us with this information:

\[ \text{AUX} \rightarrow \text{tense} + (\text{Modal}) + (\text{Have} + \text{en}) + (\text{Be} + \text{ing}) \]

But in linguistics courses so many prospective teachers never seem able or willing to make the connection between grammatical structure and teaching writing.

III. We know that teachers' conscious knowledge of grammar can help them assist students with their written expression. But the more difficult question is, *How much grammar should a student be taught in the context of a writing course?* There are, of course, differing views with regard to this question. The research still has not made the relationship between formal grammar instruction and writing improvement clear. Braddock et al. (*Research in Written Composition*, Urbana, Ill: N.C.T.C., 1963) summarized the relationship between formal grammar instruction and writing improvement in unequivocal terms:

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. (pp. 37-38)

On the other hand, Bateman and Zidonis, Mellon, Stoner, Beall, and Anderson, Ross, and Linn have reported positive relationships between structural and transformational grammar instruction and writing improvement; the question as to whether the improvement was due to a combination of grammar instruction and practice using the various sentence types, or merely practice (O'Hare), is yet unresolved (Combs). And matters are further complicated by the three-year New Zealand study which reported no significant improvement in writing by those students who were instructed in transformational grammar when compared with students who did not receive this formal instruction (Elley, Barhman, Lamb, Wyllie). The whole issue is rather embarrassing because the debate has been going on for decades, and the suggestion being offered here, *teach grammar in the context of writing because it will help students recognize structural problems*, has been offered before. Dixon urged the same process in *Growth through English* (Reading, England: National Association for the Teaching of English, 1967); and Evans (p. 113) explained, "... grammar has failed to do what it can do because our methods
have not been designed to establish and maintain a sufficient connection between grammatical knowledge and the practice of writing.” The integration of grammar and writing has also been severely criticized for numerous reasons, the most important being that such a suggestion has been all many teachers have needed to advocate a course in traditional or transformational grammar in lieu of a course that integrates grammar and composition (because such a course would “improve logical thinking, sentence construction, coherence, etc.”). The crucial distinction such advocates miss is the one between the teaching OF a language and the teaching ABOUT a language (James Ney, Linguistics, Language Teaching, and Composition in the Grades, The Hague: Mouton, 1975, p. 44). A course about language is a poor substitute for a course helping students to use language, i.e., writing. To substitute a heavy emphasis in what Dale Evans calls “pedagogic basics” (“Never use contractions,” “Never start a sentence with ‘And’ or ‘But’,” and “Never split an infinitive”) for a course in which writing develops naturally out of the student’s experiences and the demands of subject and audience is not only misguided—it is damaging.

We can, nevertheless, say that some formal attention to English structure is necessary in every course involving composition. We have come to think that there are minimum essentials necessary to any student who wants command of his written expression. To illustrate this point, suppose a student habitually writes a particular kind of fragment like any of the following:

1. We want an honest politician. A man who will lead us to prosperity.
2. When winter ends and all the snow has melted.
3. Exercising at least three times a week.

Shouldn’t those writers know enough—consciously—about the structure of such dysfunctions so that they can recognize and correct them? The same need of conscious knowledge holds true for the student who writes this sentence:

Watching the changing browns and yellows of the leaves, the forest is a place to which I want to return frequently.

At a minimum, then, students must be able to recognize the subject, verb, objects, complements and modifiers (single word and word groups) of a sentence—to understand the major components of the sentence and how they operate. But how much further do we go with our expectations? When does the jargon become so imposing that the
major components of the writing act (the speaker—and his desire to communicate, the audience—and its needs, and the subject) become lost to the particles of the sentence that make up that act?

The case for terminology like “noun in apposition” and “objective complement” is not nearly so defendable. And what about other terminology: “conjunctive adverb,” “coordinating conjunction,” “subordinating conjunction,” “gerund,” “participle,” and so on? In the first place, terminology should not be taught because “students will need to know it for college entrance exams.” Gary Sutton did a very useful survey of terminology required for college-bound students, and found terminology was a “very minor aspect of standard tests in English” (“Do We Need to Teach Grammatical Terminology?” English Journal, Sept., 1976, p. 39). On the other hand, it is ludicrous to have to keep saying “words that often name people, places or things, act as subjects, objects; take ‘s’ endings if there are more than one of them, etc.” instead of noun. So terminology is only useful as a means of communication, not as an end in itself; thus -ING word is a serviceable substitute for participle and gerund, assuming the students understand the various “roles” -ING words can play in a sentence: they can function as parts of verbs; or as adjectives or as nouns. CONNECTING WORD is a useful substitute for the various types of words that play a conjunctive role in a sentence, assuming students can recognize that different connecting words assume different relationships with the sentences that they are connecting:

I got sick, and I went home.
I got sick; therefore, I went home.
Since I got sick, I went home.

Having students memorize coordinating conjunction, conjunctive adverb, and subordinating conjunction will do nothing to help them understand the structures of these sentences. How many students “know” the definition of a subordinating conjunction, and habitually write fragments that contain them? How many students “know” that a “noun is a word that names a person, place, or thing” yet can’t recognize nouns within a sentence? How many students “know” that “a sentence is a complete thought” and yet write fragments and run-on sentences? (What’s a complete thought, anyway?)

instance, urges that children experiment with three-sentence compositions as early as third or fourth grade. Gradually, they should become familiar with the minimum essentials of grammar, acquiring a key vocabulary. The tentative list that follows presents minimum essentials in the left column and a vocabulary more accessible to students in the right column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum Essentials</th>
<th>Accessible Vocabulary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Basic Parts of Speech</td>
<td>Noun (pronoun)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun</td>
<td>Verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb - linking</td>
<td>Students need to understand verb function in order to understand complement and object.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-transitive</td>
<td>Verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-intransitive</td>
<td>Adjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-auxiliary</td>
<td>Adverb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective</td>
<td>Conjunctive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Preposition—optional because it usually functions in phrases which act as adjectives, adverbs, or nouns)</td>
<td>Preposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Basic Parts of the Sentence</td>
<td>Subject part of sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Verb part of sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicate</td>
<td>Object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Direct) Object</td>
<td>Complement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complement—usually noun or adjective</td>
<td>Modifiers: adjective function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifiers —adjective</td>
<td>Infinitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—adverb</td>
<td>can be a word, phrase, or clause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Miscellaneous</td>
<td>Infinitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infinitive</td>
<td>These are often used poorly:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participles</td>
<td>students need to know how</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerund</td>
<td>they can be used as nouns, adverbs, and adjectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Phrases and Clauses—optional since these act as parts of sentences. The concepts of phrase and clause can be explained when the functions of the parts of a sentence are explained.)</td>
<td>Infinitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Basic Concepts</td>
<td>1. Subject Part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Every sentence must have:</td>
<td>1. Subject Part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Subject</td>
<td>2. Verbs Part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Predicate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B. Single words, groups of words and sentences each can function as subjects, objects, complements, or modifiers:

1. Single word subject—Swimming is fun. 
   Word group subject—To swim is fun. 
   Sentence subject—What I did this summer was fun.

2. Single word modifiers
   (adv) She walked slowly. 
   (adj) The pretty girl went home. 

Word group modifiers
   (adv) She walked down the street. 
   (adj) The girl in the park went home. 

Sentence modifiers
   (adv) She walked although she was tired. 
   (adj) The girl who is friendly went home.

Etc.

As we write this list, we realize the danger: that these items will become ends in themselves, the subject matter of semester or year-long courses in terminology. On Further Examination, the Report of the Advisory Panel on the S.A.T. score Decline (1977) describes such practices as a contributing factor in the literacy decline: “It seems clear increasing reliance in colleges and high schools on tests requiring only the putting of X’s in boxes contributes to juvenile writing delinquency.” (p. 27) “Underline the preposition.” “Check off the fragments in the following lists.” How many English courses become nothing more? Nevertheless, we are convinced that a strong English program, one that integrates writing with reading, listening and speaking, can also introduce essential grammatical concepts and terms gradually without forcing students to study only grammar for months on end.

IV. In this article we have already dealt with the question we take up explicitly in this section: What is grammatical knowledge good for? We’ve said that students need certain minimum grammatical essentials and that, ideally, teachers need a conscious knowledge of a wide range of grammatical systems to assist students who need remediation. Such remediation consists of explanation of errors and the development and/or selection of the appropriate materials and their use. But remediation isn’t the only use of grammar: exercises growing out of
structural and transformational theory can also help students develop fluency, style and coherence, as well as contribute to correctness and elimination of faulty syntax.

There are numerous activities based upon structural grammar which are helpful in leading students to a conscious knowledge of sentence structure and which are useful for encouraging student growth towards syntactic fluency. In English, word order is extremely important and structuralism emphasizes this fact; most English sentences are seen as expansions of several basic patterns:

I. NVIntransitive
   John types.

II. NVTransitiveN
    John drank the wine.
    NVTN1N2
    John gave the wine to Alice.
    NVTN1N1
    John named the kitten Brian.
    NVTNA
    Joan painted the room white.

III. NVLinkingAdj.
     John seems happy.

*IV. NVBEAdj.
     John is sexy.
     NVBE
     Joan is the president.
     NVBEAdv.
     John is here.

*Some texts do not differentiate BE from other linking verbs.

The basic pattern conception of the sentence is useful for students because it leads them to the conscious understanding of basic sentential components: subject, verb, object, complement. In addition, it can be easily shown that certain parts of speech (either single words or groups of words) habitually fulfill certain functions within the sentence: nouns or noun-like words always serve as subjects and objects; nouns (and/or noun substitutes) and adjectives (and/or adjectival substitutes) are most often complements after a linking verb, and so on. These basic patterns can be expanded in many different ways depending on the intent of the teacher. For example, if the instructor wants students to become familiar with the subject-verb-object relationship, it is useful to have students expand the NV1N pattern in various ways:

Expand the underlined nouns in the following sentences with modifiers that go in front of them.

EX: The girl lost her ball.
    The little Canadian girl lost her new red ball.

OR
Expand the underlined nouns in the following sentences with modifiers that go after them.

EX: The girl lost her ball.
    The girl who moved in next door lost her ball with the red stripes.

Sentence pattern activities also present many opportunities for sentence structure manipulation in game-like climates with little or no formal terminology. Here is an example: "Sentence expansion" is an individual or group activity in which individuals or teams choose a noun-verb pair ("The dog barks," "The woman works") and expand it with modifiers. Students are given a certain period of time in which to expand their sentences. After volunteers put their sentences on the board, the class can decide which sentences are the most interesting or effective. Teachers can slightly modify the game by using any or all of the four basic sentence patterns given above if they wish students to develop mastery of each.

For those teachers who wish to use structural sentence patterns as a means of syntactic exercise for students, there are many helpful texts which suggest how to create these exercises; one of the most useful is Modern English Grammar for Teachers by Hook and Crowell (N. Y.: Ronald Press, 1970). This text also provides useful suggestions as to how structural morphology can help students recognize parts of speech. In addition, there are structural texts such as Modern Grammar and Composition (David Conlin, Cincinnati, Ohio: American Book Company, 1971), a series that can be used in junior high school and high school; Sentence Improvement (Malcolm Moore, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971) (junior high, high school); and Commanding Sentences (Helen Mills and Wayne Harsh, Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1974) (high school, jr. college, college). Jean Praninksas' A Rapid Review of English Grammar (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1975) is for foreign students but it is a useful structurally-based resource tool for the high school basic composition teacher.

The major style building exercise growing out of transformational grammar is sentence combining, which involves the combining of kernel sentences into more fully elaborated and expressive sentences. The way one combines is based on stylistic choice and requires the combiners to exercise their syntactic ingenuity. As Moffett suggests, we generally expand our linguistic repertoire by receiving and producing sentences to ourselves; sentence combining probably represents these two activities in their purest and most simplified form:

Combine: The girl has red hair.
The girl is nice.
Combined: The girl who has red hair is nice.
(or) The red-haired girl is nice.
(or) The girl with red hair is nice.

Sentence combining has caught on because it seems to provide a link between grammar and writing. Several studies, especially O'Hare's, do show that syntactic facility improves through practice in sentence combining. In fact, the development in syntactic sophistication of O'Hare's subjects was quite dramatic, since holistic ratings indicated that the content as well as the form of writing improved.

Sentence combining is indeed inviting, because no grammatical terms are required. According to William Strong,

The task, pretty clearly, is not one of putting more linguistic data into a youngster's brain computer; after all, he or she already has access to a repertoire of linguistic skills far vaster than you or I can comprehend... The task... is really quite simple—basic, you might say. It's one of helping kids exercise the output functions of their brain computers and thus explore the depths of their linguistic power. ("Back to Basics and Beyond," English Journal, Feb., 1976, p. 56.)

It is especially important to remember that in the O'Hare study, students spent one hour a week throughout the academic year in creative sentence production where there was more than one "right" answer. While only the experimental group engaged in the sentence combining, both control and experimental groups became lively language communities: they wrote journals, did improvisations and free reading, and they read and discussed widely. Thus, a danger may be that without the addition of a supportive and interesting language climate, sentence combining could result in a rigid orthodoxy of drill and three week units divorced from other language activities.

Another possible weakness is that sentence combining is, in Moffett's terms, "a-rhetorical," a "dummy run." It is a-rhetorical in the sense that it occurs outside an "authentic" writing context—one in which someone writes about something with motives that are real to him. It is a means to an end (improved writing and speaking), and our profession has the nasty habit of turning means into ends. Moffett explains: "What is not known is whether (sentence-combining) exercises made students value elaboration for its own sake and become facile without relating this facility to those communicative, stylistic, and rhetorical needs that alone make elaboration desirable in the first place." (p. 170) Moffett points out that a learning activity should not be divorced from the motive that "engender(s) the action" (p. 171), arguing that sentence combining should occur in an authentic
writing context, such as a letter or editorial that requires greater sentence variety.

What Moffett seeks, in addition to sentence combining exercises, is language-building games or exercises that are incorporated into composition assignments, such as the following:

Suppose a teacher receives a paragraph like the following:

I have maintained interest in the game of golf. The interest has been an overwhelming amount. It has existed since I was able to understand the rules of the game. I have spent a large part of my life practicing. I consider golf to be the greatest sport in the world. Probably the main reason I practice so often is due to the extreme challenge involved.

While the lack of sentence variety is apparent, it is not atypical of much student writing. After each student rewrites the paragraph, teachers can have several volunteers put their versions on the board, and versions like the following can be discussed for shades of meaning and differences in effectiveness:

Since I was able to understand its rules, I have maintained an overwhelming interest in golf, practicing much of my life, thinking it the greatest sport in the world, and embracing the extreme challenge.

Similarly, a teacher can choose a passage from a literary work, like Walden, or from a story or novel, and then reduce it to simple or kernel sentences. Students can combine sentences to give them force and style. The following is an excerpt from Section II of Walden:

I went to the woods. I wished to live deliberately. I wanted to front the essential facts of life. I wanted to learn what it had to teach. When I came to die, I did not want to discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life. I didn’t want to because living is so dear. I did not want to practice resignation.

This is the original:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation.

To conclude, the teacher can ask for an analysis of each version for meaning and effectiveness, noting repeated patterns, word choice, sounds, and use of devices like parallelism.

For teachers who wish to incorporate sentence combining in a composition course there are several useful articles that explain how
to construct different kinds of sentence combining exercises, and how to use them to supplement a writing course (two are "Back to Basics and Beyond" by William Strong, *English Journal* Feb., 1976, and "An Outline For Writing Sentence Combining Problems" by Charles Cooper, *English Journal*, Jan., 1973). In addition, the appendix of Frank O'Hare's research monograph, "Sentence Combining," available through NCTE, has a sampling of different kinds of signalled sentence combining exercises. For those teachers who have not studied generative transformational grammar and who wish to understand the principles behind sentence combining better, Don Nilsen's article, "The Transformational Process: An Oversimplified Overview," *College English*, (March, 1977), is extremely useful. An easy to read text which introduces generative transformational grammar is Bruce Liles' *An Introductory Transformational Grammar* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1971).

Related to sentence combining yet not growing out of it directly is Francis Christensen's rhetoric program. It represents another source of ideas for teachers who wish to create or use supplemental materials to help students improve syntactic fluency. Two critical discussions of the aims and aspects of the program are provided in the articles by Michael Grady (*English Journal*, Sept., 1972) and R. C. Walshe (*College English*, April, 1971).

Finally, there are other resources which suggest possibilities for helping students improve their sentences. Although these articles are rather theoretical, there are real possibilities for practical application in Winterowd's "The Grammar of Coherence" (*College English*, May, 1970), William Miller's "New Sentence Tactics Through Predication" (*College Composition and Communication*, Dec., 1971), and De Beaugrande's "Generative Stylistics: Between Grammar and Rhetoric" (*College Composition and Communication*, Oct., 1977).

For those teachers who need additional expertise in offering explanations to students whose writing contains grammatical/structural difficulties, a "must" is Mina Shaunessy's *Errors and Expectations* (N.Y.: Oxford U. Press, 1977). Also useful are David Carkeet's article, "Understanding Syntactic Errors in Remedial Writing" (*College English*, March, 1977), and the entire Spring 1975 issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing* which is devoted to "Error"; Valerie Krishna's article is most helpful.

Once again, let us reiterate our aims here: first, to stress the necessity of the teacher's knowledge of various grammatical systems for use in the context of writing programs; and second, to remind teachers not to require of students the same kinds of knowledge. Too often, we forget that only a very small percentage of our students
will become English teachers; an equally small number have an inherent curiosity about the structure of a language. What students need are those minimum essentials which will help them be more effective communicators in both written and oral discourse.

Notes