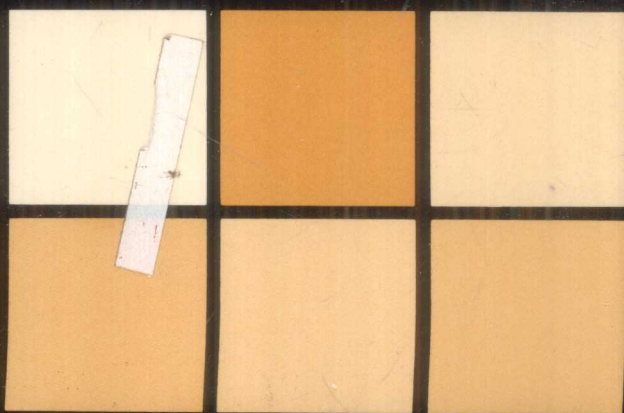


Glenn Blalock

BACKGROUND READINGS
FOR INSTRUCTORS USING

THE
BEDFORD
HANDBOOK
FOR
WRITERS



Third Edition

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*Background Readings
for Instructors Using*

**THE
BEDFORD
HANDBOOK
FOR
WRITERS**

Third Edition



Glenn B. Blalock

*University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill*

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Preface

In her preface, Diana Hacker writes that she intends *The Bedford Handbook for Writers* to be useful to a wide range of students. Similarly, *Background Readings for Instructors Using The Bedford Handbook for Writers* is intended to be useful to a wide range of instructors, instructors with diverse backgrounds and with different levels of experience. My purpose is to provide useful and accessible references; to suggest helpful, practical solutions to common problems and concerns; and to challenge new and experienced instructors to consider how and why they do what they do as writing teachers. I like to think that these readings will engage instructors in a dialogue with the handbook: Although each selection is important and interesting on its own, they all benefit from the link with a student handbook.

This collection represents a wide range of scholarship on composition addressed to composition instructors. The readings were chosen from the professional literature cited in extensive annotated bibliographic references included throughout the *Instructor's Annotated Edition of The Bedford Handbook for Writers*. They were chosen for their potential to complement, supplement, or enhance the teaching done with *The Bedford Handbook for Writers* by addressing practical classroom issues and, wherever possible, offering alternative ways of thinking about those issues. They are also meant to spark interest and stimulate further reading. These selections should enable teachers to benefit not only from Diana Hacker's textbook but from its connections to and reliance on the rich body of research that comprises contemporary composition studies.

My intrusions in this text are minimal. Each part has a brief introduction that explores the possible relationships between the part, the readings, and the ways of teaching them. The selection headnotes attempt only to introduce the author, to give a sense of the selection's original context, and to offer a short synopsis or overview of the reading. I chose not to interpret, to prescribe methods, or advocate theories; instead, I hope I have provided a forum for composition scholars to share their insights with composition instructors.

The organization of *Background Readings* follows exactly that of *The Bedford Handbook for Writers*: Each part of the handbook is paralleled by at least one reading selection that addresses a key question about teaching its subject matter. Just as you may skip around in the handbook throughout the semester, so too may you skip around in this book of readings. No matter where you are in Diana Hacker's text, there is something in this collection to

Preface

complement it. And thus no matter how teachers choose to incorporate *The Bedford Handbook for Writers* into their course plans, this collection should contribute to their teaching.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Working on this project has given me a new appreciation for what I mean when I tell my students that composing is a recursive process and that effective writing results from collaboration. I owe much to many, so I want to conclude this preface with a necessarily incomplete list of acknowledgments to those who contributed in various ways to this book. Without Diana Hacker's *Bedford Handbook for Writers*, of course, this collection would not have a reason to be; and her comments at various stages ensured that it would be a worthy accompaniment to the handbook.

Thomas Recchio of the University of Connecticut helped shape the table of contents. At the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Erika Lindemann created and maintained the environment that encourages and values this kind of work; and her confidence in my abilities enabled me to accept this project. Jim Williams challenges me regularly to do more than I think possible. Sarah Marino has supported this work from the beginning, provoking me regularly to consider alternatives I would have overlooked.

Several individuals at Bedford Books deserve special mention. Associate Publisher Joan Feinberg conceived of this project and trusted me to attempt it; I have tried to repay that trust throughout this project. Managing Editor Elizabeth Schaaf paid close attention at crucial stages. Copyeditor Cynthia Benn wrestled with my often broken prose, rescuing what I meant to say. With patience and flexibility, production editor Debbie Liehs turned the manuscript into a book. Meredith Weenick assisted cheerfully with many important tasks. Beth Castrodale diligently researched the biographical information and assisted in securing permissions; she deserves my sincere thank you. And because I worked so closely with her, I feel as though I owe the most to Ellen Kuhl, the developmental editor on this project. She guided me through every stage with her infinite patience, her perceptive and honest reactions to my writing, her sound suggestions for the problems I regularly encountered, her timely sense of humor, and perhaps most important, her professionalism. Finally, I must record my thanks to Geralyn, who watched me disappear too many evenings and weekends to work on this project.

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Contents

Preface v

PART ONE THE WRITING PROCESS 1

The Writing Situation 1

James D. Williams, From *Preparing to Teach Writing* 1

Erika Lindemann, From *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers* 5

The Writing Process 12

George Hillocks, Jr., From *Research on Written Composition: New Directions For Teaching* 12

James A. Berlin, From "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories" 15

Audience 27

Douglas B. Park, "Analyzing Audiences" 27

Barry Kroll, "Writing for Readers: Three Perspectives on Audience" 36

Invention 48

Richard Young, From "Recent Developments in Rhetorical Invention" 48

George Hillocks, Jr., From *Research on Written Composition: New Directions For Teaching* 54

Mike Rose, From "Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language: A Cognitivist Analysis of Writer's Block" 59

Contents

Revision 60

Mimi Schwartz, From "Revision Profiles: Patterns and Implications" 60

Nancy Sommers, "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers " 62

Responding to Writing 71

Erika Lindemann, From *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers* 71

Nancy Sommers, "Responding to Student Writing" 76

PART TWO PARAGRAPHS 85

Frank J. D'Angelo, From "The Topic Sentence Revisited" 85

Rick Eden and Ruth Mitchell, From "Paragraphing for the Reader" 86

PART THREE EFFECTIVE SENTENCES 93

James D. Williams, From *Preparing to Teach Writing* 93

Peter Elbow, "The Challenge for Sentence Combining" 98

Richard L. Graves, "Symmetrical Form and the Rhetoric of the Sentence" 110

Edward P. J. Corbett, From *The Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student, Second Edition* 118

PART FOUR WORD CHOICE 120

Dwight Bolinger, "Another Case in Point: The Jargonauts and the Not-So-Golden Fleece" 120

Jenefer M. Giannasi, From "Language Varieties and Composition" 132

Casey Miller and Kate Swift, From *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing* 135

Sylvia M. Vardell, "I'm No Lady Astronaut': Nonsexist Language for Tomorrow" 140

PART FIVE GRAMMATICAL SENTENCES 147

Joseph M. Williams, "The Phenomenology of Error" 147

David Bartholomae, From "The Study of Error" 163

PART SIX ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE 174

Ann Schlumberger and Diane Clymer, "Tailoring Composition Classes to ESL Students' Needs" 174

Vivian Zamel, From "Recent Research on Writing Pedagogy" 181

PARTS SEVEN AND EIGHT PUNCTUATION AND MECHANICS 186

Wallace Chafe, *What Good Is Punctuation?* 186

Alan S. Brown, From "Encountering Misspellings and Spelling Performance: Why Wrong Isn't Right" 192

PART NINE GRAMMAR BASICS 195

Sharon Crowley, From "Linguistics and Composition Instruction: 1950-1980" 195

Ellery Sedgwick, From "Alternatives to Teaching Formal, Analytical Grammar" 201

PART TEN RESEARCH WRITING 205

Carmen B. Schmersahl, "Teaching Library Research: Process, Not Product" 205

Jeff Jeske, "Borrowing from the Sciences: A Model for the Freshman Research Paper" 211

Richard L. Larson, "The 'Research Paper' in the Writing Course: A Non-Form of Writing" 215

Alice Drum, "Responding to Plagiarism" 221

PART ELEVEN SPECIAL TYPES OF WRITING 224

Writing Arguments 224

Marie J. Secor, From "Recent Research in Argumentation Theory" 224

Richard Fulkerson, "Technical Logic, Comp-Logic, and the Teaching of Writing" 234

Writing about Literature 249

Steven Lynn, "A Passage into Critical Theory" 249

Business Writing 262

Michael Mendelson, From "Business Prose and the Nature of the Plain Style" 262

PART ONE

THE WRITING PROCESS

The first part of *The Bedford Handbook for Writers*, "Composing and Revising," guides students through the composing process, covering the full range of their concerns as they work toward successful completion of their writing. To complement that coverage, the articles and selections for the first part of *Background Readings* confront a series of questions that instructors must consider as they integrate the handbook into their class plans:

- What does it mean (for teachers and for students) to assess the writing situation?
- What alternatives should students consider when they approach an audience analysis?
- Which invention strategies work best at particular stages of the composing process?
- What assumptions have teachers made when they teach "the writing process" in a certain way? And why should they examine them?
- Is revision the same for everyone?
- What do teachers do and what should they consider doing as they respond to student writing?

THE WRITING SITUATION

From PREPARING TO TEACH WRITING

James D. Williams

James D. Williams is assistant professor of English and director of the undergraduate writing program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has published numerous journal articles, and he is the author of Preparing to Teach Writing (1989) and co-author (with Grace Capizzi Snipper) of Literacy and Bilingualism (1990). Currently, he is working on a text on writing across the curriculum.

Preparing to Teaching Writing resulted from Williams's work in training writing teachers. In the first half of his book, Williams surveys research and theories that affect the teaching of writing; in the second half, he presents a methodology informed by his explanations of those theoretical foundations. In the following selection, from an early chapter that explores the relation between rhetoric and writing, Williams argues that writing is a social act. And although teachers don't have to accept Williams's claim, he implicitly challenges them to consider their assumptions about language and writing. His reason is clear:

Unless assignments are functional and rhetorical, asking students to assess situations becomes a teacher-sponsored, product-centered activity rather than an essential part of the process students use to produce effective writing. In other words, teachers should assess the situation they create for students when they give assignments.

Language as Action

When we think about language at all, we probably don't think about it as being an action. It seems to have little in common with hitting a baseball, or sewing a dress, or driving a car, which are easily identified as actions. Yet understanding language as an action is crucial to understanding the role rhetoric plays in writing, as well as to exploring a few of the problems students have with writing.

Consider the characteristics of actions. They involve an agent. They produce some sort of change in the world. In addition, to be truly considered an action, they must be intentional; that is, the agent must intend to engage in an action and to produce some sort of change.

This last point seems especially important, for without intention we may have an event, but not an action. We can understand the distinction if we consider, say, a girl playing baseball. As she comes to bat, we could identify her intention to hit a home run.

Now let's suppose she hits the ball and sends it out of the park, thereby realizing her intention. But what if the ball sails right through a neighbor's window and hits him on the head while he's reading the newspaper, knocking him out cold? Can we say that the batter performed the action of knocking the neighbor out? Not really. The batter's action was simply hitting the home run. Breaking the window and knocking out the neighbor were *results of the action*, because the batter had no intention of doing either. On this basis, an action is performed only when one intends to do something and actually does it (see Searle, 1983).

We see how this analysis relates to language when we consider that anyone who uses language is an agent, since words do not spring forth out of thin air but are produced by a speaker or writer. Moreover, most language is intentional, and by nature is primarily functional. That is, we typically use language to affect our environment, whether it be through making requests, issuing directives, supplying information, or making assertions.

Assertions are especially interesting because, unlike requests and directives, for example, their functional nature is not readily apparent. Much school-sponsored writing asks students to formulate a series of assertions that they are then supposed to support. If you were to say "There is a robin on my balcony," you would be making an assertion, but how is it functional? How are you performing any action other than merely mouthing some words? Well, first you are asserting a particular representation of reality consisting of a state of affairs in which there is indeed a robin on your balcony. But in hearing your statement (or reading it, as the case may be), the audience must formulate a mental picture of your asserted representation of reality, such that *your* representation in effect becomes *its* representation. If this process doesn't occur, your assertion will simply not be comprehended; the words won't have any meaning.

It seems reasonable to propose that in asserting "There is a robin on my balcony" you are expressing your belief that in fact there is a robin on your balcony. You are asserting, in other words, the validity of your representation of reality. The mental model that the listener or reader formulates must also include your assertion of validity. Your belief becomes *his* or *her* belief. In this adoption of belief lies the element of change characteristic of an action, and in this sense your assertion is most certainly functional because you have transferred to the audience your representation of reality and your belief in that representation.

Interestingly enough, you need not actually hold that belief, you need only instill it in your audience. This is the point about rhetoric that the Sophists noted, for which they were so criticized by Socrates and Plato. One begins to understand on the basis of this analysis why the ancient Greeks viewed language as both powerful and potentially dangerous. To appreciate their view more fully, you need only move from the simple example of the robin and consider assertions related to ethics, values, and belief systems. To get others to view the world as you do is perhaps the most powerful aspect of language, and it underlies all forms and definitions of rhetoric, including dialectic. . . .

Rhetoric and Context

One of the major differences between speech and writing is that speech occurs in a context where the audience is visible and where the discourse topic is implicit. Let's suppose for a moment that you are working in your room, typing a term paper on a personal computer. A friend walks in and asks, "How much memory do you have?" Without hesitation you would provide the appropriate response, perhaps "256K." The amount of memory one has in a computer is a fairly important concern, so the question is quite reasonable, as is your response, which indicates the relative storage space your computer has. But both the question and the answer make sense only in a context that includes a computer.

In conversation, the topics of discourse are usually either present or come from a shared body of background information. Moreover, in conversation we are able to draw on a vast range of social or nonverbal cues to help with communication. These range from hand gestures, facial expressions, and other visible points of reference in the context to an understanding of conversational turn-taking and an awareness of appropriateness conditions.

This is not the case in writing. Writing my computer example, for instance, I had to establish a scene to make the question and the response understandable. It was necessary not only to explain the hypothetical situation but to say something about computer memory, in case some readers aren't familiar with personal computers. Writers are required to *create a context* for readers (see Hirsch, 1977; Williams, 1985). If they are successful, writers and readers will share experiences and information that will make the writing comprehensible.

Several researchers have suggested that creating a context for a piece of writing is fundamental to competent discourse (see Bamberg, 1983; Williams, 1985; Witte & Faigley, 1981). In the narrative example of the computer, creating a context consisted simply of setting the scene. In argumentation or analysis, matters are more complex.

The Writing Process

Suppose, for example, you ask your class to write an argumentative essay dealing with whether students should be provided smoking areas on campus. Where will they (and you) begin? what must go into creating an appropriate context?

Based on what we know about how people use language in real situations, your students will have to provide background generalizations that establish the topic as one students, parents, and school officials have discussed or may be prepared to discuss. They will also have to establish premises: the value of individual rights, importance of safety from fire hazard, teenagers' personal autonomy, or lack of it, and so on. They will have to identify the topic explicitly, and very important, they will have to offer an acceptable reason for producing the essay. At this point, our discussion of intentionality allows us to recognize that simply fulfilling the assignment should not be deemed an acceptable reason.

Failure to perform any of these tasks may result in incoherent prose (Bamberg, 1983; Witte & Faigley, 1981). It therefore seems that creating a context is another significant by-means-of relation based on an understanding of rhetoric and writing.

Research also suggests that creating a context does not occur spontaneously for student writers, and it is unlikely that it occurs spontaneously for mature, experienced writers, either (see Flower & Hayes, 1981). It requires a plan and an awareness of numerous rhetorical devices related to audience. Writing lacks the social cues that give conversations form and meaning. Creating a context for readers may be thought of as explicitly providing cues that would normally be implicitly available in speech.

In this regard we can imagine the process you would engage in as a teacher if you had to write a note to a student's parents to report poor behavior. The note may be written hours or days after the act that prompted it, and the context of the student's behavior must be recreated for the parents. But the context for such a note would be a relatively easy thing to establish, because you would have a real incident to report, a real audience to report to, and a real purpose in writing. The nonfunctional nature of most student writing, on the other hand, makes it more difficult; it usually lacks reality on all counts, unless one wants to make the dubious claim that the teacher represents a realistic audience.

Sensitive teachers tell students repeatedly to imagine an audience consisting of readers outside the classroom, but as long as the assignment itself remains nonfunctional, such advice doesn't seem to work very well. With little or no experience writing to real audiences with a real purpose, students are inclined to fall back on what experience they do have with real audiences, which is of course speech. Lacking a context for a nonperformative language event, they assume what they consider the normal context or situation for the occurrence of language. With few exceptions, this takes the form of a dialogue where the other participant is internalized as the teacher. Thus student essays are often characterized by conversational features, such as repetition, lack of an identifiable topic, and so forth.

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From A RHETORIC FOR WRITING TEACHERS

Erika Lindemann

Erika Lindemann is professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she directed the writing program for ten years. She edited the Longman Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric: 1984-1985 (1987) and 1986 (1988). From 1988 through 1991, she edited the annual CCCC Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric, continuing the important bibliographical work she began with Longman. With Gary Tate, she co-edited a collection of new essays, An Introduction to Composition Studies (1991).

Lindemann's A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers came from her extensive work with public school teachers and graduate teaching assistants. Though her book emphasizes the practice of teaching writing, she provides a sound theoretical framework for all of her suggested methods. The selection that follows is "What Is Writing?", chapter two of her book; it demonstrates how theoretical discussions can inform and illuminate methods of teaching writing. Lindemann offers several alternatives for presenting the elements of the writing situation to students, expanding significantly the traditional concept of the communication triangle and complementing The Bedford Handbook discussion of the five key elements of writing. In addition to suggesting how this expanded framework can help students understand the importance and the complexity of assessing the writing situation, Lindemann points out that teachers can benefit also if they consider these elements as they compose assignments and respond to student writers.

Writing is a process of communication which uses a conventional graphic system to convey a message to a reader. Let's examine that working definition:

Writing is

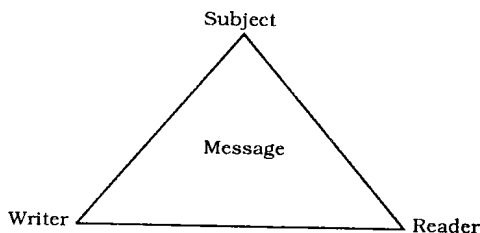
- a process of communication
- which uses a conventional graphic system
- to convey a message
- to a reader.

All processes of communication have elements in common. "Who says what to whom" characterizes written messages as well as spoken ones. This chapter describes those elements, the ingredients we combine in various proportions to compose written and spoken messages. How we combine them [is] "the process of communication" . . . Although this chapter concerns itself primarily with the rhetorical context that shapes student papers, keep in mind that teaching, like writing, is a process of communication. Classroom

The Writing Process

talk and comments written on student papers also represent messages which teachers convey to a student audience.

The working definition of *writing* given at the beginning of this chapter specifically names three elements present in any rhetorical context: a conventional graphic system, a message, and a reader. The statement "who says what to whom" introduces a fourth element, a "who" or writer. The so-called "communications triangle" (which does not include the graphic system) introduces the subject, the larger reality (topic) from which writers draw the more narrow, specific message (thesis).



The communication triangle offers students a useful model for defining the rhetorical problem a writing assignment must solve. The terms are relatively simple, and the diagram establishes relationships between terms. In formulating questions about those relationships, we can help students plan their response to the assignment:

What do I know about my subject? (writer-subject relationship)

Who is my audience? (writer-reader relationship)

What does my audience need to know to understand the subject? (reader-subject relationship)

Roman Jakobson's diagram represents a more elaborate version of the communications triangle ("Linguistics and Poetics," p. 353). His perspective is the same, but because his model contains six terms, it offers a broader view of the rhetorical context in which writing occurs. As teachers, we need a more detailed understanding of that context than we might expect of our students.



Because Jakobson intended the diagram primarily to explain "factors inalienably involved in verbal communication," some of his terms differ from those used in other models. Let's examine each term as it applies specifically to writing.

The Addresser

The addresser or writer composes the message. In our classes the most important addresser is the student writer, a complicated human being whose experiences, perspectives, and unique language shape every feature of written discourse. To teach well we must know as much about our students as we have time to learn and patience to discover. Otherwise, we can't determine

whether our teaching enhances or interferes with their ability to write effectively.

Students, however, are not the only addressers in a classroom. Teachers too express messages, both spoken and written, and act as models for students. If we don't write, why should they? Teachers should write as frequently as they ask students to, sharing with them strategies experienced writers develop in their wars with words.

The Addressee

The receiver of the message, the reader, is often ignored in traditional writing courses. Students have not had much experience writing for audiences and often have difficulty addressing even an audience of peers. Their "What do you want?" and "How long does it have to be?" reveal that they expect The Teacher to be the only reader for any writing they do. For most academic writing, the teacher really is the only audience, but students also need practice writing for themselves, for each other, for audiences outside the classroom. Teaching students how to write for increasingly diverse and complex audiences enables them to establish larger networks of social relationships. For this reason, the investigators in Britain's Schools Council Project urge writing teachers to give greater attention to the addressee:

We want to suggest that one important dimension of development in writing ability is the growth of a sense of audience, the growth of the ability to make adjustments and choices in writing which take account of the audience for whom the writing is intended. This accommodation may be coarse or fine, highly calculated or totally intuitive, diffused through the text or explicit at particular points in it; but, whatever the form of its realization, a highly developed sense of audience must be one of the marks of the competent mature writer, for it is concerned with nothing less than the implementation of his concern to maintain or establish an appropriate relationship with his reader in order to achieve his full intent. (James Britton et al., *The Development of Writing Abilities*, 11-18, p. 58)

Context

All messages come from somewhere, from some reality the writer re-creates in words. *Context* refers to situations which offer the writer potential subject matter. For example, if I notice a woman stuffing a blouse into her purse on her way out of a department store, I may conclude that she stole it and out of that context frame the message "Did you pay for that?" Eventually, the experience may find its way into an editorial on shoplifting. Of course, I may have misinterpreted the experience; perhaps the woman wanted to save the store the expense of a paper bag. If so, she will respond from the context of her experience, "Yes, I paid for it. Would you like to see the receipt?" The incident now becomes potential subject matter for a discussion of appearance versus reality. Interpreting reality is a complicated process, . . . but for now, we can define *context* to mean an entire world of subject matter or topics which writers develop into messages.

Message

Message refers to what is being said *about* the topic or subject, about the context. In a writing course the term *thesis* refers to message, to experience that is filtered, narrowed, and interpreted by the writer. When we ask students "What is the point of this essay; what is being said here?" we are asking them to restate the thesis or message. We are also discussing message whenever we talk about the organization of written discourse; its structure

reflects the order we impose on our experiences in shaping what we want to say.

Contact

For communication to occur, the addresser and the addressee must somehow be in contact with each other. A physical as well as psychological connection must exist between them. In speech, contact is generally visual and auditory. Because speaker and listener occupy the same space and time, the speaker can observe signs of recognition or confusion in the listener's stance and facial expressions, revising the message to make it clearer.

In writing, contact is achieved through pen or pencil and paper, media less comfortable to use than the human voice. Some students, in fact, experience serious "writer's block" when confronted with the prospect of putting pen to paper; they freeze.¹ More than likely, their unreasonable fear stems from past teachers' finding fault with every paper. To protect themselves from making mistakes, from failing, such students simply will not write unless they fear the penalty for not writing even more than they fear writing itself. Or they may have developed poor handwriting as a defense mechanism. Realizing that they *must* write, they hope we will interpret their scrawling in their favor, reducing the number of errors they must confront when the paper is returned. Red ink, the medium for comments on student writing, also creates a strong psychological channel between student and teacher. Some students can attend to it, responding to what has become a "color of authority," while other students view it as a "color of defeat." They may be so overwhelmed by copious red marks that they cannot comprehend the message; when that happens the medium acts as a psychological barrier to communication.

Code

Code refers to the language of the message. . . . Mathematics, braille, FORTRAN, semaphore, the International Phonetic Alphabet, Morse code, and the linguistic features of speech — all are examples of codes. The English graphic system comprises (1) alphabet letters and conventions for arranging them into words, sentences, and paragraphs; (2) a system of punctuation marks which separate the structural units of a communication — commas, periods, exclamation points, question marks, dashes, hyphens, semicolons, colons, single and double quotation marks, slash marks, apostrophes, parentheses, ellipses, brackets ([]), and braces ({ }); and (3) mechanical customs. Most texts define *mechanics* inadequately, but the term generally refers to matters of manuscript form rather than to conventions which express meaning. That is, mechanics determine what the text looks like rather than what it says. The writer's use of margins, indentation, italics, numerals, symbols (@, \$, %, &, and *), capital letters, abbreviations, even the convention of writing from left to right — all these belong to mechanics.

The English graphic system has a long history and, like the language itself, has changed over the years. We have gained and lost alphabet letters and redefined formal conventions. Medieval monks, for example, rarely indented their writing; parchment was simply too expensive to waste. Instead, they indicated "paragraph" by writing in a different color, adding a decorative (illuminated) letter, or changing the script. The practice of indenting paragraphs or separating blocked unindented paragraphs by a line of "white space" developed relatively recently. Conventions governing paragraph length also seem to be changing. As a rule, paragraphs tend to be shorter than they