

COMPOSITION
AND RHETORIC

COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC

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PREFACE

English Composition in high schools ought not to be taught as if all boys and girls hoped to be authors. Whatever power to write or speak it may develop will be applied by most pupils in the course of a "common" day's work and in very ordinary ways. They will use it, for example, in writing letters, reports, or notices, and in preparing short speeches, announcements, or accounts of events. In large part, therefore, high school composition should deal with the fundamental factors of effective expression, with sentence structure, punctuation, paragraphing, and the organization of the whole composition. With refinements of literary skill it should deal little, if at all. The necessary exposition of principles and the still more necessary practice in applying them should be made significant by connecting the whole process, not primarily with literature and the lure of an artistic career, but with the actual demands of life at school and the opportunities of the commoner occupations in the world without.

Not that literary values, literary models, or interest in the purely literary problems of composition need be ignored. Some boys and girls do hope to be authors. Many boys and girls enjoy trying to write stories, descriptions, and expositions without more immediate aim than to interest or inform the reader. There is, besides, an adolescent desire for expression that often finds its first outlet in the high-school class in composition. More important still, literature contains the most striking exemplifications of the very principles which must be applied in effective compositions of the practical sort. Artistic forms of composition cannot be neglected; but they should not receive either exclusive or primary attention.

This book embodies these principles in a text for first and second year high-school classes. No doubt it is not the only book written in the light of these views; but the authors believe that it offers one or two new ways of exemplifying them. In the chapters on *Uses*

of *Composition*, *The Study of Composition*, *Outline Drill*, *How to Recite*, *The Account of Events*, and *Delineation* we have tried to give new meaning and new scope to the endeavors of the high-school student of this subject. This section on *The Elements of Composition* deals with the most common pitfalls in sentence structure, and the Appendix outlines the subject of grammar as a whole. The examples, with but few exceptions, are taken from the writings of to-day—newspapers, magazines, reviews, biographies, short stories, and novels—in the hope that appreciation of the practical and literary achievements of the present may lead to wider reading.

The authors gratefully acknowledge their indebtedness to many individual authors as well as publishers for their courtesy in permitting the use of selections from their works. Among the magazines that have thus co-operated are *Baseball*, *Collier's*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Outing*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Public*, *The Outlook*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Scribner's Magazine*, *The Survey*, *Technical World*, *World Peace Foundation*, *The Youth's Companion*, *The Boston Transcript*, *The Century Magazine*. To the following publishers for permission to use selections as specified cordial acknowledgment is made: The Century Company, "Letters of Lewis Carroll," Roosevelt's "Heroes Who Fight Fire" and "The Roll of Honor of the New York Police," Hill's "Fighting a Fire," Moffett's "Careers of Danger and Daring," Bacher's "Stories of Whistler"; Charles Scribner's Sons, J. B. Connolly's "Out of Gloucester," John Fox's "Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come," Thomas N. Page's "Gordon Keith," Quiller Couch's "Old Fires and Profitable Ghosts" and "The Splendid Spur," R. L. Stevenson's "Ebb Tide," "St. Ives," "The Wrecker," "The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson" and "Vailima Letters," "A Collection of Letters of Thackeray," Van Dyke's "Fisherman's Luck" and "Little Rivers"; George H. Doran Company, Arnold Bennett's "Denry the Audacious"; Doubleday, Page & Company, Booth Tarkington's "The Gentleman from Indiana"; C. P. Farrell, R. G. Ingersoll's "Prose Poems"; Harper & Brothers, Stephen Crane's "The Monster," H. C. Lodge's "The War with Spain," "The Letters of James Russell Lowell"; Houghton Mifflin Company, "The Diary of Gideon Wells," N. S. Shaler's "Autobiography," Andy Adams' "Crossing the Big Boggy," Emerson's "Essay on Manners," C. H. Page's "The

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Boston, 1917.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I

THE USES OF COMPOSITION

LESSON	PAGE
1. WHAT COMPOSITION IS.	3
2. THE USES OF COMPOSITION	9
3. THE STUDY OF COMPOSITION	19
4. WHAT MAKES A COMPOSITION EFFECTIVE	34
Clearness, Force, Ease	
5. HOW TO CHOOSE A SUBJECT	43
Knowledge and Interest	
6. HOW TO TREAT A SUBJECT	48
7. HOW TO MAKE AN OUTLINE	51
8. OUTLINE DRILL	57
9. HOW TO PREPARE AN ORAL COMPOSITION	61
10. HOW TO RECITE	68
Correlation, Point of View, Arrangement	
11. HOW TO RECITE (<i>Continued</i>)	73
12. HOW TO PREPARE A WRITTEN COMPOSITION	77

PART II

THE ELEMENTS OF COMPOSITION

13. WHAT A SENTENCE MUST CONTAIN	83
14. WHAT A SENTENCE MAY CONTAIN	90
15. HOW CLAUSES ARE CONNECTED,—CONJUNCTIONS	94
16. HOW CLAUSES ARE CONNECTED,—RELATIVE PRONOUNS	98
17. MODIFIERS OF NOUNS	102
18. MODIFIERS OF VERBS	105
19. INFINITIVES	108
20. PARTICIPLES	112

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LESSON	PAGE
21. TENSE AND MOOD	115
22. DIRECT AND INDIRECT DISCOURSE	120
23. CAPITALIZATION AND PUNCTUATION	124
24. PUNCTUATION	131

PART III

THE PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

25. UNITY	139
26. UNITY (<i>Continued</i>)	143
27. UNITY (<i>Concluded</i>)	147
Inclusion, Separation, Subordination, Uniformity	
28. COHERENCE	152
Position, Reference, Connection	
29. COHERENCE (<i>Continued</i>)	156
30. EMPHASIS	159
31. EMPHASIS (<i>Continued</i>)	164
Climax, Antithesis	
32. THE PARAGRAPH	166
Form, Content, Dialogue	
33. THE PARAGRAPH (<i>Continued</i>)	173
Sentence Groups	
34. THE PARAGRAPH (<i>Continued</i>)	178
Topic Sentence	
35. THE PARAGRAPH (<i>Continued</i>)	186
Development—Time and Space	
36. THE PARAGRAPH (<i>Continued</i>)	188
Details, Examples, Comparisons	
37. THE PARAGRAPH (<i>Continued</i>)	191
Unity, Coherence, Emphasis	
38. WORDS	195
39. AN EXACT VOCABULARY	198
40. A LARGE VOCABULARY	200

PART IV

THE FORMS OF COMPOSITION

41. LETTER WRITING	207
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

xi

LESSON	PAGE
42. LETTER WRITING (<i>Continued</i>)	215
Mechanics	
43. BUSINESS LETTERS	222
44. SOCIAL FORMS	230
45. THE TYPES OF COMPOSITION	233
46. NARRATION—STORIES	245
Action—Effective Detail	
47. NARRATION—STORY TELLING (<i>Continued</i>)	259
Standpoint, Conversation	
48. NARRATION—STORY TELLING (<i>Continued</i>)	270
Introduction, Order, Conclusion	
49. THE ACCOUNT OF EVENTS	277
Matter of Fact	
50. DESCRIPTION	284
Standpoint, Impression, Order	
51. DELINEATION	295
Identification, Visualizing	
52. EXPOSITION	304
53. EXPOSITION (<i>Continued</i>)	309
Definition, Procedure	
54. ARGUMENT	319
APPENDIX—Grammar	333
INDEX	349

PART I
THE USES OF COMPOSITION

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COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC

PART I

THE USES OF COMPOSITION

LESSON 1

WHAT COMPOSITION IS

1. Two Ways of Saying the Same Thing.—Here is an incident which might have occurred in any American high school or academy:

The business manager of the *Central High School Recorder*—known to the whole school as “Busy” Smith—finished his instructions to the two first-year agents with his customary vigor. “Don’t let the sophomore rooms beat your record,” he said. “You have two minutes to talk. Remember what I said about this first issue. Bring out the main points, emphasize the freshman features, and end with an appeal to their school spirit.”

Judson, agent in the E division, had his speech by heart and said it clearly and without halts. The class listened in silence except for some girls in the back of the room, who giggled once or twice.

“Classmates,” he began, “the first edition of our school paper is out and we want everyone to buy a copy. We want this for two reasons: first, to show your school spirit, and second, to make the paper a success. It is hard work to edit a paper, and very disappointing not to have it sell because the spirit of cooperation is too low in the school. Other high school papers are successful, why not ours? It is our duty to make it successful.

"This edition is a good one. It contains articles by teachers and pupils, editorials on school affairs, and accounts of our athletic teams. It is well worth the money. We are just starting in at high school and we shall always be proud of our high-school work. The paper will be worth keeping to remind you of the days you spent here. Make a good beginning by taking a copy now."

The room teacher made the collection, and turned over to Judson \$1.90 and two pledges for copies to be delivered next day. Judson had persuaded twenty-one pupils out of thirty-three.

Malory, of the F division, spoke with some hesitation, but earnestly. Before he began he placed a copy of the *Recorder* on each desk. Then he said:

"Mr. Barrows has given me permission to say something about the school paper, which you have on your desks. This is the first edition of the year, but it shows what our school can do. The photograph on the cover was taken at the first football game of the season, by Jamieson of the sophomore class. It shows that famous forward pass which won us the game. The first article is by our coach, Dr. Matthews, and explains the new rules. Dr. Matthews promises a successful season for our team and tells why. The article on the gymnastic work makes a point of the freshman exercises; you ought not to miss that. The story on page ten is about Camp Kitson, where three members of this class spent the summer. Jennings can tell you how true to life it is. The new school song is on page nineteen. Every good Central freshman ought to know that by heart before the next game. It will be sung for the first time at the review of the cadets next Wednesday. Dr. Holman has explained his new scheme for the school on page twenty, and the department notes show you what there is to be done in debating, music, the modern-language club, the sketch club, and the science excursions.

"The paper is too good to miss; and besides, you have your

part to do as a member of this class. Let's show them how this class means to take hold."

When the money was counted, Malory had \$3.40. All but one pupil had bought a paper. The one pupil was Malory.

This story has been told to make clear to you the main purposes of English composition. Neither of the agents in the story made a perfect speech, but one speech was more effective than the other. That is the chief practical difference between good English composition and bad.

2. Composition an Every-day Necessity.—Consider what this means to you. You ought to be dissatisfied with slipshod, unsuccessful work of any sort. If you build a boat, you want it to trim well and make good time; if you play tennis you want your service to be sure and swift; if you manage a club, or a team, or a paper, you want your accounts to balance true; if you study a lesson, you want to learn something from it: in short, in all your efforts you want to accomplish completely and surely the purpose you have in view. Now whenever you speak or write have you not a definite purpose before you; namely, to express in words whatever you have in mind? It may be a vague and ill-defined feeling, such as homesickness; it may be a simple and powerful conviction, such as the conviction that your classmate is the best man for the football captaincy; it may be a single fact in your history lesson, or a long train of thought about your future career: in any case, the effort to express it is *work to be done with words*. That work may be done poorly—ineffectively,—or well—effectively.

Of course there are various degrees of excellence in composition and it may not be in your power to make yourself a master in the use of English. There are very few masters in any art. But no one ought to be satisfied who has not attained a considerable degree of practical ability in the speaking and writing which his daily life demands. If you can do more, so much the better for you. Reporters, lecturers, lawyers, ministers, and authors must make English composition a main part of

their life work; perhaps you will take up one of these professions yourself. Yet no matter what your occupation, you will have constant occasion to speak and write effectively. Even if your business does not require it, the rest of your life, at home and elsewhere, will. You already have many opportunities a day to make good use of English, and always will have. To be sure, they differ: a sermon differs from a business letter in its purpose, its subject, and the audience to which it is addressed; a story differs in the same way from a telegram; a poem from a recipe. But there is an ineffective way to compose each of these, and an effective way. So too, your German translation, the record in your physics note-book, the letter to your summer camp fellow, the story of the basket-ball game as you tell it at the home table, your recitation in history, your report as secretary or treasurer of a club, your application for a position, your argument for class baseball teams—all these are compositions, and you may train yourself to make them effective.

Composition, then, is an every-day art, a practical art, an art that everyone must use. As a builder puts lumber together to make a house and thus gives actual form to his idea of what that house should be; as a rug-maker weaves colored threads into a design which he first sees only in his mind's eye; as a musician places together the notes which express the melody he first hears in the silence of his brain,—so you must put together the words which express ideas and feelings first known to you alone. Composition of any sort is *putting things together so as to express a meaning*. English composition is putting words together to express feelings and thoughts. It is an art we practice daily and hourly, and either effectively or not according to our degree of skill.

3. Three Helps in Composition.—Skill can be developed only through much training. From the use of this book you may confidently expect to gain the ability to make better use of English in the common affairs of life; but of course you cannot achieve this result without persistent effort. Effective use of

language is not a simple matter. It demands a great deal more than the learning of rules: it demands *the study of principles, the observation of good models, and constant, careful practice.*

1. *Principles.*—If you are to compose well you must know in what good composition consists. Are you quite certain, now, that your judgment about speech or writing is reliable? Read a column in the newspaper, a page in a book, or one of your old compositions. You may have a very definite opinion of the merits of each, but do you know why you formed that opinion and whether it is a good opinion? Could you rewrite the old composition with much certainty that you are improving it? In matters of mere correctness, to be sure, you may be quite competent to judge. If you have studied grammar, you should be able to distinguish easily between correct and incorrect forms and idioms. Correctness, however, is but a single element in effectiveness, and grammar is only a stepping-stone to composition. The other principles of effective composition will be made clear to you in the pages of this book, and if you give them faithful study you should be able in the end to criticize and improve your use of words intelligently and with certainty.

2. *Models.*—Many of your high-school studies will help you greatly in your composition; but one study will do more for you than any other. This is the study of literature. The literature which you will read, in school and out, will give you examples of good English which will serve as models in your own efforts at expression.

Possibly your work in life, or your ambition, may never tempt you to aspire to a style like that of Addison, or Hawthorne, or Irving; most of your writing may be of a more practical sort than theirs, and you may not even desire to copy a great master's style. But from the study of their works the characteristics and qualities of excellent English will become plain to you, and by well-directed effort you should be able to attain many of these characteristics and qualities in a style of

your own. Nor is it necessary to confine your study of models to the masterpieces of English literature. You may find much that is admirable, in its way, in newspapers, magazines, modern books, business letters, and other common sources. Such models should be chosen with care and submitted to your teacher for approval; but once approved, they may serve quite as effectively in the formation of your style as the greater productions themselves. You should endeavor, in any case, to use the good English written by others to make your own English good.

3. *Practice*.—Observation of good models, however, must be supplemented by persistent practice. As you learn a principle of composition or recognize the skill with which some author has used it in his work, you must try again and again to apply it in your own. You must bear the principle in mind as you write, correct what you have written so that it will more perfectly embody the principle, and never be satisfied until you have done your best to make the principle a real guide. Merely to know a principle of composition is not of much importance; merely to recognize excellence in others will help you but little; you must make the actual effort to realize that excellence in your own practice, to use that principle in your own work. Turn eagerly, therefore, to the task of writing or speaking and make the most of every composition as an opportunity to apply what you have learned. "Practice makes perfect."

Principles, models, practice,—these three means for the improvement of your expression the course in English should provide. If you use them well, you can increase amazingly the ease and power of your speech and writing. It is worth while to work hard for this. Your whole life will be worth more to you and to others, if you gain such command of English that your daily use of it is truly effective.

Composition is an art everyone must use whenever he speaks or writes. Speech and writing are more or less effective according to the skill of the speaker or writer. To gain the power to work