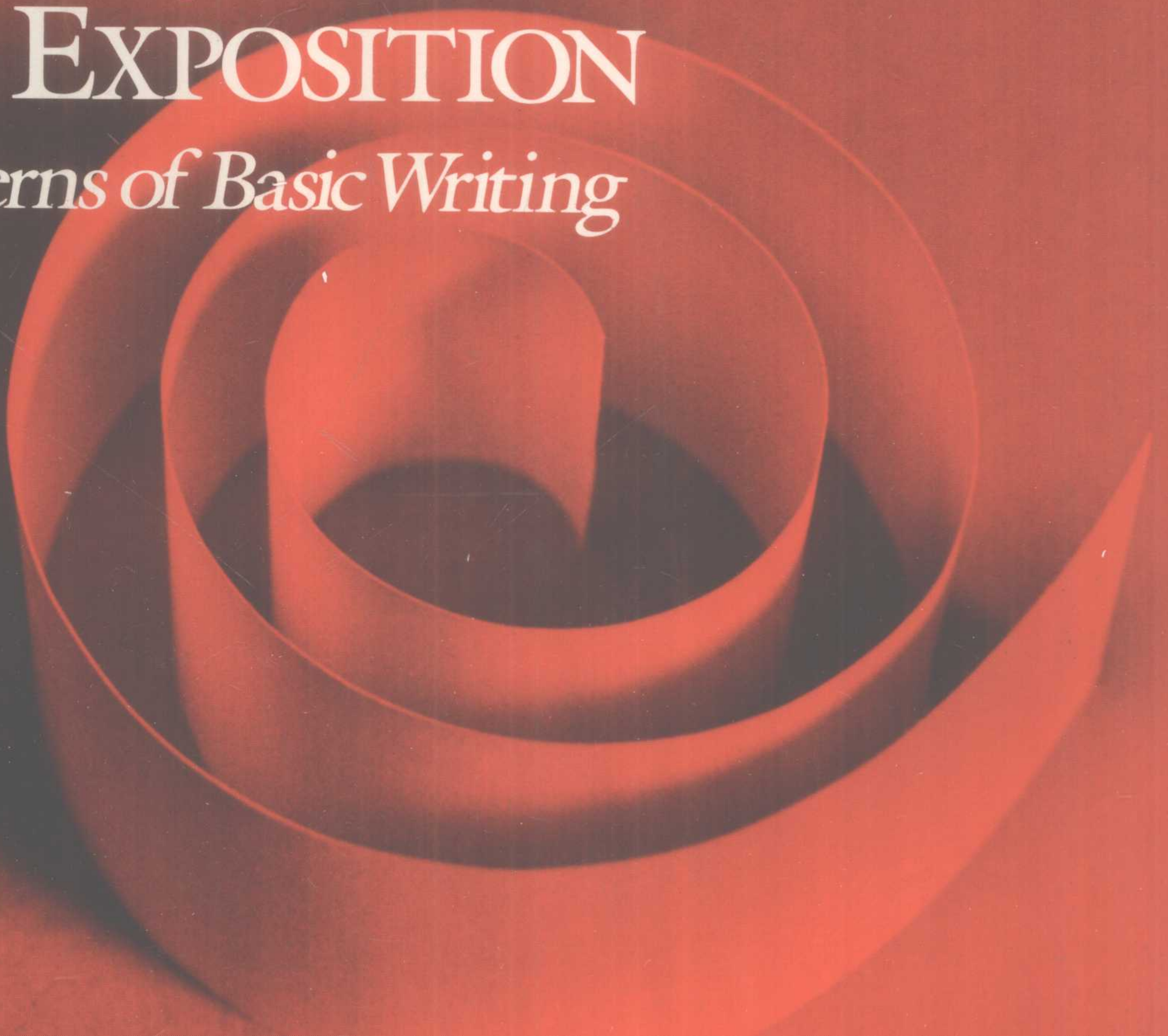


SARAH D'ELOIA FORTUNE / BARBARA QUINT GRAY

EXPERIENCE TO EXPOSITION

Patterns of Basic Writing



Experience to Exposition:

PATTERNS OF BASIC WRITING

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In Memory of Mina P. Shaughnessy

Preface

The seeds of this book were planted in weekly meetings of five colleagues at The City College of New York — Mina Shaughnessy, Blanche Skurnick, Alice Trillin, and ourselves. Basic writing teachers in The City College English Department, we met for several years in the mid-1970s to work out a series of lessons for teaching sentence grammar to adult beginning writers. Out of these meetings, supported through the CUNY Instructional Resource Center, grew *The English Modules*, a series of instructional videotapes with coordinated workbook units published jointly by the City and State Universities of New York.

People familiar with the *Modules* will recognize their pedagogical sequence as well as some of their original exercises in this text. We are indebted to our three *Modules* coauthors for the pieces of their work that are woven into the fabric of this book, for their endorsement of this project, and most importantly, for their insights into teaching and language that have remained part of our work and thought since the group disbanded in 1978.

Also critical to our work, both in its original and expanded forms, has been the influence of our students, particularly our basic writing students at The City College. They have endured our materials in many forms and, in the process, have shared with us their rules of grammar as well as their confusions over ours. They have been patient and incisive teachers, and we are grateful for their instruction and their criticism.

Since we decided to expand and reformulate the original *Module* materials, we have had a great deal of additional help from many sources. We have valued the solid, constructive criticism of a number of reviewers: Professors Milton Baxter, John A. R. Dick, Roger Garrison, Charles Guilford, John Harwood, John A. Higgins, Sivia Kaye, Richard L. Larson, Elisabeth McPherson, and Barbara S. Morris. We wish to thank the staff of Harper & Row who contributed to this text. In particular, we are grateful to Phillip Leininger, sponsoring editor, for his support of our project, his sound editorial judgment, and his consummate tact. Nora Helfgott, project editor, provided invaluable assistance and guidance through the various stages of production. We are indebted to her for her sound advice and cheerful understanding.

The manuscript was typed with the efficient and cheerful cooperation of Frances Howard and Elizabeth Schofield.

Finally, we would not have found the time or the spirit to complete this project without the unflagging support and enthusiasm of Owen Fortune and Chip Gray and the cooperation and curiosity of Greg D'Eloia and Billy and Tommy Gray.

Notwithstanding all the expert help and advice we have found in so many quarters, the flaws that remain in the text are entirely our own.

Sarah D'Eloia Fortune
Barbara Quint Gray

Introduction to the Teacher

English has a reputation for being a hard language, for having so many rules and exceptions to the rules that the student despairs of learning everything. Yet English is no more complicated than any other human language.

One goal of this text is to put students in touch with the regular patterns of English in order to help them control it better. A major assumption of the text is, in fact, that English is systematic, understandable, and controllable, and that deviations from standard written English also fall into patterns which, once recognized, can be isolated and changed. As students work through the text, they will cover areas that they already understand and use correctly, even if they may not be entirely conscious of that understanding. They will also cover aspects of English that are less familiar and confusing and that may be sources of error; the text provides opportunity to come to grips with the structures and options of standard English.

In addition to presenting the fundamentals of grammar and punctuation, the text provides writing assignments designed to give students experience in the full range of composing activities. These writing tasks encourage students to integrate their study of sentence grammar into the larger contexts in which that study becomes useful and to apply their understandings of grammar to editing their work.

Both in grammar study and in composing, the text acquaints students with the messiness of writing, gets them involved in that mess, and shows them how to enjoy it and use it productively. The text is designed to immerse students in the process of composing sentences and of honing them to work effectively in prose passages. Thus, it provides experiences that help students compose and edit their own writing.

Chapter Organization

Each chapter of the text follows the same pedagogical sequence: Experience, Explanation, Exercise, Expertise, and Exposition. Students initially have a great deal of passive knowledge about English structure that can serve them well when they become aware of it. The Experience section draws on this knowledge to

simultaneously expand students' understanding and raise students' confidence in their ability to study grammar. After leading students through an experience that stimulates their awareness of how their language works, the text provides a brief, straightforward Explanation section, describing what their intuitions have already shown them. This explanation makes sure that they achieve a conscious sense of the structure and provides the nomenclature with which to talk about it.

Students then move to the Exercise section of the chapter, which presents several different contexts for examining how a structure works and for solidifying command of it. Each Exercise section begins with quite simple tasks and ends with more complicated ones. The sections intentionally conclude with very difficult structures in the belief that students profit from having their understanding stretched, even to the breaking point. They need not be afraid to make mistakes or undertake unsuccessful experiments, for in the context of this book, mistakes become phenomena to analyze and learn from, to put in the larger context of the systematic nature of the language and of departures from its standard forms.

The last major section of each chapter is an Expertise section, which contains embellishments on the main topic of the chapter. Some Expertise sections, like that in Chapter 1, contain material that is still quite basic. Other sections contain details that go beyond basic structural information. The detailed material in the Expertise sections has been included through the conviction that beginning adult writers, while sometimes dramatically inexperienced in the written language, are intelligent, capable students who can benefit from a thorough presentation. These sections acquaint them with the linguistic complexities of each area so students can develop the greatest flexibility in choosing linguistic options.

Each chapter concludes with an Exposition section that guides students through several stages of writing and rewriting, using peer criticism to find areas needing revision, and finally drawing on the grammatical understandings they accumulate throughout the book that will help them to look with increasing care at grammar and punctuation. The composing steps outlined in these assignments can be used independently of the specific writing tasks suggested, so that instructors who prefer to substitute their own assignments can do so.

We frequently use conventional grammatical terminology throughout the book to name and define structures. If students learn this terminology, they can make clear, accurate contributions to class discussion and consult writing handbooks when they need to. Very few exercises require that students learn terminology in order to do the exercises successfully. Instead they imitate the structural patterns presented. However, a few exercises do ask students to find and label crucial structures, like verbs, that are the sources of persistent errors.

Also throughout the chapters, we have highlighted whatever rules of punctuation seem naturally to relate to the structures being discussed. Thus, we consider punctuation as a system of signaling structure rather than as a set of isolated conventions. An appendix at the end of the book presents a unified

summary of punctuation rules for reference purposes, but it is not intended for use in teaching those rules.

Overall Organization of the Text

Chapters 1 and 2 draw heavily upon speakers' intuitions about how their language works. These chapters consider relationships between kernel elements of sentences, relationships that are so basic as almost to defy rational explanation. That is, speakers know that subjects regularly precede verbs. Speakers regularly generate sentences that meet that requirement, that establish that relationship. Yet the exact nature of the relationship is as elusive as it is fundamental. Rather than depend primarily on some inadequate and thus confusing definition—for example, the subject is the doer, the verb states what is done—a definition which is not powerful enough a generalization to cover all cases, we have decided to build directly upon students' intuitive grasp of the intellectual force of the relationship.

Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 consider the verb, subject-verb agreement, and tenses. This material is positioned early in the text so that students can practice using verbs correctly for the rest of the term. One of the most difficult parts of the language for student writers to control, the verb is likely to require students' analytical insight more than most other structures.

Most students and many teachers will find the explanation of the verb radically different from anything they have seen before, certainly different from the discussions that typically appear in writing textbooks. It is an explanation designed to build incrementally to a full mastery of English verb phrases. Students are required to analyze the changes in verb forms that lend structure to meaning and to reduce that analysis to a series of formulaic statements. While this approach may seem strange, the success of the verb material depends upon students' conceptualizing structures for themselves and objectifying their knowledge of verb phrases. This process replaces students' dependency on how the language sounds to them, a dependency that can lead either to use of forms that have oral, but not written, currency or of hypercorrected forms that do not normally occur in speech or in writing.

Chapters 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 explore the mechanisms by which structures join the basic core of the sentence to modify its meaning: how relative pronouns, participles, and conjunctions work. The last part of the text—Chapters 13 through 17—considers sentence options, alternatives open to the writer for conveying meaning. This section investigates, too, the effect of making one choice rather than another, of using an adjective rather than a relative clause or of placing a subordinate clause in front of rather than in the middle of a sentence. It ends with chapters on more complicated structures like absolutes, noun clauses, and infinitive phrases that students may not know, or may not use, or may need to understand in order to integrate them with their use of other structures.

Appendices at the end of the book cover spelling rules, punctuation rules, a

table of irregular verbs, manuscript conventions, and a questionnaire for the student to use in preparing a detailed self-evaluation at the end of the term.

Methodologies

This text draws on several methodologies that, in turn, draw on several grammatical theories. In its presentation of kernel sentence patterns, for example, it draws on structural grammar. It uses Chomsky's auxiliary transformation rule to make the most systematic presentation possible of the English verb. It draws on transformational grammar, too, in its dependence on sentence combining, a technique well proven to increase students' syntactic maturity.

Sentence decomposing, an extension of sentence combining, has also been added to this text. It is based on the hypothesis that students can reverse the process of embedding sentences to discover sources of some of their sentence structure problems and the solutions to them as well.

The text uses controlled composition, allowing students to focus on a specific grammatical feature while internalizing structural principles such as paragraph development or use of cohesion devices. It uses sentence imitation to lead students to feel the force of words on one another—for example, to recognize the constraints that the choice of one word places on the possibilities that can be chosen later. Like sentence combining, this technique builds syntactic maturity and organizational sense.

In a basic writing course, this text will teach students the kind of grammatical knowledge they need to bring their sentence structures increasingly under control. It is not necessarily intended, though, to constitute a complete course. For emerging fluency needs to be coupled with awareness of expository structures if it is to be useful in academic writing. Thus this text would be well paired with a selection of readings that presents students with brief, clear examples of expository prose in several modes including narration, description, comparison/contrast, process, and argument.

The text is intended to be extensive enough to give adequate practice and to make material clear. But it has been kept as brief as possible. Its purpose is to develop a foundation for students working with their own prose, not to provide exhaustive drill. This choice has been made in the conviction that students' own writing, and the careful thought that it requires, is the best exercise for learning to write.

The text is intended to engender in its users a spirit of exploration and a sense of curiosity about what works, what doesn't work, and why. We hope that you will share this spirit with us and write to us, in care of Harper & Row, about where you have found these materials problematical and where successful.

Sarah D'Eloia Fortune
Barbara Quint Gray

Introduction to the Student: How to Use This Book

If this book has been assigned for your course, your instructor believes you will profit from looking closely at how sentences are put together as you mold them to fit into your paragraphs and essays.

You already have a great deal of knowledge about English sentences. You have been speaking English fluently for years. The number of things you know vastly outnumbers any areas about which you are confused. In spite of any problems you may have getting ideas to write about and no matter how many mistakes you make getting these ideas down on paper, you still do most things right.

This book builds on two of your strengths: the substantial knowledge of English you already have and your capacity to form powerful generalizations—to know a pattern when you see it. You have been making generalizations since infancy. You know, for example, that lighted cigarettes are hot. You know that Brand X jeans outwear Brand Y and are worth the extra money you have to pay for them. You know that the food in the campus cafeteria is both cheaper and more nutritious than that served in the closest fast-food joint. This book will help you use the understanding you already have about English to sort out those areas about which you are uncertain. You will use your ability to form generalizations when you look at the rules, the exceptions to the rules, and the mistakes you make—to get at the sources of your errors so that you can gradually bring them under control.

Each chapter works the same way. Each begins with an Experience section which presents a list of sentences illustrating a certain fact or pattern of English. You will be asked to state for yourself what this fact is or to show in some other way that you see the pattern. This is your chance to form your own generalization—to “see it” for yourself, in your own way. You may want to compare your observations and insights with those of your classmates. You should not leave this section until you have a definite idea in mind, much like the cartoon character with a light bulb above his head. Your light bulb may be filled with an exclamation point. “Aha! I’ve got it!” Or perhaps a question mark. “What’s going on in Example 2?” “How do I talk about what I see?”

The Explanation section of each chapter elucidates the fact or pattern demonstrated in the experience. This Explanation section will help you confirm your observations and give you the words commonly used to talk about the structure.

The Exercise section gives you practice applying what you know to constructing and punctuating sentences. Exercises begin easy and end hard. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. If you aren't finding some of the material difficult, you aren't being stretched to increase your competence. Expert writers start sentences they can't finish and write sentences they can't decide how to punctuate — so be patient with yourself while you grow as a writer.

The Expertise section builds upon the first three sections. Once you have grasped and practiced the basic pattern, you can take up exceptions, less common cases, sources of errors, and strategies for proofreading your papers with increasing accuracy. This section increases the sophistication with which you look at the basic pattern and helps you apply your knowledge to how you look at your own sentences.

Each chapter ends with an Exposition section. These assignments lead you from short compositions on personal experience to longer compositions on issues about which you have strong convictions. In these assignments we encourage you to share your writing with others while it is in progress, so that you can revise it more effectively. The honest reactions, criticisms, and suggestions of family members, friends, or classmates to early drafts can help you improve what you say and how you say it. But as the writer, you will have to decide which of their ideas you can accept.

We encourage you to concentrate on content and organization until you are preparing your final draft. Then it is important to apply what you know about sentences as you proofread your writing for correctness. We also encourage you to analyze any mistakes you continue to make in order to get at the sources of your errors. Trust your ability to formulate and reformulate explanations, to push toward an answer that makes things clear. It is a habit of mind that will serve you well, not only in your improvement as a writer, but in how you approach mastering the content of other courses.

Finally, we encourage you to do one last writing assignment that is not a part of the book. Our former students have taught us a great deal of what we know about how to teach grammar and writing. They have told us when something worked for them and when it didn't. When you have finished this book, we hope you will want to write to us, in care of Harper & Row, 10 East 53d Street, New York, New York, 10022, and tell us about your experience with these materials. We need to know which things were clear and especially helpful and which areas you found confusing, irritating, or overly difficult. It will be particularly helpful if you tell us your way of explaining things to yourself. Your comments will help us improve these materials for the students who come after you.

Sarah D'Eloia Fortune
Barbara Quint Gray

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