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COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC

BY

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PREFACE

This book aims throughout to promote self-cultivation in correct and effective speech and writing. Better English for immediate use, rather than the futile attempt to "develop writers," is its goal.

The capacity, the needs, and the interests of the average student have at all times been considered in the preparation of the text. The specimens of composition, selected from both standard and contemporary writers, have been chosen for their attractiveness to modern students as well as for their illustrative aptness. The subjects suggested for oral and written composition afford boys and girls, country-bred and city-bred, opportunity to use material familiar to them through everyday observation and experience. Numerous exercises in oral narration and exposition, frequent assignments in letter-writing, and definite practice in the writing required of students in other school subjects,—note-taking, translating from foreign languages, and the writing of reports and examination papers,—all furnish specific motivation for the study of composition and render the instruction immediately usable. The twenty-one full-page illustrations, which are made the basis of a number of exercises, include a rather wide range of subjects that appeal to the present generation of boys and girls.

Besides the usual equipment found in the average manual of composition, the present book contains a large amount of important supplementary material commonly available only in handbooks. This additional material enhances the value of the book for purposes of recitation assignment and makes it useful for frequent reference after it has been completed as a class text.

Though the arrangement of the first three parts indicates the relative order in which each topic may be profitably taken up, the entire book is readily adaptable to a variety of conditions and special needs as well as to the particular pedagogical ideas of the individual teacher.

Part One consists of an introduction to oral and written expression. Practice in oral composition and in the retelling of another person's thought constitutes a natural approach to the writing of original compositions. Detailed instructions and well-planned exercises in the proper choice of a subject, the selection and orderly arrangement of material, the making of a simple outline and its logical development, and the thorough revision and careful rewriting of each composition furnish the student necessary guidance in his efforts at original expression. Letter-writing affords valuable practice in the most natural and familiar type of written composition.

Part Two deals with the units of composition: the paragraph, the sentence, and the word. The writing of paragraph compositions provides considerable drill in paragraph development. The four chapters devoted to the sentence include a more extensive treatment of sentence structure than is to be found in most textbooks of composition. Punctuation and grammar as they function in sentence construction are treated in a practical way. The chapter on cautions in grammar and sentence structure supplies the student with the means of correcting many faults in his everyday speech and writing. The four chapters devoted to diction will help him to overcome errors in his diction and will arouse in him an interest in word study.

Part Three contains a concise discussion of the four forms of prose discourse. As many illustrative selections are included as space permits. Though formal argument receives its share of attention, greater emphasis is placed on oral debating and free informal discussion. In each of the first four chapters in this

section there are appropriate exercises in letter-writing. A special chapter on the short story is added to the discussion of narration.

Part Four is intended for frequent reference by the student, though each chapter may be profitably assigned for close, systematic study. The brief grammatical review supplements the chapters in Part Two dealing with sentence structure. Exercises in Chapters VIII and IX may be utilized for drill in parsing and in sentence analysis. The final chapter, containing the principal rules of spelling, a list of the common prefixes and suffixes, and more than six hundred words that are often misspelled, will have decided value for a majority of students.

The material included in the six sections of the Appendix will contribute appreciably to the student's equipment both in the study of literary selections and in writing.

From twelve years of experience in the teaching of English, and from association and discussions with progressive teachers in many schools, the author has evolved the plan of organization and derived a great amount of the material for the present book. As a teacher in the high schools of Texas, and later as instructor of a large number of freshman students in one of the state normal schools and in the University of Texas, the author had opportunity to observe closely the product of the high school and to study from both points of view the problem of composition-teaching.

For most valuable aid in the preparation of this book the author desires to acknowledge his special indebtedness to the authors of Lockwood and Emerson's "Composition and Rhetoric," by whose kind permission he has freely embodied in his text methods and material made familiar by a long acquaintance with that excellent book, which in its own day was probably the best in its field. If in the making of this textbook to meet present conditions and supply modern teaching needs the author has

succeeded in catching something of the spirit of practical helpfulness to pupil and to teacher that characterized that book of an earlier period, his greatest desire will have been realized.

To the following persons grateful acknowledgment is made for their assistance in the preparation of this book : to Mr. Frank W. Cushwa, of Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, New Hampshire, and to Mr. A. B. De Mille, formerly of Milton Academy, Milton, Massachusetts, for a thorough reading of the manuscript and for many helpful suggestions ; to Miss Caroline M. Doonan, of the Newton Technical High School, for valuable criticism of the proofsheets as the book was going through the press.

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COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

THE STUDY OF COMPOSITION

1. **Introduction.** As we enter upon the study of composition we may ask: What is composition? Why should I study it? How can I master it? To give preliminary answers to these questions is the purpose of the present chapter. To provide a practical treatment of these and other related questions is the function of the remainder of the book.

2. **Composition defined.** Whenever we communicate with other persons, either by speech or by writing, we are *composing*; that is, we are putting together thoughts so selected and arranged as to convey our meaning. Expression by means of speech is termed *oral composition*. Expression by means of writing is termed *written composition*. In order to express ourselves clearly and well, we should learn to exercise care in the choice and arrangement of our thoughts and acquire skill in the use of words and in the construction of sentences, paragraphs, and whole compositions.

Composition, like any other art, is governed by established rules and principles. These have been discovered through practice by generations of speakers and writers before us. For our convenience and profit they have been brought together and clearly stated as the rules of grammar and the principles of

rhetoric. Grammar is the science that deals with the forms and the constructions of words. Rhetoric consists of the study of the principles governing the clear, forceful, and elegant expression of thoughts. *Composition, therefore, is the expression of what we have to say in accordance with the rules of grammar and the principles of rhetoric.*

3. Units of composition. The whole composition, which is the largest unit of expression, is made up of three subordinate units; namely, the paragraph, the sentence, and the word. These four units will be fully discussed and illustrated in later chapters.

4. Kinds of composition. According to our purpose as speakers and writers, we may make our composition (1) *narration*, (2) *description*, (3) *exposition*, or (4) *argument*. By means of narration we seek to entertain our hearers or readers by recounting an experience, relating an incident, or retelling a story. By the use of description we attempt to represent vividly for them a scene, an object, a person, a mood, or an impression that has interested us. By means of exposition we endeavor to explain something to them. By employing argument we try to lead them to believe as we do and to act as we desire them to act.

5. Sources of material for compositions. Though the subjects on which we may speak and write are infinite, we derive these subjects, and the material for developing them, from a relatively small number of sources. The most common of these sources are personal experience, observation, conversation, lectures, and reading.

6. Essentials of effective composition. Before we can make a subject interesting to others we must understand it thoroughly ourselves and must learn how to present it clearly and effectively. The manner of expressing our thoughts is next in importance to the thoughts themselves. As speakers and writ-

ers we should constantly endeavor to make it easy for others to understand what we have to say. This we can learn to do by conforming to the three essentials of effective composition; namely, *clear thinking*, *adequate expression*, and *good form*.

Few of us are endowed by nature with the ability to think clearly. This ability we may acquire, however, by limiting ourselves to definite subjects which we are capable of handling; by forcing ourselves to decide what it is we wish to say about the subject and for what purpose we are going to say it; and by persistent care in making our words express exactly what we mean.

Adequate expression requires that our composition be properly adjusted to the subject and carefully adapted to the interest and understanding of our hearers and readers. Out of all the possible ways we may think of and experiment with in expressing our thoughts we should try to discover the one most effective way. Only by doing this can we attain to adequate expression.

Good form in composition is at all times essential. We should therefore make conformity to the following requirements habitual:

1. Effective oral delivery.
2. Proper arrangement of manuscript.
3. Strict observance of the rules of grammar.
4. Care in the choice of words and in the use of idioms.
5. Correct spelling.
6. Intelligent punctuation.

Violations of these requirements hinder hearers and readers in their attempt to get a clear understanding of our thoughts, and for this reason greatly detract from our efforts at clear thinking and adequate expression.

7. Reasons for studying composition. The ability to think and to convey his thoughts through speech to others of his kind distinguishes man from the lower animals. The ability to

think accurately and to express his thoughts clearly and permanently distinguishes the educated man, who leads, from the uneducated man, who must be led. During our school life the mastery of the English language is of immediate importance, for our progress in every other subject is dependent on our command of English. In later life this mastery will prove of even greater importance in promoting our success and happiness.

Perhaps in other days a man who was too indolent to give attention to his writing might have avoided the necessity; crude expression might have served him. But today, under the influence of our quickened civilization, a man can scarcely hope to become an important factor in society unless he can express himself with some degree of adequacy. People will not stop to listen to him if he cannot explain his wants clearly and without unnecessary hesitation; and they will not do what he desires if he cannot convince them and move them to action. And if a man is unable to use his mother tongue accurately, he not only turns many away from him day by day because of his obvious habits of carelessness, but when the supreme opportunity comes, he is, through his lack of power, unable to reach a large part of his audience of readers. Unless he is content to be a third-rate lawyer, minister, business man, or scientist, and is willing to be forever classed as uneducated, he must be able to increase the value of his thoughts by expressing them skillfully.¹

Interested, intelligent study of composition will enable us to develop greater skill in speaking and in writing. Some of us may discover that we have thoughts to which we desire to give literary expression. This desire we may ultimately accomplish if we first train ourselves in the clear, accurate, and forceful expression of the thoughts we now have. *Our immediate aim in studying composition should be the mastery of English as a necessary tool.*

¹From "The Art of Writing English," copyrighted, 1913, by R. W. Brown and N. W. Barnes. Used by permission of the American Book Company, publishers.

8. The mastery of English as a tool. Every person who attains success either as an artist or as an artisan must first of all become the master of his tools or instruments. He must acquire such skill in their use that he can do with them exactly what he desires to do. Every user of the English language who attains success as a speaker or a writer must first of all become the master of his language, the tool or instrument of communication. He must acquire such skill in its use that he can say accurately and effectively what he desires to say.

If we allow our present inability to speak and write well to discourage us so that we make no effort to master our language, we shall condemn ourselves to a life of commonplaceness and inefficiency. Similarly, if we envy successful speakers and writers their mastery of English but content ourselves merely with dreaming of the time when we too, through some magical gift, shall possess an equal mastery, we shall never realize our dream. Mastery of English does not come in that way. It must be won through persistent, well-directed effort.

In our efforts to gain greater skill in expression we have many valuable aids. Sympathetic teachers and good textbooks will furnish us guidance. Association with the best speakers and writers will stimulate and inspire us. By improving our speech we shall acquire accuracy and readiness of utterance and increase our power over words. By listening to good speakers and by reading widely we shall add to our general information as well as to our knowledge of the correct methods of speaking and writing. Through frequent systematic composition we shall gain indispensable practice in clear thinking and in the accurate expression of our thoughts. Sir Francis Bacon, a man who rose to great political power and literary eminence because of his mastery of English, emphasized the importance of reading, speaking, and writing. "Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man."