

Inspecting Shadows of Past Classroom Practices: Tracings from a Technical Writing Course in the Early Twentieth Century

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Summary

This article highlights some normally unmarked processes of teaching and learning that took place as technical writing courses emerged in American colleges, and more generally inspects some shadows of practice. First, it situates classroom activity in our current portraits of early technical writing pedagogy in American colleges, and second, it offers traces from a 1924 technical writing course found in the margins of a copy of Homer Andrew Watts' The composition of technical papers (1917). This trace evidence is used to highlight an underside of pedagogical histories that is difficult to recover, but worth seeking.

Some marginal markings from the text, and the references for this paper follow.

APPENDIX A: Marginal Notes in More Detail

Contents of Book	Pages	Included in reading assigned	Not Assigned or Marked to Omit	Markings that show reading
preface	v-ix			
PART I General Principles of Expository Writing				
Ch I: Introduction	3-11		[na]	
Ch II: Fundamental Problems and Suggestions	12-19		[na]	
Ch III: Principles which Govern the Planning and Writing of the Whole Composition	20-52		[na]	p. 36 –comment about outlines p. 49 correction of word
Ch IV: The Paragraph	53-76		[na]	
Ch V: The Sentence [150 ss]	77-140	exercises pp. 124-40	[pp. 77-123 na]	2/3s of 150 ss are checked or corrected
PART II Types of Technical Exposition				
Ch VI: Technical Description	143-197			
intro to section	143	√		
principles	146	√		
student themes [8]	157	1-3		4-6 have comments; 7 does not
technical descriptions [5]				
street lamps	168	√		√
mechanical filter	170	√		√
sand-drying plant	172	√		
burglar alarm	178	√		√
steam engine	186		[na]	
Ch VII: Exposition of Processes	198-254			
principles	198	√		underlining
student themes [7]	204	1-5	[6, 7 na]	comments on 2,3,5[none on 6,7]
expositions of processes [5]				
study of math	216		√	
erecting a tent	220	√		√
submarine construction	222	√		√
large telescope	233	√		√
refining petroleum	241		√	√
Ch VIII: Exposition of Ideas	255-347			
principles	255	√		underlining
student themes [8]	267	√		comments on 1-3
exposition of ideas [8]				
electric heaters	279	√		√
using a technical journal	281	√		√
reading journals	289	√		√
scientific method	290	√		√
web-footed engineer	297	√		√
electric traction systems	309		[na]	
telephone service	317		[na]	
origin of industrial system	335		[na]	
Ch IX: Reports	348-391			
principles	348	√		√
student reports [6]	366	√		√
professional reports [5]	377	√		√

Ch X: Business Letters	392-420	√		underlining
principles	392	√		√
student letters [7]	409	√		√
professional letters [15]	413	√		√
index	421-31			

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of both technical and sociopsychological advances in communication, especially as utilized in mass media. Other pivotal changes included challenges to accepted values, such as those supported by religion; changes in social relations, especially toward versions of group and individual equality; and an explosion of knowledge affecting paradigms as well as particular information. The educational response was mainly to develop technical colleges, to promote adult education at all levels, to turn attention to part-time and evening courses, and to provide more training and education within the industrial enterprises themselves. The adoption of modern methods of food production diminished the need for agricultural workers, who headed for the cities. The course develops technical writing skills necessary to communicate information gained through a process of technical or experimental work. The course highlights the factors that determine the degree of technicality of the language and concepts involved. You will learn how to write different technical reports, e.g., laboratory reports, research reports, design and feasibility reports, progress reports, consulting reports, etc. The course develops technical writing skills necessary to communicate information gained through a process of technical or experimental work. The course highlights the factors that determine the degree of technicality of the language and concepts involved. Of course, we don't want to crowd the students with too many ideas if this is going to stifle creativity, but we need to be ready with enough suggestions to make sure they can never say I can't think of anything to write. Finally, patterns and schemes help students to write with confidence. This is the first stage of looking at different genres that we mentioned above. They can write postcards from a picture we give them, or create an interview with a portrait, say, from 200 years ago. There are many writing games, too, such as story reconstruction activities where students have to build up a story from a set of pictures, each of which only one of them has seen. Writing-for-learning is the kind of writing we do to help students learn language or to test them on that language.