

## Case Study

# A Case for *Pedagogic Writing* Instruction for Pre-Service Teachers to Learn Applied Grammar in the Context of Their Own Writing

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### **Abstract**

*Revived interest in grammar as a tool to teach writing is a phenomenon of the 21st century since inquiry in the 50s determined it to have “no positive impact on” writing instruction (Locke, 2005; Qtd. in McCormack-Colbert, Ware, & Jones, 2018, p. 165). Yet in the past two and a half decades, the concepts of Contextualized Grammar and Pedagogic Grammar have earned recognition in English and Language Education as a new kind of instruction shown to enhance writing when providing learners strategic mini lessons in grammar. This article also proposes the converse: in a college grammar course, strategic writing instruction assists students to learn grammar and usage in an applied setting of creating, revising, and editing their own texts. This article first reviews the premises and bases for the reappearance of grammar to teach writing and then describes the writer’s parallel approach to grammar instruction through the strategic use of writing assignments referred to here as Pedagogic Writing. The article closes with an account of the performances and perceptions of pre-service teachers sent to English by the School of Education to take ENG G 207, Grammar and Usage, showing preliminarily their successful application across three semesters, from spring 2020 through spring 2021.*

### **Keywords**

*contextualized grammar, pedagogic grammar, pedagogic writing, rhetorical grammar, traditional grammar, and writing skills*

### **1. Introduction**

Teaching traditional grammar as part of writing instruction faded with studies in the mid-last century for lack of evidence that it helped writers. Because it was decontextualized from the act of writing itself,

grammar was something “done to” a text, after the fact. It has consisted of hunting for applications of grammar and usage that violate the rules or norms conveniently gathered in in English handbooks. But especially since the 90s, English and Language Education scholars and researchers have revived and transformed grammar instruction by integrating it into the writing process as students generate and revise their texts. English educators call it *Contextualized Grammar*, while Language educators use the term *Pedagogical Grammar*. But they share the practice of delivering grammar instruction through strategic mini lessons to enhance writing instruction.

Shaped by an English PhD concentrating in rhetoric and composition, I have mainly taught college courses in those areas. But I have also enjoyed periodic opportunities to teach ENG G 207, Grammar and Usage, for which the School of Education sends its pre-service teachers to the English Department. My first time occurred as three consecutive single-semester sections just before taking on administrative assignments as a school dean and as a vice chancellor in Academic Affairs for some years. Near the end of that sequence, I had grown dissatisfied with the traditional pedagogy represented by departmental sample syllabi: a grammar text and its unit materials, exercises, and tests. By the third iteration, I began to seek options within the 21st century literature.

I wanted to find methods more in keeping with my philosophy of teaching language to account for its intimate connections to both grammar and rhetoric. During that time, I found potential resources that signaled respect for the rule-relevance of grammar, while building students’ confidence in their literacy abilities. Although I lacked the time then to implement change, I have applied these resources since returning to the classroom in spring 2020, refreshing my excitement to teach grammar again—with an important difference. ENG G 207 is not a writing course. It uses writing to contextualize grammar instruction, not vice versa. Consequently, I call the approach *Pedagogic Writing*, in its parallels to *Pedagogic Grammar*. I have found it a viable way to cultivate interest and a willingness to invest effort in a subject that some learners may perceive as dull, too difficult, or irrelevant to their lives. Now, I am applying these discoveries to teach ENG G 207. My experiences in teaching writing and grammar have shown me first-hand that—with the right approach—they make ideal classroom companions. This article will describe the pedagogy and include preliminary evidence of student successes in spring and fall 2020 and spring 2021.

## 2. Review of the Literature

### 2.1 Viability of Traditional Grammar

Traditional grammar instruction has declined in the writing classroom without going away. Writing instructors still ask their students to remove errors from their writing, often in a final draft. They may or may not require a handbook, but if they do, it is likely to be used like a dictionary—as a resource for students to look up elements on their own, like commas or sentence-errors like fragments. Accordingly, learning is passive, at best, as a writer may well commit the same errors on the next occasion. Kolln has called the approach a “fix-it” effort (Qtd. in Micciche, 2004, p. 716). Shaughnessy has described it just

“a way of being right” rather than as “a way of thinking” or “a style of inquiry” (Qtd. in Micciche, p. 721). Schiach has referred to it as “decontextualized” basic skills to be somehow absorbed from student handbooks (Qtd. in Myhill, 2005, p. 77). Bruss (Qtd. in Micciche, 2004) has gone a step further, criticizing traditional grammar in “failing” to help learners to reflect on their writing “and the grammar that shape[s] the meaning of the message” (p. 722).

It would be unusual for an instructor under age 40 to have been exposed to non-traditional methods in teaching grammar as they have yet to make their way into the education of future teachers. I used this approach in ENG G 207 not only prior to 2006 but also in 2020 when I resumed teaching. Grammar was not a subject occupying space in my PhD writing courses even for a composition and rhetoric concentration. So, it was no surprise that the sample syllabi I received from the department that spring still relied on a grammar and a pedagogy of unit exercises and tests that involved no writing. The majority of faculty who teach our grammar course are part-time, many of them with an English education comprised of an M.A. often with credits heavy in literature. But whether credentialed by a masters or a PhD, we have largely been left to teach as we were taught—and many of us probably last studied grammar in middle or high school.

In contrast to traditional grammar instruction, writing instruction has evolved. For instance, critical thinking (CT) is now an expectation even in freshman composition. To paraphrase a widely cited definition among CT professionals, one who thinks critically arrives at an intentional “judgment” through interpretive, analytical, and/or evaluative acts based upon “fair-minded,” “reasonable,” “honest,” and “clear” evidence (Facione, 1990, p. 2). To teach critical thinking, two approaches are common: “infusion” –which calls on students to directly examine and apply CT concepts and principles; or by “immersion”—relying on the content-course curriculum for learners to reach these outcomes naturally (Ennis 1989). Unfortunately, CT is divorced from grammar considerations even in a writing course, except insofar as the writing process may succeed in “immersion.” Micciche (2004) argues that the same “driving commitment to teach critical thinking” should be the task of “rhetorical grammar,” which includes “reading rhetorically” (p. 718). Otherwise, where, when, and how may college freshmen and sophomores have learned to think critically such that it naturally flows into their use of grammar in their written texts? Moreover, even if grammar were taught by infusion, the content of a traditional grammar course lacks substance, without intentional applications to a text and its context. Reppen and Richards (2014) have argued for two perspectives on grammar: one as “knowledge” and the other as “ability.” In the first case, grammar knowledge may “focus on rules for sentence formation.” In the latter case, it contemplates active learning to observe and experience how students (or other writers) use grammar in their “spoken and written texts” (p. 5).

## 2.2 *Beginnings of Substantive Grammar*

Several voices have advocated teaching grammar as a matter of substance. Strate (2020) has attributed its emerging resilience today in part to an enduring and expansive history. He has reminded us, for example, that the very concept came to English from the Latin *grammatica* and traces back to

the ancient Greek's word *gramma*, both referring to "any single letter in the alphabet" and "any written document of record" (p. 67). Further, Strate has urged us to remember that "grammar originally referred to the study of language and literature, . . . encompassing both literacy and literary criticism, poetics and the interpretation of texts" (p. 67). In that respect, grammar is "a substantive matter of textual interpretation, analysis and evaluation" (p. 67).

A recent grammar text with substance is A.K. Barry's *English Grammar: Language as a Human Behavior* (2013). Aimed for a one-semester course for preservice teachers, its Preface cautions students not to expect a traditional text. It takes an organic approach in drawing "insights from modern linguistics" (xi). In part, this fact means that readers should anticipate topics which, once raised, will reappear elsewhere to study more deeply or in another context. Barry's arrangement also demonstrates how grammar elements "interrelate and function together, rather than being wholly separate" (xii). The focus on language as a human behavior emphasizes the "complex interaction between language rules" and their applications to writing (xii). So, instead of using terms like "correctness," the text speaks of "appropriateness" in what is said, heard, or read. Although the Barry raises "usage and usage questions whenever relevant" (xii), the Preface immediately affirms students' capabilities as language users, assuring them that in their study of grammar, they will "build . . . on what they already know, to develop an appreciation for how language works" (xi). I have been using Barry primarily as a teaching resource and for the section devoted to prospective English teachers.

In English Education, grammar instruction was invigorated by *Teaching Grammar in Context* (Weaver, 1996) and *Teaching Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing* (Weaver & Bush, 2008). Attesting to their value, Richard Nordquist (2020), a teacher-scholar with texts to his own credit, has unabashedly recommended them to practicing and prospective English teachers. Also, he has helped to disseminate their principles for teaching in relation to writing. Below I include those which have been especially useful to me, first as I looked for an alternative to traditional grammar and then as I have designed and implemented the new curriculum for ENG G 207.

- "Teaching grammar divorced from writing doesn't strengthen writing and therefore wastes time."
- "Sophisticated grammar is fostered in literacy-rich and language-rich environments."
- "Grammar options are best expanded through reading and in conjunction with writing."
- "Grammar conventions taught in isolation seldom transfer to writing."
- "Marking 'corrections' on students' papers does little good."
- "Grammar instruction should be included during various phases of writing (Qtd. in Nordquist, 2020).

In the first book, Weaver helpfully synthesizes four ways to view grammar, deduced from a variety of texts and contexts: grammar as a) syntactic structure, b) prescriptions for the use of that structure, c) rhetorical effectiveness in that use of structure, and d) fundamental "sentence sense," the ability to "comprehend and generate language" (Weaver, 1996, pp. 1-2). In addition, both of Weaver's books are grounded in quality research and theory, while the later book includes an informative table contrasting

the theoretical grounding of traditional and instruction: the one is “reductive,” requires students to learn grammar rules before writing, assesses their learning through tests apart from a context, and emphasizes “correctness” of “mistakes,” thus associated with the prospect of failure; the other is “productive,” involves students in writing as a context for mini grammar lessons, assesses learning through a variety of texts and their contexts, and treats errors as natural to learning, thereby associated with success (Weaver & Bush, 2008, pp. 81-82).

Among Weaver’s advocates, Chin (2000) has recommended and reprinted with permission Weaver’s list of how to attain a “Minimum of Grammar for Maximum Benefits.” The one below is a partially adapted list of those most useful to my approach in ENG G 207:

- Editing is a good time to teach “concepts on subject, verb, sentence, clause, and phrase.”
- Style can readily be taught “through sentence combining and sentence generating.”
- Sentence-sense benefits from having students manipulate their “syntactic elements.”
- In approaching “dialects of power,” it is wise to also teach the “power of dialects.”
- Teaching “for convention, clarity, and style” is a prime time to teach “punctuation and mechanics.”

Chin herself (2000) has also endorsed Weaver’s classroom strategies that are now widely practiced in teaching grammar in the context of writing, including sentence combining and sentence generation activities, interactions learner-to-learner, learner-to-teacher, peer partnering, as well as conferencing with students on their progress or challenges when they may arise. As a regular practice, Chin encourages students by speaking to them in terms of “working together to expand their repertoire of syntactic and verbal styles,” as opposed to their hunting and “fixing” errors. Over the three semesters since I have shifted away from practices of traditional grammar, I have worked deliberately to excise my use of terms like “correcting mistakes” in favor of “finding opportunities for revision and editing.” Extending this line of thinking, Weaver, Bush, Anderson, and Bills (2006) have urged writing instructors to intertwine grammar mini lessons throughout the writing process—not just by integrating them but employing them with the right kind of activities. For instance, to make writing itself more impactful, learners should consider their “purposes and audiences” (p. 78) if they are to discover how their sentences “create meaning” for them (p. 99). To this advice, Ediger (2018) has suggested grounding lessons in “real-life activities” and “varied kinds of writing” to deepen knowledge of how grammar works in context (p. 147).

### *2.3 Emergence of Rhetorical Grammar*

Reppen and Soetaert (2012) have acclaimed the historical ties between grammar and rhetoric as still much alive. In the two decades in which I have taught writing, assignments have included rhetorical strategies. For instance, in fall 2020, my freshman composition students did a rhetorical analysis of Cady Stanton’s “Declaration of Sentiments” as their first major paper and compared it to the “Declaration of Independence.” For that purpose, they learned to identify and discuss how the documents related to their audiences, using Aristotle’s appeals to reason (*logos*), feeling (*pathos*), and

character (*ethos*) (Furley & Nehamas, 1994). But until I implemented *Pedagogical Writing* in teaching ENG G 207, grammar students did not engage substantive matters, as they did no writing. However, Kolln and Gray's (2011) text *Rhetorical Grammar* gave me tools to incorporate rhetorical analysis and evaluation in my recent classes. As a result, assignments help learners acquire a "conscious knowledge of [their] sentence structure" as a necessary part of rhetorical strategy. To illustrate, rhetoric and grammar occupy one space when writers address issues like cohesiveness and conciseness. Applying Kolln and Gray's work has given me ways to build students' confidence in recognizing and appreciating "their own language ability" as part of "the intuitive grammar expertise" innate in all human beings (xiii).

Another sensible account of rhetorical grammar appears in Joty, Carenini, and Ng (2015), whose thinking resembles that of Kolln and Gray. "Clauses and sentences rarely stand on their own in an actual discourse"; consequently, rhetorical analysis enables students to "uncover" how the parts of their texts combine to create a coherent structure (p. 385) to serve their purpose and audience. By incorporating *Pedagogic Writing* in ENG G 207, to this end and others, my grammar students write three short narratives during the semester, each focused on a different aspect of *literacy*, broadly defined, as detailed this article's third and fourth sections.

#### 2.4 Relationship to Literacy

Among the positive educational forces having been recently brought to bear on grammar, another is the close relationship of substantive grammar instruction to teaching writing, and thus to cultivating literacy skills. The American Institutes for Research (2021) has singled out literacy as "the fundamental skill that unlocks learning and provides individuals with the means to pursue knowledge and enjoyment independently." Experience shows that skills like writing develop gradually over time; however, it makes good sense that those privileged to teach students in courses closely related to literacy skills, provide the best kind of instruction, including in writing and grammar. The World Literacy Organization (2021) has related student development of literacy skills to "rich discussions in the classroom" in which they apply learning "to new and different contexts." In this way they can "analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what they learn." As a result, "literate students" position themselves "to challenge the assumptions and implications of ideas and institutions" and to apply it "to take action on important issues. . . . to change the world."

In this context, it stands to reason leaders in public education would support literacy education.

But it is not that simple. In my state since the 90s, policy-driven forces of government have taken an unanticipated toll on the capacity of four-year public colleges and universities to facilitate the literacy of students with basic needs. By implementing a community college system and limiting four-year degree programs to a set number of credit hours (typically 120), four-year institutions have found themselves legally and/or morally unable to meet the literacy needs of some of their admits. In theory, these policies constructively aimed to make associate and baccalaureate degrees available to more residents, taking less time and money. Yet they have deprived some students an immediate opportunity

for their literacy growth.

Here is how it has happened. To support the new community college system, the legislature has reduced or failed to increase dollars to four-year institutions, while holding back higher tuition. To curtail competition of four-year with two-year college selection, it also made courses in basic math and English sole domain of the two-year. But financial burdens have resulted in some broadening of admission requirements by the four-year, leading to more probational admits who need basic skills. On the premise that an institution ought to educate the students they admit, the English Department created a hybrid writing course ENG W 130—neither remedial (without associated credit hours) nor a program requirement (elective). It combined key basic skills with gradually integrating more typical assignments of a freshman composition course. Students who have taken have found it useful. However, enrollments have been relatively low because students often prefer the most direct path to graduation.

These state policies have also taken an indirect toll on enrollment in ENG G 207, as it is neither required for the English major nor a requirement of the General Education Program, whose hours were cut back to 30 statewide. Most of the English Department's 200-level courses are different kinds of intermediate writing, to accommodate majors in other fields like Business, Computer Science, Education, or the like. But with state regulation of credit hours, those programs have dropped them as a degree requirement, converting them to a pre-requisite for admission to their major. To make them available to these students, the English Department submitted all the 200-level writing courses for General Education Program approval, which has not increased credit hours but given students more choices for their second General Education Writing course. However, these courses had to add to their own outcomes those in one of the three categories of General Education [omit: which they had] to fulfill: Arts and Humanities, Natural Science, or Social Science.

Meanwhile, ENG G 207, Grammar and Usage, was not a writing course, thus not eligible as an option under General Education. It is sustained by the School of Education, who requires it to position their majors to pass the state licensure test, with the added incentive that prospective educators should be effective communicators. To meet their demand only requires two sections in spring and fall and one in summer. Consequently, the course has received spare attention from the department. To my knowledge, only three full-time faculty have taught it in 25 years, myself, another English professor, and the Director of the Writing Center. As mentioned earlier, the problem is that any grammar attempted in service of writing remains decontextualized, awaiting opportunities for faculty to learn and implement writing as a substantive way to teach grammar.

### *2.5 Language Studies of Pedagogic Grammar Instruction*

Akin to the earlier discussion of teaching grammar with substance in the service of writing instruction, the concept of *Pedagogic Grammar* instruction is evident among today's research studies. They have examined issues like whether teaching well-timed grammar mini lessons in conjunction with stages of the writing process generates positive results. For instance, McCormack-Colbert, Ware, and Jones (2018) conducted action research to examine "the repertoire of infinite possibilities" in which

instruction study may provide learners (p. 170). Specifically, they explored whether teaching of this kind could benefit “learners with persistent literacy difficulties” (p. 165). The module they created for instruction also kept in mind insights from Myhill and Watson’s earlier study (2014) that to be helpful, grammar instruction must be “embedded and purposeful . . . at relevant points” (Qtd. in Mc-Cormack-Colbert, Ware, & Jones, 2018, p. 169). The researchers arranged for a classroom teacher in a Wales secondary school to implement their module with a group of five learners with dyslexia. In the lesson, they analyzed a piece of nonfiction writing and applied what they saw there as useful to write their own “scientific magazine article.” Shortly after the experiment, the instructor shared her belief with the researchers that applying the model’s patterns to their own work seemed to stretch learners’ comfort zone and to induce “greater confidence” (p.180).

Similarly, Robinson and Feng (2016) have affirmed the strategic use of targeted grammar instruction in key moments of students actively writing. Concerned that fewer than a third of American elementary students have “effective strategies to access what they know” about language in order “to build on that knowledge,” they found that subjects increased the quality of their writing skills in receiving direct grammar instruction through well-timed mini lessons to facilitate their sentence structure, mechanics, and usage. Writing also provides opportunities to discover and generate ideas, organize them coherently, think through them to solve problems, and reflect on them from a distance. Gray and Smithers (2019) drew a comparable conclusion to Robinson and Feng (2016) in testing the efficacy of task-based language teaching (TBLT) to promote second and foreign language skills development. They noted that L2 learners “often lack the functional support for accurate, fluent output,” but when they replaced traditional grammar explanations with a pedagogical grammar known as MAP— “a semantic meaning-order approach”— subjects strengthened their “form-to-meaning understanding” (p. 88). MAP first includes “a synthetic approach, in which “grammar is synthesized for communicative use” and then “an analytic approach that analyzes communicative use as served by students’ grammatical forms” (p. 90). The investigators concluded that although using TBLT and MAP separately had increased “syntactic complexity, “when they were combined, greater “gains in accuracy and fluency” occurred, as the treatment directed learners “attention to a sequence of functional choices,” thereby “simplifying or eliminating” a need “for metalinguistic explanation” (p. 104).

The most innovative approach to *Pedagogic Grammar* in my review of this literature came from Rule (2017), who blended a MAP and rhetorical approach to sentence style with the “neuroscientific concept of embodied simulation,” which involves “visual, motor, and spatial modalities of the body” to “attune writers to the felt effects of written language” and the prospect of revision (p. 19). She concluded that the subjects’ exposure to this mode of “invigorated instruction” enabled them to transcend a gap between “knowing about grammar” and “knowing how to do grammar,” when invited to refine their meaning through a change of syntax (p. 19). I use this approach to revision and editing throughout the semester in ENG G 207.



### 3. G 207's Strategic Use of Students' Own Writing to Learn Grammar and Usage

Notably, the strong interest in grammar instruction found within the research and scholarship discussed above has aimed to improve writing through carefully targeted grammar instruction. But G 207 is obliged to teach grammar to its pre-service future teachers. So, how then does writing become a means and not the end of course assignments that include three papers with multiple drafts stretching over the semester? The rest of the article will illustrate how G 207 had addressed this question through the concepts, principles, and methods alluded to in the literature review.

#### 3.1 Course Materials

- Instead of a textbook, students learn grammar through writing their own texts (i.e., the course papers identified below).
- Course assignments are supported by instructor-created material or adapted elements from credible websites. For grammar, they have included Purdue's OWL: Online Writing Lab, No Red Ink, and Grammar Bytes, and our own Writing Center, while a variety of other sites provide resources on matters of literacy, narrative writing, or other course content.

##### 3.1.1 Illustrated Task-Set on Sentence Types

Beginning with the second draft of paper 2, I provide students the following task-set to learn the features of sentence types and to apply them to identify those in their texts for later revision.

- Task 1: *Analyzing Your Draft 2, Paper 2 Sentence Types* - Drawing on the grammar material provided for this purpose, number the sentences in the first two paragraphs of your latest version of paper 2. Identify the sentence type, in the margin after the sentence. Then at the top of each paragraph, total in the left margin how many of each kind you identified: simple (SS), compound (CD), complex (CX), or compound/complex (CD/CX).
- Task 2: *Assessing Your Confidence Level that Your Task 1 Responses Match the Criteria* - Review the material on sentence-type features and then indicate your level of confidence on a scale of 1-4, (4 being "most") for a criteria match to your identified sentence types in Task 1. Place this number beside the parenthesis where that identification occurs. Give reasons or details for your answer or ask a question to seek clarification. *1 = little to no confidence; 2 = slight confidence; 3 = mostly confident; 4 = highly confident.*
- Task 3: *Review the Task 1 Responses from Your Designated Peer Partner* - Consulting the material on Sentence Type elements, indicate your level of confidence in your partner's feedback on whether your identifications match the criteria by the same 1-4 scale as in Task 2. Give reasons or details for your answer or ask a question to seek clarification.
- Task 4: *Making Sense of Feedback on Your Sentence-Type Identifications* - Write two paragraphs: one about the sense you make from the feedback you have gleaned from Tasks, 1, 2, and 3, and the other about what you have learned about sentence-type variety to make the draft more effective for readers. Also, explain any issues or ask questions to learn more.

- Task 5: *Using the handout advice on “Good Practices for When to Intentionally Use a Specific Sentence-type”* – a) closely examine the sentences original to your draft 2’s first two paragraphs and highlight the number in *yellow* of any sentences you want to revise based on the advice; and b) just below the yellow text throughout the 2 paragraphs, revise the sentence into the recommended type, using *green* text. Finally, write 2-3 sentences on any “patterns” you have discovered in your sentence type use to better serve your sentence-level revision for the final draft.

### 3.2 Course Papers

- Students write the texts to which they will apply varied course guidance during the term. For example, each of three papers is a short (3-4 page) narrative essay in three drafts, unified by a *literacy* theme.

- In writing their *literacy narratives*, students tell stories from their lived experience in relation to a given literacy concept.

- The literacy concepts derive from a seminal piece by Suzanne Langer on “Language and Thought” anthologized by Eschholz, Rosa, and Clark in *Language Awareness: Readings for College Writers* (2005). Relevant to G 207, Langer addresses the human linguistic ability to use both *signs* and *symbols*--rather than just the *signs* through which all animals, including humans, respond instinctively to the presence of something they experience. If it is threatening, they instantly either “flee” or “fight.” However, only human beings have the capacity to interpret *symbols*, thereby freeing them to “make something out of an experience, through “conceptualizing.” In that process, they may take account of the present, as well as reflect on prior experience and project their thoughts into the future to consider goals and values. Langer has spoken of the decisions emerging from our conceptualizing as becoming part of the larger “history of human culture—of intelligence and morality. . . and religion. . . always and only, found in human societies” (p. 56). These are the foundational ideas for the three course papers.

- Narratives call for learners to be both the main character and the narrator who conceives and unfolds a plot, sets it in a scene, and peoples it with other characters who interact through periodic dialogue, as the action rises to a high point of tension before resolving.

- Biographical models of literacy narratives are analyzed for these features and for their significant content on coming to language by Malcolm X, Helen Keller, David Raymond, and a student paper, all anthologized in Eschholz, Rosa, and Clark (2005). G 207 students are free to choose their topics within the context of the literacy concept central to each paper.

- *Pedagogic Grammar* instruction unfolds strategically in connection with the sequence of drafts, with increasing focus on revision and editing to embody more effective sentence construction and application of other elements of grammar and usage, to be demonstrated in subsequent drafts.

### 3.3 Writing Prompts

- Paper # 1 asks students to work within Langer’s concept of a *sign* to write a personal-experience narrative involving how it was “read” in a way that had an impact on their life at the time. Popular

choices have included interpreting behaviors of (or as) a child, of a pet, or of a risk taken, enriching their understanding.

- Paper # 2 calls for students to work within Langer’s concept of a *symbol* to tell a personal story about a challenge they faced and what it symbolized for them, then and now.

- Paper # 3 requests students to choose an event or closely related set of events that significantly impacted or shaped their *literacy* as a writer or reader. *Literacy* may be defined narrowly to focus on their writing or reading experience, or broadly to focus on an experience in which they used their power of *conceptualization* to work through a confusing or problematic situation. For this project, they read and analyze more of the *literacy-narrative* models mentioned above. A common topic that has involved both meanings of *literacy* has related to a behavior in which the learner was forced by a parent, teacher, or significant other to do something to which he or she was strongly opposed. But in living it through and looking back on it now, he or she was able to re-assess the experience as turning out well.

### 3.4 Performance Rubrics

- The first-draft rubric lays out performance criteria for skills in Narrative, Literacy, Writing, Sentence, and Grammar/Usage. To illustrate, “Writing Skills” focus on big-picture items like purpose, thesis, audience, and organization. “Grammar Skills” at this stage addresses sentence boundary issues and the comma rules most relevant to them, as well as spelling, capitalization, and agreement.

- The rubric for draft two adds or modifies some first-draft criteria based on new instruction. For example, narrative writing benefits from the type of language used, with verbs playing a more significant role, descriptive language needed to clarify the scene and to develop character interactions, dialogue for the audience to “hear” appropriate ones, and the story’s development unfolding by the narrator-writer. Additional comma rules for sentence construction are integrated into the mix, as well.

- The final draft rubric’s expands criteria for Sentence and Grammar and Usage Skills to expect more mature sentence construction, having completed, for example, the sequenced task-set appearing above; it also expects effective use of both the semicolon and the colon and all comma usage. Note below that they act separately as an applied grammar test. [See the Appendix for the rubric guiding students through paper 3’s final draft at the end of the course.]

### 3.5 Applied Grammar and Usage Tests

- Each final draft embeds a progressively complex applied test of Sentence Skills and Grammar and Usage Skills.

- Criteria match what students should know and be able to do with sentence construction and effective punctuation and mechanics at that time.

- The test score counts toward the final draft score of each course paper, as well as separately as an applied test score, thus giving greater weight to grammatical outcomes overall.

### *3.6 Classroom Instruction*

- An assignment is due each session and provides the basis for discussion of relevant grammar and writing instruction. As an extra-incentive, students who attend class earn 10 participation points plus the designated score for the specific assignment.
- All sessions occur for 75-minutes twice a week and continue to be delivered by Zoom, due to restraints on physical contact arising from health concerns related to COVID 19.
- Zoom break-out sessions in pairs or small groups sometimes precede whole-class discussion, each kind generating constructive criticism on applications of the day's topic(s) for instruction.
- Whole-class discussion involves every student giving examples from his or her work, asking questions about it, and receiving /providing suggestions from/to classmates.

## **4. Indirect Assessment as a Tentative Tool Pending a New Assessment Plan**

Although much has been accomplished since resuming instruction of G 207 in spring 2020, I will turn my attention in fall 2021 to create an authentic assessment plan tied to course outcomes. Included in this work will be re-designing the rubrics for each draft of the three course papers to identify how criteria tie to the course outcomes. I will continue to use their final drafts to embed three applied grammar and usage tests.

### *4.1 Student Performances at Three Checkpoints by Current Grade Averages*

Meanwhile, for my own understanding and for my Faculty Annual Report to the dean, I have relied on the grade-point averages at given checkpoints during the term. Course points are distributed widely across daily work, generally 15-25 points, first and middle drafts of papers 40-50 points, and final drafts 80-100, plus the separately applied test score of 40-50 points assessed by the rubric's performance criteria for sentence and grammar and usage skills. Altogether these categories count over half of the total points possible.

Our Canvas delivery system allows students to access their grades and averages very quickly throughout the course, while campus policy asks faculty to report to students every few weeks on their "engagement" (attendance, participation, assignment completion, and performance level). I use this opportunity to affirm learners for what they do successfully and to assist them with a conference or a referral, as needed.

### *4.2 Student Performances*

The information below on student performance relates to the three checkpoints I have made in each of three-semester of G 207 since spring 2020.

**Table 1. Student Performances Reflected as Grade Averages at Checkpoints**

Data available for Spring 2020 - 13 enrolled: 3 checkpoints of course averages

02/12/20:	A (1)	B (6)	C (3)	D/W/F (3)
04/06/20:	A (1)	B (5)	C (2)	D/W/F (5)
05/03/20:	A (1)	B (6)	C (3)	D/W/F (3)

Data available for Fall 2020 - 24 enrolled: 3 checkpoints of course averages

09/06/20:	A (9)	B (9)	C (3)	D/W/F (3)
11/06/20:	A (7)	B (8)	C (7)	D/W/F (2)
12/05/21	A (8)	B (10)	C (4)	D/W/F (2)

Data Available for Spring 2021 – 14 enrolled: 3 checkpoints of course averages

02/28/21:	A (4)	B (5)	C (1)	D/W/F (4) [note: I moved these figures to the left margin to match those above]
04/14/21:	A (2)	B (3)	C (4)	D/W/F (5)
05/05/21:	A (2)	B (6)	C (3)	D/W/F (3)

Comments: These data show fluidity in how students began their work in G 207, maintained it through and after mid-term, and concluded it, all in 15 weeks. During each semester, some students or their loved ones were infected by the Covid 19 virus. All of them attended Zoom classes as they felt up to it during their isolation period and illness. Most of them made up the work they had to miss. However, the lack of continuity that naturally occurred made tasks more difficult. Although they had the assignments and related material, having to miss class discussions impacted grade averages to some degree. Most changes in course average over these checkpoints involved movement between B and C range. The data also showed that more students enrolled in G 207 in fall than spring, which I had also experienced in the earlier sequence in which I taught the course. A few withdrawals came in the first week or two, with two more nearer the end, for students who had encountered problems in life or work interfering with their time or energy to devote to studies.

#### *4.3 Spring 2021 Student Self-Assessment Of Course Progress*

Anticipating the upcoming assessment project, I experimented in spring 2021 by asking students for feedback on how they saw themselves improving over the term in what they knew and/or were able to do. For this purpose, I provided them the list of outcomes below and asked them to quantify their perceived progress from the outset of the term, using a scale of 1-5 (imagining it set to zero the first day of class).

Course outcomes variously emphasize grammar/usage and writing. However, G 207 relies on the sentence as the foundational unit of grammar/usage. So, learners ultimately demonstrate these skills through their drafts of the three literacy narratives. Course methods also account for an organic overlap

of grammar/usage skills with the rhetorical skills reflected by students' choices to be clear and intentional in their content.

Yet these options are also embedded within the specific criteria used to assess skills in narrative, literacy, writing, and sentence construction. Accordingly, the impact of *Pedagogic Writing* instruction to help students learn grammar is arguably difficult to distinguish from *Pedagogic Grammar* instruction aimed to improve student writing. But in a course devoted to grammar, it does not concern me. My hope is to encourage more grammar instructors to incorporate strategic writing assignments for students to use their own texts to develop what they know and can do. Meanwhile, pending further study and experience, students' perceptions about the course and their learning experience will be a useful guide to the next steps for development and/or ongoing improvement.

#### 4.4 Student Self-Assessment

**Table 2. Spring 2021 Course Outcomes as Student Self-Assessment of Progress**

1) Communicate effectively through appropriately meeting the course standards for written English in your own texts and in response to texts written by others: $39/45 \times 5 = 4.33$
2) Integrate a reasoned point of view in appropriate types of expression for self and others as educated adult: $41.5/45 \times 5 = 4.61$
3) Differentiate the basic English phrases and clauses by type and function and how each serves communication in different ways: $36/45 \times 5 = 4.00$
4) Vary sentence types for more engaging and more mature expression, as well as clarity, conciseness, and cohesion for readability: $40/45 \times 5 = 4.44$
5) Apply appropriate/correct grammar & usage according to how the words function within a sentence: $35/45 \times 5 = 3.89$
6) Assess constructively your own texts and those of your peers according to performance criteria: $39/45 \times 5 = 4.33$
7) Adapt a message to meet the needs and expectations of your readers, to move them to belief and/or action: $37.5/45 \times 5 = 4.10$
8) Demonstrate <i>literacy</i> as a concept by applying it to experiences that show its significance in one's life and/or work. $39.5/45 \times 5 = 4.3$

Comments: Tasked to differentiate whether these outcomes serve *Pedagogic Writing* instruction or *Pedagogic Grammar* instruction, I view outcomes 1, 3, and 5 as relating primarily but not only to grammar instruction. Outcome 2 relates more to writing instruction. Outcomes 4, and 6-8 relate mostly to writing instruction, with # 8's focus on *literacy* also linking the three course papers, relevant to the role of literacy in learning. Student ratings on all outcomes averaged 4.26 overall and ranged from a

high of 4.61 to a low of 3.89. The favorable numbers suggest that students felt more confident in both their writing and their intentional and evolving use of grammar within it, in view of the course objectives as they understood them.

A more regular source of student perceptions of G 207 takes the form of campus Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETS) at the end of each semester, as an indirect measure of assessment. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness asks students for SET input by a given date. The number of replies from my students below lead me to suspect that a few may have forgotten, others were perhaps occupied by exams, and still others may have been turning to next interests (summer or the holidays), among other possibilities. SETS consist of two parts: a) students' level of agreement with a list of affirmative statements about the course, measured by a Likert Scale, and b) responses to open-ended questions on perceived strengths and weaknesses of the course.

#### 4.5 Student Evaluations of Teaching

**Table 3. Learner-Agreement with Affirmative Statements about the Course Experience**

Topics Remarkd Upon	Spr 20 (n 10/12)	Fa 20 (n 12/24)	Spr 21 (n 7/13)
Clarifying examples of important course concepts	90%;	83%;	100%
Clear course objectives	90%;	75%;	100%
Clear expectations for learning	70%;	75%;	100%
Prompt return of exams to benefit me	100%;	50%;	100%
Enough grading opportunities	100%;	91%;	100%
Prepared for class	90%;	90%;	100%
Learned a lot	80%;	75%;	100%
Avg. "n" response rate overall 29/49 = 61%	Avg. 89%	Avg. 77%	Avg. 100%
Avg. of all responses 266/3 = 89%			

Students are also invited to comment on their course experience through the open-ended questions at the end of the form. Below is a *summary* of sentiments shared by one or more learners in at least two of the three sections.

#### 4.6 Individual Responses to Open-Ended SET Questions

Question: <i>Which are the strongest or most valuable aspects of the course?</i>
Perceptions on learning:
Learning many different and helpful things that improved communication skills
Learning grammar through my own writing and editing our own papers
Learning through my own mistakes and having constructive feedback
Learning through challenge while comfortable to ask questions or seek help

Perceptions on instructional methods:
Using our own papers to learn grammar, with specific deadlines and timely feedback
Great conversations in our discussions and participation in class meetings
Enjoyable assignments, both basic and challenging
Getting grades back faster than normal
Question: <i>What are the major weaknesses or least valuable elements of the course?</i>
Perceptions on learning: None of the responses related to learning
Perceptions on methods:
Having so many smaller assignments were hard to keep up with
Being able to follow some assignments
Meeting on Zoom, which sometimes had connectivity problems

Comments: Although I chose to summarize only those responses with similar thoughts or feelings of students in at least 2 of the 3 sections, my own review always examines and reflects on the comments of every student. In many cases, they were positive, including several of those above. In other cases, they have provided useful perceptions for me to reflect upon their implications for improving instruction going forward. One reason that may have led some students not to respond to the SETs in the latest section was their having just completed the Self-Assessment Survey. The last few comments in the table just above will be topics for review and planning this summer.

## 5. Limitations and Conclusion

One hope of this article has been to raise awareness among language educators of *Pedagogic Grammar* as a promising tool for writing instruction. Yet it is also an argument for *Pedagogic Writing* instruction as a fruitful way to support students to learn grammar in the context of their own writing, the approach illustrated here for ENG G 207 over the past few semesters. Students' testimony, though a small sample across three terms, encourages me that we are on to something better than I had experienced earlier using the traditional method. Nonetheless, those for whom I write here represent a broad spectrum of fields and specialties. Few of you may be teaching a course devoted only to grammar and usage. Yet you may perhaps find other reasons to connect with this content. Language as discourse has a way of drawing diverse elements together. As writer and readers, we share a common desire for our students to learn—to know and/or be able to do the various objectives to which we direct their energies. Likely, we have also helped to motivate them, whether a single nudge to do their best, or a series of them to keep on trying throughout the term. Further, we may also have tried to help them gain a sense of self-satisfaction or pride in what they have accomplished. Each effort we make may be more impactful than we know or imagine. In this context, I hope that you have found something of value here to your own language instruction for learners.



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## Appendix

ENG G 207 Rubric for Final Draft of Paper 3, Spring 2020

Name: Literacy Narrative Pts Earned: Applied Test 3 Pts Earned:

The number of points possible in the segments below varies. Consequently, they will be earned according to the scales and criteria below. So, for a criterion worth 4 pts, all 4 pts will be awarded for a "more-than-acceptable" performance, etc.

Scale 5: Evidence is - 5) Exemplary; 4 = More than Acceptable; 3 = Acceptable; 2 = Borderline; 1 = Insufficient or Not Evident [Note: I moved this phrase from the line beneath it to go with the present line]

Scale 4: Evidence is - 4) More than Acceptable; 3 = Acceptable; 2 = Borderline; 1-0 = Generally Not Evident

Scale 3: Evidence is - 3) Consistently Evident; 2 = Inconsistently Evident; 1-0 = Generally Not Evident

Scale 2: Evidence is - 2) Consistently Evident; 1-0 = Inconsistently Evident or Generally Not Evident

#### 15 pts Traditional Essay with Mixed Genre Skills

- Effectively blends information and illustration with persuasion (4 pts)
- Clearly targets an audience of college students who have not thought much about literacy in general or their own (4 pts)
- Directs a clear thesis to the audience about the nature and value of literacy in a context they can relate to (2 pts)
- Organizes paragraphs around topic sentences relevant to support the thesis or premise (3 pts)
- Supports topic sentences with illustrative details (2 pts)

#### 15 pts Literacy Knowledge Shown and Conveyed

- Provides an appropriate definition of literacy, explicit or implied, and credits any sources (4 pts)
- Illustrates the nature of literacy through examples from school, college, and life or work (4 pts)
- Explains how literacy grows through a variety of challenges to read, write, and/or communicate (2 pts)
- Addresses the importance/value of literacy development to the writer and reader (2 pts)
- Relates literacy to an adapted quote from Langer's essay "Thought and Language" and/or from the G 207 course syllabus options (3 pts)

#### 15 pts Writing Skills for Cohesion and Coherence Demonstrated

- Threads the main thesis and/or a related theme through the whole, either explicit and/or implied (3 pts)
- Aims the title to hint at the premise, purpose, and audience for writing (2 pts)
- Transitions readers paragraph to paragraph (pointer words, useful repetition, parallelism) (3 pts)
- Transitions readers from sentence to sentence (e.g., needed for clarity) (3 pts)
- Conjunctions (fanboys and subordinates) show an effective logical connection: e.g., similarity, contrast, consequence, cause, addition, etc. (4 pts)

### 15 pts Writing/Grammar Skills for Conciseness

- Demonstrates attentive editing for conciseness (3 pts)
- Repeats words/ideas only for a useful purpose (e.g., clarity, emphasis) (3 pts)
- Uses active voice in general, reserving passive only for a strategic purpose (e.g., audience sensitivity) (2 pts)
- Uses compound sentences only for equally important and clearly related main clauses (4 pts)
- Avoids vagueness in word choice (e.g., “there are and limits “is,” “are,” “were,” “am” to helping verbs appearing with an action verb) (3 pts)

### 20 pts Sentence Construction [Note: please change the introductory ‘signs’ below to match the box-shape used in above sections]

- ✚ Builds mature sentences thru multiple methods, including
  - Varied openings (3 pts)
  - Varied sentence types (4 pts)
  - Varied sentence lengths (3 pts)
  - Strategically placed simple sentences for emphasis or separation (2 pts)
  - Strategically using two closely related and equally important independent clauses as compound sentences (3 pts)

### 20 pts Effective Grammar and Usage Observance

- Free of Comma splices, Run-on sentences, and Sentence fragments (5 pts)
- Free of errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation of book/play titles (3 pts)
- Free of agreement errors (pronoun/reference; subject/verb) (2 pts)
- Uses one or more commas to separate (5 pts)
  - an introductory word, phrase, or clause from the main clause [Note: please change the circles here and below to the box-sign used above]
  - items in a series
  - two adjectives that modify the same noun
  - non-essential sentence element from the essential part of the sentence
  - a parenthetical statement
  - narrator’s words from spoken dialogue
- Uses a hyphen to connect an adjective modifying a second adjective in a sentence (2 pts)
- Uses the semicolon and the colon effectively for the purposes and occasions studied (3 pts)