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who cared more for politics than he did for men and women. English politics are interesting chiefly to Englishmen, but whether England lives or dies politically, there is always a world full of human beings, who are after all the most fascinating study in the world.

A NATIONAL SURVEY OF THE GRADING OF COLLEGE
FRESHMAN COMPOSITION

H. W. JAMES

During the past year the writer has made a national survey of the grading of college Freshman composition. This was done by having compositions mimeographed in longhand and graded by teachers of English in colleges and universities of the United States. In this article he will present the technique employed, quote the compositions which were used, give a summary of the results, and point out some constructive measures which will assist in remedying certain defective conditions the study brings to light.

Two short college Freshman compositions were chosen and sent to the heads of the English departments in several of the more important colleges in every state with the request that instructors giving courses in Freshman composition grade the papers. Compositions of one page in length were selected to facilitate sending several copies to each school and also that the request would not seem too large an undertaking. Care was taken to reduce variables to as great an extent as possible. The themes were mimeographed in longhand to avoid introducing the new factor of typewriting. Instruction was given to use 100 per cent for perfect and 70 per cent for passing in order to have all grades on the same basis. It was asked that the themes be graded as having been written after the student had completed six weeks of college Freshman composition. (The papers were sent out on November 13, hence this standard was fresh in the minds of the instructors.) As above mentioned, it was requested that instructors giving courses in English composition grade the papers. That this was carried out is indicated by the

following quotation from a letter received from an English head in one of our large state universities: "The four instructors are three full professors and one assistant professor. They have had many years of experience in grading Freshman themes."

The response to the foregoing request exceeded all expectations. It seemed that the questionnaire was sent out at a time when English instructors were thinking along the line of the problem. Fully one-third of those returning grades wrote a personal letter expressing their interest and giving suggestions. The following three excerpts from letters will indicate the nature of the replies.

From the English head in one of the large eastern universities:

The situation you are studying exists everywhere, I am sure, and the results of your investigation will be a welcome contribution to composition teachers. I am glad to co-operate in this way and shall appreciate the report.

From the English head in one of the large southern colleges:

I think that you have hit upon an excellent plan for ascertaining the general practice in colleges as regards the standards in grading English themes. I have often wished for some sort of consensus of opinion myself, and your plan ought to bring satisfactory results. I trust that my report will not be too late to be incorporated with the others and that I may have the benefit of your conclusions.

From the English head in one of the large state colleges on the Pacific Coast:

We discussed the subject among ourselves, and came to the conclusion that you had originated what may in the future become a state-wide and possibly even a nation-wide practice.

Replies were received from 75 colleges and universities, giving the grades upon the two compositions of 363 English instructors. In order that the readers may evaluate properly the report the following complete list of schools reporting is given:

Iowa State College	Ames, Iowa
University of Pittsburgh	Pittsburgh, Pa.
Centre College	Danville, Ky.
University of Vermont	Burlington, Vt.
Mississippi A. and M. College	A. and M. College, Miss.
University of Alabama	Tuscaloosa, Ala.
Beloit College	Beloit, Wis.
University of Washington	Seattle, Wash.

University of North Carolina	Chapel Hill, N.C.
University of Wisconsin	Madison, Wis.
University of Texas	Austin, Tex.
Purdue University	Lafayette, Ind.
Howard College	Birmingham, Ala.
Greensboro College	Greensboro, N.C.
Indiana University	Bloomington, Ind.
University of North Dakota	Grand Forks, N.D.
Columbia University	New York City
University of Missouri	Columbia, Mo.
University of Tennessee	Knoxville, Tenn.
University of Nebraska	Lincoln, Neb.
University of Michigan	Ann Arbor, Mich.
Ohio State University	Columbus, Ohio
University of South Carolina	Columbia, S.C.
Bryn Mawr College	Bryn Mawr, Pa.
Florida State College for Women	Tallahassee, Fla.
George Washington University	Washington, D.C.
University of Wyoming	Laramie, Wyo.
Converse College	Spartanburg, S.C.
Ohio University	Athens, Ohio
University of Kansas	Lawrence, Kan.
Mount Holyoke College	South Hadley, Mass.
Grinnell College	Grinnell, Iowa
Nebraska Wesleyan University	University Place, Neb.
Washburn College	Topeka, Kan.
Brown University	Providence, R.I.
Princeton University	Princeton, N.J.
Greenville Woman's College	Greenville, S.C.
University of Chicago	Chicago, Ill.
University of South Dakota	Vermillion, S.D.
University of Oklahoma	Norman, Okla.
Colby College	Waterville, Me.
University of Oregon	Eugene, Ore.
University of Colorado	Boulder, Colo.
North Dakota State College	Fargo, N.D.
Mississippi State College for Women	Columbus, Miss.
Oregon Agricultural College	Corvallis, Ore.
Middlebury College	Middlebury, Vt.
Baylor College	Belton, Tex.
Virginia Polytechnic Institute	Blacksburg, Va.
University of Delaware	Newark, Del.
University of Maine	Orono, Me.
Alabama College	Montevallo, Ala.

Michigan State College	East Lansing, Mich.
Colorado Agricultural College	Fort Collins, Colo.
Northwestern University	Evanston, Ill.
The College of Idaho	Caldwell, Idaho
St. John's College	Collegetown, Minn.
St. Bernard College	St. Bernard, Ala.
College of Industrial Arts	Denton, Tex.
University of Pennsylvania	Philadelphia, Pa.
University of Utah	Salt Lake City, Utah
University of Arkansas	Fayetteville, Ark.
State University of New Mexico	Albuquerque, N.M.
State University of Iowa	Iowa City, Iowa
University of Illinois	Urbana, Ill.
Ohio Wesleyan University	Delaware, Ohio
State University of Montana	Missoula, Mont.
University of Arizona	Tucson, Ariz.
Syracuse University	Syracuse, N.Y.
Yale University	New Haven, Conn.
Alabama Polytechnic Institute	Auburn, Ala.
Idaho University	Moscow, Idaho
Randolph-Macon College	Ashland, Va.
One college that failed to sign the return blank	

In Table I we note that for composition A we have a range in grades of from 40 up to 95, and for composition B we have a still wider range of from 20 to 97. In reporting this study to a state association of English teachers the writer was asked by one college

TABLE I

Composition	Number of Cases	Lowest Grade	Q 1	Median Grade	Q 3	Highest Grade
A.....	363	40	70	76	80	95
B.....	363	20	62	70	75	97

The median deviation from the median for A is five points.
The median deviation from the median for B is five points.

professor of English: "What sort of an animal can a composition be to have such a wide range?" This wide range is not surprising to those who have studied similar investigations. All such studies reveal that English compositions are graded differently by different people, and the purpose of this investigation is not to verify this

fact but to offer some constructive suggestions as to a method of remedying it.

While it is true that we have a wide range of scores, it is also true that we have a marked central tendency. For paper A approximately 67 per cent of the grades were within six points of the me-

*Atwater Kent's contribution to American
Musical Home life*

The Atwater Kent Radio Corporation is making a striking contribution to American musical home life. It has recently sponsored a series of artists concerts of which the artists are chosen from the Metropolitan Opera company, the Oratoria, and the concert halls. The concerts are to be broadcasted for thirty-eight weeks, every Sunday evening, at eight-fifteen from station W. E. A. F. New York. The opportunity of hearing such concerts within the average American home is certain to be of benefit in improving the taste of the people for the best in music. Few people are able to hear such artists as Madam Homer, Fritz Kreisler, Galli Curci and others on the concert stage; whereas this opportunity is given them through the Atwater Kent radio concerts. The artist is benefited also by her contact with a great unseen audience, more vast than any which could be assembled in a single hall. The radio is the door way by which the artist gains access to the American home.

(Source) Birmingham News (PAPER A)

dian; for paper B, approximately 57 per cent were within five points. Under these conditions the median grade represents very accurately the composite judgment of the English teachers.

Washington is honored by a young clergyman

At Valley Forge a memorial has been erected which "symbolizes the spirit of the Revolution." The idea of such a memorial as this was first conceived by a young clergyman (Reverend W. Herbert Burk, D. D.), who wished to honor the "founder of his Country." The patriotic vision inspired him to have erected a statue of Washington at prayer. But as this feeling deepened in him, he decided upon the tribute of a nation at prayer instead. Therefore, the Washington Memorial Chapel stands in this park of more than a thousand acres, in much dignity and beauty. The workmanship of this building is remarkable. Every detail is symbolic. All of the designs and records which are used to exemplify history and religion are hand-wrought or hand-carved. The many mints of the Chapel moved Woodrow Wilson to call it "the shrine of the American people." When the vision of the founder is fully realized, the memorial will be an altogether "unique architectural achievement" which will perhaps be called, as a representative of the English Crown has called it, "the American Westminster."

"Mentor" October 1925 (PAPER B)

As previously mentioned, the 75 schools reporting submitted the grades of 363 English instructors, or each college was represented by an average of about 5 instructors. As can be seen from a survey of the list, the colleges are extremely representative of the higher-type schools in different sections of the country; and it does not appear plausible that any one person or faculty can properly challenge the grade as given by this group of experts.

This being accepted, we can call our median grade a national standard for compositions which are of the quality represented by themes A and B, which are reproduced in this article. Inasmuch as the median grade of composition B is just passing and the grade of A is six points above passing, we may say that the two themes give a standard of quality which we can use to denote passing work of college Freshman composition after the students have had six weeks of instruction. We do not have a composition scale but we do have a criterion by which the college English teacher can judge whether the class is particularly poor or above the average of the nation. The passing mark is the critical mark, and with this determined the instructor should have little trouble in ranking those above this line.

In addition to giving two themes with nationally standardized grades, a more detailed statement of results will be given, and a few constructive suggestions which came out as a by-product of the study will be added.

Probably the first criticism of this investigation is that instructors in different colleges have different objectives in English composition. How wide these objectives are or how justifiable it is to have wide objectives in teaching Freshman composition the writer will not attempt to state. The criticism is however nearly negated by the fact that there was almost as much variance in the grades of instructors on the same faculties as there was in the group as a whole. One of our largest universities had thirty-six instructors grade the papers with the following distribution for one of the compositions: one gave it a grade of 85, two of 80, three of 75, nine of 70, eight of 65, nine of 60, one of 55, and three gave it a grade of 50. Another large state institution gave the same theme grades ranging from 30 to 85. In several cases exactly half the faculty gave the highest grade to paper A while the other half gave the

highest grade to paper B. The faculty with fair agreement was the exception rather than the rule. As one English head stated: "As you will see, the instructors in the same college vary considerably in their estimate of the worth of a theme. I suppose that will always be the case so long as we have difference in minds. My instructors all have been with me for years and we have worked together so long that it seems that we would be measurably uniform in our standards."

The foregoing figures are given to show that one of the first problems is to work for uniformity within faculties. If the writer were an English head¹ he would adopt the following technique. He would have compositions mimeographed at regular intervals during the year and given to the instructors in composition for them to grade independently. He would then call a meeting of these teachers and have a thorough discussion of the paper and come to an agreement as to the grade the majority would give it. Those who differed materially would have to readjust their standards. After a few years a faculty following the foregoing practice should be fairly uniform. If this were accomplished in all the colleges within a state the next step would be to have regular meetings of representatives from the various colleges to work for state uniformity and after this sectional uniformity.

One other thought before summing up conclusions. The statement was made by several in replying to this investigation that they would accept no compositions having in them spelling or similar type errors. This appears to the writer an excellent suggestion. In his opinion it is not the function of the college composition (or the high-school composition) to serve as a spelling test, and he thinks that it will not be detrimental to spontaneity of writing to require the student to make a thorough inspection of his paper before handing it in. As the proportion of students who continue formal education through high school and college increases, the English teacher is going to be held more and more accountable for teaching correct English habits.

In the past she has been able to squeeze out of this responsi-

¹ The writer is director of the school of education, Alabama College.

bility, as there was always a chance the person deficient in writing ability had not had instruction in written composition.

In conclusion, the study has brought out evidence to show: (1) that there is an extreme variability in the grades of college instructors of Freshman composition; (2) that the variabilities within a single faculty are nearly as great as for teachers of different schools.

The following constructive suggestions are offered for remedying the foregoing conditions: (1) The use of the two standardized compositions quoted, for the purpose of checking your standard with the national standard. (The quality represents passing work of students with six weeks of college instruction.) (2) To work for faculty uniformity, heads of English departments should mimeograph compositions at regular intervals for their staff to grade independently. A faculty meeting should then be held and an agreement reached as to the grade of the compositions. (3) To develop good habits in writing, compositions should not represent spelling tests. All spelling errors should be corrected by the student before the composition is handed in to the instructor.

THE TEACHING OF POETRY

EDWARD HARLAN WEBSTER

When the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was issued, Theodore Watts-Dunton contributed the essay on poetry. This study at once placed him in the front rank of living critics. In this article, introducing the subject, he defines poetry thus: "Absolute poetry is the concrete and artistic expression of the human mind in emotional and rhythmical language." And as if to make sure that everyone will exactly comprehend his meaning, he adds: "No literary expression can properly speaking be called poetry that is not in a certain deep sense, emotional, whatever may be its subject-matter, concrete in its method and diction, rhythmical in movement, and artistic in form."