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It’s hard for me to realize that the first edition of *Image Grammar* is over ten years old. It’s been a pleasure to watch the book go through fifteen printings, receiving some excellent reviews and creating bands of *Image Grammar* devotees across the country. Yet it is sad to see that some teachers still cling to old habits. Discussing grammar in the teachers lounge is still like stepping between two opposing 350-pound NFL linemen just after the ball is snapped. Although the discussions are not quite that physically explosive, they seem to generate a similar competitive hostility. When the topic is grammar, teachers can become combative.

In one camp are the traditionalists, who insist that students must be drilled in traditional grammar. If an *English Journal* survey is correct, 61 percent of secondary English teachers fall into this category. In the other camp are the remaining 39 percent, equally adamant in their views. These teachers argue that teaching traditional grammar is linguistically unscientific.

For over thirty years I’ve listened to teachers in these opposing camps debate. Back in the late seventies I can recall two individuals in our English department who typified these opposite poles. (For the sake of anonymity, I’ll call them Delaney and McLarken.) Each tried to lure department rookies like me to their way of thinking.

Delaney, a relatively young teacher with twelve years of experience, championed the “research-based” view. “Any enlightened English teacher,” he would say, “has to recognize the validity of the research. Would you go to a doctor who ignored the findings of the medical profession?” For Delaney research communicated an authority not unlike the word of God. Delaney’s bible was the classic study by Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer (1963), which concluded that teaching grammar failed to improve student writing. “Teaching traditional grammar,” Delaney would say, “takes valuable time away from writing and reading.”
On the other side of the grammatical planet was Mrs. McLarken, a thirty-three-year veteran and proponent of an “experience-based’ view. She felt research was a lot of “hokey.” “Those college professors don’t have a clue what public school teaching is all about,” she would say. “Besides, their studies just give an excuse for some teachers to avoid the hard work of teaching grammar.” She liked to point out that she had produced many fine student writers with her traditional approach and delighted in arguing that writers like Poe, Steinbeck, and Hemingway were all raised on traditional grammar. “What worked for Steinbeck,” she would argue, “will work for your students.”

Personally, I felt both Delaney and McLarken were excellent teachers, each truly concerned with doing what was best for their kids, each well informed and teaching from a strong foundation of experience. Since neither seemed more persuasive than the other, I tried both approaches.

At first, I taught traditional grammar because I knew this best. I drilled kids with worksheets and designed a flowchart that looked like a Los Angeles road map to track students individually through each aspect of mechanics and usage. At one point about 50 percent of my teaching time was devoted to traditional grammar. But in spite of my efforts, one glaring fact seemed obvious: there was no carryover from grammar instruction to writing performance.

So I switched to a linguistic approach. This proved even more disastrous. Not only was there no carryover from transformational grammar to writing, but linguistic concepts seemed more difficult for students to grasp.

Recognizing this, scholars had also shifted their emphasis away from linguistics and began advocating the integration of writing and grammar. This seemed like an excellent idea, but most available textbooks just repackaged traditional lessons with new “whole language” labels. With no clear direction or resources, I felt a little like a casualty in a scholarly war, left on the classroom battlefield without a weapon to combat the hordes of grammar-deficient students.

As the whole language movement emerged, so did exciting ideas for integrating reading, writing, and speaking. What made this movement so appealing to me was that its primary advocates were not scholars but teachers sharing what worked well in their classrooms. However, on the question of grammar, whole language offered little direction. While some strategies looked promising, to implement them required the kind of individualization only possible in an elementary classroom of twenty to thirty students. With 150 students a day in the secondary classroom, many of the one-on-one grammar strategies of whole language were almost impossible to implement effectively.

With these scholarly roads leading nowhere, I began the journey that led to image grammar. For thirty years I’ve traveled on this journey with more than four thousand students. From these encounters, I’ve developed and tested the ideas you are about to read.
I’d like to share with you some of the best trails I discovered in this journey, but before we begin, let me caution you. First, this is not a journey into the nuances of conventions. If you come in search of clarifications for the uses of lie and lay or the preferred spelling of judgment, you’ll be disappointed. Image Grammar explores only those concepts that help students “feel” what Joan Didion (1984) calls “the infinite power” of grammar, a power derived from images.

Second, image grammar developed from questions like “How does Jack London make you feel you are not just reading but living in the frozen months of the Yukon gold rush? How does Erma Bombeck create images that trigger eruptions of laughter? What fundamental elements in writing are similar to the fundamental elements in art?” Questions like these emerged from the study of the writer as an artist, an artist using grammatical structures to paint powerful images and create engaging melodies.

Finally, this journey helped me to understand the need to teach grammar in an artist’s studio. This means allowing for studio time when students can practice their art, writing with models—real, photographed, filmed, written, or staged. It means discussing the art of the masters, posting their written passages, and sharing insights from reading in small-group discussions and individual conferences. It means experimenting with many and varied genres and maintaining portfolios.

This view is not an analogy, but a new perspective for teaching grammar as part of the writing process—a view often advocated by professional authors but never quite developed. Pulitzer Prize–winning author Jon Franklin, for example, describes writing as an image journey, a single image a molecule in the writing universe. Author Ray Bradbury credits his childhood love of comic book images with nurturing his skill as a science fiction writer. And Hemingway comments that the paintings of Cezanne helped him develop his written descriptions of landscapes. These are not isolated instances but a common theme among many writers. Yet professional authors never explain how to create images with grammatical structures. Image Grammar attempts to do that.
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BACK COVER:

Bob Inglass’ “Book Review: *Image Grammar: Using Grammatical Structures to Teach Writing* by Harry Noden” (The Quarterly of the National Writing Project 23 (1): 40) is reprinted with permission from the National Writing Project (NWP). The mission of NWP is to improve the teaching of writing and improve learning in the nation’s schools. Explore NWP’s resources at www.nwp.org.

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In the Brazilian Amazon, annual forest loss from all causes rose from less than 3 million acres in 1991 to an average of 4.8 million acres during each of the past three years—the equivalent of seven football fields a minute. In 1995 alone, more than 7 million acres were destroyed—an area roughly the size of Belgium. (Laurance 1998, 35)

This paragraph, by feature writer William Laurance, is a small piece of nonfiction art. With impressive statistics and a shocking comparison, Laurance grips the imagination of readers, who come to understand the concept of five million acres of devastated rain forest by visualizing seven football fields vanishing every sixty seconds—a powerful personalized image, a type of image rarely found in fiction.

Just as the media of oil paint and clay provide different possibilities for expression, fiction and nonfiction generate different forms and different variations in content. Writers, like artists, select forms to express their content, and
in the writing, content shapes form. Ben Shahn, a well-known oil painter, explains it this way in his book *The Shape of Content*:

> Form is formulation—the turning of content into a material entity, rendering a content accessible to others, giving it permanence, willing it to the race. Form is as varied as are the accidental meetings of nature. Form in art is as varied as idea itself... Form is the very shape of content. (1985, 53)

Freitag’s pyramid, Provost’s plot points, and Joseph Campbell’s hero’s journey are just a few forms that explore shape in fiction. With nonfiction very different models represent the forms. To illustrate this difference, let’s examine a popular nonfiction model used for writing both feature articles and student research papers.

The nonfiction article form is analogous to a piano composition played on a limited keyboard (see Figure 9–1). Articles so constructed begin with a lead for the first note, end with a conclusion for the last note, and in between play combinations of four melody keys—exposition, narration, quotation, and description. The melody keys may be played in any sequence, using any repetitions that sound pleasing. While authors of feature articles vary the notes they play to meet the demands of different types of articles and different styles of magazines, the keyboard for this form remains essentially the same.

**Figure 9–1.** The Limited Keyboard Used in a Nonfiction Article
Writing Introductory Leads

There are various choices for the first-note lead. Writers sometimes refer to the lead as the *hook*. The opening of an article hooks the reader's curiosity and shouts subliminally, *Read this! This is fascinating!* Although writers such as Don McKinney, William Rivers, and Jerome Kelly have suggested varied categories of leads, eight seem to generate the most effective beginnings with students:

1. the narrative lead
2. the quotation lead
3. the question lead
4. the statistical lead
5. the mystery lead
6. the descriptive lead
7. the imagine lead
8. the direct lead.

The Narrative Lead

A narrative lead lures the reader with a compelling story in one to three paragraphs. Here is a narrative lead, taken from a chapter in Edward De Bono’s *New Think*:

Many years ago when a person who owed money could be thrown into jail, a merchant in London had the misfortune to owe a huge sum to a money-lender. The money-lender, who was old and ugly, fancied the merchant’s beautiful teenage daughter. He proposed a bargain. He said he would cancel the merchant’s debt if he could have the girl instead.

Both the merchant and his daughter were horrified at the proposal. So the cunning money-lender proposed that they let Providence decide the matter. He told them that he would put a black pebble and a white pebble into an empty money bag, and then the girl would have to pick out one of the pebbles. If she chose the black pebble, she would become his wife and her father’s debt would be cancelled. If she chose the white pebble, she would stay with her father, and the debt would still be cancelled. But if she refused to pick out a pebble, her father would be thrown into jail, and she would starve.

Reluctantly the merchant agreed. They were standing on a pebble-strewn path in the merchant’s garden as they talked, and the money-lender stooped down to pick up the two pebbles. As he picked up the pebbles, the girl, sharp-eyed with fright, noticed that he picked up two black pebbles and put them into the money bag. He then asked the girl to pick out the pebble that was to decide
her fate and that of her father . . . . The girl . . . put her hand into the money-bag and drew out a pebble. Without looking at it she fumbled and let it fall to the path where it was immediately lost among the others.

“Oh how clumsy of me,” she said, “but never mind—if you look into the bag you will be able to tell which pebble I took by the color of the one that is left.” (1967, 11–12)

DeBono’s story entices readers to explore the nature of thinking. Like all effective introductions, it captures the reader’s interest first. Information in the form of exposition comes later. In the sample that follows, student Zach Vesoulis accomplishes the same thing using a narrative about a battle in computer cyberspace:

As the examples above illustrate, the narrative lead tends to be longer than other leads, often running several paragraphs. But its story appeal makes it one of the most popular introductions.

**The Quotation Lead**

The quotation lead is shorter and gives the reader a feeling of a live news broadcast. It brings a conversational tone to an article with an intriguing comment. Often the sentence that follows the quote enhances the reader’s curiosity. Notice how these professional authors use unusual quotes to capture your interest:
"Music did bring me to the gutter. It brought me to sleep on the levee of the Mississippi River, on the cobblestones, broke and hungry. And if you've ever slept on cobblestones, broke and hungry. And if you've ever slept on cobblestones or had nowhere to sleep, you can understand why I began ['The St. Louis Blues'] with ‘I hate to see the evening sun go down,’” said W.C. Handy. (Santelli 2003, 15)

“My paintings become part of a world of their own during the process of their evolution, and the less I know about that world, the better the painting will be,” says Texas artist Elona Cole. “I create planes of space and textures without any preconceived idea or plan.” (Doherty 1993, 52)

“I remember that I was four [actually she was five] years old when the ‘tragic ten days’ took place. I witnessed with my own eyes Zapata’s peasants’ battle against the Carrancistas,” said Frida Kahlo. (Kettenmann 2003, 7)

**The Question Lead**

The question lead intrigues the reader by posing one or more direct questions. While this seems like a simple lead to construct, it is actually one of the more difficult, because the questions need to evoke curiosity, teasing the reader to continue. Here are a few effective examples, the first from a student and the other three from professionals.

What do you tell a boy whose heart’s dream is to be a pilot, who eats, sleeps, and lives airplanes, who collects every airplane picture he can get his hands on (even draws them superbly with the most fantastic detail), what do you tell him . . . when he is retarded? (Kubis and Howland 1990, 186)

The human body has a temperature roughly of about 37 or 38 degrees Centigrade. This is about 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. The usual temperature of a room is about 22 degrees Centigrade. Why do we not feel cold? (Miller 1970, 3)

If you could approach a stationary whistle with a speed equal to that of the velocity of sound, what do you think you would hear? (Miller 1970, 5)
Just creating a question doesn’t ensure a quality question lead. Suppose in this last example, Miller had opened with this question instead: *Have you ever asked yourself questions about the speed of sound?* The effect of the hook would have been lost. Unlike other introductions that have a natural appeal, questions must be especially compelling. Simply asking a question isn’t enough to create a psychological hook.

**The Statistical Lead**

Statistics impress readers. Numbers seem to generate some mystical spell, giving authority to the simplest information. Writers use this lure with lead paragraphs that present fascinating numbers. Student Molly Fitzpatrick experiments with this enticement by introducing an article with some surprising statistics on child abuse:

With a statistical lead, writers can personalize data by translating larger numbers to small applications. For example, if 25 percent of the nation’s population seek out psychological help, a writer might say, “One out of every four of your friends may one day need psychological counseling.” In the opening of this chapter, Laurance personalized the loss of 4.8 million acres of forest by comparing it to seven football fields vanishing every minute.

**The Mystery Lead**

The fourth lead, the mystery lead, parallels a fictional concept called *story question*. Both techniques keep the reader in suspense by posing unanswered story questions. Watch how feature writer Margaret Bourke-White uses this device:

The mysterious malady began so quietly I could hardly believe there was anything wrong. There was nothing strong enough to dignify with the word *pain*, nothing except a slight dull ache in my left leg when I walked upstairs. I did not dream it was the stealthy beginning of a seven-year siege during which I would face a word totally new to my vocabulary—incurable. (1960, 471)
Bourke-White leaves unanswered questions: What type of medical problem would come with such little warning? Does the seven-year siege mean she recovered or that she is now hopelessly beyond help? Does the word *incurable* mean the author may soon die? To find the answers to these questions, the reader must read on.

The mystery lead teases by giving readers half of a story. Here are three student examples:

---

**The Descriptive Lead**

Descriptive leads splash images like poetry, painting vivid characters, animals, objects, or unusual settings. Read this lead by author William Newcott:

The midsummer sun was high in a clear yellow-brown sky. The morning’s filmy blue clouds had dissipated, and the temperature was 8 degrees Fahrenheit—way up from last night’s low of minus 100 degrees. A breeze wafted from the west at about eight miles an hour. A perfect afternoon for a drive on Mars. (1998, 17)

Student Will Cleary created a descriptive introduction to puzzle the reader into speculating about his cat’s unusual obsession:

---
The Imagine Lead

Closely related to the descriptive lead is the imagine lead, where the writer asks the reader to imagine something. Here are a couple of examples—the first from a student research paper on quarks, the second from a review of Michael Crichton’s *The Andromeda Strain*:

Imagine this, you are sitting at home and the next thing you know you get this disease and your blood starts to clot. In other words, you freeze, right there. This is what happens in Michael Crichton’s *The Andromeda Strain*. (Daniel Pipitone)

The Direct Lead

Finally, the weakest lead to use in this nonfiction model—but the best lead for a technical journal article, an essay test, or a business memo—is the direct lead. The direct lead defines the thesis of a long piece of writing in the same way a topic sentence generalizes the main idea in paragraphs. Although the direct lead lacks the imaginative appeal of other openings, its purpose differs. Other leads try to hook readers who lack a compelling interest in the topic. The direct technique assumes that the reader wants the information and doesn’t need to be coaxed.

When appealing to the readers is unimportant, direct beginnings are efficient. This is why manuals, technical reports, scientific journal articles, memos, and business communications often begin with a direct
technique. These forms of nonfiction, unlike the feature article, announce the topic, as in this example taken from a book on chess openings:

In this chapter we examine the Max Lange Attack, the Classical Variation of the Two Knights’ Defense, and a line in the Scotch Gambit that can arise if Black avoids the other two systems. (Levy and Keene 1976, 1)

The direct technique can also be used in the second paragraph when an article’s title doesn’t offer enough clarity to the thesis.

**The Combination Lead**

Often professional and student writers combine techniques. For example, student Linsay Davis combines a statistical and question lead in this introduction to a piece on the McCaughey sextuplets:

---

**Writing the Body of an Article**

Examine Figure 9–1 again. Returning to our piano analogy, after the writer plays the introductory note, he or she plays a melody using combinations of four piano keys:

- exposition
- narration
- quotation
- description.

Each key, representing a passage of one or more paragraphs, can be played in any order, but like any musical composition, the tune will sound more pleasing if notes vary in duration, in intensity, and in combination with each other.

**Narration and Description**

Narration and description, two introductory techniques, repeat as forms in the body of this nonfiction model. Narratives vary the melodic flow of nonfiction and also create psychological appeal.
appeal. Moffett observed that “children use and depend upon narrative as their principal mode of thinking” (1968, 343). McNeil (1987) discovered that children acquire information more effectively when reading narratives. So the narrative plays a unique role in the reading and writing history of individuals. Description, frequently woven within narration, adds the important sensory images such as color, detail, and sound. With description, authors can choose to inject phrases, sentences, or entire passages, as the writing demands.

**Quotation**

Quotation, another element of the body, adds authority and a conversational tone to the work. Reading a quotation, we feel as if a television commentator has held up a microphone to an important personality. The cadence and phraseology of the quote create a change in the rhythm, adding variety and a feeling of presence.

The frequency of quotes in a magazine varies with the magazine’s style. *People* magazine, attempting to capture a more “lively” feeling with a faster pace, uses quotes almost continuously, while *National Geographic*, more focused on places and ideas, injects quotes for emphasis and variety. Quotes appear less often in articles where the content is scholarly. Here, quotes often highlight clarifications by an authority.

**Exposition**

Exposition, the last of the four central elements, changes its shape like a chameleon to fit the content. Following the classic forms described in Chapter 7, exposition develops topics around the logical patterns of:

1. details and examples
2. proofs and reasons
3. comparison and contrast
4. process
5. illustration
6. cause and effect
7. narration
8. enumeration.

By its nature, exposition reflects logical patterns, and as a result, teachers can illustrate these patterns in paragraphs, passages, and complete works. For example, in the following comparison-contrast paragraph, Nobel Prize–winner Konrad
Lorenz argues that one of civilization’s eight deadly sins is the “entropy of feeling.” To support his thesis he uses a variety of expository passages, including one that compares and contrasts joy and pleasure:

The psychologist Helmut Schulze has drawn attention to the remarkable fact that the word *Freude* (“joy”) does not occur in Freud, who recognizes pleasure, but not joy. Schulze says, in substance, that when, sweating and exhausted, with sore fingers and aching limbs, we reach the summit of a difficult mountain, knowing that the even more difficult and dangerous descent lies ahead of us, this is not pleasure but one of the greatest joys on earth. Pleasure may be achieved without paying the price of strenuous effort, but joy cannot. Intolerance of unpleasurable experience converts the natural ups and downs of human life into an artificial plain, the great wave of mountain and valley becoming a scarcely noticeable ripple, and light and shade a monotonous gray. In short, intolerance of unpleasurable experience creates deadly boredom. (1973, 39)

Next students might be shown something like Bruce Catton’s comparison and contrast of General Lee and General Grant, a passage that runs for several paragraphs in *Bruce Catton’s Civil War*. In addition, students might be introduced to a book that compares two diverse views on a popular subject such as cloning, gun control, or euthanasia.

Using writing samples of different lengths illustrates the common logic of nonfiction and also demonstrates how other passages in the model—quotation, description, and narration—can support the logical framework of a longer work. This is useful since students are accustomed to viewing shorter models, which usually run one to five paragraphs in length.

**Writing Conclusions**

Endings are difficult for students. Many either stop abruptly with no sense of finality, ramble on well beyond the ideal stopping point, or rely on overused expressions such as *in conclusion*, *to summarize*, and *finally*. You can help alleviate this common problem with a few guidelines that can shape a variety of conclusions. Author Leo Fletcher recommends three. A good conclusion, explains Fletcher, will:

1. “emphasize the point of your article”
2. “provide a climax”

If students keep these guiding principles in mind, they can more easily offer a variety of conclusions. For example, notice how the following three
conclusions incorporate Fletcher’s principles in different ways. The first meets Fletcher’s guidelines by discussing the future; the next ends with a summary; the last finishes with a quote.

**Look to the Future**

Concluding an article on the destructive power of tsunamis—tidal waves created by earthquakes—feature writer Kathy Svitil suggests what might happen in the future in the United States:

The fate of Arop, Warapu, Malol, and Sissano should be disquieting to residents of the West Coast of the United States. A Pacific earthquake could easily send a tsunami their way as well. If they were lucky and the quake was distant, they’d have a couple of hours’ warning. But if the quake were closer to shore, they might not know what was happening until they saw the wave looming overhead. (1992, 68)

**End with a Summary**

Just as Svitil’s future ending on tsunamis emphasized the main idea, created a climax, and left something to reflect on, artist Lynn Newman accomplishes the same thing with a summary. In his first-person article on why and how he uses photographs as preliminary sketches for painting, Newman concludes:

While I realize using snapshots as a sketchbook is no substitute for drawing or painting on location, it is a way to unravel at least one artistic quandary. Perhaps the wise use of snapshots can free some valuable time and rejuvenate your artistic sensibilities. (1999, 50)

**Finish with a Quote**

Similarly, a quote can bring resolution to an article as this example from an article on preserving wetlands:

“As it’s difficult to guarantee that we can re-create all that will be lost,” Zedler says, “our primary responsibility must be to protect what’s left.” (Nadis 1999, 16)

In addition to these concluding techniques, students can shape endings with a question, a narrative, a surprise, or a host of other methods. As long as students follow Fletcher’s basic guidelines, they can let their imagination create any endings that fit the logic of their work.
Putting It All Together

Now that we have examined the parts of the nonfiction article/research paper model, let’s return to our keyboard analogy and see how one student used this model to shape an entire piece. In the article that follows, also included on the CD, James Larson reminisces about how, at age eight, he first saw his mother lose—then regain—her aura of strength. Each of the following passages is an excerpt; this choppy flow is not characteristic of the longer original. However, notice how James uses nonfiction forms—the piano-key techniques—to create variety. (Before each section, the nonfiction forms are identified in brackets.)
The elements of this article play like a piano piece. From these excerpts, you can see how James mixes techniques for effect. He begins with a story question introduction, moves to a description with a quote, plays a little exposition, injects a quote, throws in a couple of narratives, adds another quote, and concludes with a thesis statement summary. The variety sustains interest.

Each technique adds to the meaning and psychological pace of the article in different ways. Quotes bring an authority to the work, giving the reader the feeling of an eyewitness newscast. Narratives enhance the central image of his mother and provide a story appeal, creating a release from the exposition that informs. Description, often mixed with narration, engages the senses. All these elements play notes that harmonize around the central theme of Mom’s struggle.

**Avoiding the Rigidity Trap**

Using a nonfiction form can help students avoid writing everything with patterns of pure exposition. However, forms function more like clay than marble. We need to caution students that forms are created simultaneously with ideas.
A writer shouldn’t try to stuff ideas into predetermined boxes of form. This was the problem with the classic five-paragraph theme. Instead of teaching it as one of many forms, we taught it as the form, and students bent their thinking to match the structure. In time, critics began to ask, “Where is the five-paragraph theme in professional writing?” It seldom occurred. Professionals allow their ideas to contribute to the form, and few published ideas matched the pattern of the five-paragraph theme.

Russell Baker discovered the importance of not imposing form early in his writing career. In *Growing Up*, Baker describes receiving an assignment from his eleventh-grade English teacher, Mr. Fleagle, to write an essay using the classic essay form. As he wrote about the comical images of his family eating spaghetti (a dish they rarely ate), Baker became caught up in the joy of sharing the experience and felt compelled to deviate from the form he had been taught:

Suddenly, I wanted to write about the warmth and good feeling of it, but I wanted to put it down simply for my own joy, not for Mr. Fleagle. It was a moment I wanted to recapture and hold for myself. I wanted to relive the pleasure of an evening at New Street. To write it as I wanted, however, would violate all the rules of formal composition I’d learned in school, and Mr. Fleagle would surely give it a failing grade. Never mind. I would write something else for Mr. Fleagle after I had written this thing for myself.

When I finished it, the night was half gone and there was no time left to compose a proper, respectable essay for Mr. Fleagle. There was no choice next morning but to turn in my private reminiscence of Belleville. Two days passed before Mr. Fleagle returned the graded papers, and he returned everyone’s but mine. I was bracing myself for a command to report to Mr. Fleagle immediately after school for discipline when I saw him lift my paper from his desk and rap for the class’ attention.

“Now, boys,” he said, “I want to read you an essay. This is titled ‘The Art of Eating Spaghetti.’”

And he started to read. My words! He was reading my words out loud to the entire class. What’s more, the entire class was listening. Listening attentively. Then somebody laughed, then the entire class was laughing, and not in contempt and ridicule, but with openhearted enjoyment. Even Mr. Fleagle stopped two or three times to repress a small prim smile.

I did my best to avoid showing pleasure, but what I was feeling was pure ecstasy at this startling demonstration that my words had the power to make people laugh. In the eleventh grade, at the eleventh hour as it were, I had discovered a calling. It was the happiest moment of my entire school career. When Mr. Fleagle finished, he put the final seal on my happiness by saying, “Now that boys, is an essay. Don’t you see? Congratulations, Mr. Baker.” (1982, 188–89)
Baker’s willingness to allow form to emerge naturally taught him that content and form work as one. Just as the dancer cannot be separated from the dance, so the grammar of style cannot be pried from the grammar of form: both weave a harmony of purpose.

**STRATEGIES**

**Strategy 1: Stuff a Sack of Shapely Ideas**

Barry Lane, in *After THE END*, describes form this way: “Many writers talk about the power of visualizing the shape of the pieces they work on. A novel that loops back in time might be shaped like a coiling spiral, an essay centered on one central idea might look like a big duffel bag stuffed with examples” (1993, 93). Lane suggests asking students to draw the shape of something they have written, which is an excellent way to relate form to content. Consider having your students do this with one of their writings, but first introduce the strategy with this exercise.

**Steps:**

1. Select two short pieces of professional writing—one fiction, the other nonfiction.
2. Ask your students to draw two shapes, one representing each piece. To get them started, give them some shapes to consider sketching as models: a spider web, building blocks, Legos, different-size beach balls, chains, sacks, bookshelves, planets, a refrigerator, desk drawers, a map, flashing Christmas lights, a pyramid, a stretch of river with tributaries, a garden plot, or a tree.
3. Share the drawings and discuss how the content related to the form.

**Strategy 2: Run a Magazine Search Competition**

**Steps:**

1. Divide the class into four random teams. Explain that today they will be competing as a team for bonus points. The task of the team members will be to find as many examples of each element in the nonfiction article/research paper form as possible in a one-period library search.
2. Have each team pick a captain whose responsibility will be to check items found by other team members, verify them as valid examples, and turn in all of the team’s examples.
3. Give students the following handout or write the information on the board:

**TECHNIQUES FOR INTRODUCTIONS, BODIES, AND CONCLUSIONS**

**INTRODUCTION TECHNIQUES:**
- Narrative
- Quotation
- Question
- Statistical
- Mystery
- Descriptive
- Imagine
- Direct

**BODY TECHNIQUES:**
- Narrative
- Quotation
- Description
- Exposition

**CONCLUSION TECHNIQUES:**
- Future
- Summary
- Quote

4. Explain how teams will earn points:

- One point will be awarded for each example of an introduction technique, a body technique, or a concluding technique (see handout).
- Only *specific* examples will count. In other words, if a student hands in a paragraph labeled only as introduction or body or conclusion, he or she will not receive any points.
- The specific label *within* the category must be included. For example, in the body category, only these labels would earn points: narrative, quotation, description, and exposition. For introductions and conclusions, teams must identify the specific type: statistical, question, mystery, and so on.

5. All examples must be:

- copied,
- labeled by the type of element,
- turned in at the end of the period, with the names of team members listed on a cover sheet.

6. After the team packets have been turned in and scored, choose some of the best examples to use for review.

**Strategy 3: Experiment with Forms**

A common strategy among language arts teachers for years has been to have students rework a piece of writing in another genre. Teachers have asked students to create a poem based on a nonfiction article, to write a letter as one
of the characters in a short story, or to develop a short story based on a news article. These crossover experiments not only help students understand how form shapes content, but also how the same thesis can be expressed in a variety of ways.

Over the years, crossing genres led to the emergence of the “new journalism,” a form of writing that blends nonfiction with fiction. Truman Capote’s success with *In Cold Blood* inspired a succession of similar works blending fiction and nonfiction.

In the classroom, students can have fun experimenting with this new form.

**Steps:**

1. Have students find a factual narrative—in either a nonfiction article or a documentary film.
2. If students have difficulty locating a written or a video source, suggest they log on to Google and search online newspapers (like *The Washington Post, The Cleveland Plain Dealer, The Chicago Tribune, The Los Angeles Times,* and *USA Today*) for some interesting nonfiction stories that could be rewritten as fiction.
3. Ask them to write a short fictionalized story based on the events in their chosen piece. (Using a documentary film has the advantage that students can more easily experience and incorporate images. This makes their writing more detailed.)
4. Remind students that since they are writing fiction, they should feel free to add imaginary images and inject fabricated dialogue.
5. Because their work is more fiction than fact, they need to change the names of any individuals mentioned in the original article.
6. Ask students to print copies of the original stories and turn them in along with their reworked version. This way, if you share stories in class, you can occasionally share the original piece the story was based on for comparison.

Responding to the above assignment, Stefanie Klaus transformed the events from an episode of the television program *Unsolved Mysteries* into a short story. Here is the beginning of her fictionalized nonfiction piece, which you can use as a classroom model (it’s included on the accompanying CD). In it she adopts a first-person viewpoint, placing herself in the role of the main character.
Strategy 4: Mix Forms with a Multigenre Research Paper

Each genre reflects content through different forms, creating insights unique to that genre. A poem expresses an idea in a way radically different from a news report. A short story and an essay on the same event open different doors of perception. To help students explore how different forms generate different types of information, Tom Romano, in his book Writing with Passion, suggests having students create a multigenre research paper. Using music, character sketches, comic strips, art, short stories, poetry, monologue, news reports, and a host of other communicative genres, students piece together a different kind of research paper.

As a model, Romano suggests using Michael Ondaatje's The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, a unique book that describes the life of Billy the Kid through songs, thumbnail sketches, poems, drawings, monologue, newspaper reports, and so on. You may want to make digital copies of selected sections of the book for in-class illustrations.

Try this variation. Divide the class into groups of five or six and distribute the following instructions (they’re included on the CD).
1. Select an individual, living or dead, who fascinates you. This individual can be a historical figure, an actor, a musician, a scientist, an author, a politician, a general, a poet, a criminal, a comedian—anyone your group finds engaging. To ensure that there is a mixture of magazine articles, books, and multimedia material for your group to research, create a bibliography of available material and submit it along with the name of the person for approval.

2. Create a multigenre research paper using some combination of the following genres and subgenres:
   - **Art**: drawings, paintings, collages, photographs, digital clips, ceramics, sculpture, jewelry, mixed media, cartoons, comic books, advertisements, T-shirts, logos, billboards, architectural designs, CD and DVD covers
   - **Music**: original or found, instrumentals, songs with lyrics, tunes written with the flavor of blues, jazz, rock, rap, pop, country, or classical, electronic music, percussion music, Native American music, music from a specific time period
   - **Drama**: one-act play, readers theater, a film scene, a monologue, a formal speech, a dialogue
   - **Fiction**: short story, character sketches, action dramas, fictional memoirs, fictional letters, fictional diaries, a legend, children’s story, anecdote, short description, mystery, science-fi story, western, romance, humorous piece, horror story, a detective story
   - **Nonfiction**: magazine articles, biographies, news reports, letters, diaries, sports features, personality features, weather reports, opinions, movie reviews, film reviews, opinions, how-to pieces, scientific pieces, historical pieces, informational pieces on music, art, entertainment, medicine, or technology
   - **Poetry**: lyric poems, narrative poems, pop poems, shape poems, cinquains, syllable poems, haikus, song lyrics
   - **Photographs**: films, DVDs, digital images, photographs.

3. Each team member must contribute two works, in two different genres. Try for as much variety as possible within your group. Each entry should contribute significant information on the chosen personality. You may share resources with the other members of your group, interpreting different aspects of the same resource in different genres.

4. Present your work to the class. If time permits, we will discuss how different genres contributed different perspectives of your researched personality.
Give each student on the team two grades, one for individual effort, the other for the quality of the team project. Grades might be based on criteria such as:

**FOR THE INDIVIDUAL GRADE**
25% Content: evidence of research, interesting insights, depth of details  
20% Form: powerful use of the elements of selected genre  
20% Style: quality of stylistic elements in sentence structures, paragraphs, passages and word choice  
20% Conventions: few conventional errors

**FOR THE TEAM GRADE**  
15% Unity of the Overall Project

**Strategy 5: Create an Instant Tabloid Article**

This activity helps students quickly understand how to compose a nonfiction article. By using tabloid topics with imaginary data and working as a team, students can construct a complete article in two class periods. Follow these steps:

**Day 1: Introduce the Activity and Design the Article**

1. Divide the class into groups of eight or more (each group must have at least eight members). If a group has more than eight students, have the ninth student create an additional narrative. (Another shocking event has unfolded. The problem becomes worldwide.) If a group has a tenth student, have that student create another expository paragraph. (Recent events reveal that someone or some group might make millions of dollars on this event.)
2. Ask each group to select a topic for a tabloid article from the list below.

**TABLOID HEADLINES**

QUARTERBACK’S HELMET PICKS UP VOICES FROM THE DEAD  
DERANGED SPACE ALIENS INJECTING THEIR DNA INTO POLITICIANS  
BEER CANS FOUND ON MARS  
TITANIC SUNK BY UFOS  
STARVING CAMPER MAULS GRIZZLY  
SANTA’S ELVES REALLY SLAVES FROM THE PLANET MARS
CROP CIRCLES APPEARING ON PEOPLE’S HEADS
REDNECKS SHOOT DOWN SAUCER!
OLYMPIC HIGH JUMPER FINDS NEW POWER IN FROG SWEAT!
ELVIS WAX FIGURE CRIES REAL TEARS
NEBRASKA DOESN’T EXIST, SAYS AUTHOR
MICROSCOPIC SPACE ALIENS INFESTING CARPETS
SCIENTIST ATTACKED BY KILLER SQUIRRELS
NEWBORN BABY BENDS SPOONS WITH HIS MIND!
GIGANTIC CLAM ATTACKS WOMAN!
SATURN IS AN ALIEN SPACE STATION!
EXPLODING PIGS CREATED BY TERRORISTS
HIEROGLYPHICS DESCRIBE ROBOTS IN ANCIENT VILLAGE

3. Have groups decide which member will contribute a paragraph on which element from the list below. (Use the explanations following each category as a guide.) The category of description is not listed separately; descriptive touches can occur in any category.

ELEMENTS OF A NONFICTION ARTICLE

Introduction: Begin with any of the opening techniques except direct and show that something mysterious is happening.
Narrative: Tell a one-paragraph story about the incident giving some surprising information.
Quote: Include an interesting comment from someone involved that adds key details. (This could be part of the first narrative element.)
Exposition: Present interesting/alarming historical information that was previously overlooked and sheds more light on the event.
Narrative: Tell another story involving someone whose credibility is challenged.
Quote: Include an unexpected quote that provides important supporting evidence.
Exposition: Provide more information regarding supporting events that confirm earlier rumors and could bring financial ruin to certain people.
Conclusion (Quote): One unidentified government authority suggests that the worst is yet to come. There is evidence that an unnamed corporate CEO is trying to cover up the scandal or secret.
4. Distribute the sample article on “Gigantic Clam Attacks Woman” so students can see how an article like the one they are creating can come together. This can also be found on the CD. (Created by a team of college student teachers.)
5. Each group then outlines their own article. They may mirror the organization of “Gigantic Clam Attacks Woman” if they wish.

6. Have groups spend five minutes brainstorming ideas for each paragraph. Then have students write their individual paragraphs as homework.

**Day 2: Brainstorm Rough Drafts**

1. Have each student read his or her draft paragraph to their group in the order they arranged in the group’s outline.

2. After all the members of the group have read their rough drafts, encourage the entire group to brainstorm again, suggesting some final improvements on each paragraph. Students may want to connect or adjust story lines so that the paragraphs read as a unified whole.

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**GUIDELINES FOR A PRODUCTIVE DISCUSSION**

- Never say, “I hated that,” or something equally unkind. The purpose of the discussion is to help make your entire article more powerful.
- The best way to respond to someone else’s writing is to do the following:
  - First, mention one thing you liked about the paragraph.
  - Then make one suggestion: “If I had written this paragraph, the one thing I would have changed is...”

3. Have students write the final revised version of their paragraph as homework. Remind them to add a few descriptive images where they feel they are needed. Ask the class to come prepared to read their entire articles.
Day 3: Share the Final Draft

1. Give the groups time to review their revised paragraphs and make minor changes.
2. Have each member of the group take a turn reading his or her paragraph aloud and in the order it occurs in the entire article. Or, have a designated reader read the entire article.

Strategy 6: Create a Research Paper with the Nonfiction Model

1. Have students choose a topic and use note cards to collect paraphrased and summarized information (and direct quotes) in these categories:
   - Introduction
   - Narrative
   - Exposition
   - Narration
   - Quotation
   - Description
   - Conclusion

   The number of cards students need depends on page-length requirements.

2. Have them lay out their cards so that the succession of paragraphs results in a variety of categories.
3. Have them type a final draft. (The result should be a research paper that is enjoyable to read.)
“I seen it wit my mine own eyes,” Thomas shouted.
“You mean I saw it with my own eyes,” the teacher corrected.
“Oh, you seen it too?”
“Thomas, you must say I saw it.”
“OK, I’ll tell everyone you seen it too.”
“No, you did not seen it!”
“But I did seen it,” Thomas gasped!
The teacher interrupted, “No one seen it. Say, I saw it; you saw it. Somebody saw it.”
“They did?” Thomas was surprised.
“Now, Thomas, why did you say, ‘I seen it?’”
“Because I seen it.”
“Let’s try another way,” the teacher suggested. “What did you see?”
“Thanks a lot. What I seen, you made me forgot.” (Gendernalik 1984, 42)

His exchange, written by middle-school teacher Alfred Gendernalik, illustrates why asking many students to revise is a little like asking them to recite the first few lines of the *Odyssey* in the original Greek. For most students, revision is a mystery. The idea of
Tolstoy rewriting War and Peace eight times or Doctorow revising Ragtime six times seems not just puzzling but incomprehensible.

Part of their bewilderment comes from the tradition of teaching revision as editing conventions. Studies by Faigley and Witte (1981); Sommers (1982); and Joram, Woodruff, Byson, and Lindsay (1992) indicate that many teachers and their students equate revision with copyediting—correcting for spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and usage. While this is important, editing for conventions is only one of four essential dimensions of revision. The other three, often overlooked, include revisions of form, content, and style. All four work in harmony to create effective writing.

Recognizing Revision Roadblocks

Several roadblocks can impede a teacher’s effort to help students understand these four dimensions. First, a vague edict requiring students to revise for mechanics and usage can overwhelm them. When English teacher Ms. Latimeer says, “Be sure to proofread. I won’t accept anything that isn’t thoroughly edited,” student Harvey Sloopwater glances at his three-hundred-plus-page grammar handbook in horror.

Judging from its sheer weight, Harvey guesses that the possible number of errors described within might total around two thousand. Since his knowledge of grammar is comparable to his knowledge of crop dusting in Upper Yalta, he fears disaster.

“Proofread?” Harvey mutters to himself. “How do I proofread for errors? I don’t know when I’m making an error. If I knew what a dangling participle was, I wouldn’t have dangled it in the first place.”

Since he needs a C average to continue playing right tackle for the Hincklebeck High Hammer Heads, Harvey sincerely wants to proofread. But where in that three-hundred-page handbook does he begin? In the past, when he has managed to correct his two most common errors—pronoun references and run-on sentences—Ms. Latimeer still lowered his grade because of shifting verb tense, weak supporting examples, or other problems he hadn’t anticipated.

Another dilemma confronting Harvey is time. Why should he spend time revising if the time spent doesn’t translate into better grades? From past experience, Harvey knows that he
earns the same grade whether he spends five hours or five minutes revising. For Harvey, avoiding errors is like walking blindfolded through a swamp trying not to fall into unseen pits of grammar quicksand.

Using Short Checklists for Systematic Revision

How can you help students like Harvey learn to revise? One approach is to emulate professionals who manage their revisions by using short checklists. Donald Murray, for example, used a checklist of nine general concepts to revise (1995, 187). Richard Lanham works from a specific list of eight key items (1992, 1). Novelist David Michael Kaplan revises with several frameworks, including an eighteen-point "Laundry List of Stylistic Glitches" (1997, 176–93).

These checklists share three qualities that provide possible solutions to Harvey’s dilemma:

1. They narrow the focus of revision to a few significant items.
2. They outline a systematic approach, which makes revision manageable.
3. They cover the complete scope of revision—form, content, style, and convention. (See Figure 10–1.)

Figure 10–1. Scope of Image Grammar Revisions
By first introducing students to small checklists in each
dimension (form, content, style, and conventions), and then
later combining these to form more comprehensive lists, you
can help students build a systematic approach to revision.

Creating a Short Revision Checklist for Style
Of the four dimensions, you may want to begin by having
students revise for style. Alterations of style bring the great-
est improvement with the fewest revisions. Teachers who
have worked extensively with style find that the immedi-
ate improvement of stylistic revisions excites students. High
school teacher Mark Jamison notes that his students were
delighted and amazed by the effect of their revisions when
they added brush strokes to sentences like these:

Original Sentence: He walked onto the game field.
Revised with Brush Strokes: He walked onto the game field, hands trem-
bling from fear and adrenaline. (Jeff Branham)

Original Sentence: Shane Gordon appeared in the kitchen.
Revised with Brush Strokes: Shane Gordon appeared in the kitchen, his
hair mussed like a startled porcupine. (Erin Nichole Jones)

Original Sentence: I walked up the stairs and down the dark hallway.
Revised with Brush Strokes: I walked up the stairs and down the dark hall-
way, shadows dancing on the walls. (Jonathan Triola)

Author and teacher Don Killgallon describes a similar response with Barry,
one of his below-average tenth graders. Barry found writing frustrating and
seemed unable to produce anything better than sentences like “The elephant is
a slow person.” Barry’s success and attitude changed, however, when he began
imitating stylistic structures and started producing sentences like this:

There is a flag, striped, colorful, and starry as a night sky. (Weaver 1996,
170–73)

To construct a checklist for style, you might begin with the five basic brush
strokes described in Chapter 1. You can encourage students to add additional
stylistic devices as they expand their repertoire. The checklist below (and on
the CD) introduces several revisions of style. When you assign papers using a
checklist as the basis for a grade, students like Harvey know exactly what they
need to do to experience success.
REVISION CHECKLIST FOR BASIC BRUSH STrokes
AND SPECIFIC IMAGES

Name ________________________________ Period __________

Revisions in this piece will be evaluated based on your use of five basic brush strokes and two specific images. If your piece contains examples of these brush strokes, a specific noun, and a specific verb, circle “already used” and label the technique in the margin. If it doesn’t, add and label the techniques in the margin.

For each type of brush stroke and specific image correctly used in your writing (already used or added), you will receive 5 points. However, points will not be given for a repeated technique. For example, once you use a participle brush stroke, you cannot earn points by using another. But you may add repeated strokes without earning points if they improve the effectiveness of your piece. In this exercise, you can earn a maximum of 35 points.

1. Absolute (already used/added) _______
2. Appositive (already used/added) _______
3. Participle (already used/added) _______
4. Adjectives out of order (already used/added) _______
5. Action verbs (already used/added) _______
6. A specific noun (already used/added) _______
7. A specific verb (already used/added) _______

Total Revision Points Earned _______
Grade _______

Creating a Short Revision Checklist for Conventions

The area of revision where language arts teachers tend to have the most expertise is that of conventions—the rules for correct mechanics, usage, punctuation, and spelling. Because of this expertise, you need to be cautious not to overload your checklists with too many items. By limiting revisions of conventions to a small list of frequent problems, you can encourage greater student effort.

Several scholars have created limited lists that you can use as models for short checklists. Cazort (1997) developed a short grammar textbook based on twenty-five of the most important grammar mistakes. Weaver (1996), in her
Teaching Grammar in Context, identified five categories of grammar, each with a short list of key concepts. Connors and Lunsford (1988) targeted twenty of the most common errors in their order of frequency, shown here:

1. No comma after introductory element
2. Vague pronoun reference
3. No comma in compound sentence
4. Wrong word (their versus there, for example)
5. No comma in nonrestrictive element
6. Wrong or missing inflected endings
7. Wrong or missing prepositions
8. Comma splice
9. Possessive apostrophe error
10. Tense shift
11. Unnecessary shift in person
12. Sentence fragment
13. Wrong tense or verb form
14. Incorrect subject-verb agreement
15. Lack of comma in series
16. Pronoun agreement error
17. Unnecessary comma with restrictive element
18. Run-on or fused sentence
19. Dangling or misplaced modifier

Similarly, using research on how people rank errors from serious to unimportant, Hairston (1982) developed a list of five categories in descending order of importance, from “status marking” errors to items considered “minor or unimportant.” And Noguchi (1991) cross-referenced Hariston’s list with Connors and Lunsford’s to create a combined list. So several well-researched lists are available to help you construct your own limited checklist appropriate for your students.

Many errors on these lists can be introduced to students as problems of image confusion. In sentences like “The malfunctioning gismo overheated the transformer. It needs repair,” the pronoun creates a puzzling image. The reader can’t clearly picture which item needs repair.

Two excellent sources for examples of image confusion are Richard Lederer’s books Anguished English (1987) and More Anguished English (1993). Both catalog scores of comical images that arise from common errors with misplaced modifiers, pronoun reference, dangling participles, and logical slips. Here are a few examples taken from Anguished English:
Yoko Ono will talk about her husband John Lennon, who was killed in an interview with Barbara Walters. (101)

No one was injured in the blast, which was attributed to a buildup of gas by one town official. (104)

When Lady Caruthers smashed the traditional bottle of champagne against the hull of the giant oil tanker, she slipped down the runway, gained speed, rocketed into the water with a gigantic spray, and continued unchecked toward Prince’s Island. (105)

Two cars were reported stolen by Groveton police yesterday. (102)

Guilt, vengeance, and bitterness can be emotionally destructive to you and your children. You must get rid of them. (105)

Half the lies they tell me aren’t true. (91)

Over half of the critical conventions targeted by scholars are taught as part of the writing process when teaching image grammar concepts. For example, dangling participles occur far less often if students have used participle brush strokes to enhance noun images in Chapter 1.

Similarly, many errors in using conventions can be addressed with image grammar concepts. For example, the capitalization of proper nouns can be taught when students learn to use a zoom lens to create specific nouns and verbs. Commas in a series can be taught when teaching the music of parallel structures, and fragments can be addressed while teaching the use of subordinate conjunctions, clauses, and prepositional phrases.

Some items, of course, such as the difference between *its* and *it’s* and problems with subject-verb agreement, need to be learned through repetitious drill and multiple examples. In relation to these kinds of errors, students will need to recognize how their knowledge of conventions defines the way others view them: people judge an individual’s competence, intelligence, and education by her or his use of language conventions. Strategy 1 at the end of this chapter attempts to motivate students to improve their potential income by learning conventions.

*Creating a Short Revision Checklist for Form*

Every genre follows a specified form. All novels, all short stories, all plays, for example, share a common structure that identifies them as part of their particular genre. Even when two plays have nothing else in common, their structures are very similar. This is the case with screenplays and with kitchen tables, as scriptwriter and teacher Syd Field explains:
If we were to take a screenplay and hang it on the wall like a painting and examine it, it would look like this diagram:

All screenplays contain this basic linear structure. This model of a screenplay is known as a paradigm. It is a model, a pattern, a conceptual scheme.

The paradigm of one type of kitchen table, for example, is a top with (usually) four legs. Within that paradigm, we can have a square table, long table, round table, high table, low table, rectangular table, or an adjustable table. Within the paradigm, a table is anything we want it to be—a top with (usually) four legs.

The paradigm holds firm. (1984, 7–8).

The checklist below outlines the structural qualities of a nonfiction feature article or a research paper as described in Chapter 9.

---

CHECKLIST FOR FORM

Name ___________________________________________ Period __________

ELEMENTS

1. Introduction
2. Narrative
3. Quotation
4. Exposition
5. Description
6. Conclusion

POINTS:

Total Revision Points Earned ________

Grade ________
In every genre, writers create meaning with paradigm road maps of form. The choice of form alters the writer’s perception, influencing options for style, content, and convention. The structure governing a film script is just as different from the structure of a short story as the rules for playing baseball are from the rules for playing field hockey. Providing students with checklists of form gives them insights into these unique genre structures.

Creating a Short Revision Checklist for Content

The content of a piece of writing is shaped by the perceptions of the writer. For example, reading an essay in *Time* on the ethics of cloning, a historical scholar might evaluate the quality of the piece based on its religious-cultural-historic content. By contrast, a scientist reading the same essay might evaluate its quality based on the scientific validity of the concepts presented. However, while a writer examining the essay might notice both of these perspectives, the writer also focuses on elements of unity, development, coherence, clarity, and conciseness—a collection that requires subjective evaluations.

**A CHECKLIST FOR CONTENT**

Name _____________________________ Period _________

**Unity**
1. Does the entire piece create one dominant controlling idea and is the idea sufficiently narrow? ______
2. Does each paragraph or passage support the controlling idea? ______

**Development**
3. Do the paragraphs and passages contain enough specific details to enhance clarity and contribute to unity? ______
4. Are the logical relationships clear? Can the information be easily outlined with a classical outline or a Freitag pyramid? ______

**Coherence**
5. Are ideas clearly connected from sentence to sentence and passage to passage? ______
6. Are transitions used to help ideas and images flow smoothly? ______

**Clarity**
7. Do words, sentences, and passages clearly express ideas? ______
Conciseness

8. Are excess words, sentences, and paragraphs eliminated? ______

Total Revision Points Earned ______

Grade ______

For years many teachers have used a grading system of two marks—one for content and one for mechanics. Unfortunately, this doesn’t work well if you view content as the number of facts presented without considering items listed in the content checklist. Also, grading for content and mechanics often ignores the essential areas of form and style. But then, using mechanics poses problems of selection. Which of the five hundred plus items of mechanics will count?

One effective way to deal with this dilemma is to use a checklist, a checklist that has been taught before students revise. This gives students hope. They can see that what they need to learn in order to succeed.

Considering Some Special Concerns with Clarity

To help students improve clarity, teachers may want to discuss a concept of general semantics called the ladder of abstraction, an idea first described by Alfred Korzybski (1941). From a general semantics perspective, the relationship between words and the physical world follows a hierarchy. For example, describing Sniffer, a farmer’s pig, a writer might choose to characterize Sniffer on one of many levels. (See Figure 10–2.)

The word Sniffer generates images of a specific pig who likes to poke his wet snout through a wooden fence, who grunts and snorts at feeding time, and who even omits assorted odors on the morning breeze. For example, picture in your mind an image of Sniffer. Imagine that his nose seems to always be sniffing and that his right hind leg twitches.

But the higher one climbs the ladder, the less visual, and more abstract, the images become. The word pig is on a higher level of abstraction, meaning that it is far more vague, providing only the characteristics common to all pigs. Everything that defines Sniffer as a unique animal is lost.

Now, take another step up the ladder of abstraction and suppose you are listing the assets of the farm and Sniffer is listed as livestock. As you move up the ladder of abstraction the words include fewer and fewer specific images that identify Sniffer. When you reach economic commodity, the image of Sniffer is lost completely.
The words *economic commodity* include so many related images that the reader loses any specific focus. The trick in writing is not to eliminate abstract words but to *limit* them, supporting those you use with numerous specific examples. Many well-written passages are constructed this way, with an abstract controlling idea followed by specific supporting sentences. When writers use *too many* abstract terms or sentences, the words obscure clarity.

This fogging quality motivated Philip Broughton (1968), a public service official, to create a systematic buzz word projector. Designed to illustrate how easy it is to create impressive statements that actually say nothing, the buzz word projector provides writers three lists from which to construct one or more phrases:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0. integrated</td>
<td>0. management</td>
<td>0. options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. total</td>
<td>1. organizational</td>
<td>1. flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. systematized</td>
<td>2. monitored</td>
<td>2. capacity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After building phrases by combining two or three words in each list, a writer can create the illusion of expertise by injecting these word combinations into his or her speech or writing. So when someone asks what the curriculum committee in your school system actually does, you can reply by choosing words from the above columns and say, “The committee has been developing an integrated reciprocal contingency plan to make our school’s functional logistical time-phase more effective.” This sounds impressive, like the comment should make profound sense, but the mental images are blank.

**Considering Some Special Concerns with Conciseness**

Along with avoiding excessive abstractions, students need to be wary of what Richard Lanhan (1992) refers to as the *lard factor*, the tendency to pack paragraphs with wasted words. In *Revising Prose*, Lanham gives an example of squeezing out the lard in a passage written by a history professor:

> There is one last point in the evidence of Everard of Ypres, which deserves a comment before we leave it. This is the very surprising difference between the number of students at Gilbert’s lectures in Chartres and in Paris. (20)

Lanhan squeezed these sentences, eliminating unnecessary words and leaving only this substance:

> One last question apropos Everard of Ypres. Why did so few students attend his Chartres lectures and so many those in Paris? (21)

Lanham notes that the lard factor in this revision is 44 percent, meaning the final version contains 44 percent fewer words than the original.

Lard tends to develop when writing lacks a tight logical structure. Logic is the compass that leads the reader to a content destination. When students have no controlling idea, they
wander like lost sailors in uncharted waters. If a teacher has to ask, “What is the point you’re trying to make?” the currents of logic have usually deteriorated to an incoming tide of thick lard balls.

To avoid lard, corporate writers sometimes use a fog index to calculate clarity. To determine a fog index, add the average number of words per sentence in a hundred-word sample to the percentage of polysyllable words in the passage and then multiply that total times .04. The resulting number correlates with the approximate grade level needed to read a passage. Requiring students to do this regularly would be time-consuming and more an indication of mathematical ability than content clarity. However, most computer word processing programs now include a readability scale that allows you to calculate a text’s readability with one click of the mouse. This is can be a useful teaching tool.

**Combining Checklists**

As the year progresses, teachers might combine checklists of form, style, convention, and content to give students a feel for the interrelationships of different dimensions of writing. Here is one example of a combined checklist for a nonfiction project:

---

**A COMBINED REVISION CHECKLIST**

Name __________________________________________ Period _________

Be sure to review each of the following categories to see whether you have handled these elements well. Each listed item is worth from 0 to 5 points for a possible total of 130 points.

**NONFICTION FORM**

1. Introduction                   POINTS
2. Narrative                     _______
3. Quotation                     _______
4. Exposition                    _______
5. Description                   _______

**Style**

6. Participles                   _______
7. Absolutes                     _______
8. Appositives                   _______
9. Adjectives out of order       _______
This type of checklist makes grading easier. You can determine quickly whether a student has met the criteria listed and score points accordingly. While this practice should not replace marginal comments, conferencing, and self-evaluations, it is a useful way to reinforce wholeness in the revision process.

The systematic use of checklists can make grading easier and serve as a curriculum guide for portfolios; however, its primary benefit derives from helping students internalize their own personal framework for revision. Every writer revises from a checklist, but these are often subconscious lists, which have been composed over years of experimentation with form, content, style, and convention.
With students, the idea is to begin with one category and progress through the other three. Then, as the year progresses, teachers can add additional items, building a kind of mental filing cabinet in which to store new insights—a first step toward a systematic approach to revision.

STRATEGIES

Strategy 1: Administer the Grammar Income Test

The Shalersville University Occupational Inventory is a test that measures a student’s grammatical knowledge and then uses that measurement to predict the student’s potential income. To motivate interest in conventions, give your students this test.

THE SHALERSVILLE UNIVERSITY OCCUPATIONAL INVENTORY OF GRAMMATICAL KNOWLEDGE

Name ___________________________________________ Period __________

As demonstrated in the research of Shalersville University’s Doctor Edward McCormick, an individual’s grammatical habits correlate with his or her income. The fewer grammatical mistakes an individual makes, the more money that individual tends to earn. The test that follows will show you with 85 to 95 percent accuracy your future income level based on your current grammatical knowledge.

Instructions: Mark each sentence as C if it is grammatically correct, I if it is incorrect, or ? if you are uncertain. Wrong answers count for a minus two. A question mark, indicating you are uncertain, only counts for a minus one. Keep in mind that errors may be of any variety of convention: punctuation, capitalization, spelling, or usage.

____ 1. When the fire started, we was downtown at the movies.

____ 2. The principal didn’t have no business accusing Josh.

____ 3. Luther and I were there and saw the whole show.

____ 4. Each 30 second television ad shown during the Super Bowl costs sponsors on the average of $1.9 million dollars. Partly because of the 85 to 90 million viewers.

____ 5. In some playing cards, Charlemagne is represented by the king of hearts, Caesar is represented by the king of diamonds, Alexander the Great is represented by the king of clubs, and King David is represented by the king of spades.
6. While helping a patient, a bullet went through Clara Barton’s sleeve and killed the wounded soldier she was treating.

7. After the long day of practice, we sat down to rest.

8. Using Texas Holdem cards, bluffing played a key role.

9. Winning fifty chess games and drawing six, the blind-folded, simultaneous chess match set a record for Grandmaster George Koltanowski.

10. Maria Sharapova is a Wimbledon Champion, a multimillionaire, and also does very well acting.

11. The team of students are going in a bus instead of a van.

12. There is hardly no problem more difficult than national defense.

13. Dan’s ability to sing certainly surprised Albert and I.

14. Edgar Allan Poe did not have a steady hand, as you can see from his handwriting.

15. Don Braddick landed a 3450 pound Great White Shark in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of New York but Frank Mundus, the captain of the charter boat, is given much deserved credit.

16. Mark Twain once wrote a novel about his steamboat experience on the Mississippi River.

17. Before buying the car, we set down with the owner and discussed repairs.

18. They’re here to see the new movie.

19. Before the Aswan Dam was constructed, the Egyptians used the flooding of the Nile as a natural enrichment for their crops.

20. Stephen King has dreamed of attacking insects, falling elevators and also zombies who walk in the night.

21. Roger don’t care if he fails this test.

22. Having watched 12 hours of Twilight Zone reruns, the movie special finally came to an end.

23. The halfback turned, spun, and plowed through the line.

24. Neither the captain nor the coach did their job.

25. The Peregrine Falcon which can reach speeds of over 175 miles per hour has been sighted passing small airplanes.

26. The airplane with over 200 passengers were late to arrive.

27. The game of Sizzle ended, having used all of the game cards.
28. The collection included books by Jay Leno Dave Barry and Steve Martin.

29. Each of the plans has their problems.

30. Plant smuggling which generates five billion dollars a year is a growing illegal business.

Display the list of answers and have students score their papers. Answer key:

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**INVENTORY RANKINGS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Projected Salary</th>
<th>Occupational Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to −1</td>
<td>$400,000 and above</td>
<td>top executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>−2 to −3</td>
<td>$90,000 to $400,000</td>
<td>upper management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>−4 to −5</td>
<td>$60,000 to $90,000</td>
<td>key personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>−6 or −8</td>
<td>$25,000 to $60,000</td>
<td>semiskilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>−9 or −10</td>
<td>$10,000 to $25,000</td>
<td>unskilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>−11 or more</td>
<td>$0 to $10,000</td>
<td>unemployable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After students have taken and scored this test, explain that over the next few days you are going to increase their incomes by at least $50,000 each. Later—perhaps two or three months later—after you have worked with many of the grammatical concepts in this test, reveal that the test was fabricated. There is no Shalersville University, nor any professor named Dr. Edward McCormick who designed a grammar/income test.

However, explain that the concept of the test is very real. Every day individuals who make grammatical errors are victims of a pervasive but seldom discussed prejudice. People assume that those who make frequent grammatical
errors are unintelligent, not very knowledgeable, and incompetent. None of this may be true. Language habits are more indicative of social background than education and ability. However, any business executive will support the notion that grammatical skill directly affects promotion. So the idea behind the Shalersville University Occupational Inventory of Grammatical Knowledge is valid, although the scored income level may not be.

**Strategy 2: Punctuate That That Is Is**

To illustrate how punctuation shapes meaning, ask students to punctuate the following passage. Mention that this is an old puzzle once used in the film Charly to demonstrate the genius of the main character.

That that is is that that is not is not that that is not is not that is is not that is not is not that it it is

After students have tried punctuating the passage, use it as an illustration of how passages that sometimes sound logical to the writer can be confusing to readers when pauses are not correctly punctuated. Then give the class the correct solution:

That that is, is. That that is not, is not. That that is not is not that that is. That that is is not that that is not. Is not that it? It is. (Ravenel 1959, 143)

**Strategy 3: Editing the County Line Newsletter**

**Steps:**

1. Distribute a copy of the following exercise to each member of the class (a reproducible version is on the CD).
2. Go over the instructions.

**EDITING THE COUNTY LINE NEWSLETTER**

As editor of the County Line Newsletter, you are going to conduct a short meeting to show reporters what you expect in revision. In preparation for this meeting, rewrite the paragraph below (a brief snapshot of the Hollow Log Bluegrass Festival) to show some effective revisions. Use your imagination to fill in needed details. Then write a few comments explaining why the original was ineffective.
HOLLOW LOG BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL

The outdoor bluegrass jam was filled with music. Musicians played on all kinds of instruments. Dogs were wandering and sometimes barking. Kids were a bit disruptive, but the crowd was appreciative. Vendors sold a variety of souvenirs and great foods.

Strategy 4: Decoding Abstract Statements

This activity illustrates the problem of highly abstract words. Each of the following statements represents a well-known quote that has been paraphrased abstractly. Divide the class into teams to compete for bonus points by deciphering as many of these statements as possible in fifteen minutes.

ABSTRACTIONS

A. I’m unable to accurately perceive the possible directions that individuals might arbitrarily select, but given my predilection, I recognize only two viable alternatives: (1) restoring my emancipation from autocratic rule or (2) introducing me to the grim reaper.

B. The entire habitable and inhabitable regions of the third planet from the sun symbolically embody an elevated platform, and the two varieties of carbon-based bipedal life forms appear to be merely thespians.

C. Passageways for vehicles, humans, and animals invited egress in two highly foliated directions, and I—i elected to traverse the access which appeared in better repair from less traffic.

D. The realm of the celestial expanse of the afterworld parallels a small, hard plat ovule of the genus Brassica.

E. A small move over a short distance to a specified place, accomplished by one individual; a forward bound of extraordinary proportions performed as a tribute to the human race.

ANSWERS

A. “I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.” (Patrick Henry)

B. “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.” (William Shakespeare)

C. “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by.” (Robert Frost)

D. “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed.” (The Bible, the Book of Matthew)

E. “One small step for man; one giant leap for mankind.” (Neil Armstrong)
Strategy 6: Beat the Deadline for $500 a Word

Steps:

1. Give students the handout below (a reproducible copy is included on the CD) and review with them the “six chunks”—techniques for eliminating unnecessary words (also on the CD).
2. Divide the class into four teams and explain that they are going to compete in a game called Beat the Deadline.
3. Tell them to imagine that they are working as an editorial team for a popular magazine. Their task is to shorten the movie review on the handout to make room for an advertisement for “Comsat Hiking Boots for Infants.”
4. Tell them they should cut any unnecessary text, but that they must not eliminate anything that dramatically changes the meaning of the original. Each lost idea will cost the team $1500!
5. The Comsat Company will pay them $500 for each word they can eliminate to provide space for their ad. The more space they create by eliminating words, the larger Comsat’s ad can be.
6. They have only twelve minutes to complete their editing.

BEAT THE DEADLINE MOVIE REVIEW

Last week I saw a film, which was a science fiction flick that was really, really old. There were two totally excellent actors in the movie. Tom Snooze, who was the star, played this young lawyer guy. He was absolutely great. Snooze is the type of actor who seems to seek out roles with exciting plots. Really. Joe King, who was the other lead actor and a co-star, played a hit man. He was the type of hit man who added a lot of constant suspense.
Six Chunks: Techniques for Eliminating Unnecessary Words

To play this game, you need to know the following six chunks—techniques to eliminate unnecessary words from sentences.

1. **Image blank adjectives**
   Watch for adjectives that don’t create an image. Here are a few examples: neat, nice, pretty, strange, wonderful, etc. These adjectives can work as generalizations in a topic sentence to be followed by specific details. However, they are ineffective when used to capture an image. This is why authors like Hemingway tried to avoid image blank adjectives.

2. **Image blank adverbs**
   Adverbs are much like adjectives in that some enhance an image while others (image blanks) don’t. Image blank adjectives include words like truly, genuinely, very, and really. Although many authors try to avoid adverbs completely, at times adverbs can be effective. Excellent examples of effective adverbs can be found in almost any of Brian Jacques’ novels.
   Also, many adverbs can be replaced by a more specific verb. For example, instead of saying “Emily ran really fast down the hall,” you can eliminate three words and replace them with one: “Emily darted down the hall.” Rather than writing, “Kirk went slowly to the front of the room,” you might write “Kirk shuffled to the front of the room.”

3. **Unnecessary words**
   Omit redundancies such as armed gunman, personal friend, totally destroyed, plan ahead, and eliminate altogether. Eliminate unnecessary words. Change “The car was red in color” to “The car was red” to “The red car.” Change “It was, more or less, a rainy day,” to “It was a rainy day.”

4. **Check the word of**
   Revise your paper by looking for the word of. Be sure that it is needed.

   She is the type of person who always helps.
   She always helps.

   We will be away for the month of June,
   We will be away in June.
5. Do you need *it is (was)* and *there are (were, is, was)*?

Watch for *it is, it was, there are,* and *that there is.* Often, these are space gobblers:

There are four kittens in the litter.
Four kittens are in the litter.

The rock group Z Factor is the best that there is.
The rock group Z Factor is the best.

One song was the best. It was called “Tremors.”
“Tremors” was the best song.

6. Check *which is,* *who are,* and *who is*

These are opportunities to create appositives. You can often eliminate these two-word combinations and create a more powerful sentence with an appositive. For example, “This novel, which is a mystery thriller packed with action, was exciting” versus “This novel, a mystery thriller packed with action, was exciting.”

**Sample Solution**

The original passage is 86 words long. You should have been able to tighten this from 86 words to approximately 51, thus earning $17,500 for eliminating 35 words. However, your revision must not have lost any significant ideas. Each loss of an important idea will cost your team the equivalent of three words ($1500) in the final word count.

Last week I saw an old science fiction film, starring two excellent actors—Tom Snooze, the star who plays a young lawyer, and Ben Dover, the co-star who plays a hit man. Both were great. Tom Snooze seems to seek out roles with exciting plots, while Joe King adds constant suspense.