

**ENGLISH COMPOSITION;  
EIGHT LECTURES GIVEN  
AT THE LOWELL INSTITUTE**

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English Composition; Eight Lectures Given at the Lowell Institute by Barrett Wendell

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# ENGLISH COMPOSITION

EIGHT LECTURES GIVEN AT THE LOWELL  
INSTITUTE

BY

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1918, 1919

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### NOTE.

THESE lectures were given at the Lowell Institute, Boston, in November and December, 1890. Any student of the subject will at once perceive my obligation to the textbooks of Professor A. S. Hill, Professor Bain, Professor Genung, and the late Professor McElroy. My excuse for offering a new treatment of the subject is that I have found none that seemed quite simple enough for popular reading.

B. W.

Boston, September, 1891.

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## NOTE FOR TEACHERS

*Using Wendell's English Composition.*

Inquiries concerning the use of this book in teaching lead me to add this statement of how I have used it at Harvard College.

In the course where I regularly use it as a text-book, compositions, called *themes*, of from five hundred to a thousand words, are written every fortnight. On the introductory chapter, which I direct the class to read at once, I do not formally examine the students at all; but I expect them to have read it intelligently before writing the first theme. Between the first theme and the second, I direct them to read the chapter on Words, the suggestions in which they are advised particularly to consider in writing the second theme. When this theme is handed in, each student takes the theme of a fellow-student and devotes an hour to making, in the class-room, a written analysis of its vocabulary. In this work he is guided by the following plan, sketched on a blackboard:

- WORDS: 1. Grammatical Purity: *a.* Barbarism.  
*b.* Impropriety.
2. Kinds of Words: *a.* Latin or Saxon.  
*b.* Long or short.  
*c.* General or specific.  
*d.* Figurative or literal,  
etc.
3. Number of Words.
4. Denotation and Connotation.

At the close of the hour each criticism is folded within the



theme it deals with, and both documents are handed in together.

By this means several ends are generally attained. The student, aware of the test to which his work will be exposed, is apt practically to apply, in his own writing, the rhetorical matter contained in the chapter under consideration; he thus learns, half insensibly, to consider the subject not as an abstract one, but rather as a body of practical advice concerning artistic conduct. In categorically criticising the theme of somebody else, he is compelled at once intelligently to master the theory of the chapter under consideration, and to display his knowledge of it in an orderly way. And if he criticises well—which proves the case rather oftener than one would expect—he greatly lightens the task of the instructor who has finally to criticise the theme in question.

Between the second theme and the third, I direct the class similarly to master the chapter on Sentences, their knowledge of which is similarly tested by the following plan:

- SENTENCES:**
1. Grammatical Purity: Solecism.
  2. Kinds of Sentences: *a.* Long or short.  
*b.* Periodic or loose,  
etc.
  3. Principles of Composition: *a.* Unity.  
*b.* Mass.  
*c.* Coherence.
  4. Denotation and Connotation.

With the next theme, their knowledge of the chapter on Paragraphs is similarly tested thus:

- PARAGRAPHS:**
- I. Summarize the theme you criticise, paragraph by paragraph.
  - II.
    1. Kinds of Paragraphs.
    2. Principles of Composition.
    3. Denotation and Connotation.

With the next theme, their knowledge of the chapter on Whole Compositions is tested thus :

- WHOLE COMPOSITION: I. Summarize, paragraph by paragraph.
- II. 1. Principles of Composition.  
2. Denotation and Connotation.

Having thus accustomed students to analyzing the Elements of Style, I proceed in the following three themes similarly to call their attention to the Qualities of Style. After studying the chapter on Clearness, they are directed to analyze one another's themes by the following plan :

- I. ELEMENTS OF STYLE.
1. Words.
  2. Sentences.
  3. Paragraphs.
  4. Whole Composition.
- II. QUALITY OF STYLE.
1. Clearness.

In similar manner I test their knowledge of the two remaining chapters—the chapters on Force and on Elegance.

For the rest of the year, they are regularly required every fortnight to make a complete analysis of one another's themes. The complete scheme of criticism is as follows :

- I. ELEMENTS OF STYLE.
1. Words.
  2. Sentences.
  3. Paragraphs.
  4. Whole Composition.
- II. QUALITIES OF STYLE.
1. Clearness.
  2. Force.
  3. Elegance.
- III. GENERAL REMARKS.

In every case, each student is generally expected to make some comment under each head. Repeated use of this scheme

certainly fixes the book in their minds to a rather surprising degree.

I may add that I have for years been accustomed, in reading themes, to make a hasty categorical analysis of every theme I read. The pages of my note-book are divided thus:

NAME OF STUDENT :

	Theme I.	Theme II.	Theme III, etc.
Title of theme.....			
Mark.....			
Words .....			
Sentences .....			
Paragraphs.....			
Whole Compositions.			
Clearness.....			
Force .....			
Elegance .....			
Remarks .....			

When one has sixty or seventy themes to read every week, each single analysis must of course be hasty. If several separate analyses, however, made at considerable intervals, and necessarily in various moods and under various conditions, prove to have much in common, they result in a valid basis for generalizations about the style of the individual they concern. The experience of more than ten years confirms my belief that this method of keeping pupils in hand is efficient.

BARRETT WENDELL.

HARVARD COLLEGE, May, 1894.