

**WRITING IN ENGLISH:  
A MODERN SCHOOL  
COMPOSITION**

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Writing in English: A Modern School Composition by William H. Maxwell & George J. Smith

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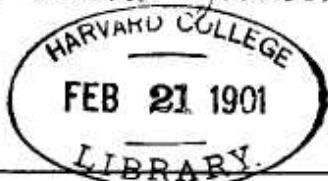
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**WILLIAM H. MAXWELL & GEORGE J. SMITH**

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WRIT. IN ENG.

W. P. 2

## PREFACE

It would doubtless be presumptuous to imagine that this book, as a guide to the preëminently important school subject of learning to write English, avoids all the faults of its predecessors, or contains more than a portion of their merits. But unless a text-book is thought to possess some definite advantages over the others in its field, it has no excuse for being. Attention is therefore directed to the following prominent features of this elementary treatise on *Writing in English*:—

1. The *general plan* of the development of the subject is noteworthy, as proceeding from the study and production of *entire compositions*, in the first chapters, to the study of the next order of composition-units, well-made *paragraphs*, then to *sentence-construction*, and, at length, to the smallest units of composition, *words*. Since it would, however, be unwise to complete any one of these great divisions of the subject before attending at all to the others, this general order, while it is kept in view throughout, is modified as shown in the Table of Contents; to which, and to its prefatory note, attention is requested. This plan is justified not only by the established principle of teaching from the whole to the parts, but by the experience of all able instructors in English, that nothing is more certain to kill a pupil's interest in composition than to compel him to begin the subject by laboring over the minutiae of style and diction, as embodied in rules of good usage and exemplified in uncon-

nected sentences. There should be composition, natural expression of connected ideas or observations, from the first. The study of the principles of sentence-construction and of choice of words should be made secondary, because the pupil does not perceive the value of such study to him, until, through the willing production of compositions expressing his own conceptions of life and nature, he has learned to feel the need of improving himself in the use of language. Interested observation and spontaneous thought require for their growth an atmosphere of freedom. Therefore it is that, in the early study of composition, we should aim, not at a finical remodeling of lay-figure sentences, but at copious and natural expression; and should defer a studied manipulation of sentences and of words until the student himself perceives the use of it. He must have something to say which he feels is worth saying and worth saying well. In this, as in other concerns, it is the spirit that giveth life, and it is the letter that killeth.

2. The method of studying *models* of good composition is prominent in this book. The number of extracts presented from good authors is large, and the character of them is such as to give of itself an interest and a value to the book. These selections are used as models not only of style, but of composition,—that is, of the skillfully ordered presentation of ideas. It is, in fact, as models of putting-together (composition) that they are first employed; the student's attention is primarily directed to the arrangement of their parts. Distinct from this use and yet along with it goes the employment of the selections as models for direct *imitation*. The effective influence of imitation in the molding of a good style is something that has been profited by, in schools, far too little. In support of it may be urged not only Dr. John-

son's advice, "to give days and nights to the study of Addison," and the recorded indebtedness of writers no less admirable than Irving and Robert Louis Stevenson to their conscious imitation of models, but, in fact, every person's unconscious response, in his own manner of writing, to the style of the authors he has read most and with most attention. The helpfulness of imitation is indeed one of the strongest bonds between the study of literature and the study of composition.

It may be well, before passing to the next heading, to direct attention also to the frequent employment, throughout the book, of the *inductive method* in the presentation of new points. It is strongly recommended that the teacher, by multiplying illustrations before calling for a principle, proceed in this method to a far greater extent than is possible in a text-book of strictly limited size.

3. Particular notice is directed to the great number and the practical character of the *exercises* in this book. They have been planned with great care, and their contents looked after no less sedulously than the order of their progression. It may fairly be said that the exercises constitute the active and living element in the book, — they should become, in the schoolroom, the outward form, concealing and vitalizing the skeleton-structure of the study.

In conclusion, a few words may be said regarding the *use of this book* by the teacher. Conditions vary so much in the myriad schools of this country, especially, perhaps, with regard to the study of English, that work adapted in many schools to the upper grammar grades may in others be precisely what is needed in the first year of the high school. It is difficult to present the principles of English composition simply enough to meet the understanding of children of grammar grades; and in fact the cardinal



objection to nearly every composition text-book designed for high-school use is that it presents the subject in a manner too dry or too difficult for the average high-school pupil.

Since the sensible teacher always regards a text-book as a mere instrument, a means not an end, he will feel free to omit, in his use of any book, whatever portions seem either too difficult or otherwise ill adapted for his particular class of pupils. He will, further, in order to meet the needs of his pupils or to make the hard-and-fast plan of a book flexible in use, deviate from its order of exercises or even from its order of contents, as may seem to him wise and good. Thus it would undoubtedly be well to work at some of the chapters in this book two at a time. Work in the sentence-making chapters (Chapters VI, VIII, etc.) might very well go on concurrently with work in description, narration, or paragraphing. In fact, the book will probably yield the best results if used, to some extent, in this way. Nevertheless, the arrangement of the chapters and the progressive system of the exercises are strongly recommended as a guide, in a general way, to the natural development of the subject; and they will, it is hoped, commend themselves, both in theory and in practice, to all who use the book.

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**NOTE TO TEACHERS.**—Attention is asked to the remarks in the Preface, regarding the plan of this book. It is to be noted that the subject of composition is treated here under the following divisions:—

- (a) Compositions, Chapters I, II, V, VII, XI, XIV.
- (b) Paragraphing, Chapters III, IX.
- (c) Sentence work, Chapters IV, VI, VIII, X, XII, XIII.

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