

**THE ESSENTIALS OF  
ENGLISH  
COMPOSITION**

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The Essentials of English Composition by James Weber Linn

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ENGLISH COMPOSITION

BY

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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## PREFATORY NOTE

OF making text-books on English Composition there is no end. The author of the work here offered consulted more than fifty, and might doubtless have consulted as many more. Yet he presents no apology for adding to the list. Some are too complicated to be helpful; others too dogmatic to be trustworthy; still others are highly valuable only as works of reference. Most are addressed either to the elementary student, to the proficient, or to the teacher. Diligent search throughout fourteen years' experience in teaching college freshmen classes has brought to the present author's notice not one book which meets the requirements of the students whom year after year he has faced. They ought not, perhaps, to need review of elementary details, but they do need it. They ought, perhaps, to be able to appreciate the finer matters of style, but they are not. This book seeks to give, in small compass, the information and direction which the average boy or girl of seventeen or eighteen, who has had the average training in composition in the grades and the high schools, needs to supplement and enliven his or her ability to write clear English. It is written as much to interest as to insist, as much to stimulate as to command. It gives few rules, and those simple; many suggestions, and those, it is hoped, clear. If it contains one sentence that needs explanation by a teacher, the author has so far failed of his intention. Any good teacher must elaborate, must

apply generalities to the individual instance, must effect by his personality what a text-book cannot effect; but the student has a right to demand, nevertheless, from his text-book statements that are accurate, helpful, and impossible to misunderstand. The author hopes that his book will meet just such demands.

The treatment of the whole composition is based on the idea that here thought, not phrasing, organization, not detail, is the important matter. The paragraph has been handled briefly because single paragraphs are subject to exactly the same laws as the whole composition, and paragraph division more certainly than anything else in composition is a matter for the individual judgment; this every one who has studied the history of the English paragraph admits. The discussion of the sentence is full, but compact and untechnical; it is more specifically a *review* than is anything else in the book, though the section on sentence-groups may offer the student fresh ideas. The word is considered first from the point of view of effectiveness, because the matter of propriety seems to the author, though highly important, not the most important matter. The section on punctuation is frankly review material. The discussion of the kinds of composition seeks to eliminate non-essentials and mere categories, and to concentrate the attention of the student on fundamental and important things.

Little use has been made of the terms unity, emphasis and coherence, so familiar to every teacher. Their introduction did much for the study of English composition. In preparatory school work the focussing of the student's attention upon them is wise. By college days, however, and even perhaps in the review year in the schools, the time arrives when the student must be allowed to realize that these terms are only means to an end, when his

interest must be stimulated to the end itself. Rules and terms, having served their purpose, give way to discussion and suggestion. When the well-known phrases fit the ideas presented here, the author has used them without hesitation, but he has not made them either his starting-point or his conclusion.

His thanks and appreciation are due to so many who have been of assistance to him, that enumeration would occupy too great a space. To Professor Barrett Wendell's *English Composition* and Professor Charles Sears Baldwin's various writings on rhetoric, he would gratefully acknowledge his debt; it is a debt common to all who teach the subject nowadays. His colleagues at the University of Chicago have been unwearied in friendly aid. In connection with the exercises, Miss Evelyn May Albright and Miss Gertrude Emerson have given help of a sort which the author could hardly have done without, and for which he here returns his warmest thanks.