

FIRST LESSONS IN COMPOSITION

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First Lessons in Composition by John S. Hart

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JOHN S. HART

**FIRST LESSONS
IN COMPOSITION**

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BY

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IN THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY.



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A Manual of American Literature.

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PREFACE.

NOTHING in school is usually so poorly taught as Composition. This is the uniform testimony of those conversant with the subject. Yet it would be difficult to name a branch that equals it in practical value. The ability to express one's knowledge readily and clearly, which is only another name for skill in Composition, both helps in acquiring knowledge, and multiplies almost indefinitely the value of it when acquired. The scholar who has this skill can thereby learn faster every other branch of study, and at the same time can turn every other branch to greater account. Why should a part of education of such primary importance be so generally neglected? Is there any inherent difficulty in teaching Composition, which can justify this neglect? It is my assured conviction, on the contrary, that there is no branch which can be taught with greater ease, or with more entire certainty of success. The great mistake in the matter is that the study is not begun soon enough. Teachers wait till a scholar is twelve or fourteen years old, and then, all at once, without any previous training, tell him to write a Composition. They might as well tell him to make a steam-engine. Exercises in Composition should begin as soon as a child begins to read and write, and they should at first be of the simplest possible character, such as any child can write who can write his own name. The exercise, instead of being attended to once a month,

or once a quarter, should be attended to daily. It should be put on the same footing as reading and spelling. It should begin long before the study of Grammar, and should continue year after year as a part of the daily routine in school, until the study is finally merged in that of Rhetoric. A teacher who will persistently give his class a course of exercises of this kind, graduating the exercises to the growing capacity of the scholars, will find no more difficulty in teaching Composition than a parent finds in teaching his children to walk. Scholars by such a course of exercises acquire insensibly and almost without conscious effort the ability to express their ideas with clearness, force, and elegance, and this ability, as before remarked, gives increased value to every other acquisition.

The present work is a book of exercises, rather than a text-book. These exercises, however, are throughout based upon a scheme of thought, a text, so to speak, which was in the author's mind, and by which the scholar is led on systematically, and in due logical order, from the simplest and most elementary forms of expression to those which are complex and ornamental. The exercises thus lead by natural and easy steps to the study of Grammar and Rhetoric, and are believed to be the best possible introduction to those important branches. The scholar who has been trained to write with grammatical and rhetorical correctness will find no difficulty in studying the theory of Grammar and Rhetoric; for here, as everywhere in the educational process, PRACTICE BEFORE THEORY is the dictate equally of common sense and of sound philosophy.

J. S. H.

STATE NORMAL SCHOOL,
Trenton, N. J., Dec., 1870. }





PART I.

ON WORDS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION,	9

CHAPTER I.—Simple Words.

SECTION 1. Nouns,	12
SECTION 2. Adjectives,	14
SECTION 3. Verbs,	16
SECTION 4. Adverbs,	17

CHAPTER II.—Derivative Words.

SECTION 1. Nouns,	19
SECTION 2. Adjectives,	24
SECTION 3. Verbs,	30
SECTION 4. Adverbs,	31

PART II.

SENTENCE-MAKING.

CHAPTER I.—Simple Sentences.

SECTION 1. The Simplest Form of the Sentence,	33
SECTION 2. The Parts of a Sentence,	35
Pronouns,	38
SECTION 3. Adjuncts,	39
1. Adjuncts to the Subject and the Object,	40
Form 1. Adjuncts formed by Noun in Apposition,	40
Form 2. Adjuncts formed by Noun in Possessive,	41
Form 3. Case 1. Adjuncts formed by Adjective,	43
Case 2. Adjuncts formed by Adjective-word,	44
Form 4. Adjuncts formed by Preposition-phrase,	44

	PAGE
2. Adjuncts to the Predicate,	45
Form 1. Adjuncts formed by Adverb,	45
Form 2. Adjuncts formed by Preposition-phrase,	45
REVIEW EXERCISES,	49
COMPOSITIONS,	54

CHAPTER II.—Complex Sentences.

SECTION 1. Connective Sentences,	55
Compositions,	59
SECTION 2. Antithetical Sentences,	61
Compositions,	63
SECTION 3. Inferential Sentences,	63
Compositions,	65
SECTION 4. Dependent Sentences,	65
Compositions,	67
SECTION 5. Relative Sentences,	67
Compositions,	68

PART III.

VARIETY OF EXPRESSION.

CHAPTER I.—Change of Arrangement.

SECTION 1. Prose Changed,	69
Compositions,	70
SECTION 2. Poetry Changed,	70

CHAPTER II.—Change of Structure.

SECTION 1. Subject, Object, or Predicate Changed,	72
Compositions,	74
SECTION 2. Change from Active to Passive, etc.,	74
Compositions,	75
SECTION 3. Change of Participial Constructions,	75
Compositions,	77
SECTION 4. Change of Person,	77
Compositions,	78
SECTION 5. Miscellaneous Changes,	78
Compositions,	80
SECTION 6. Synonyms,	80
Compositions,	86
SECTION 7. Copiousness,	87
Compositions,	88

PART IV.

FIGURATIVE EXPRESSION.

CHAPTER I.—Simile.

	PAGE
Compositions,	91

CHAPTER II.—Metaphor.

Compositions,	94
-------------------------	----

CHAPTER III.—Metonymy.

Compositions,	96
-------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.—Synecdoche.

Compositions,	98
-------------------------	----

CHAPTER V.—Interrogation.

Compositions,	100
-------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VI.—Personification.

Compositions,	102
Miscellaneous Subjects for Composition,	103

PART V.

STYLE, or The Best Mode of Expression.

I. Clearness,	107
II. Emphasis,	114
III. Unity,	116
IV. Strength,	119

PART VI.

LETTER-WRITING.

I. The Heading,	123
II. The Address,	125
III. The Subscription,	126
IV. The Superscription,	127