What Is "College-Level" Writing?

Volume 2
Assignments, Readings, and Student Writing Samples

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INTRODUCTION

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We cordially welcome you to our second collection of essays devoted to exploring "college-level writing."

Our goal for this new collection is to broaden and deepen the discussion we began in our first volume and to focus attention as much as possible on the *practical* and the *pragmatic* aspects of college-level writing. For that reason, the essays in this collection focus exclusively on matters that English teachers concern themselves with on a daily basis—assignments, readings, and student writing.

As was the case with our first volume, we do not seek here to produce a final, fixed, definitive answer to the question, "What is 'college-level' writing?" Our goal, instead, is to extend the conversation we began in our first book and to anchor this continuing conversation in real writing produced by actual high school and college students. In so doing, we hope to begin a process of defining "college-level writing" by example. In this regard, we see this volume serving as companion to the important outcomes statements issued recently by the Council of Writing Program Administrators and the Common Core State Standards Initiative regarding first-year composition and college readiness (see also *NCTE Beliefs*).

We certainly think this collection offers our profession a diverse and fascinating set of perspectives to consider as we pursue the important work of defining more clearly the kind of reading, writing, and thinking we want students to be doing in high school and college. It is also our hope that this collection will help promote dialogue among high school and college teachers nationwide. This is precisely the kind of conversation across institutional boundaries that has been identified as a national priority for educators in a number of recent reports, including *College Learning for the New Global Century* (Association), the Spellings Commission Report (United States), and Stanford University's Bridge Project report (Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio). This book can also be seen, then, as one response to calls to initiate substantive dialogue between high school and college English teachers. We believe this book will be of great value to English teachers at virtually all levels of instruction and to everyone interested in preparing students to be successful college-level readers, writers, and thinkers.

The idea for this collection developed from an authors' session held at the 2006 NCTE Annual Convention in Nashville to celebrate the publication of the first volume of *What Is "College-Level" Writing?* (NCTE). Four of the contributors—Merrill Davies, Jeanette Jordan, John Pekins, and Patrick Sullivan—spoke at this session, addressing a standing-room-only crowd full of enthusiastic and curious teachers. Most of those in attendance were high school teachers, and many were eager to talk about college-level writing. Some even expressed the hope of finally discovering what college-level writing actually was. Many had specific and pragmatic questions about first-year college writing, and a number of those at our session that morning suggested that it would be helpful to have actual assignments and samples of student writing to share and discuss.

It seemed like a rather obvious idea—to use artifacts from high school and college composition classrooms to help define what we mean by college-level writing. But a scholarship review turned up very little published work that included actual student writing.

This new collection of essays is designed to address this obvious need.

Because we found collaborations between high school and college teachers especially rare, one type of essay we feature in this collection focuses on dialogue across these institutional boundaries. In these essays, high school and college English teachers discuss college-level expectations and the best ways to prepare high school students to be effective college-level writers.

We also feature a group of contributors who set out to define college-level writing by using writing assignments and sample student work from their own classrooms. The goal here was to build a practical working definition of college-level writing from contributors who represent the widest possible variety of perspectives from secondary and postsecondary institutions. These essays include work from high school teachers, basic writing teachers, and first-year composition teachers.

We also include essays that address other important issues related to college-level writing, including assignment design, the use of the five-paragraph essay, the Advanced Placement test, state-mandated writing tests, and second language learning.

In addition, we invited a number of student contributors to write about their experiences transitioning from high school to college. We asked these contributors to illustrate their progression toward college-level proficiency by discussing landmark pieces of their own writing.

Finally, we invited Edward White and Kathleen Blake Yancey to serve as respondents for this collection. We asked them to identify important points of agreement among contributors and to offer us pragmatic advice for moving forward.

Contributors to our first collection often found a kind of "guessing game" at work among high school and college teachers. In the essays collected here, we seek to move beyond this guessing game toward real conversation. We respectfully invite you to join us.

One final note: A project of this scope could not have been completed without the generous support of colleagues, family, and friends. We would like to thank Kurt Austin, our editor at the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the anonymous field reviewers at NCTE, whose support and constructive criticism were invaluable to us as we worked on this project. We would also like to thank our production and publicity team at

NCTE, especially Carol Roehm, and our amazing freelance copy editor Peggy Currid. We would also like to offer a special note of thanks to the students who so generously allowed us to use their work. Their work made this volume possible, and we thank them for letting us use it. We would also like to thank our families for their support, patience, and many kindnesses.

We hope that you enjoy this book and find it useful. It has been an extraordinarily gratifying project to work on.

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When a College Professor and a High School Teacher Read the Same Papers

Tom Thompson
The Citadel

Andrea Gallagher
Wando High School

It is counterproductive to pretend that the first year of college is simply thirteenth grade, just another step up from twelfth grade. Although college has some features in common with high school, it has a whole new set of rules and expectations. Andrea Gallagher teaches in a large high school where the majority of students graduate and proceed to two- or four-year colleges and universities. Tom Thompson teaches in a small liberal arts college.

Though our schools are less than twenty miles apart, we find ourselves in entirely different worlds. The institutional differences are significant. High school students are minors: They are required by law to be in class and can be cited for truancy if they don't show up, but they have only limited ability to choose their classes or teachers. College students are adults: They choose whether to attend class (though nonattendance might affect their grade), and they have much more freedom to select their classes and even the time of day they want to attend classes; further, if they don't like the professor, they usually have the option of changing sections during the first week of the semester.

High school teachers are held responsible for the performance of their students; if too many students perform poorly on the statewide assessments, the teachers can lose their jobs and the state can even take over the school. In college, the responsibility

rests with the student: Professors keep office hours, but it's up to the students to stop by for help if they need it. High school teachers might be compelled to provide frequent updates to parents on the progress and performance of their students; college professors are forbidden by law from revealing grades to parents unless the student provides a written release.

The Assignment

Our discussion focuses on an assignment in a dual-credit education course offered at Andrea's high school. This is not a writing class, or even an English class, but a class in which high school seniors are expected to produce "college-level" work because they earn college credit for the class. For several years, Tom has been the guest teacher for a unit focusing on a research-based paper assignment, giving students a chance to have "a real college professor" read and respond to their papers. The objective for this research-based assignment, according to state standards, is this: "Students will research and debate a variety of educational issues that affect our schools." To meet this objective, Tom designed the following assignment.

The goal of this assignment is to have you select a "hot topic" in education, research the issues and differing viewpoints that make it a hot topic, and report your findings to your classmates in a paper. In the process of reporting your findings, you will also draw a conclusion about the claims or perspectives YOU find most compelling. (That is, you will ultimately argue that a particular position or solution to a problem is the "best" one.)

Hence, the assignment has two major parts: **RESEARCH** and **WRITING**. In doing the research, you will need to *generate as much information about the topic as possible*; if it's a "hot topic," you should be able to find articles promoting a variety of ways—and usually some conflicting ways—to look at the issue, or a variety of solutions to solve the problem. (Note: If you can't find much, then the topic isn't really "hot.") You must find at

least **five** sources to cite (i.e., quote, paraphrase, or refer to by name) in your paper; at least **three** must be print sources.

The second step is to present your research findings in writing. In your closing paragraph you will tell us which views/solutions you find most compelling, but the first step is to lay out the issues or problems and explain the various views or solutions. Only at the end of the paper should you explain why you think one particular approach/perspective/view/solution seems better or more likely to work than the others.

Because you are addressing classmates, your tone does not need to be excessively formal. It's OK to use "I," and it's OK to cite local examples to make a point, but you still need to use standard grammar and spelling, and you need to follow the conventions of research papers as set out in the *MLA Guide for Writers of Research Papers*.

Your paper should be 800 to 1,200 words (roughly three to five pages, 12-point type, double-spaced), and it should include a Works Cited page.

Three Student Papers

Tom selected three papers that he thought represented below average, average, and above average responses to the assignment.

Average Paper

The first paper, written by Liz, looks at the issue of mega schools.

<center>

Is Bigger Always Better?
The Advantages and Disadvantages of "Mega" Schools

</center>

Ken Reightler Jr. once said, "Education is the key to success," but is everyone receiving the education that he needs in order to be successful? It was once thought that it would be best to expand the curriculum in a school so the students could learn more, even though it meant the number of students enrolled at that school would increase. Since the 1940s the number of students enrolled in a school across the nation has grown. (Moore 8). So the question today is: are mega schools

giving students the education they need in order to succeed? The controversy between mega schools and small schools focuses on financial cost, athletic teams, extra opportunities and diversity, as well as academic success; however, a study conducted in 2006 gives a solution to this controversy that no one has considered yet.

When deciding on what type of school to build financial cost becomes a topic. It is expensive for districts to build and operate schools. By building a mega school, districts are able to cut down finances. The cost for the contractor, land, building supplies, and hours for labor are just some of the factors that make building one mega school cheaper than building a few small schools (Moore 8). Faculties' salaries, equipment, supplies, and technology all add up as well and their expenses become rather large. By combining small schools into one mega school these expenses are able to be lowered. Not as much staff is needed and equipment, supplies, and technology can be shared. However, a mega school costs more to organize and ensure safety than a small school (Quindlen 68). Even though a principal may be extremely organized and display good leadership, there are still costs in running a mega school successfully. Technology, such as walkie-talkies, electrical devices, and extra internet and phone lines, is required to run a mega school efficiently and have it organized (Pommereau 10). When looking at the cost of a mega school, safety is a big expense also. Some schools may have to incorporate metal detectors, security guards, cameras, police officers, and extra assistant principals. These things cost a lot but are necessary for the safety of the students (Toppo 10D). The options for a mega school versus a small school regarding financial cost vary because it is cheaper to build and operate a mega school but at the same time it is more expensive to organize and ensure safety.

Athletic teams are important to a school. They give students an activity to do outside of school, help students find a belonging, give an opportunity for those who cannot afford college a chance for them to still go, and bring school spirit to the student body. Most mega schools have good athletic teams. This is because many good coaches are drawn towards a large school since there are more opportunities and a greater number of athletes which does not occur at a small school. Mega schools have a larger fund for its sports and athletic opportunities because there are more ticket sales, fund-raising, and other ways for the teams to earn money. Although, the main reason for athletic teams being successful is that they have a larger talent pool to select from. Coach Brad Batson

from Wando High says, "The larger schools are better as a whole because of selection" (Batson). However for every high-light there is a malfunction. Mega schools can often eliminate a student from the team because he is not good enough for the school's sport team but in general he is a good athlete. Small schools give all athletes a chance to make the team (Quindlen 68). When deciding if a mega school is better than a small school, athletics should be a topic. Just like the other cost regarding school size, there are positives and negatives.

The more students at a school the more opportunities and diversity the school can have. This means that mega schools are able to have more extra curricular activities, opportunities, and more of a diverse student body than a small school. A mega school allows more time and sponsors so students can get more involved. At most large schools there are more clubs and activities for a student to join. There is something for everyone. A major play, band, marine biology club, foreign language activities, or a talent show can occur because there are a lot more students and teachers who are willing to put in time and effort. There are also many more opportunities available to students who attend mega schools. Culinary arts programs, drama, and other various electives such as accounting, engineering, and pharmacy are available to students. These opportunities allow the students to get involved as well as focus on a career choice (Pommereau 10). Almost all mega schools are diverse, whereas most small schools do not have as many minorities and the social economic status of the families is similar (Schneider 18). When a school is diverse it helps students fit in with their culture, religion, or personality. There is a group for every student (Pommereau 10).

However, there may be unaccommodating consequences in these areas at a mega school. When a school is so large opportunities and diversity can fail. Even though there may be more extra curricular activities at a mega school, they do not always work. At a small school student participation in extra curricular activities is higher (Batson). In addition, small schools may not be able to offer the extra opportunities like mega schools can offer, but they can help in other ways. Small schools are able to reach out to everyone and help students make decisions about their future. They have the opportunities and resources to help students decide if they are going to college, where they are going to apply, and what they are going to major in. A mega school has too many students to make these individual opportunities available (Schneider 28–31). Also, diversity can have a pessimistic outcome. It makes it even harder on a student if he cannot fit in anywhere.

Batson says, "It is easier to find a belonging at a small school." This is mainly because the small schools have more of a personal environment (Moore 8). The extra opportunities and diversity that a small school does not have are both two great things a mega school has to offer but if not handled correctly they can have consequences.

In the end, the academic program is the most important factor determining whether a mega school or small school is better. After all, school is mainly for academics. A mega school is able to offer many different courses and levels for its students. Advance Placement classes as well as honors, college-prep, and regular classes are available at mega schools because there are so many students at the school that fit in these categories (Pommereau 10). However, students at small schools are more likely to have higher composite test scores than those at mega schools (Schneider 16). This is mainly because at a small school the teacher to student ratio is smaller. A student at Wando High, Kaitlyn Rubino, who previously attended a small school of 300 students, says, "The ratio was around fifteen [students] to one [teacher] and you did have a stronger bond with teachers." A student-teacher bond is created at a small school. This encourages students to learn more and succeed in academics, as well as contribute to a lower drop out rate and a higher attendance rate (Quindlen 68).When viewing a school's academic success one can either look at the different levels of learning available to students and their grades in their classes, or one can look at composite test scores and the student to teacher ratio. Which ever one is chosen will determine if a mega school or small school is the best for students when it comes to academics.

To find a solution to this controversy, a study was conducted in 2006. It determined if small is really better in high school size. Statisticians found out this answer by looking at twelfth-grade students' math achievement, their postsecondary expectations, the number of college attendances, and the type and number of colleges the students applied to. After testing, the statisticians found no significant difference between the mega school and the small school. Instead, they discovered that educational success depends on what the student wants and is comfortable with. Some students learn the best and take the most from a mega school, whereas other students need a small school to perform their best and receive what they need. Therefore, the answer to the question, is small really better, is no. The size of the school does not affect educational success but rather the student's characteristics and comfort affect his educational success (Schneider 18–32).

In conclusion, financial cost, athletic teams, extra opportunities and diversity, and academic success are all factors that can be considered in determining whether a mega school or small school is the best for success. Each school, no matter what the size, offers positive and negative cost in all categories. However, it is not the school that determines educational success but the student. Each student has a school size where he can learn his best and has the most opportunities (Schneider 31–32). I do not believe mega schools are better in contrast to small schools. If both are run efficiently and meet the needs of the students everyone will get rewards from them. The district can alter the financial costs to make each school less expensive to build and operate. Athletic teams can be good at any school. It is up to the members of the team to become champions. I can see where extra opportunities in a mega school exceed those in a small school, but they are more successful at a small school. Diversity is not a big factor because it is up to the student to want to fit in and have a sense of belonging. I think academic success is the biggest factor in deciding whether a mega school or a small school is better. However, both schools have encouraging viewpoints. A mega school offers more levels and classes for its students so they can get the most out of their education (Pommereau 10). A small school has a smaller student to teacher ratio and a more personal environment which encourages academic success (Rubino). After my research, I am in agreement with the statisticians who say that the size of the school does not affect educational success. It is the drive in the student in the right environment that holds the key to success.

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TOM: For me, this paper meets the main criteria of the assignment. The opening paragraph provides a context ("the number of students enrolled in schools across the nation has grown"), poses a research question ("are mega schools giving students the education they need in order to succeed?"), and lists some important issues in the debate ("financial cost, athletic teams, extra opportunities [and] academic success"). Each subsequent paragraph addresses one of those issues, with an additional paragraph offering a possible solution. Liz cites five published sources and two interviews, and her in-text citations and Works Cited page follow MLA guidelines.

But how well does the paper do what it sets out to do? By asking whether mega schools are "giving students the education they need to succeed," Liz obligates herself to look at features of mega schools that affect student success, but that's not what she does. She simply lists four features that people debate—perhaps the first four that turned up in her research. With respect to cost, for example, she looks only at benefits to the school district, not benefits to student success. Likewise, the "athletics" paragraph suggests that athletics help students "find a belonging [and give] an opportunity for those who cannot afford college a chance for them to still go," but again, athletic scholarships say nothing about academic success. With respect to diversity, she says that when a school has more programs and clubs, "students can get more involved"; while student involvement might somehow relate to improved student performance, Liz fails to make such a case. Only the "academics" paragraph explicitly addresses student success: she cites a statistic that "students at small schools are more likely to have higher composite test scores than those at mega schools." That's a reasonable point, but rather than trying to dig up more sources to bolster this argument, she seems content to mention the point, then let it go. With so little development, the paper merits only a minimally passing grade.

ANDREA: For me, sticking to the assignment carries more weight. In my reading of the assignment, students are to identify the context of a problem and potential solutions for that problem—in other words, they should write a problem/solution paper. But the only "solution" Liz addresses is building small schools. Instead of writing a problem/solution paper, she writes a comparison/contrast of mega schools and small schools. From the beginning, there is no attempt to look at other solutions for the mega school issue; it becomes an either–or situation, either mega schools or small schools.

Liz uses her source information fairly well in outlining the advantages and disadvantages of the mega school and the small school, and she arrives at the conclusion that it is not the size of the school that determines student success. The assignment asks students to decide which solution is best, however, and Liz says that the size of the school is not the issue; there is no analysis of a solution here. In fact, she avoids taking a side. Her conclusion isn't based on her broad research and understanding of the issue; it is based on *only* the Brookings Institution study that concludes that the size of the school is not an issue. It is clear that Liz is either unaware of these contradictions or is choosing not to respond to them.

In terms of language usage and command, phrases such as *a lot* really lack the maturity expected at this level, but trying to sound too mature is equally distracting. The sentence, "However for every highlight there is a malfunction" shows that Liz is writing with a thesaurus at her side.

In short, Liz's paper is typical of what I often see in students' research: Consult the required number of sources, but keep looking until you find one that says what you want it to say. The thinking skills involved in developing an argument are often sacrificed in favor of a "hide and seek" sort of approach to research. For me, this paper can be considered "college-level writing," but just barely.

TOM AND ANDREA: Although Tom is willing to allow for greater latitude in how Liz addresses the prompt and Andrea holds her more strictly to the assignment, we agree that the paper meets minimum criteria and therefore merits a passing grade.

Below-Average Paper

The next paper, by Kaitlyn, shows an effort to address the assignment but clearly falls short. Her problems are typical of those we both see in other below-average papers.

Part-Time Coaches in High Schools

Many schools are faced with the ever-present predicament of not having enough teachers show interest in participating, as coaches, in their school's athletic programs. This lack of enthusiasm, unfortunately, leads to a limited amount of athletic opportunities for students to join because there simply are not enough teachers who are willing to coach the various sporting programs. One might say that this problem does not solely rest in the fact that there are still ample openings for athletic coaches in our schools, but that our teachers are not being equally considered for those positions.

How can we properly address this present day coaching problem? Well, one such solution to this problem may be to hire "lay coaches" (Bryant 1) for the various available positions. A lay coach is a part-time employee who is just an athletic coach and not a teacher; many other countries, such as Germany, Belgium, France, and Great Britain, have hired lay coaches, and it has been a very successful program (Knorr). This may sound like the perfect solution to our coaching quandary, but there are still some disadvantages to this solution. One such disadvantage to hiring lay coaches is that these individuals may exhibit a "lack of continuity to the overall program" (Bryant 3). Another disadvantage could include "poor communication with school employees and the lack of concern for equipment and non-educational emphasis" (Bryant 3). Lay coaches also have their own outside jobs, which would naturally take precedence over their coaching jobs, and therefore would bring additional stress to school administrators. Lay coaches can also get fired more easily than non-lay coaches, because unlike most teachers, the firing of a lay coach does not need a valid, documented explanation. Additional grounds for firing lay coaches include:

- ◆ the purchase of equipment without authorization from an administrator or athletic director;
- ◆ the misuse of school facility keys;
- ◆ the violation of state, school or district rules;

- ◆ defiance of authority; and
- ◆ inappropriate relationships with students (Bryant 4).

A major advantage of using lay coaches is that "athletic programs could be more flexible in filling coaching needs" (Bryant 1). Additional advantages in hiring lay coaches include:

- ◆ increased program offerings to athletes;
- ◆ they are easier to hire than full-time teachers who coach; and
- ◆ the needed prevention of coaches overseeing multiple sports (Bryant 2).

Prior to hiring a full-time teacher all applicants should be questioned as to whether or not they show the knowledge and interest in filling any available coaching positions in the school district. If so, the enthusiastic applicant should be hired over any other non-interested individual. Hiring teachers to coach their students also gives administrators the reassurance that all state, school, and district policies will be followed accordingly and that rules will not be violated (Hoch 2). Also, since the teachers are already at the school they would have better communication with students and the administrators and would, therefore, have fewer misunderstandings about funding or equipment questions. Full-time teachers also have work schedules that permit them to easily coach after school. Therefore, there are many advantages of having a teacher as an athletic coach.

There are also a few unattractive concerns that may arise when hiring teachers as coaches. There is an existing fear that some teachers, who coach, end up making coaching their main priority and therefore neglect their curriculum. One reason that teachers may focus more on coaching than their teaching responsibilities is because sporting teams get "more publicity and prestige for the school" (Chelladurial 2) and therefore emphasize the present "reward systems favoring coaching over teaching in terms of job security and salary" (Chelladurial 2). For example, if a coaching teacher leads one's team to a state championship the school would want to make sure that this coach remains with the school. In order to do so the academic institution may try to entice the teacher by offering one the possibility of instant tenure or a substantial salary increase.

Coaches are important, major role models to our youth. They provide a greater leadership role to our youth than general teachers because they interact with smaller groups of students, provide motivation to our athletes, and spend longer periods of time together with them (Chelladurial 2). Unfortunately, personality and gender differences can also distract a teacher's attention from academics to athletics. One personality theory that explains why coaching can become a higher priority than teaching is "managerial motivation" (Chelladurial 3). This theory explores the distinctive need for individuals to be able to quantify their results and deadlines. In other words, the theory of "managerial motivation" explores control based scenarios.

"Interpersonal orientation" (Chelladurial 4) is another personality difference that determines why coaching takes priority over teaching. Interpersonal orientation includes those individuals who are self-assertive, active participants. Whereas a person who prefers teaching would be much more expressive in their ideas through creative measures (Chelladurial 4). Therefore, personality differences reflect whether a teacher's first priority is given to coaching or teaching.

Gender differences also affect whether coaching or teaching remains the first priority of a teacher. Gender is one of the few things that make men and women different. Yet another difference concerning these genders comes through their teaching and coaching styles, and therefore their "coaching philosophy is going to be different" (Chelladurial 5). For instance, a woman might have the philosophy that as long as you try your hardest you are a winner, whereas a man might value the result over the actual effort. Another difference concerning gender teaching and coaching is one's "perception of the culture of the sport and organization, and their socialization into teaching and coaching is very different" (Chelladurial 5). Through various studies it has been revealed that more men than women prefer to coach. Most men embrace the responsibility of coaching because they are not afraid to be strict and yell at their athletes, whereas some women still remain hesitant. Also, men and women have very different perceptions of coaching and teaching. A female teaching coach may be consistently warm and comforting to all her students, whereas a man may be nice in his classroom, but strict when coaching his athletes. Therefore, many aspects contribute to the focus of coaching over teaching.

One must continue to analyze the ever present dilemma of teachers as coaches. This is a very serious problem considering all of the numerous coaching positions still left unfilled.

Hiring lay coaches instead of full-time teachers to coach our youth is a very plausible answer to this problem. If an applicant is not certified to teach at our schools, yet wants desperately to coach our students, they should be hired. On the other hand, if a teacher was hired predominantly on her willingness to coach and not based on her qualifications, then our students will lose out academically. Therefore, it is in the best interest of our states and their schools to hire lay coaches to fill the necessary coaching positions. One may only hope that through these challenging staffing decisions that the integrity of both our academic curriculum and sporting programs prosper in the end.

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Tom: The opening sentence shows a basic misunderstanding of the issue: "Many schools are faced with the ever-present

predicament of not having enough teachers show interest in participating, as coaches, in their school's athletic programs." This sentence seems to set up a problem–solution paper with teacher apathy as the problem and part-time coaches as an answer, but the real problem in Kaitlyn's district—and the reason I offered this as a suggested topic—was that the school board had suddenly outlawed the long-standing practice of hiring part-time coaches, so some schools had lost almost their entire coaching staffs and needed to find replacements for the part-timers. I expected to see references to local news stories and interviews with local teachers or coaches, but the paper mostly just summarizes two articles, one of which focuses on general differences between coaches and classroom teachers rather than the value of part-time coaches; Kaitlyn never even mentions that the issue affects her own school.

The final sentence of the opening paragraph further muddies the issue: "One might say that this problem does not solely rest in the fact that there are still ample openings for athletic coaches in our schools, but that our teachers are not being equally considered for those positions." What's the problem: that teachers aren't interested in coaching, or that teachers who want to coach aren't given fair consideration? This lack of an appropriate focus, combined with other common problems such as too much reliance on one or two sources, overblown prose, and weak control of mechanics, keep this paper in the below-average category.

The first body paragraphs summarize an article about advantages and disadvantages of using "lay coaches" in high school athletic programs. Most of the rest of the paper summarizes another article, this one looking at differences between teaching and coaching and what happens when coaches also have classroom duties. Some of the points are appropriate to the discussion—for example, the observation that financial incentives could lead teacher/coaches to devote more time and energy to coaching duties than to the classroom—but the paper fails to connect this idea to any other relevant ideas, and it never moves beyond mere summary. Being able to summarize appropriate sources is an important skill, but for a position paper, the writer needs to *use* those summaries in the service of some kind of claims.

ANDREA: Organization is a major issue. After simply defining what a "lay coach" is, Kaitlyn says, "This may sound like the perfect solution to our coaching quandary, but there are still some disadvantages to this solution." Yet at this point in the paper, Kaitlyn has not discussed *any* benefits of lay coaches; she doesn't do that until the second set of bullet points. And the reader will see the continuity only by ignoring the first set of bullet points, which gives a list of reasons why lay coaches can be fired. It's hard to tell whether this is supposed to be an advantage of lay coaches or a disadvantage; perhaps Kaitlyn isn't sure which she wants it to be.

An even bigger issue for me, however, is that Kaitlyn seems not to understand what she's writing. For example, she quotes an article saying that lay coaches may show "a lack of continuity to the overall program," but she doesn't give any indication that she knows what this continuity is or why it would be important. Like the section later about "managerial motivation," Kaitlyn's quotes seem to be chosen for how impressive they sound, not how well they support what she wants to say. The real problem may therefore be not with *writing* (although there are certainly language command issues evident), but with *reading*—specifically, with her inability to understand and synthesize the information she has found.

TOM AND ANDREA: Whether the problem arises from Kaitlyn's reading or writing skills is difficult to determine, but we agree that this level of work will not allow her to be successful at the college level or even the high school level.

Above-Average Paper

Few students in this class have produced papers over the years that Tom would rate as above average. The D grades typically outnumber the C grades, and it's unusual to have more than a couple of A or B papers in a class of fifteen students. But these are high school seniors—sometimes first-semester high school seniors—trying to write like high school graduates. Curiously, Laurie Ann's paper, which Tom selected as above average, generated the most disagreement about what should "count" as college-level writing.

The Effectiveness of the Multiage Teaching Program

Multiage teaching has been around for a very long time, much longer than the graded classroom. The early Jews developed schools for boys from ages six to thirteen and taught them in the synagogues. In ancient Greece, young boys, ages seven to eighteen were brought together to receive physical and mental training. In medieval trade guilds, students studied with their teachers until they were ready to be on their own. Some would finish their apprenticeship soon; others might take a longer time. Each was considered as good as the artisan who had taught him. In the monasteries of the 1500s, "a sixteen year old and a six year old were likely to be seated side by side in the same class." Our earliest American schools were multiage. They included all the children of the village, from ages 6 to 16. Even the rural schoolrooms of 25 to 50 years ago contained children of a wide variety of ages with just one teacher. It was not until the early 20th century that the idea became to hold students into compartments until their social group is ready to advance as a unit began (Longstreet & Shane 1).

The teacher of a multiage class has an advantage in that he or she may look at the curriculum for two consecutive grade levels and know that he or she has two years where she is on that continuum of learning to the end or even beyond. The second year is where this program really begins to pay off because the teacher knows exactly where each student stands in progress and what the students have learned. The class can operate as a collective unit, or family, rather than having to adapt again.

Multiage educational practices are grounded in the philosophy that every child can learn and has the right to do so at their own pace, that learning is a continuum rather than a series of steps, that diversity is not only a reality but is something to be embraced, and that a classroom is a family of learners (Meisels, Steele, & Quinn-Leering 3).

Multiage classrooms believe that children learn best from interactions with other children who are also at different stages of learning, including cognitive, emotional, social, and physical. Teachers have determined that these types of "mixed" age classrooms reflect a more honest portrait of family life and community life, and a better chance of greater cultural diversity as well; all ideals that differ widely from the traditional practice of classroom selection of children by age and/or ability alone.

Kathleen Cotton states that the multiage teaching program is based on the following assumptions and truths about

teaching and learning: Student diversity is a given. Diversity in the classroom is viewed by the teachers as a strength and is central in making the learning community effective. A multiage classroom operates more like a family operates to solve its everyday problems. The classroom is based on the belief in a teaching model that is interactive in nature, with everyone learning from each other. The multiage curriculum also operates on the belief that learning does not necessarily occur in a neat, orderly sequence, but rather that learning is dynamic, complex, and developmental. The multiage teaching program is based on the belief that how to learn is as valuable as what is learned. It is not assumed that covering curriculum is learning. Finally, the curriculum is based on the belief that the teacher will facilitate a variety of teaching and learning experiences that will be developmentally appropriate for students in the class, and that children will learn from these experiences (Cotton 17).

When instructing children at this early an age, it is very critical for the teachers and students to build relationships (Love, Logue, & Trudeau 2). Children construct knowledge about the world and learn skills through social interactions. They learn to make meaning out of their dialogues and adjustment with adults and older children. In particular schools, due to such differences in the teachers and children—cultural, racial, and linguistic—it is common for the teacher to keep the children for more than one year in order to solidify relationships and give children and parents comfort. This also would lend greater continuity to the effort to develop every child's social, ethical, and emotional potential, as well as his or her intellectual and physical capacities (Love, Logue, & Trudeau 2).

Based on research on the way in which children learn, the multiage teacher uses a process method of teaching. In this method, the teacher facilitates each child's learning success based on the child's individual developmental stages of learning (Stone, *Playing* 15). For instance, the child learns to write by writing, to read by reading, to develop social skills by being in a social environment with children of differing ages and ability levels. Peer collaboration and cooperation are important aspects of the multiage curriculum. As the teacher helps the child become a better reader, writer, and problem-solver, so does the older child facilitate the learning for the younger child (Stone, *Playing* 16).

The traditional school system infers same age equals same ability. Most parents and teachers know this is not the case, particularly in relation to the years 1–3. The multiage class-

room allows learning to be more responsive to the developmental needs of young children. This rate is different for each child and is often characterized by spurts and plateaus (Bredekamp 35). Activities and learning experiences in the multiage classroom are planned to accommodate the varied needs of the children. The fact that a child can be part of this class for more than one year supports these developmental needs and allows children time in a supportive environment (Bredekamp 35).

In her book entitled *Creating the Multiage Classroom,* Sandra Stone emphasizes that those who advocate a multiage classroom do it for four reasons. These four reasons include an underlying premise that all in the classroom are special; each child has strengths and weaknesses, and the teacher and the students work as a collaborate unit. A second advantage is that learning is planted as a lifelong goal and that learning is never completed. A third advantage is that the teacher is able to become familiar with each student over a long period of time. Teachers, students, and parents develop close relationships similar to a family structure which further allows for positive social development, better decision making, less anxiety at the beginning of the school year, and less learning time lost to setting up classroom rules and explaining school year expectations. A fourth benefit of a multiage class is that the teachers are facilitating in a cooperative, collaborative manner, using an assortment of approaches to help students successfully master concepts and skills, which ensures students' continual progress at their own developmental rates, positive feelings of self-worth, and an eagerness to continue the process of learning (Stone, *Creating* 45).

Educators, parents, administrators, and students list countless advantages of multiage classrooms. These advantages can be grouped into several categories: advantages to students because of the mixed-age environment, advantages to students because of the multiple-year experience, and advantages to teachers (Thompson 5). One of the prominent advantages to the students due to the mixed environment is the modeling that takes place. Thompson defines modeling as "The natural process by which younger students pick up behaviors they observe in older students" (Thompson 5). Younger students will imitate academic and social behaviors demonstrated by the older students. Modeling and tutoring benefit both the older and the younger students and occur more naturally in multiage classrooms because of the age span. Continuity has also been shown to be one of the biggest advantages of multiage education (Stone, *Strategies* 12).

Through my analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the multiage class, I believe that as a whole the multiage class seems to be very effective. I have experienced single graded classes as well as multiage classes, and from just observing there is little difference. Through further observations, the children in the multiage class seem to be more cooperative and helpful toward each other and the teachers. The first graders help the kindergarteners learn the rules that their teacher requires. There is less time spent on instruction and more time spent on learning. Instead of the teacher having to spend time on teaching the children how to operate in the classroom, the students are more focused on the actual lessons and more quality learning is completed. There are many advantages of multiage teaching as I mentioned earlier and through observations of the children, this becomes very apparent. This method is used in many schools in South Carolina and more specifically in Charleston County. Jennie Moore and Goodwin Elementary advocate this program. Many schools have implemented this into their curriculum. Many teachers actually request that his or her child be put in this type of environment because they feel that the student will be able to learn more if the teacher already has a background with the student and knows what type of learner he or she is. I think that one main reason for multiage classrooms not being as common as the single graded classroom is because parents are taken back by the fact that their child will be integrated with students older than theirs and may feel like they will be compared to those who are a year ahead of them. I feel that the multiage classroom has been proven effective in schools and should be implemented more due to the positive outcomes of the students and teachers.

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TOM: For me, this paper rates better than average because it shows a command of material from a variety of sources and it builds a persuasive case for its position. Laurie Ann's sources all fit her topic, and her paper offers much broader coverage of the issue than either of the other papers. Also in contrast to the other papers, rather than simply summarizing a few sources, it uses those sources as evidence to support a position. Finally, Laurie Ann writes with an authority not apparent in the other essays, possibly because she has personal knowledge of this topic: As she notes in her closing paragraph, many schools in her district use multiage classrooms in additional to traditional ones, and she has personal experience with both formats. Choosing a topic with which she is familiar certainly makes for a different situation than choosing a topic about which she knows nothing, but topic selection is part of the writing process.

ANDREA: Although this paper unarguably demonstrates the best command of language and content, I still see significant problems

with how completely this paper addresses the assignment criteria: There is no assessment of why this is a hot-button issue, no analysis of the weaknesses or disadvantages of this type of educational setting, and certainly no discussion of alternatives or solutions—all aspects of the issue that the original assignment seemed to be looking for. Laurie Ann expects the reader to acknowledge that she has already identified the problem and that the multi-age approach is the solution. What should have been a synthesis leading to an evaluation has instead become a thorough, well-written report on one facet of education. It meets the page requirement, exceeds the source requirement, and follows MLA format. But while it is in fact researched and well-written, it does not meet my expectations for a position paper. If we determine this to be the best paper, aren't we overlooking its weaknesses in addressing the assignment?

TOM AND ANDREA: Tom, for whom state standards are not a part of the professional landscape and who is therefore used to much more latitude when evaluating papers, is less concerned with strict attention to each component of the assignment and does, in fact, focus more on the clear, well-constructed and appropriately supported case that Laurie Ann builds. A major goal of this assignment is to introduce students to "college-level writing," and—at least for Tom, in this particular setting—using a wide variety of sources, demonstrating an understanding of those sources, using those sources to build a solid case, and speaking with an authority based on a clear understanding of the material are all features of college-level writing, especially in contrast to writing that summarizes a few seemingly random sources for no clear reason.

Andrea uses more task-specific rubrics in her work at the high school level, and she is inclined to think with a task-specific checklist for this assignment as well, even though one wasn't included with the assignment. Laurie Ann's paper, though well-written, doesn't allow her to check off the assignment criteria regarding the actual argument that was supposed to be constructed.

And therein lies a difference in how we read. Andrea, who is required to teach to the state standards, and who has therefore internalized those standards, reads with a mental checklist, regardless of (or in addition to) the rubric in play; Tom, operating

without such guidelines, (unless he imposes his own), is left to read from whatever perspective (or for whatever features) he finds most appropriate or compelling. These differences, we believe, are related to the different worlds we inhabit.

Different Worlds, Different Readings

High school teachers and college professors—note the different titles—inhabit different worlds. In addition to the institutional differences described earlier, we also face significant instructional differences. High school teachers, who teach a full complement of classes every day, typically have more than twenty-two contact hours each week; college professors, who usually teach four courses per semester, typically have twelve contact hours per week. In terms of student contact hours, a college professor with four classes of twenty-five students each has about 4,500 student contact hours per semester; a high school teacher with an average of twenty-five students per class faces more than ten thousand student contact hours per semester. Most high school teachers have their own classrooms, which they can individualize to complement the classes they teach; most college professors have an office (and a departmental secretary), and they might have a different classroom for every class. High school teachers are expected to attend a certain number of inservice programs each year; college professors are expected to publish. Perhaps the most salient feature, at least in terms of our discussion, is the high school emphasis on standardization: standardized curricula, standardized tests, standardized rubrics. In "The Truth about High School English," Milka Mosley notes, "Just like the students, high school English teachers have to conform to and cover the curriculum approved by our school boards because everything we do is closely monitored by standardized testing" (60). The goal is to be sure that a student in a given course masters a standard set of skills and knowledge, regardless of the teacher or the school at which the class is offered. This emphasis, combined with high student numbers and a demand for accountability, leads to a need to simplify. The

five-paragraph theme, with its clear, easy-to-grade format (which also makes grades easy to justify when challenged), continues to be a staple assignment, even in junior and senior classes. The complexity of an organically structured essay is time consuming to teach and often not subject to reliable measurement, so external factors steer teachers away from such essays. Simple forms are quicker to teach and easier to measure.

Rubrics can help standardize instruction and assessment. Andrea sees many rubrics in high school, since teachers who teach the same material are more likely to use a common rubric. Tom sees rubrics only occasionally in college, and professors who use rubrics tend to do so mainly for convenience, to speed up the grading process. Although (or because) they promote standardization, rubrics can lead to boring, overly structured papers. That is, teaching to a rubric can dictate too closely each step of the process, so that writing becomes a cookbook activity: "First, state the problem and explain why it matters; second, identify at least three possible solutions; third, identify positive and negative aspects of the first solution, the second solution, and so on; then say which solution is the best."

In college, professors chafe at the idea of standardization. When Tom tried to get members of his department to create some kind of description of what students should be able to do upon successful completion of the composition sequence, the general response was that "we don't need to do that; we all know what good writing looks like." Although some departments publish a generic rubric (at least for first-year comp courses) describing A work, B work, and so on, the more common situation seems to be that individual professors have considerable say over the standards in their own classrooms. This situation looks like a double standard: College professors hold high school teachers accountable for producing graduates with a standard set of skills, but they feel no responsibility to a similar system of accountability.

College professors can expect students to work with a degree of independence that high school teachers cannot expect or require. To be sure, teachers in both college and high school want to help their students pursue increasingly sophisticated levels of reading and writing. Based on admission standards, however,

college professors can expect a certain degree of sophistication as a starting point, and they can expect their students to work with a fairly high degree of independence. High school teachers, however, enjoy no such luxury: They must accept whatever students show up, take them at whatever level they can function, and use whatever methods—however remedial—necessary to help students progress. To provide adequate and individualized instruction, the high school teacher probably has to create more handouts, as well as more worksheets, quizzes, and tests. The high school teacher might even be expected to post one or more grades every week for every student, or even daily grades, so parents can monitor the progress of their students. Such frequent grading is unheard of in college. Students generally receive grades less frequently in college, and they don't always appear to know how they're doing in a particular course. If they're not doing well, it's their responsibility to seek out the extra help (from student services, the writing center, or maybe a tutor) to improve.

To make the jump to college even more challenging, students who learned to do well in their high school English classes—who internalized the descriptors of high performance levels on the standard rubrics—suddenly find themselves facing unknown (and often unpublished) criteria; they don't know what an A paper looks like, and they might have a professor who won't (or can't) provide a clear description the way their high school teachers did. These students, who learned to play the high school game by following the high school rules, will find themselves playing a completely different game in college, where the rules may change from professor to professor. The first year of college isn't just another grade level—it's a whole new culture.

High School Writing and College Writing

In this volume and its predecessor, authors trying to define "college-level" writing have had to admit the elusiveness of such a definition; still, our task is to add what we can to the effort, based on our perspective and our discussions.

At least part of the difficulty with creating a definition arises from the lack of standardization in college classes. It's not hard

to find a rubric that defines appropriate writing for students at any grade level in public schools, but many (if not most) colleges lack such a document. The SAT rubric offers one definition for successful writing, and the Advanced Placement test for English language and composition offers another. Colleges that use scores on these tests to substitute for first-year composition courses acknowledge passing scores as indicators of college-level performance. Beyond these documents, however, we have little common ground for describing our objective. What "counts" as adequate for one college might be substandard at another college; in fact, writing that earns a passing grade with one professor might earn a failing grade with another professor at the same college.

Mixed with the elusive definition of college-level writing is a further complicating distinction: There is clearly a difference between competent writing and sophisticated writing. A competent paper will respond directly to the assignment and show command of the subject, either through synthesis of adequate research materials or as a result of authentic experience. A competent paper will have an introduction, conclusion, and some logical (if perhaps predictable) flow of ideas in the middle. A competent paper will be free of errors in conventions (grammar, mechanics, and usage) that require the reader to reread in order to construct meaning.

And while a competent paper doesn't *require* rereading, a sophisticated paper *invites* it: that is, a sophisticated paper is one that the reader *wants* to reread. Word choice and sentence variety are used to bring out the voice of the writer, ideas are expressed with insight, and the organization subtly moves the reader from one idea to the next.

The same basic qualities appear to be present and required at each level (high school and college, competent and sophisticated), but then our difficulty shifts to how to measure the importance of those characteristics in each piece of writing we assign and assess. Following the trend toward holistic scoring, the weighting of individual components is unnecessary; the overall impression is what matters most.

One way we can help high school students prepare is by trading in our task-specific rubrics for skill-specific rubrics, since the "skills" associated with good writing are transferable to a variety

of tasks and genres (Popham 98). For their part, it would be helpful if college professors also used skill-specific rubrics so their students will know what's expected or how those professors define good writing. As things stand now, high school students can at least find published standards (for their school, their district, or their state) for acceptable work; college students may or may not be able to point to any such standards. In college, students must figure out for themselves what counts as acceptable performance—more evidence that the distance between high school and college is not just another step up some academic staircase but instead is a chasm.

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This sequel to *What Is "College-Level" Writing?* (2006) highlights the practical aspects of teaching writing. By design, the essays in this collection focus on things all English and writing teachers concern themselves with on a daily basis—assignments, readings, and real student writing.

The collection also seeks to extend the conversation begun in the first volume by providing in-depth analysis and discussion of assignments and student writing. The goal is to begin a process of defining "college-level" writing by example. Contributors include students, high school teachers, and college instructors in conversation with one another.

Through this pragmatic lens, the essays in this volume address other important issues related to college-level writing, including assignment design, the AP test, the use of the five-paragraph essay, as well as issues related to L2/ESL and Generation 1.5 students.