



A study to determine the affect [sic] of introducing remedial English usage instruction in collegiate business communications  
by Lorraine Machina Steerey

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education  
Montana State University  
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Abstract:

The principal problem of this study was to compare student achievement in business letter writing and traditional coursework in business communications courses following an outline excluding remedial English usage instruction with student achievement in business communications courses following an outline including remedial English usage instruction.

The second problem of this study was to compare the reliability of holistic grading with analytical grading when used to evaluate student achievement in business letter writing.

This study was conducted Winter Quarter 1983 at Montana State University and Eastern Montana College.

Students were given Barton's Language Skills Test for college students in business communications as a pretest. The pretest also included the writing of two business letters.

Control groups received no formal instruction in remedial English fundamentals. The experimental group received instruction in remedial English fundamentals. The experimental group received instruction in remedial English fundamentals by the lecture-discussion method.

After both groups completed the business letter writing unit, they took the postinstructional tests. These tests consisted of Barton's Language Skills Test and the writing of two business letters.

The reliability of holistic and analytical grading was compared. Sample letters were scored by the holistic grading method by trained readers. Then these letters were scored analytically by the same trained readers. The reliability of these methods was determined by using Kuder-Richardson's formula.

Two-way analysis of variance was used to statistically compare student achievement of the groups which received remedial English usage instruction with those students who did not receive this instruction.

The findings of this study indicate that formal instruction in remedial English usage does not significantly affect a student's ability to write a business letter. However, this instruction does significantly increase student formal knowledge of English usage.

The findings of this study also support the use of holistic grading for the judging of student achievement in business letter writing.

A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE AFFECT OF INTRODUCING  
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COLLEGIATE BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

by

Lorraine Machina Steerey

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

Doctor of Education

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY  
Bozeman, Montana

March 1984

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APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

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This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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VITA

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The writer expresses deep appreciation to the memory of her parents without whose past encouragement she would not have been able to complete a project of this magnitude. The writer also expresses deep appreciation to her husband, Willie, for his patient encouragement and suggestions in making the completion of this study possible. Appreciation is also expressed to Sandra P. Collins for her patience and understanding while this study was completed.

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ABSTRACT

The principal problem of this study was to compare student achievement in business letter writing and traditional coursework in business communications courses following an outline excluding remedial English usage instruction with student achievement in business communications courses following an outline including remedial English usage instruction.

The second problem of this study was to compare the reliability of holistic grading with analytical grading when used to evaluate student achievement in business letter writing.

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After both groups completed the business letter writing unit, they took the postinstructional tests. These tests consisted of Barton's Language Skills Test and the writing of two business letters.

The reliability of holistic and analytical grading was compared. Sample letters were scored by the holistic grading method by trained readers. Then these letters were scored analytically by the same trained readers. The reliability of these methods was determined by using Kuder-Richardson's formula.

Two-way analysis of variance was used to statistically compare student achievement of the groups which received remedial English usage instruction with those students who did not receive this instruction.

The findings of this study indicate that formal instruction in remedial English usage does not significantly affect a student's ability to write a business letter. However, this instruction does significantly increase student formal knowledge of English usage.

The findings of this study also support the use of holistic grading for the judging of student achievement in business letter writing.



## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Sound business communications skills have always been important for success in the business world. Modern technology and new developments in the communications area have only made the need for these skills more important. "We are living in the throes of an 'information explosion,' in an age in which the public demand for accountability requires that about every business transaction be put in writing" (Lacombe and Kane, 1977:24). Hulbert reports that top executives spend as much as 90 percent of their time communicating -- reading, writing, speaking, and listening (1979:10).

Business students without communication skills will find it more and more difficult to succeed. "Students in business communications classes must realize that much of a working day for a businessperson involves use of words, either in sending or receiving some kind of information. Words are expensive tools, and how well these tools are used is an important factor in determining the success or failure of a business" (Stiegler, 1977:15). Business executives readily agree that the "ability to communicate" is a prime requisite for managerial success (Hulbert, 1979:10).

Even though this skill is recognized as extremely important for success in business, employers are finding it increasingly difficult to find business graduates who can write effectively.

In an article Norma Carr-Smith quotes Roy Timmerman, Vice President of the Bank of America, as saying:

If I must choose hiring an applicant who can write well and one who knows accounting well, I would choose the person who can write well. We can provide the necessary training in accounting principles rather quickly and easily. We don't attempt to tackle writing problems because the training process is a long and difficult process (1977:18).

Many educators and business persons believe that before a person can write well, that person must have a solid foundation in the mechanics of the English language. In a study completed by Gump, one businessperson is reported as stating:

Basic grammar is the foundation for all business communication. Everyday I receive messages (some from major publishing houses) whose meanings are lost in a tangle of misplaced modifiers, mismatched verbs and nouns, etc. The concept statements listed in the survey are all important to business communication, but the basics must come first (1979:128).

With the writing ability of students declining and with the increased demands of business for good writers, business communications professors are facing the dilemma -- should the teaching of English mechanics be included in the basic business communications course?

#### Statement of the Problem

The principal problem of this study was to compare student achievement in business letter writing and traditional coursework in a business communications course following an outline excluding remedial English usage instruction with student achievement in a business communications course following an outline including remedial English usage instruction.

The second problem of this study was to compare the reliability of holistic grading with analytical grading when used to evaluate student achievement in business letter writing.

#### Need for the Study

Business executive and business teachers have long recognized the "ability to write is one of the best skills a student can bring to the business world" (Boyd and Inman, 1976:132). Several studies have been completed in which business professors and business executives have been surveyed to determine what they feel are necessary competencies for job success. In most of these studies communication skills rise above the technical skills required in the various business fields. In follow-up studies students indicate a desire for more training in the area of business communications. Recent accounting graduates felt that communication skills were even more important than basic accounting skills (Addams, 1978). After spending a session with top marketing people, one student remarked: "It was interesting to learn that the most important background we should get was English composition. Apparently, you have to be able to get your point across on paper or you've had it" (Madeline, 1980:13).

Allen reported a survey in October, 1979, of employees and teacher-coordinators of cooperative education programs to determine the common deficiencies of younger employees both full- and part-time. The study found that most of these deficiencies were related to a lack of communication skills. One comment made was: "little knowledge of grammatical classification was displayed" (1979:55-56).

Huffman feels students should know standard English because:

Standard English, used by the business community, is a form with which students need a great deal of help. They should recognize that standard English enables them to communicate with people at the business and professional level, without fear of revealing peculiarities about themselves (1969:9).

Business professors often require that students write effectively without grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors. But, how can students write without these errors, if they do not have a solid foundation in English mechanics. Business communications professors can no longer take the viewpoint that English mechanics should be taught before the students reach the collegiate level. "It is no longer safe to assume that students have mastered grammar in their respective high schools" (White, 1979:21). Many students do not possess these skills when they enter collegiate business communications. Furthermore, employers are demanding that their employees possess these skills.

In an interview which was reported in Nation's Business, William R. Sears, Managing Partner of Sears & Company was asked, "Then, why can't many (businesspersons) communicate well?" Sears responded:

Because they aren't taught how. The requirement for good, solid grammatical, succinct expression seems to be emphasized, in many colleges today, only in English courses. A student can go through a history course or an engineering course and never learn to write well (1969:83).

Although a few studies have been completed in the area of remedial instruction of English mechanics in business communications courses, most of these studies have compared traditional instruction with computer assisted, programmed, or student self-study instruction. While it has been recognized that students may benefit from these other methods, research has been inconclusive.

Because research has been inconclusive, the method of instruction used becomes a decision to be made by the business communications professor.

Christensen concludes:

Because there are no conclusive results from this study or previous studies concerning a best method of instruction for presenting English competencies to business writing students, it appears that method of instruction should be an important consideration of teachers involved in curriculum development and instruction of these courses (1979:125).

Christensen also recommends that further research is needed to determine how English mechanics can best be presented to students (1979:126). This study sought to aid those teachers at the participating institutions in designing their business communications courses so that they can best meet the needs of their students and the businesses they are serving. It attempted to provide these teachers with information on the effectiveness of introducing remedial English instruction into the classroom.

Previous research completed in the area of remedial English instruction has not addressed many of the areas and procedures which were included in this study. This researcher's study was unique in the following areas:

Traditional vs. no instruction. Some of the studies completed compared traditional instruction in remedial English usage with computer-assisted, programmed, or student self-study instruction in remedial English usage with no instruction in remedial English usage. One of these studies was completed in 1972; the actual data was gathered during the 1966-67 school year.

The student body has changed very much since that time. In a study completed by Manship the enrollment of "girls" was so small that no effort was made to determine the difference of achievement according to sex (1974:10). The American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business reports that women comprised 35 percent of those students graduating from accredited business schools in 1980 (1982:4).

This trend of a changing student mix in our business classrooms points to the need for further study of the effects of remedial English instruction. Warner feels that we should assess our student body frequently.

We should assess the verbal skills of our students every few years in order to know what ability range and what verbal shortcomings we are confronted with in the classroom. We cannot assume that this year's student mix is the same as that of even four or five years ago (Warner, 1979:17).

Since the student body changes, research must be current so that professors have up-to-date data on the effectiveness of teaching methods and techniques. The correlation between study scores on the preinstructional and postinstructional tests with sex, major, and G.P.A. were addressed in the present study.

Montana institutions. The amount of time devoted to the overall content of a business communications course should also depend on the needs of the students in the particular geographic area, the time frame within which the learning is to occur, materials available, and the capability of the professors involved (Steigler, 1977:16). The researcher could find no study which dealt with the English fundamental needs of the business communications students in Montana.

The writing ability of Montana students was the subject of an article which recently appeared in the Billings Gazette (1982). In this article, Irving Dayton, Commissioner of Higher Education, expresses concern for the writing abilities of the students enrolled in the institutions of higher education in this state. "A severe writing deficiency exists on all six campuses of the state university system," Dayton said; "writing needs to be emphasized in all academic disciplines -- not just in departments of English."

Criterion measure. The criterion measure used in most of the research studies in business communications remedial English instruction was an objective test. However, the method of evaluation in the business world is the business letter or report, not an objective test. Wunsch feels that the business letter is the appropriate criterion measure because this is the way writing ability is measured in business. Furthermore, no objective measure has been designed to measure letter writing ability (1980:27).

This researcher's study used three criterion measures to measure student achievement. They were: (1) an objective test to measure student formal knowledge of English usage, (2) a business letter writing test to measure student writing ability, and (3) a mid-term and a final examination to measure student knowledge of basic business communications course content.

Holistic grading. Further investigation revealed that when studies did use business letter writing as a criterion measure, analytical (scaled-point) grading was used instead of holistic grading. Some of

these studies found that the evaluators were inconsistent. Wunsch recommends that further study be conducted to determine the reliability of using holistic grading in evaluating business letter writing (1980: 86). The researcher found no formal research which addressed this specific problem.

Multi-instructor approach. Several of the remedial studies have used the "one-instructor" approach. Leonard West, a leading researcher in business education, states:

Experiments involving classroom instruction by only one teacher are totally useless if the subject or topic of the research is sensitive to teaching skill or other variations in teaching behavior that are intrinsic to the treatments being contrasted . . . . therefore require a minimum of two teachers . . . . otherwise one cannot know whether it is the teacher or the treatment that accounts for the outcomes (1974:32).

The present study used not only more than one instructor, it used more than one school. There were four instructors, two at Montana State University and two at Eastern Montana College.

Formalized evaluation. Many of the studies completed did not formally evaluate the remedial English work completed. Students were merely required to complete daily reading and some written assignments. Thus, students perceive the ideas and principles introduced as not being important; and they may have little motivation to learn these ideas and principles. This attitude is not only present in the college courses; it is also reinforced in the high school courses. Warner addressed this point in a recent article:

While their (students) high school composition course included some grammar, "it was never counted." It is no wonder that many of our students begin with little motivation to learn



in the Business English course which they perceive as one of little importance (1979:21).

The students in the experimental groups of the present study were required to complete drill work. In addition, they were quizzed each day on the remedial English usage unit. These quiz grades and the score received on the Barton Language Skills Test (posttest) counted towards the student grade.

Number of letter assignments. Previous research did not address the number of letter writing assignments completed by the students before the posttest. Students simply completed the posttest after completion of the English usage unit and the business letter writing unit. No mention was made of the number of practice letters written by students before they were judged.

Research indicates (Dalton, 1976; Inman, 1970) that six letters are sufficient for student growth in business letter writing. This study required that all students write six practice letters before they took the business letter writing posttest.

Design. The design of a study that will grade writing is critical. McColly (197:154-155) points out several areas which must be considered in order to make the study as reliable and valid as possible. Several of these areas were not addressed in previous research. These areas were addressed in this researcher's study. These areas were:

1. The use of trained readers
2. The use of established grading criteria
3. The use of preinstructional and postinstructional business letter writing tests

4. The use of writing samples from each student both on the pre-instructional and postinstructional business letter writing tests
5. The randomization of the papers
6. The simultaneous grading of the papers by the evaluators
7. That the evaluators work independently
8. The simultaneous grading of preinstructional and postinstructional business writing tests.

If business communications professors are to spend the time necessary to develop basic English skills, they must know whether student achievement increases enough to warrant the time devoted to it. "Obviously, there needs to be more concrete evidence on the part of business and education as to what needs to be stressed in a basic communication course. Rarely will one find the content of one college course parallel to that of another" (Woodcock, 1979:43).

The choice of the teaching method used in teaching any course is usually the decision of the professor of that course.

Guselman feels that teachers may be teaching the right things but in the wrong way:

Why state that people in business and the professions learn more and more about communication and supposedly communicate better and better, yet the results seem worse and worse? Of course it may be that educators are not teaching the right things or teaching the right things but in the wrong ways (1980:3).

The present study sought to provide business communications professors with additional information on the relevance of teaching remedial English usage by the lecture-discussion method. It also compared

the reliability of holistic grading with analytical grading when used to evaluate student achievement in the business letter writing.

General Questions to be Answered

This study attempted to answer the following major questions:

1. How does student achievement in business letter writing compare between students who had remedial English usage instruction and students who have not had this instruction?
2. How does student formal knowledge of English fundamental compare between students who had remedial English usage instruction and students who have not had this instruction?
3. How does student achievement in the traditional coursework of business communications compare between students who had remedial English usage instruction and students who have not had this instruction?
4. How does student achievement in English fundamentals, business letter writing, and traditional coursework in business communications compare among students who attend class three days per week and those students who attend class four days per week?
5. Is there a difference in student achievement among business majors and non-business majors?
6. Does sex or G.P.A. have any effect on student achievement in English fundamentals, business letter writing, or traditional coursework?
7. Which grading method is more reliable in evaluating business letter writing -- analytical or holistic grading?

### General Procedures

Arrangements were made through the chairperson of the Department of Business Education and Office Administration at Eastern Montana College and the Head of the Department of Business, Office, and Distributive Education at Montana State University for conducting this study in the business communications classes taught in those departments Winter Quarter 1983.

Students were given Barton's Language Skills Test for college students in business communications as a pretest. The pretest also included the writing of two business letters. These tests were given the second, third and fourth days of instruction. Students who did not complete the entire pretest were eliminated from the study.

In addition, students were asked to fill out a short personal data form to gather information on sex and major. They also filled out a consent form so the researcher could obtain student G.P.A.'s from the respective schools. This information was used to determine the correlation between G.P.A. and student achievement.

Control groups received no formal instruction in remedial English fundamentals. The experimental group received instruction in remedial English fundamentals. The experimental group received instruction in remedial English fundamentals by the lecture-discussion method. This group also completed daily assignments on the principles presented, and they were tested over these principles.

After both groups completed the business letter writing unit, they took the postinstructional tests. These tests consisted of Barton's Language Skills Tests and the writing of two business letters. In

addition, student achievement was compared on the mid-term and final examinations. This was necessary to determine the effect the teaching of the English fundamentals had on student achievement in the basic content of the business communications course.

The reliability of holistic and analytical grading was compared. Sample letters were scored by the holistic grading method by trained readers. Then these letters were scored analytically by trained readers. The reliability of these methods was determined by using Kuder-Richardson's formula.

Analysis of variance was then used to statistically compare student achievement of those groups which received remedial English usage instruction with those students who did not receive this instruction.

When a preference was found through analysis of variance, covariance was used to equate the groups on the variable in question.

#### Limitations and/or Delimitations

This study was limited by the researcher's inability to control the following variables:

1. The assignment of the students to the communications classes at the two schools involved.
2. The assignment of the researcher to teach two of the participating sections.
3. The assignment of students to control or experimental groups in order to insure groups of similar language arts abilities and writing abilities.

4. The differences in the effectiveness of the cooperating professors.
5. The differences in the times of the day that the classes met.
6. The differences of the physical environments of the classrooms.
7. The extent to which the students knew they were part of a study, and the effect this had on their achievement during the study.

The delimitations of this study were:

1. The study considered only those students enrolled in business communications classes at Eastern Montana College and Montana State University during Winter Quarter 1983.
2. No specific restrictions were imposed on the control group for their own out-of-the-class review of English fundamentals.
3. The control groups of this study used the textbook -- Basic Business Communications by Raymond Lesikar and Editing Business Prose by Richard Lanahan.
4. The experimental groups used the textbook -- Basic Business Communications by Raymond Lesikar, Editing Business Prose by Richard Lanahan, and Communicating Clearly, The Effective Message by William H. Bonner.
5. Only those students who complete the entire battery of pretests and posttests were considered in the study.
6. Student knowledge of English fundamentals was measured by Barton's Language Skills Test.
7. Student achievement in business letter writing was measured by the evaluators selected for this study.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided by the researcher or correspond to those used in other research as indicated by the citation and are to be used as definitions for this study.

Analytical grading. Analytical grading means the scoring of a business letter in each of the following areas: purpose, tone, choice of words, English usage, and organization. Analytical grading allows each specific area to contribute to the overall grade of the paper (McColly, 1970:151).

Business communications course. Business communications course means a one-quarter course in which the theory and application of effective business communications is presented. The course includes the writing of business letters. It is the basic or first course in business communications. Specifically, at Eastern Montana College it was BuEd 301, Business Communications. At Montana State University, it was BUED 321, Business Communications.

Traditional course. A business communications course which follows a business communications outline which does not include instruction in remedial English fundamentals.

English fundamentals, English mechanics, or English usage. These terms include instruction in grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and sentence structure. These also imply practical application of the rules of grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and sentence structure. Other

terms which often mean the same thing are basic writing skills, writing mechanics, or writing principles.

Holistic grading. Holistic grading means the scoring of a whole piece of writing based on the theory that the whole piece of writing is greater than its parts (Hatcher, 1979:10). This method of evaluation considers a piece of writing as a whole; it is not divided into its various parts. Such a method examines the piece of writing on its total merit rather than as a sum of its parts (Donahue, 1982).

Remedial English fundamentals instruction. This means special teaching intended to improve the students' general ability in the fundamentals of English.

#### Summary

Student writing ability has become a concern of both businesspersons and business communications professors. One of the areas of concern appears to be student knowledge of English fundamentals. "Teaching grammar and usage with the best instructional strategy is an important goal of every instructor of a business communications course" (Tesch, 1979:54).

This study attempted to give business communications professors additional information on the influence remedial English instruction in English fundamentals by the lecture-discussion method has on student achievement in business letter writing.

It also looked at the reliability of using holistic grading in judging achievement in business letter writing.



## CHAPTER 2

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

For the purpose of this study the related literature is presented under the following main topics: Writing Skills in the Business World, Remedial English Usage Instruction -- The Dilemma, What Should be Included in Remedial English Usage, Measuring Improvement in English Usage, The Judging of Writing Tests, Current Research in Remedial English Usage Instruction in Business Communications, and Research Related to Remedial English Usage Instruction in Business Communications.

Writing Skills in the Business World

Importance of Writing Skills. Writing skills have always been important for success in the business world. "The business world literally runs on written communications" (Boyd and Inman, 1976:132). Modern technological developments have led to the paper explosion, and communication skills are now even more important. Business communications is occupying a greater role in this highly industrialized world of the 20th century. "The ability to express ideas in writing is one of the leading requirements for success in the business world. An individual's effectiveness as a business worker and as a person depends upon his ability to communicate with others through the written or spoken word" (Inman, 1970:1).

This need for good writing skills is not new to business executives. In an article in the Nation's Business Rollin Simmonds reports the results of a survey in which several business leaders were asked to identify the skills used most frequently. About 80 percent of the executives responding put skill in writing letters at the top of the list (1960:88).

In addition, with the development of word processing, executives will not be able to rely on the luxury of a private secretary. With word processing, executives originate materials onto some type of recording media. It is their responsibility to properly punctuate, capitalize, and spell any unfamiliar words. In other words, they are expected to have a command of the English language. Van Dyk interviewed ten executives to determine why and how they write for the job. One of them is quoted as saying: "It (word processing) is the wave of the future, so college students can no longer assume that when they enter the business world that they will be able to rely on the editing services of a personal secretary" (1980:6).

Another executive viewed the importance of writing skills as:

"In my experience, the most successful executives are those who communicate their ideas to others, both superiors and subordinates" (Stine and Skarzenski, 1979:27).

The need for English fundamentals. The content of the basic business communications course is an area of constant concern. Business communications professors must equip students with the skills necessary for success in the business world. Since basic business communications is

usually a service course, business communications professors must meet the needs of a diverse group of students (Tesch, 1980:34).

What should be included in the content of a basic business communications course? Several studies have been conducted that have addressed this problem. Most have found that instruction in English usage is at the top or near the top of the list.

When Tesch surveyed members of ABCA (American Business Communication Association) and the AACSB (American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business), he found that AACSB members felt that English fundamentals needed more emphasis in business communications courses than did the ABCA members. Tesch explains that this disagreement could be attributed to the fact that "English fundamentals are usually incorporated into all aspects of a communication course." But, he continues to say "some emphasis may be needed as a separate topic" (1982:32).

In another study Brown found that an area where employers believed full-time workers needed improvement was in the area of the ability to write effectively (1976:7).

Gump conducted a study in 1979 to determine the concepts which are pertinent to the basic communications course at the collegiate level as perceived by business professors and business executives. The concept which included mechanics of grammar, spelling, and punctuation was ranked among the top five for each of the three groups surveyed (business professors, business communications professors, and business executives). Non-communication business professors most frequently mentioned knowledges and skills relating to writing theory, mechanics, and

oral communications. Business executives made the following comments as to what they felt were the most essential communication skills:

ability to organize; ability to write whole sentences; ability to spell and punctuate; willingness to condense (1979:86).

From a corporation exporting to West African nations:

Over the years, we have employed college graduates who are sadly lacking in the basic rules of English grammar, spelling, and sentence construction; unfortunately, that has been more pronounced recently (1979:86).

Stine and Skarzenski conducted a study of 120 businesses with offices in Iowa; 80 percent of the companies responding also had offices outside of that state. When asked, "What writing problems do you see in the paperwork crossing your desk," the executives reported wordiness as the number one problem; grammar, two; sentence structure, three; spelling, four; and punctuation, seven. Professors ranked these same problems with spelling as number one; sentence structure, two; grammar, three; and punctuation, four. The executives and professors were also asked, "What should college writing courses teach your future employees (your students)," the executives ranked grammar as number four; spelling, five; vocabulary and word choice, six; and sentence structure, nine. The professors ranked grammar and mechanics as two. These executives and educators seemed to agree on the point that grammar and mechanics are important basic skills. One business respondent put it this way:

We would like to see more emphasis on the basics -- even at the expense of creativity. Students should know all about grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, and style. Yet many do not. Worse, many do not seem to understand why they should care (1979:28).

This survey also indicated that executives do support tough grading standards for grammar and spelling errors. A company president wrote, "I think the rigor of a maximum of one error per 100 words is of the utmost importance and teaches a rigor that must be adhered to" (1979:28).

The accounting profession has repeatedly recognized the need for basic writing skills. In 1978, Addams conducted a study to determine the communication needs of practicing accountants. He attempted to identify those skills and writing projects which were most important to an accountant's success. The study revealed that many accountants felt that communication skills were even more important than basic accounting skills. The study also reported that accountants felt that the teaching of business writing should include: (1) writing concisely, (2) constructing smooth sentences, (3) choosing clear words, (4) making conclusions; and rated slightly lower were: (1) adapting to the writing situation, (2) organizing reports, (3) determining objectives, (4) applying grammar and punctuation. The accountants felt that writing skills including grammar and punctuation were the most difficult area of application for practicing accountants.

The AICPA committee on education and experience requirements for CPA's in 1968 suggests that accounting curricula should include six to nine hours in communications. They went on to say:

Effective communication, both written and oral, is an indispensable skill of the professional. We are unconcerned with the method adopted by the schools to assure that the student has acquired these skills. But we would recommend that every course the student be required to demonstrate his continuing ability in written communication. Our concern is not with the literary style but with the student's ability to convey

the intended message clearly, concisely, and precisely, without errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling (58).

Andrews and Koester were concerned with the disparity which exists between the communication instruction given in the classroom and the accounting student's perception of what should be expected in the "real" business world and of the expectations of the accounting profession on newly-hired employees' communication skills. The Study surveyed accounting professionals and recent accounting graduates in all segments of the accounting profession in all of the states. They found that practicing accountants have a concern about the overall written business communications skills of recent accounting graduates. They also found that this concern was further expressed by a need for accounting students to have more training in writing, organization, and grammar (1979: 33-42).

As previously stated, business communications is occupying a greater role in this highly industrialized world of the 20th century than ever before. The ability to express ideas in writing is one of the leading requirements for success in the business world. An individual's effectiveness as a business worker and as a person depends upon his ability to communicate with others through the English language (Inman, 1970:1).

Nation's Business reports: "Two honor graduates of a highly regarded school of business were called into a vice president's office at a company where they had been working since getting out of school a few months earlier. They were fired on the spot" (1977:60). Why? "Neither could get down on paper in proper English as much as a three

paragraph memorandum" (1977:60). The article further states that another graduate student could not get into his head that a sentence must contain a verb (1977:60).

Business has found that many of those who are the most skilled in their own fields are among the poorest writers. Some of the errors reported are lack of conclusions, excessive wordiness, poor grammar and sentence structure, atrocious spelling, and general confusion. In an article which appeared in Business Week, the President of Pepsi Cola stated he sees an erosion of writing skills in many of the bright young people who are brought into Pepsi. The article further reports that an executive of one of the largest corporations in the world was so insecure about sending a letter to an American Ambassador that he hired a company to compose the letter for his signature (1976:57-58).

This lack of communications skills is further reported in an article which appeared in Nation's Business. The National Assessment of Education Programs found that American teenagers "are losing their ability to communicate through written English" (1977:61).

#### Remedial English Usage Instruction -- The Dilemma

For years business communications professors have been wrestling with the dilemma -- should business communications courses include remedial English instruction? There is a decline in the English abilities of students. The English scores are continuing to decline on the ACT exam. Newspaper want ads often include requests for applicants with good English skills (Jacobs, 1978:80). Several viewpoints exist and must be discussed.

At one extreme is the attitude that the problem should have been solved before a student reaches a business communications class -- that this is a problem for the students to solve on their own and time in class should not be devoted to remedial English instruction. Faidley feels this way:

This (business communications) is not another English course. Certainly spelling or other egregious errors that appear should be eliminated but the writing approach should be non-grammatical if student interest is to be maintained (1973: 199).

In response to Faidley's comment that student interest is lost if remedial instruction is introduced into the classroom, Cornwell replies: "The study of grammar does not have to be a negative experience. . . . Relevance may be the key to teaching and learning grammar. . . . Students should be shown the value of everything that is taught" (1980: 306-307). Students themselves believe that grammar material should be discussed in class (Manship, 1974:67).

Another key factor in keeping student interest could be the grading of the grammar principles presented in class. If the grammar unit does not count towards the student grade, then how can we expect the students to feel the subject matter covered is important (Warner, 1979: 17).

Others take the position that students who can demonstrate an acceptable level of competence in English usage should not be required to sit through this instruction (Barton, 1980:90). Barton suggests that these students be allowed to concentrate their efforts on other areas of business communication (1981:90).



Hall also professes that business communications is one of the last courses a student takes, and it should be assumed that the students have had several years of instruction in English and should know the basics (1973:199). But, others believe that no matter how competent a student is in the use of the English language, the student can always benefit from a review and that the student will not suffer as a result of this review (Johnston, 1976:10).

White also agrees with this point. She expresses it this way: "A review at the beginning of the semester proves to be a learning experience for those students whose backgrounds are weak; it serves as a 'memory jogger' to those who may have temporarily forgotten the rules and their applications" (1979:21).

Another current opinion is that English fundamentals should only be taught as the need arises (Clark, 1962:25). In two separate articles, Lesikar (1962) and McBride (1961) warn business communications professors that they must be careful not to let their courses become little more than a review of elementary grammar principles.

McBride suggests that the teacher "assume these fundamentals until, through reviews and preliminary writing exercises, we make the student aware of his deficiencies very early in the course. Then he may either drop the course and remove his deficiencies before pursuing business writing further, or he will (we hope) determine to remove them by constant additional study and effort as he pursues the course, using periodic personal conferences based on the work he's doing" (1961:19).

Then finally, at the other end of the extreme are those who believe that every high school, community college, and university should initiate a course in business English. And, that students should be made to demonstrate facility for using the English language correctly before

they are permitted to enter the classroom (Johnston, 1976:9-10). Jacobs supports this position and believes that high school administrators should implement business English programs (1978:79-81).

However, with the number of required courses increasing in a student's collegiate program, most business communications professors realize that implementing a course in business English is not feasible. They, also, realize that students do not come to class with a knowledge of basics of English usage and that some time must be spent on this topic. "For years teachers have been concerned about the weak language skills of many of our students" (Warner, 1979:32).

In defense of including English usage instruction: "Teachers of written communications have long been plagued by the grammar dilemma. Students with a poor understanding of the rules of grammar cannot be expected to produce effective written communications, yet that is exactly what we ask them to do" (Lacombe and Kane, 1977:25).

Tate asks this question: "Why shouldn't business educators at least try harder to develop students' written communication skills in high school and college?" (1977:250).

In response to, "Why teach basic English," Butler stated four reasons: (1) Most Americans make six job changes in their lifetime. In order to meet the demands of a new job, a person will need reading, writing, and speaking skills. (2) Business education students will have to fill out forms, read documents, and conduct the everyday business to run their lives. (3) Most business education students will eventually marry and have families. It is important for our students to realize that they will be the most influential English teachers

their children will ever have. (4) Business students may find it necessary to return to school to take refresher courses, learn new skills, or complete advanced degrees. These students must be able to handle reading and writing assignments (1979:13).

Another reason for teaching English usage is the maintenance of goodwill and the importance of portraying the right message. Business can be lost because of a misinterpreted message.

Likewise, the people who write for the business community should be aware that every message should contain elements that either initiate or maintain goodwill. . . . The sufficient factor is the quality of language. Good strategies that misuse language do not finally communicate goodwill, but the meaning that the receivers get is totally opposite (Switzler, 1977:18).

Small, unintentional, careless blunders have caused more people to lose their goodwill than have misconceived or inappropriate strategies. There is a lot of talk about getting back to basics. Goodwill is a basic. And in writing it is inseparably connected with two other basics -- generosity and grammar (Switzler, 1977: 19).

#### What Should be Included in Remedial English Usage

"A knowledge of writing principles and communication psychology are essential ingredients for effective communication. More basic, though, is a fundamental grasp of grammar principles -- the way our language is structured. Too many times incidence of miscommunication occur because of faulty grammar" (Clark, 1977:33).

But, what knowledge does a student need in order to prevent these miscommunications. Clark suggests that we prioritize the teaching of grammar principles -- this is teaching only those principles that are essential for effective basic communication, omitting or delaying the teaching of those principles that require the expert level of communication. Priority Level One would include principles that seek to

overcome gross grammatical irregularities (e.g., complete sentence structure, irregular verb forms, subject/verb agreement); Priority Level Two would include those principles whose errors are to be considered not as grievous as Level One (e.g., plural of compound nouns, compound adjectives); Priority Level Three includes only those errors that the expert grammarian could detect (e.g., pronouns after than and as; adjectives that cannot be compared) (1977:33-34).

Wilkinson feels that after grading an estimated 100,000 business communications papers in eight different universities over the past 42 years, the list of what should be taught boils down to a few main points (1977:2):

1. Agreement -- subject/verb, pronoun/antecedent
2. Capitalization
3. Comparisons
4. Diction
5. Emphasis
6. Expletives
7. Fragments
8. Modifier (dangling and misplaced)
9. Punctuation (the 13 often ignored or misunderstood pointers)
10. Passives
11. Reference to pronouns
12. Sentence organization and structure
13. Spelling
14. Unity

Ivarie included the following topics in the English usage curricula for his study (1968:111-131):

1. Review of a glossary of grammatical terms
2. Clauses and phrases
3. Functional classification of sentence parts
4. Ambiguous antecedents and pronouns
5. Uses of active and passive voice
6. Sentence classification
7. Use of punctuation to separate main clauses
8. Punctuating modifier and appositives
9. Typewriter and punctuation marks
10. Connecting elements of equal rank

11. Coordinating conjunctions as connectives
12. Connecting elements of unequal rank
13. Conjunctive adverbs as connectives
14. Correlative conjunctions as connectives
15. Elimination of the comma fault
16. Elimination of dangling modifier and misplaced modifiers

Schlattman's English usage instruction unit included (1979:37-39):

1. Patterns of the simple sentence
2. Achieving sentence variety
3. Making subject and verb agree
4. Solving your verb problems
5. Skill in graphics (punctuations)

The jury of experts who participated in Barton's study felt the following topics were important in the teaching of language skills (1981:55-72):

1. Grammar skills -- possessive forms of nouns; pronoun/antecedent agreement; active and passive voice of verbs; subject/verb agreement; transitive and intransitive verbs; coordinate, subordinate, and correlative conjunctions; comparison of adjectives; prepositional phrases; adverb phrases and clauses
2. Development of effective sentences -- sentence structure; building of sentences; clauses and phrases; appositives; parenthetical words, phrases, and clauses; direct objects; indirect objects; objects of prepositional phrases
3. Word choice, emphasis, and tone
4. Paragraph construction -- topic sentences; unit; emphasis; coherence; paragraph order and development; paragraph sequencing; completeness; length and number of paragraphs
5. Capitalization

6. Use of punctuation -- mastery of the use of semicolons, colon, quotation marks, dashes, and apostrophes; the main uses of periods, question marks, exclamation points, underscores, and hyphens

7. Spelling skills

8. Miscellaneous -- uses of numbers; vocabulary and dictionary studies.

Warner examined writing samples of 431 students, each was marked for errors in English usage. The number of errors per theme was 0 to 32. The mean number of errors per theme was 11. Total errors for the 431 themes was 3,703. The largest number of errors (1264) occurred in punctuation; next was awkward syntax (457); and third was incorrect word choice (451). Punctuation errors included: using commas where none were needed, omitting needed commas, substituting periods for question marks. Awkward syntax was identified as sentence construction which was so poor that the sentence was incorrect, ambiguous, or illogical. Incorrect word choice included using there for their or then for than (1979:18).

Warner further reports that the high error rate in punctuation resulted from: (1) the students not knowing the rules of punctuation; (2) "knowing" the rule but not being able to apply them to their own writing; (3) constructing such poor sentences that correct punctuation was impossible (1979:18).

It is difficult to determine exactly what should be included in the language skills unit. One of the jury members of Barton's study wrote:

While I'm sure it is impossible to teach all those things included in this listing, I do believe students must have mastered these skills either before or during the course in business communication in order to have a confident command and fluent use of the language. I assume there is a high degree of language skills developed prior to the course in business communication and that would permit the student an opportunity to demonstrate that skill (1981:73).

The entire course of business communications cannot be devoted to remedial English usage, but the topic must be given enough time so that students are not left in a state of confusion. "A rapid brief review often leaves students more confused than as before and less willing to accept the fact that grammar instruction is important" (Huffman, 1969: 11).

"Research indicates the need for English instruction with the suggestion for number of class hours given to the review of English fundamentals subjects as spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and paragraphing, varying from a total of 3 class periods to 15" (Dortch, 1976:225).

The amount of time necessary to devote to the topic may also vary from 20 percent of total class time for communication fundamentals (communication theory, grammar, and psychology of consideration) (Boyd, 1976:135) to an entire course devoted to the topic of business English. Ivarie reports that in his study the lecture-discussion method took a total of 260 minutes in a three-semester hour course (1968:66).

#### Traditional vs. Linguistic Approach

Traditional approach treats words separate from their context; for example, a noun is a person, place, or thing. This approach often

includes memorizing rules, completing drills, and diagramming sentences (Levy, 1970:241).

The linguistic approach treats words according to their context in the sentence; for example in Roberts' a noun is a word that patterns as apple does in these positions: I saw the apple; I was disappointed in the apple; Her apple is gone; Apples are plentiful in Washington (Roberts, 1956:13).

Research is not inclusive and cannot identify either of these approaches as being superior. "While many in the field of English agree that grammar is of little use in improving writing there are still a great many teachers who hold to the grammar book, believing that there will be some transfer to better sentences if only students learn their nouns and verbs (Haynes, 1978:83). Haynes reviewed the current research in the teaching of writing, and found that the same statement is true for the linguistics approach. She states, "research is inconclusive regarding whether structural linguistics or transformational grammar aids in writing judging from the studies to date . . ." (1978:86).

The studies reviewed by Haynes all were done in the English area where effective writing is based on creativity and style. However, business letter writing is not so concerned with the writer's style but with the message to be transmitted. "The business person tends to deal in specifics. . . . Perhaps the grammar confuses the meaning. Maybe the spelling distracts. Or the punctuation could lead to a double interpretation" (Boyd and Inman, 1976:133). Miscommunication can cost a company a great deal in goodwill along with time and money. Business



students must be concerned with misplaced modifiers, sentence structure, etc.

Allred and Clark conclude from their study that their findings "indicate a need for a college business communication course to stress the planning and organizing processes as well as the syntax and grammar-related activities" (1978:35).

#### Measuring Growth in English Usage

While objective tests are a valid measure for judging a student's knowledge of the rules of English usage, they are not a valid measure for judging a student's ability to transfer this knowledge to his writing or for judging a student's writing ability. McColly feels that objective tests, "simply are not measures of writing, for the purpose of the judging of writing ability they should be ignored" (1970:149).

Dierderich completed a study in 1961 to determine if any part of essay evaluation could be done better through objective testing. He concluded that mechanics and wording could be measured more reliably and systematically by objective tests. He also states that these factors take up most of the time in grading since they offer the largest number of small, specific errors to correct. If these principles were tested by objective measures, evaluators of essays would be able to spend more time and more precise observations of the remaining grading factors. Included in an article entitled, "What Does Research Say About the Judging of Writing Ability," this statement is made:

The judging of writing ability of students is a problem because of the great disagreement among English teachers as to the matter of good writing. Objective tests are of little help, since they are not measures of writing. Essay tests are the only

valid measures, but to make them as reliable and as valid as possible requires that attention be given to a number of source errors (1970:148).

### Holistic vs. Analytical Grading

Analytical grading consists of the evaluator assigning points based on a scale or key and with each category receiving a certain number of points. For example, in the studies of Schlattman (1976) and Pickard (1972) letters were graded in the areas of purpose, tone, choice of words, English usage, and organization. In analytical grading, each of these specific areas contributes to the overall grade of the paper (McColly, 1970:151).

However, McColly does point out that research has shown that "when a judge thought he was responding to some specific quality he was actually responding to his general impression or to the overall quality of the essay" (1970:151).

Holistic grading evaluates each paper for total effectiveness.

While holistic scoring does not deal with the individual student's writing, if a pre- and post-writing of comparable purpose is used, it can measure growth. For example, to measure improvement in written business communication, students would be asked to write both a pre-instruction and post-instruction letter, and the raters would score the letters holistically (Feinberg, 1980:44).

With holistic grading, papers are graded by use of a simple numerical scale. The two most frequently used are the four- and six-point scales. In each of these scales one point is low, and either four or six points is high. McColly and Reinstad conducted a study to determine which scale was more reliable. They concluded that both scales were reliable. They recommend the use of the four-point scale because

with the six-point scale there was greater difficulty in orienting the evaluators to the use of the scale and in their actual use of it. They go on to say that these two factors make the four-point scale quicker and easier to use (1965:55).

The four-point scale grades could be interpreted as (Myers, 1966: 43):

1. Obviously below a reasonable standard
2. Not sufficient promise or competence to be considered in the upper half
3. Clearly competent, promise of effective performance
4. Superior; not perfect but very good; effective.

In measuring growth in writing for criterion performances, holistic grading on a four- or six-point scale appears to be superior because as "the number of points on a scale is increased and the rater is forced to make finer distinctions he becomes less reliable. There is more chance of variability between his rating on one theme and his rating on another just like it, as well as between his ratings and those of other raters" (McColly and Reinstad, 1965:55).

Opinions are varied (as reported by the Journal of Education Research) and do not point to either the analytical grading method or the holistic grading method as being superior.

Opinion is divided over the comparative value of judging writing-test essays simply for general merit or for performance on each of several specific factors. The validity of a single rating is not questioned; the issue is whether or not an array of ratings is not more discriminating. Research findings indicate that the controversy may be tour de force, because ratings for specific factors tend to collapse entirely into a single rating through the halo effect (What Does

Educational Research Say About the Judging of Writing Ability, 1970:148).

Even though Pickard used analytical grading, instructions to the evaluators included this statement: "You may reread the letter for the fine points asked on the evaluation sheet, but let your first reaction be your major guide" (1972:173).

It appears that the more simple the grading procedure, the more reliable and valid the results will be. Pickard supports this statement (1972:23-24):

No complicated patterns were prescribed for rating the letter because of the need to keep the workload of the evaluators as light as possible and to do the rating exercise as simply as possible. By rating the letters one at a time on all thirty-two questions, there was, of course, the possibility that one facet of the letter could influence the ratings of another facet of the letter. For example, the tone of a letter could very well influence the ratings for choice of words; and word choice could influence the tone ratings. Such influence is impossible to avoid even by rating the letters on one category at a time because all the categories are spread throughout each letter, and a rater would be exposed to all categories each time he read a letter, regardless of the category he was rating at any particular reading. Furthermore, the various categories are interdependent on one another. For example, general tone of a letter is "good" or "bad" by virtue of the words chosen to express the tone. Therefore, the simplest and the easiest pattern for evaluating the letters was considered the best.

These statements would appear to support the case for the use of holistic grading for the evaluation of business letters written by students. Interdependence of ratings would lead to the "halo effect" if analytical grading were used.

### The Judging of Writing Tests

The actual grading of writing tests leads to questions of validity and reliability. There are several sources of error which must be controlled.

Writers. When we give the normal student writer a writing test, we create not the best writing condition but the worst. But, since distractions are very much a part of life, who is to say that the result of these distractions (e.g., running lawn mower, a sniffing student) should not be reflected in the student's grade (McColly, 1970:149). We all know that the every day activity of the office is not quiet, and our students must be able to function in that environment.

Readers. The most important reader factor is competence. The more competent the judges of writing tests are, the closer they will be in agreement and the more valid their judgments will be (McColly, 1970: 150).

In a large scale study which looked at essay rating, Dierderich, et al., analyzed the reliability of readers from six fields: English professors, professors of social science, professors of natural science, lawyers, businessmen, and writers and editors. He found that the English teachers graded the papers more reliably than any of the other groups. In addition, all groups agreed with the English teachers more often than they did with members of their own profession (1961:11-14). McColly reminds us that the purpose of this study was to find a difference of opinion. He also feels that the reliability of English teachers compared to the other professions was not surprising (1970:150). It is

noticed that the group of professors did not include business professors, business communication professors, or shorthand professors. These professors often have an extensive background in English usage and in grading written papers. Furthermore, it is quite possible that the reliability of these professors would be just as high as that of the English teachers.

It is plain that readers must be given proper training and orientation, regardless of how knowledgeable they are. Two different approaches exist. One way is to present predetermined standards and criteria and some kind of object to which readers will apply those standards and criteria. The other approach is to have the readers meet and discuss the writings to be graded and allow them to determine the standards and criteria to be used. But, in both cases the readers must practice. The faster the reader can rate the writing pieces, the more valid and reliable his judgments become. If a reader is well trained and oriented, his instantaneous judgment is likely to be a genuine response to the criteria for which he is looking. But, if that reader is given more time to think about the judgment, the more likely irrelevant qualities will enter into his judgment (McColly, 1970:151).

A minor factor to be considered is reader fatigue. However, McColly reports that reader fatigue enters the picture after several days of evaluation (1970:152).

Topics. Writer performance varies from topic to topic. The grading of writing tests could then be influenced by a student's knowledge of the subject. Topics must be carefully chosen and highly structured so that

this concept is not reflected in the students' writing. However, another approach is to give students a basic content, and ask them to make something out of it. This really becomes a task in logic more than pure writing ability (McColly, 1970:152-153).

Since business letters address a certain topic or a particular situation, this second approach would appear to be the approach to use in the grading of business letter writing.

Appearance. "Quality of handwriting has a significant influence on scores given essay tests. Readers are more generous with papers with good script than with poor" (Chase, 1968:318). "The only cure for this condition is to have examination essays typed or put into some other standard printed form" (McColly, 1970:154).

Design and methodology. McColly (1970:154-155) feels that the design and methodology must include control of both chance and systematic factors: "to randomize the effects of the former and either to remove or to spread equally among the factors the effects of the latter."

McColly's list of factors includes (1970:154-155):

1. Effects of reading order will be systematic if each reader grades the writings in the same order. It can be changed to a chance factor by shuffling the writings and having each reader grade the writings in a different order.

2. Readers must work independently for logical and statistical reasons. A normal and independent distribution of data is desired, the aforementioned conditions help to achieve this.

3. Reader's score on any essay or any quality should not be dependent on his score or any other. In other words, readers should not be required to give a certain number of 4's, 3's, 2's, and 1's.

4. Since readers must work independently and simultaneously, they should be provided with solitude.

5. The design of a study which is to evaluate writing tests must be rigorous. "Perhaps the easiest mistake here is in having the pre- and post-essays rated separately. All essays must be rated at the same time" (1970:154). They should be part of an intact rating session. Time allowed between sessions introduces variables which can contaminate the data.

Administration. Any writing test must be impromptu. All writers whose writing tests are to be judged as the same population should take the test at the same time. If that is not possible, the tests should be given under conditions which are as nearly alike as possible (McColly, 1970:155).

The second critical factor under administration is time. "A writing test should be productive of an essay, not mere sentences, and it would seem that at least 40 or 45 minutes are required in order to give students a chance to write an essay" (McColly, 1970:155). The topic must also be compatible with the time. The standards and criteria must accommodate the time allowed (McColly, 1970:155).

The validity of impromptu testing is backed up by the fact that in the business world there may not be time to write. "Today's business people generate communications that appear in final form as writing.



But actual writing -- pushing a pencil across the page -- is constrained by time limitations and new office operating procedures" (Kramer, 1979: 27).

"Another positive aspect of in-class writing is that students develop the ability to think and organize 'on the spot,' which is required in many situations in the business world" (Dortch, 1976:224).

Since business letter writing involves a response to a structured situation and there is also a trend for short, to-the-point responses, many experts recommend that a business letter should average only 100 words. With this in mind, Pickard gave students two hours to analyze three problem situations and to write three letters in response to these situations (1972:10). Schlattman gave students 25 minutes to write each of the evaluation letters (1976:40). Both of these studies included letters from three different types of situations.

Number of practice letters needed. How many letters must be written by the student before achievement can be tested? A current opinion is that students learn by doing. So in order for a student to learn to write better, that student must practice writing. Kramer believes that our students must continue to write as much as possible (1979:27). Dortch reports that when Murphy and Peck surveyed 223 schools, they found that the number of required writing tasks varied from 0 to 50 letters (1976:226).

In the ABCA Bulletin the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Course Standards suggests that a minimum of 12 assignments be required, ten of those to be short and intermediate pieces of non-routine letters, memos, proposals, problem formulations, outlines, etc. (1974:18).





























































































































































































































































































































