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A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF TEACHER COMMENTARY ON STUDENT TEXTS

The Ohio State University

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A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF TEACHER COMMENTARY
ON STUDENT TEXTS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Margaret Morrell Morgan

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The Ohio State University
1985

Reading Committee:
James L. Battersby
Sara Garnes
Ann Dobyns

Approved By
James L. Battersby
Advisor
Department of English
VITA

December 22, 1944 . . . . Born - Norfolk, Virginia

1966 . . . . . . . . . . . . B.A., The Ohio State University

1968-69 . . . . . . . . . Teaching Assistant, Dept. of
Anthropology, Ohio State University

1975 . . . . . . . . . . . . M.A., Dept. of English, The Ohio
State University

1974-79 . . . . . . . . . Teaching Associate, Department of
English, The Ohio State University,
Columbus, OH

1979-80 . . . . . . . . . Lecturer, Department of English,
The Ohio State University,
Columbus, OH

1980-84 . . . . . . . . . Instructor, Department of English &
Journalism, University of Central
Arkansas, Conway, AR

1984-85 . . . . . . . . . Lecturer, University of Arkansas
at Little Rock, Little Rock, AR

FIELDS OF STUDY

Undergraduate Studies: Anatomy

Graduate Studies: Anthropology

Graduate Studies: English
Major field: Rhetoric. Professor Edward
P.J. Crockett
Literary Criticism. Professor J.L.
Battersby
Nineteenth Century English Literature.
Professor Richard Martin
Twentieth Century British and American
Literature. Professor Marlene Longenecker
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF RESEARCH

English teachers spend a great deal of time, day in and day out, commenting on student essays. Many teachers would be surprised to learn that over two dozen studies in the last twenty-five years have been unable to establish a clear connection between the comments teachers make on student essays and subsequent improvement in student writing ability. In 1979, Jean Anne King concluded from her dissertation research that "(1) students often do not comprehend teacher responses to their writing; (2) even when they do, they do not always use the responses and may not know how to use them; (3) even when they use them, they do not necessarily write more effectively as a result" (Knoblauch and Brannon 1). Other studies arriving at similar conclusions have been reviewed in recent articles by Cy Knoblauch and Lil Brannon and by C.W. Griffin. If the purpose of teacher commentary is to improve student writing ability, the question of how to account for this apparent failure is of foremost importance for teachers and students alike.

Research on the effectiveness of teacher commentary has consisted primarily of attempts to establish correlations
between improvement in student writing (often measured holistically in pre- and post-testing) and various factors such as the location, form, and content of comments. Some studies have also categorized comments by their function. King's research mentioned above, for example, divided teacher comments into three categories: comments correcting outright, comments naming errors, and comments offering rules. Another study by R.J. Marzano and S. Arthur divided commentary in a slightly different way: one type emphasized the actual correction of mechanical errors; another presented abbreviated grammatical responses; and the third offered "substantial" commentary "designed to foster thinking." Evelyn Bata's 1972 study categorized comments by their location, comparing marginal with end comments.

The results of all these studies, however, were basically the same: no significant improvement in the quality of student writing could be discerned as a result of teacher commentary. The form that the commentary took seemed to make little difference; one form did not seem to be better than another in terms of the results it produced. Although no study, to my knowledge, has considered the consequences of dispensing with teacher commentary altogether, the implication of the existing research is that teacher commentary itself has little effect on improvement in student writing ability.
Marie Kelley studied writers' maturation as a result of opportunities to revise in the light of teacher commentary. Kelley distinguished between "clarifying" and "directive" responses but found no difference in writer maturation as a result of either type. Muffy Siegel, studying the difference between the comments of experienced and inexperienced teachers, found that experienced teachers tended to comment more on the content of student papers and to give more personal reactions, whereas inexperienced teachers failed to distinguish between important and unimportant errors and tended to correct errors more. Experienced teachers tended to treat errors as "symptoms," to relate their comments to the "broader goals of instruction," and to establish "the presence of an attentive and challenging audience in the person of the instructor" (Siegel 306). Although Siegel's research implies that the methods of experienced teachers are likely to be more effective than the methods of inexperienced teachers, her study does not in fact demonstrate that the comments of experienced teachers are more effective than those of inexperienced teachers.

At least two studies have focused on the relationship between student improvement and comments offering praise or criticism. Earl Seidman's dissertation of 1967 and Winnifred Taylor and Kenneth C. Hoedt's article in the *Journal of Educational Research* (1966) address the question of the
relationship between the attitudes shown by teachers in their
commments and students' attitudes toward their writing. Both
found that students have better attitudes toward writing when
the teacher offers praise instead of criticism, and that as a
result (apparently) students tend to write longer papers.
Eric Bell and Allan Price examined another aspect of com-
mentary closely related to praise and criticism, the
assignment of grades. Bell and Price compared the writing of
two groups of students, those who received grades and those
who did not. (Both groups received comments on their
papers.) They found no correlation between withholding
grades and improvement or lack of improvement in student
writing. Motivation is thought to be one of the strongest
factors in learning. If the results of the studies by
Seidman, Taylor and Hoedt, and Bell and Price are correct,
then it seems that the kind of motivation offered by praise
from teachers or by grades is either insufficient or of the
wrong sort to bring about the kind of change teachers aim
for.

Other investigators have examined the medium through
which comments are presented. Researchers Jean B. McGrew,
V.B. Coleman, and T.E. Miller found that taped teacher
responses, like commentary offering praise, produced better
attitudes in student writers, but, again, better attitudes
did not result in demonstrably better essays. It should be
noted, however, that the medium used in these studies was electronic and thus not truly oral in the sense of the student's being addressed face to face by the teacher. Still other researchers have taken into account the fact that there is a difference between subsequent student writing in other essays and subsequent revisions of the same essay. It is difficult to see how a student can be expected to gain facility in any skill without being given the opportunity to correct mistakes, yet one of the most disturbing discoveries to emerge from a review of research in this area is that many teachers still do not see their comments as part of a writing process involving successive revisions of a piece of discourse. Dennis Searle and David Dillon, for instance, studied teacher responses at intermediate grade levels and found that practically none of the responses in their study anticipated eventual revision of the paper being commented on. Instead, 59% of the responses in their survey were characterized as "didactic/correction" or "summatively judgmental" (233 - 242). As Nancy Sommers points out, commentary that focuses exclusively on judging the worth of a text or pointing out errors, particularly when it is framed in a set of standardized terms that are not text-specific, is not likely to encourage students to make changes in their compositions. As Sommers says, "The problem here is a confusion of process and product: What one has to say about the
process is different from what one has to say about the product. Teachers who use this method of commenting are formulating their comments as if these drafts were finished drafts and were not going to be revised. Their commenting vocabularies have not been adapted to revision and they comment on first drafts as if they were justifying a grade or as if the first draft were the final draft" (154).

After reading articles such as the one by Sommers, one might guess that comments aimed at revision would be more successful in terms of student improvement than those that are not. Research in this area, however, shows mixed results. In 1963, Louis Arnold divided his student subjects into two groups, asking one to revise with reference to teacher comments and instructing the other group not to revise at all. At the end of the year, he found no difference in performance between the two groups. Several early studies, however, offer different conclusions. John Fellows' 1936 study indicated that student who received mechanical corrections improved in grammar and punctuation when they were given the opportunity to revise. Today many authorities would question whether the correction of grammar and punctuation errors constitutes substantial improvement in writing ability. However, a 1958 study by Earl Buxton gives support to the view that revision can result in improvement. Like Arnold, Buxton divided his students into two groups, asking
one to revise in response to extensive commentary. The other group did no revising but received comments. Buxton's revision group, unlike Arnold's, showed considerable improvement over the other group.

The difference in these results can probably be attributed to the conditions under which revision took place. Buxton's revisers rewrote their essays in class while the raters of their essays moved about the room answering questions and giving advice as students requested it. More recently, Nina Ziv also studied teacher commentary in a workshop type of setting. Her results indicate that students can show improvement in their writing in multiple-draft assignments with the help of teacher intervention in such a setting. Studies such as Ziv's and Buxton's suggest at least three factors in student improvement relative to teacher commentary: a direct oral medium instead of taped or written responses; student-initiated questions rather than teacher-initiated commands; and, most important, a view of writing as a learning process taking place in a classroom setting. As Sommers has said, "The key to successful commenting is to have what is said in the comments and what is done in the classroom mutually reinforce and complement each other. Commenting on papers assists the writing course in achieving its purpose" (155).
Problems arise when the purposes of the course, the purposes of the teacher in responding, and the purposes of the student in writing do not reinforce or complement each other. "The challenge we face as teachers," according to Sommers, "is to develop comments which will provide an inherent reason for students to revise" (156). A teacher's reason for commenting and a student's reason for revising often do not coincide, as when, for example, "the writer wants to talk about how she got her first job while the teacher wants an exercise in comparison and contrast" (Brannon and Knoblauch 158).

The research of Sommers, Brannon, and Knoblauch reveals that "teachers' comments can take students' attention away from their own purposes in writing a particular text and focus that attention on the teachers' purpose in commenting. The teacher appropriates the text from the student by confusing the student's purpose in writing the text with her own purpose in commenting" (Sommers 149). The result of such an appropriation is that a student's motivation for making changes is diminished.

Without motivation for an end he or she desires, a student is unlikely to improve. "It is precisely the chance to accomplish one's own purposes by controlling one's own choices that creates incentive to write. Denying students control of what they want to say must surely reduce incentive
and also, presumably, the likelihood of improvement" (Brannon and Knoblauch 159). According to Brannon and Knoblauch, teacher intervention in student writing processes should take the form of asking and answering questions: "The teacher's principal concern in asking and cooperatively answering these questions is to make the writer think about what has been said, not to tell the writer what to do. The point is to return control of choice-making as soon as possible to the writer, while also creating a motive for making changes" (163).

The view of teacher-student relations expressed by Sommers, Brannon, and Knoblauch is transactional: the teacher reads and responds to the student's writing, and the student reads and responds to the teacher's writing. Each provides an audience for the other. In 1975, James Britton and his associates in England showed that student writing could reliably be categorized by audience and function (or purpose). Britton's audience categories included self, teacher, wider audience (known), and unknown audience. His function categories included transactional, expressive, and poetic. After categorizing hundreds of student scripts according to the audience roles that could be inferred from them, Britton found that, "Nine-tenths of the scripts were put in the audience categories of the teacher-learner dialogue and 'pupil to examiner'. ... 'Pupil to examiner'
claimed nearly 49% of the scripts, teacher-learner dialogue, nearly 39%" (94). Thus, the great majority of students were writing to the teacher qua teacher, not to a wider or an unknown audience.

In 1982, Paul Burnette used the function and audience categories described by Britton to classify teacher comments. When classified by function, 65% of the comments he collected were defined as serving the purpose of recording or regulating errors. When the comments were categorized according to the audience role assumed by the teacher, 61% were defined as "impersonal" and 27% as "examiner." Taken together, the studies by Britton and Burnette reveal one important fact: For good or ill, and regardless of admonitions to "write for a general audience," students write for teachers. Teachers, on the other hand, respond more frequently as examiners or as testers than as teachers. Britton describes teaching as "an ongoing process, an interaction between pupil and teacher, a continuing dialogue. . . . In the teaching situation, a pupil looks, in his writing, to the response of the teacher and beyond that to his own activity to follow. He writes for a response" (69). From a student's point of view, a typical writing transaction in school must be like sending a letter off in the mail and getting no answer; instead, he receives a critical evaluation of the letter from a sort of censor who intercepted it in the
mail and returned it with all the objectionable parts marked. The message never got through.

Burnette's principal conclusion is that the purposes teachers have and the roles they assume in writing comments explain the type of responses they make, a conclusion that at first glance seems almost too obvious to merit the support of an entire dissertation. Burnette's study, nonetheless, is important because it is one of the few that view teacher's as rhetors and students as their audience instead of vice versa. Most other research has evaluated the success of the teacher's commentary in terms of the student's action, i.e., how well the student has performed in response to the exigencies of the rhetorical situation, of which teacher comments are one part. This type of research tends to ignore the fact that the teacher has also performed a rhetorical act in response to the exigencies he or she has perceived in the rhetorical situation. Or, if that fact is taken into consideration, it is assumed that the success of the teacher's act is reflected in the success of the student's.

This line of reasoning is unconvincing because it does not make a clear distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions for the success of a rhetorical act. It may be necessary in some cases (such as when the teacher points out grammatical errors) for the teacher's act to be successful in order for the student's act to be successful, but it does not
follow that that condition alone is sufficient for a student's overall success in writing. That is, a teacher's rhetorical act may be successful without the student's necessarily being so, just as the student's acts may be successful without the teacher's being so. Research on teacher commentary in the past, however, has tended to view the success of one rhetorical act in terms of the success of another.

The overall success of a piece of writing is usually determined by the application of a given set of criteria. In studying teacher commentary, however, researchers have used two sets of criteria, one for the evaluation of student texts and another for the evaluation of teachers' texts. Student texts are usually evaluated according to their grammatical, logical, and rhetorical features as those features relate to the rhetorical situation implied by the text. No study, to my knowledge, has used these same criteria for the evaluation of teachers' texts. Instead, the worth of the teacher's writing is measured by the worth of the student's writing. If we "measure" the success of student texts by certain criteria, shouldn't we "measure" the success of teachers' texts the same way? This is not to say that student essays and teacher comments are the same thing, merely that these types of discourse can be analyzed in similar ways.

In Understanding Discourse, Karl Wallace remarks that "there is little difference between teaching effectively and
communicating effectively" (Wallace viii). This study will approach teacher commentary as a type of teaching, teaching as a type of communication, and communication as a type of rhetorical action. The materials of this study have been drawn from the many real and hypothetical examples of teacher commentary already published by authoritative sources. These sources include Nancy Sommers' award-winning article "Responding to Student Writing"; books on teaching such as William Irmscher's Teaching Expository Writing and Erika Lindemann's A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers; and teaching manuals that accompany composition textbooks, such as Schwegler and Aaron's Instructor's Manual to Accompany the Little, Brown Handbook.

Most previous studies of teacher commentary have focused on the writing of students, with teachers' comments being viewed as contributing factors to its improvement or lack of improvement. This study will shift the focus from student as writer to teacher as writer. The rhetorical acts of students are certainly important, but it is my contention that the rhetorical acts of students and those of teachers take place within, and as a response to, separate rhetorical situations featuring different audiences, different exigencies, and different constraints. Furthermore, the factors influencing teachers' writing have received much less attention in the past than the factors influencing student writing.
Both types of writing take place in the institution of education. I contend that writing in an educational setting alters the nature of the written act in fundamental ways. Within this setting, many rhetorical situations are possible. In discussing rhetorical situation, I will be using the terminology originated by Lloyd Bitzer: exigence, audience, and contraints. I will try to show that teacher commentary that creates or enhances exigences (Bitzer's spelling) for a student audience is more likely to result in improvement than commentary addressing constraints. Student responses to constraints may result in change in subsequent writing, but that change does not necessarily constitute improvement.

Writing in an educational setting also means that the language used by teachers is primarily prescriptive; that is, it chiefly concerns the laying down of rules or courses of action. Researchers such as King, mentioned above, hypothesize that teacher comments are often unsuccessful in bringing about improvement because students do not understand them. What then does it mean to say that a student does not understand a prescriptive comment? To answer this question, I have used the terms set forth by John Searle in *Speech Acts*. Searle asserts that understanding an utterance means "understanding its meaning." A student's understanding of the meaning of a teacher's comment involves his understanding of the teacher's intention and of the conditions under which the
statement or implied statement made by the teacher holds true. I will discuss a number of typical teacher comments that have as their purpose the performance of such conventional transactions as instructing, arguing, forbidding, persuading, etc., in order to see whether these comments meet the conditions necessary for the successful completion of a speech act.

In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle describes the types of discourse appropriate to given occasions for public speaking, forensic being the discourse of the law courts, deliberative that of legislative assemblies, and epideictic that of ceremonial occasions. He also mentions the strategies appropriate to each type of discourse. Aristotle suggests that the example is most effective for deliberative discourse and the enthymeme for forensic discourse, since the purpose of deliberative discourse is to establish what should be done and the purpose of forensic discourse is to establish what was done. I contend that teachers share similar purposes when they comment on student papers, but their purposes are often not accomplished because they sometimes use the means appropriate to one type of discourse for the ends of another, and because students who read teacher comments are often unsure of which purpose the teacher intends.

In order to illustrate this, I have divided teacher comments into three basic types according to their purpose.
The first type, which I have called **informative**, is similar to Aristotle's forensic discourse in that its purpose is to establish what was done and whether what was done is acceptable or unacceptable according to prescribed rules and conventions. The second type of comment, which I have called **deliberative**, is similar to the language of legislative assemblies in that its purpose is to establish policy, to give advice, or to encourage the hearer to make decisions with regard to future actions. The third type of comment I have called **epideictic**; it is similar to the epideictic oratory of Aristotle in that its purpose is to select certain events, objects, or persons as examples for praise or blame.

These three categories are meant to be neither all-inclusive nor mutually exclusive. Far from being a Procrustean bed, their purpose is meant to be primarily heuristic. Although most comments, I believe, fall into one of these categories, some may not; and although the categories are defined by purpose, some comments may serve more than one. Indeed, I believe that the overlapping and hierarchical nature of purpose is one of the factors that can contribute to a comment's lack of effectiveness in helping a student to improve his writing. I contend that we cannot really assess the effectiveness of a teacher's comment unless we first ascertain the purpose the comment was intended to serve. The purposes by which my three categories have been
defined are immediate purposes. These acts—informing, advising, praising—can be viewed as ends in themselves, or they can be viewed as acts which are instrumental in achieving other purposes. In the past, teacher commentary has been studied for the most part in terms of its ultimate purpose, improving student writing. If, as much of the research in this area indicates, teacher commentary seldom achieves this end, we might seek the reason in its failure to achieve lesser or subordinate ends. In this, as in all acts, one cannot hope to gain an ultimate end unless one's immediate ends are realized first.

This study will therefore address the question of how best to judge the effectiveness of teacher commentary in terms of means and ends, and whether the ends of certain types of commentary should not be considered as subordinate to the ends of others. Specifically, I will try to show that the ends of epideictic commentary best represent the central purpose of teacher commentary as a whole and that this type of commentary should precede the other two types both logically and chronologically. I contend that epideictic commentary helps to establish the value system upon which the arguments of the other two types of commentary are based, and in reinforcing values through amplification, it helps to create the adherence to values that must precede action on the part of the student. In other words, for deliberative
and informative commentary to be effective, a student must first be predisposed to act, and epideictic commentary can help to create this predisposition.
CHAPTER TWO: TYPES OF TEACHER COMMENTARY

If one looks at the examples of teacher commentary published by Sommers, Irmscher, Schwegler and Aaron, Lindemann, Siegel, and others, one can see that each includes a number of different kinds of comments. Some are abbreviated; others are complete sentences. Some refer to the past, some to the present, some to the future. The attitude shown by some is objective, by others, subjective. Some are statements, others are questions or commands.

Teachers obviously comment on student writing in a number of ways, but I believe that most comments can be placed in one of three broad categories relative to the teacher's purpose in making the comment. Thus, teacher commentary can 1) inform students about what they did wrong, 2) advise students as to what they should do in future writing, and 3) praise or criticize students' writing, as a whole or in part. Each of these purposes arises as a result of a different rhetorical situation, and each is characterized by its own sort of language. All three, however, can be found in comments on any given paper.
A. Informative Commentary

The first type of comment, whose purpose is to tell students what they did, usually points out errors. (Comments concerning the good or bad qualities of the writing do not fall into this category but into the third one we shall discuss, epideictic.) Comments pointing out errors often employ conventional abbreviations, such as sp, dm, ww, etc., as well as numbers and letters that refer to rules in a handbook. Corrections of student errors (as distinct from labeling them) also fall into this category.

The language of these comments is what James Britton and others call "informative," that is, language whose function is to record, to report, and to generalize. Thus, teachers can record individual errors in order to point them out to a student or to refer to them later in their evaluation of the paper. Comments recording specific errors usually occupy a marginal or interlinear position in the text. Teachers can also report their observations of a series of errors in a paper in a narrative or descriptive way. Such comments usually occur at the end of the paper preceding recommendations for revision, if the paper is an early draft, or preceding an overall assessment for a grade, if the paper is a final draft. Comments that report a teacher's observations often take the second person. For instance, in commenting on
a shift in tense, a teacher might say, "In the first paragraph, you use the present tense, but in the second, you shift to past tense." Shifts in person are also described in a similar fashion. Comments reporting observations often immediately merge into comments that generalize about a series of errors. These comments, which also use the second person, may generalize about the errors in a single paper, as in the following examples: "... your sentences are not always effective. The main problems are wordiness, vague pronoun reference, and imprecise word choice" (Siegel 309); "You seem to have taken parts of two different essays and stuck them together" (Siegel 309); "Though your topic sentences move the essay along, your comparisons are sometimes too jumbled for your connections to be clear" (Fowler 51). Or the comments may generalize in order to compare a paper to previous ones: "You slipped back into wordiness in this paper. ... [However,] this paper is still much better than earlier ones" (Siegel 309).

Informative comments are usually oriented toward past action, even though they may be expressed in the present tense. Probably more important than tense, however, is the indicative mode of informative comments. Using the indicative mode reveals a factual or objective attitude on the part of the speaker. By factual, I mean that the state of affairs being referred to is assumed to be independently
verifiable. If the state of affairs is independently verifiable, we can say that the statement or comment made by the speaker is true. Complete indicative statements and questions can be prefaced by the phrase "it is true that..." Thus when a teacher writes dm on a student paper, I take this abbreviation to mean "This is a dangling modifier." This statement is assumed to be true because another teacher could look at the paper and verify the fact that the dangling modifier exists. The second teacher could do this because he or she shares the same rules and conventions governing modifiers as the first teacher. The first teacher's statement is taken as "objective" because it refers to an observable state of affairs in the world rather than to some inner state of affairs experienced by the teacher. Such an inner state could not be verified by a second party.

For informative comments to serve their purpose effectively, two conditions must obtain. First, it must be true that what the teacher points out as an error is indeed an error. Some teacher comments are inaccurate because of a too-hasty reading of the text or because of a misinterpretation of the writer's intention. Others are downright wrong, as in the case of the reader of the text cited by Sommers (150), who marked the word pageantry as misspelled when it was in fact correctly spelled. Other comments, such as awk or wordy, are not references to specific errors but
expressions of the reader's affective responses, and affective responses cannot be independently verified.

The second condition necessary to the effectiveness of informative commentary is the student's understanding of the teacher's comment. The student must understand both the locutionary and the illocutionary force of the informative comment. For example, when a teacher writes a comment such as *dm*, the student must know what constitutes a dangling modifier, and he must be able to make a correct reference from what he knows to the specific instance in the paper. In addition, he must also know how the teacher intends the comment to be received, whether it be as a statement, a command, a request, etc. It is not enough that the teacher speak the truth; the student must also know that the teacher is speaking the truth, which means that he must know the conditions under which the statement holds true. By "conditions," I mean points of agreement on modifying circumstances that exist as prerequisites to understanding. (This topic will be explored more fully in a later chapter on speech acts.)

Knowing the truth value of informative commentary is necessary for effective communication to take place between teacher and student, but it is also important for another reason. Unless the writer speaks the truth and the reader knows the truth is being spoken, justice cannot be served. Justice, as Aristotle points out in the *Rhetoric*, is
the goal of forensic discourse, and insofar as it concerns
the establishment of past fact, informative commentary is
similar to forensic discourse. Justice is the goal of infor-
mative commentary, just as it is the goal of forensic argu-
mentation. Justice means "treating equals equally," as Chaim
Perelman points out in The Idea of Justice and the Problem of
Argument (40). In order that justice be served, equals
must be treated equally. In legal proceedings, all accused
persons must be considered as equal before the law, and the
law must be clear as to what constitutes error or wrongdoing.

The "rule of justice," as Perelman points out, is purely
formal. Thus, in administering the rules of grammar and
usage, a teacher must decide what counts as equal and how
offenders shall be treated, because the "rule of justice"
does not specify how this shall be done; it states merely
that equals shall be treated equally. The goal of treatment
is justice or fairness. This means that a teacher must
decide upon the weight or seriousness of each offense and
treat all instances of the offense in the same way, whether
they occur in papers by different students or in papers by the
same student.

For a teacher, "the law" is embodied in what is known as
"the Handbook." The handbook states explicitly the rules of
grammar and usage, just as other laws in our society are
codified in books relating to criminal law, equity, or social
decorum. The subject matter of informative commentary therefore concerns error, specifically error as action performed in violation of some grammatical rule or social convention. Informative commentary has as its immediate purpose the pointing out of error to a student. This purpose, however, may be subsumed under other purposes. For the teacher, comments pointing out errors may serve as recorded observations to be used as data in assessing the paper for a grade. The grade is in turn supposed to effect some sort of change by functioning as a reward or punishment for the student's behavior. Thus, a comment might have as its immediate purpose the informing of a student regarding his errors in writing, but the ultimate purpose might be the effecting of change in the student's behavior, change which the teacher hopes will result in improved writing.

The extent to which lower grades serve as a deterrent to error has not been established, but with respect to justice, whether or not punishment results in altered behavior is not relevant. Offenders are not punished in order to alter their behavior (although that is often assumed to be a consequence), but in order to serve justice. Similarly, good grades should not be regarded as rewards for good behavior, since good citizens do not act in expectation of being rewarded for the non-commission of punishable offenses. From
this perspective, a grade, good or bad, is merely a just assessment of a true state of affairs.

Aristotle points out that the audience in a forensic situation assumes the role of decision-maker (1335). The audience hears the facts, weighs them, and comes to some kind of conclusion or verdict about them. The process is primarily cognitive rather than affective, and all members of an audience are assumed to be equal in terms of their capacity for reason. Therefore informative commentary can serve a number of disparate audiences. Students can read it, weigh it, and come to some decision about it that may or may not be a factor in their future actions with regard to the paper. Teachers can also be the audience for their own informative commentary, looking back over the errors they have recorded, weighing them, and coming to some decision as to how they should be factored into the process of arriving at a grade.

Informative commentary, to summarize, arises as a result of a teacher's perception of a certain state of affairs in a paper, namely error, and it is addressed to an audience that assumes the role of decision-maker. The immediate purpose of informative commentary is justice, or the treating of equals equally. This purpose can serve other purposes that might be seen as desirable or necessary either by the teacher or the student. In any case, the rule of justice merely states that
equals be treated equally; it does not specify what constitutes an equal or how equals should be treated. These decisions are matters not of fact but of value. As we shall see in a later chapter, if teachers and students do not share the same value system with respect to the written word, it is doubtful whether the kind of reasoning used in informative commentary will lead teachers and students to the same conclusions about what should be done.

B. Deliberative Commentary

Teacher commentary that tells students what they should do, either in revisions or in future papers, falls into the category of what Aristotle would call deliberative discourse. James Britton notes that the language used in this type of discourse has a conative function: its purpose is to persuade, to bring about some kind of change in either action or attitude (98). Writing whose primary goal is a change in action rather than attitude Britton calls regulative. Regulative discourse "is concerned with making demands, issuing instructions where there is an obligation to obey them and making recommendations which carry the weight of authority or the force of the speaker's wishes. (It is not concerned with giving information or putting forward reasons)" (99).
The following is an example of a teacher comment having a regulative function. While this example also includes other types of commentary, its primary purpose is to provide the student with finite and fairly concrete procedures to follow in revising:

Your topic and your point of view on it are very intriguing. But the lack of concrete detail at the places I have noted weakens the essay. Work to add detail as you revise. The problems in logic in the fourth paragraph are important and need to be dealt with if you decide to retain the preceding paragraph (see 4d-3 in the Handbook). After you have completed these more substantial revisions, look for problems in pronoun reference, which make many of your sentences confusing. (Do Exercises 1 and 2 in Chapter 12 of the Handbook.) Check on the other problems noted in the body of the paper, and be sure to correct the spelling errors before you hand in the revised essay for a final grade (Schwegler and Aaron 67).

A regulative function may also be seen in comments that make demands. Demands can be found in commentary on either early or final drafts; their main characteristic is their lack of specificity relative to the substance of the text or to the exact procedure that the student should use in meeting the demands. The following comments are reported by Nancy
Sommers as one teacher's response to a single student paragraph: "Elaborate"; "Be specific"; "Be precise"; " Avoid 'one of the'"; "Avoid 'it seems'"; "Begin by telling your reader what you are going to write about"; and (above all) "Think more about your reader" (Sommers 152). As Sommers notes, these demands could easily be rubber-stamped or interchanged from one text to another.

A third type of regulative function is performed by commentary that issues instructions. These comments differ from the other regulative comments mentioned above in that they are text-specific, they address a single problem rather than a series, and they provide procedures as to how the problem may be remedied. Many of the comments cited by William Irmscher in Teaching Expository Writing are of this type. For instance, in response to a paragraph containing a long, confusing sentence, Irmscher writes, "First of all, read your first sentence and your last one. Both of them are clear, direct statements. Then read the one in between. See if you can divide that long sentence into two or three short ones so that each one speaks as clearly as your other two sentences do" (43). In response to a paragraph full of short, choppy sentences, Irmscher comments, "Good opportunity for sentence combining. Give me a four-sentence version of the same paragraph without loss of significant detail" (152). This type of commentary, unlike the informative commentary
mentioned earlier, both identifies the problem and gives instruction on how it can be remedied.

A fourth type of regulative commentary gives recommendations or advice for future papers, usually in the terminal comments on a final draft. These comments, like the demands mentioned earlier, are often non-specific, consisting of general admonitions with regard to certain types or categories of errors. For instance: "Watch out for the sentence and punctuation problems. Look up the appropriate sections in the Handbook" (Schwegler and Aaron 78). Or: "I have taken note of comma splices in determining the grade; work on avoiding them in your next paper because they will count even more heavily in the grade" (Schwegler and Aaron 66). One can observe in this comment the reference to the teacher's authority; because of this authority, compliance by the reader is assumed in most comments giving recommendations for future actions. Since compliance is assumed, these comments are not usually accompanied by reasons or emotive appeals.

Some comments, however, seem to acknowledge the fact that compliance does not necessarily follow. These comments differ from comments pointing out errors or giving advice and recommendations in that they show a conscious attempt by the writer to influence the reader by the use of traditional rhetorical appeals, or what Aristotle would call "artistic
proofs." Such commentary might appeal to the writer's logic or reasoning ability, to his emotions, or to the teacher's ethos as an authority, as a friend, as a peer, etc. Britton calls this type of discourse persuasive. Persuasive comments use rhetorical strategies to influence the behavior or attitude of students rather than their actions. The student must be persuaded that it is in his best interest to act in certain ways.

Whereas informative comments take the indicative mood and regulative comments the imperative, persuasive comments have a subjunctive quality, as indicated in such words as might, would, or could, and phrases such as "I suggest that." These words and phrases are often reinforced by additional material giving the reader reasons why he should do something or telling him what advantage will be gained if he does. For example: "Explaining this a bit more would make your point even more effective" (Schwegler and Aaron 72); "You might add details like those in the paragraphs describing the other categories. . . . You might try to indicate what the reader will learn from your essay—you do this effectively in the last paragraph" (Schwegler and Aaron 78); "Try to use your introduction; pay attention to it. Don't treat it as something to be gotten out of the way and forgotten. That is, don't ignore your own good ideas" (Siegel 309). Even though the latter comment is in the imperative, its intent is
clearly to exhort or to urge the reader to act rather than to
demand that he do so. These comments appeal to the writer's
pride in his abilities (even more effective, your own good
ideas) in order to persuade him to act in certain ways.

Comments in the form of questions can often have a
similar persuasive effect (Odell 78 - 86). In order to
stimulate a reader to action, however, the questions must be
open-ended. By that I mean that the answers should be
neither foregone conclusions nor simple yes/no responses,
since answering such questions would lead the student to
regard the issue as settled rather than open to further
discussion. Some questions are not really questions but
instructions, as far as their purpose goes. For instance,
when Irmscher says, "Paragraph 2 is a simpler, more direct
statement of Paragraph 1. Why not make it the opening and
drop the first?" (151), the form of his comment is
persuasive, but the intent is basically regulative: "Drop
the first paragraph." Similarly, when he says of a student's
use of the word hillbillyistic "Say this word out loud. Do
you still like it?" (151), the possible answers are limited,
and the regulative intent of the comment is patently clear:
"Change this word to something else."

Open-ended questions, on the other hand, can be very
persuasive. The answer to the question in this comment, for
example, is not a foregone conclusion at all: "I'd suggest
that you develop the idea of the opening paragraph—the reasons for the spread of interest in all forms of exercise. Why, for example, would someone choose jogging rather than tennis or calisthenics?" (Siegel 309). Another teacher commenting on the same essay asks a similar question: "Exercise stretches unused muscles (1) in the morning, (2) at any time, (3) when muscles need stretching because of tension. What else?" (Siegel 309). And in response to this student sentence, "Honoré de Balzac doesn't seem to uphold my theory," Irmscher responds, "Which way is it? Balzac doesn't agree with you? Or you don't agree with Balzac? Or, possibly, you don't find support in Balzac's novels?" (151). As one can see from this response, Irmscher is very good at combining instruction with persuasion, since he suggests possible answers for development while leaving the choice of development up to the student.

C. Epideictic Commentary

The third broad category of teacher commentary is similar to what Aristotle would call epideictic discourse, or praise and blame. The purpose of epideictic is the recognition of worth or its lack, and the mood of its language is exclamatory. The speaker is neither pointing at what the writer did in the past, nor suggesting what he could do in
the future, but **responding to** what he perceives as the essential nature of the discourse. There are two types of epideictic responses, whose differences may be observed in the two different ways that a comment such as "This is good" can be interpreted. On the one hand, the statement might mean "I like this." On the other hand, it might mean "This compares favorably with certain categories of experience that I recognize." Neither statement has the kind of indicative or referential quality that a statement such as "This is a comma splice" has. Instead of serving the function of allowing the writer to point out some feature to a reader, epideictic comments allow the writer to express his recognition of some essential quality or qualities that the object possesses. Lawrence Rosenfield describes this function as the "beholding" of reality.

In recognizing the worth of something, epideictic discourse reveals a concern with value. The kind of value addressed by epideictic is intrinsic to the object itself. The value judgments implied by informative and deliberative commentary, on the other hand, concern value as it is **conferred** upon an object by the application of extrinsic standards or criteria. Epideictic assessment differs from the judicial assessments of forensic discourse and the policy assessments of deliberative discourse in that its end is not unanimity or consensus among the participants in the
rhetorical situation. Consensus with regard to the worth of an object exists prior to epideictic discourse. Epideictic merely recognizes what is agreed upon as worthy and amplifies that worth. Its goal is an appreciation of what the event or object is (its "being," if you will). Such an appreciation is an important part of a teacher's response to student writing, because unless this initial recognition is made, later responses will be inconsistent or inappropriate. That is, one cannot decide how a text is to be treated justly until one recognizes what kind of a text it is, nor can one tell a student what kind of changes to make in a text unless one is clear about what kind of text it is.

In order to appreciate a text, a reader must first "open" himself to it. As Aristotle puts it, he must become passive; in order that he may act upon the text, he must first allow himself to be acted upon, to be changed or affected by what he reads. For this reason, the language of epideictic commentary is basically expressive. According to Britton, "expressive language is language close to the self. It has the functions of revealing the speaker, verbalizing his consciousness, and displaying his close relation with a listener or reader." Much expressive language is not made explicit, because the speaker/writer relies upon his listener/reader to interpret what is said in the light of a common understanding (that is, a shared general context of
the past), and to interpret the immediate situation (what is happening around them) in a way similar to his own" (90). When a teacher intends a comment such as "This is good" to mean "I like this," he is expressing his affective responses to the discourse he is reading. Examples of affective responses would include one-word comments such as "Yes," "Ugh!" and "True!" as well as typographical comments like "!!" (All these examples are taken from the sample papers given by Schwegler and Aaron 72 - 73 and 79). Typical positive responses are "Good point" (61), "These are good details" (73), "good phrase" (74).

Negative responses, on the other hand, often appear to be references to errors. The symbol "?" (63) and the abbreviation "awk," for example, can be interpreted as negative responses, but they refer to the reader's responses rather than to errors: "I'm confused" or "I don't like the way you phrased this." Constructions labeled awk do not usually contain specific errors; otherwise the teacher could have given them more explicit labels.

Comments using the word interesting are likewise frequently phrased as if the lack of this particular quality were some kind of objective error which could be pointed out in an indicative way. Thus, when a teacher makes a comment such as "The thesis is clear, but not very interesting" (75), "interestingness" seems to be equated with clarity as a
quality that a text might possess. The likelihood of two teachers agreeing on the clarity of a given sentence considered in isolation from the context of the rest of the paper is rather high, since the criteria for sentence clarity are shared by most teachers. However, the likelihood of the same two teachers agreeing on the inherent interest of a given sentence is difficult to estimate, since the interest-value of most sentences is determined by context. Similarly, when a teacher makes a comment such as "This paragraph needs to be expanded in order to be more interesting to a reader" (Sommers 150), the teacher seems to be implying some necessary connection between expansion and interest. This could be misleading to a student revising such a paragraph because it implies that expansion will necessarily result in the paper's becoming more interesting, which is not necessarily the case. Teachers need to be aware of the epideictic nature of such comments as "This is an interesting use of the word" (73), partly so that students will not be misled into thinking that lack of interest is an error unrelated to context and audience participation, and partly so that teachers themselves can learn when to use such comments for greatest effect.

Almost all sources on teacher commentary encourage teachers to express their positive responses to a text, even though research in this area has shown little correlation
between this practice and improvement in student writing. In addition, students seem to want praise even more than comments that could help them make more substantial improvements. However, comments such as "Good" are not likely to bring about immediate improvement because of their non-specific nature. A student may be pleased at getting a positive response, but he cannot be sure exactly what he did to evoke that response unless the teacher supplies more information.

A comment such as "These are good details" or "This is an interesting use of the word" (73) supplies more information to the student about what he did than the single word good or interesting. However, the additional information will not be very useful to the student in terms of its applicability to future writing unless he realizes that features like original word usage and concrete detail are parts of standardized sets of features that are consistently used by this teacher (and possibly others) for evaluative purposes. These standardized sets of features create the special categories in which texts are placed in order that they may be analyzed and judged in an educational context. For instance, one might create a category by citing the following features: pieces of written discourse having a length of approximately 500 words, divided into five paragraphs, with a thesis statement appearing at the end of
the first paragraph, and having the purpose of instruction, persuasion, or entertainment. When a teacher receives a piece of writing having all these features, plus others which he may have added for this particular writing assignment, he may write the comment "Good essay." By this he may mean "I like this essay," but he may also mean "This is a good example of an essay having the features specified for this grade category."

William Irmscher breaks down grade categories according to whether or not a paper demonstrates a general feature he calls "competence":

- A - Demonstrates unusual competence
- B - Demonstrates competence
- C - Suggests competence
- D - Suggests incompetence
- E - Demonstrates incompetence (154)

Irmscher then selects five features by which competence may be demonstrated or suggested: content, form, diction, mechanics, and style. (These are the features, he says, used by the College Entrance Examination Board.) In order for a paper to be placed in, say, the B category, it must demonstrate competence by exhibiting the following features relative to the five criteria mentioned above:

1. An ability to absorb ideas and experience and to interpret them meaningfully in a context of the writer's own conception.
2. A capacity to develop an idea with a clear sense of order.
3. A capacity to draw upon words adequate to express the writer's own thoughts and feelings.
4. An ability to use mechanics as an integral part of the meaning and effect of the prose.
5. A capacity to consider alternate ways of expression as a means of making stylistic choices possible.

Although this set of features is widely accepted by many teachers in the humanities, not just in English departments, its very universality may prevent teachers from recognizing several important facts with regard to its potential for creating change or improvement in student writing. First of all, as criteria for demonstrating competence, this set of features is not necessarily shared by members of the academic community outside the humanities, nor by some within the academic community, nor by the community at large outside the schools. Persons in the fields of business, computer science, or engineering, for example, are not as likely to value stylistic variation (#5) or the interpretation of subject matter from a particular point of view (#1) as persons in the field of literature. Individual instructors may have personal preferences in these areas, but for these disciplines as a whole, these features are not as essential as they are in, say, English. The features listed by Irmscher are underlain by a certain set of values, and it is by virtue of these values that messages concerning the worth of specific texts can be communicated to others. If the student does not have these values (i.e., a respect for interpretive ability, orderliness, verbal expression,
observance of conventions, and style), or if he has them but is unaware of the ways that they can be applied to writing, then he is likely to interpret the comment as meaning merely "I like this paper very much."

Second is the fact that these features represent criteria that English teachers would use to judge any piece of writing, inside or outside the classroom. That means that the criteria that one used to judge a Ruskin essay or an Eliot poem are the same criteria by which one would judge an essay by little Billy Joe Hargis from Podunk Junction, Arkansas. Universally applicable standards pose something of a dilemma for teachers, because on the one hand they wish to be just to students such as Billy Joe, but, on the other, they also wish to demonstrate their allegiance to certain standards of excellence. Using these standards in assigning grades can leave teachers with a feeling of being compromised either way, because even an excellent student essay is seldom comparable to a good essay by, say, Lamb. Thus the teacher is forced to defend his awarding of the A with the admission that "Well, it's good for what it is," and "what it is" is an essay by a student, a learner.

In order to discover a satisfactory process by which student writing may be evaluated fairly, we need to recognize that such writing falls into a special category relative to the purposes of education. Louise Phelps calls this type of
discourse a "metadialogue," distinguishing it from a dialogue, or primary symbolic act. Metadialogues, or secondary symbolic acts, include critiquing, judging, editing, imitating, and practicing, according to Phelps. The relationship of primary to secondary symbolic acts is explained by sociologist Erving Goffman as a kind of "keying" in the musical sense. A "key" is a set of conventions by which a given meaningful activity is systematically transformed into another activity which is patterned on the first but is perceived by the participants as something different (Goffman 42 - 44). Playing and practicing are two "keyed" activities that are easily recognized as such, but Phelps notes that most acts in teaching and learning are also keyed.

In a similar vein, James Britton describes three types of student writing that belong to categories keyed by the special contexts of education: the pseudo-informative, the pseudo-conative, and the dummy run. These types of writing have a "pseudo" character (and the term is not necessarily meant to be pejorative) because the kind of audience that would allow the rhetorical situation to become transactional is not present. For instance, in writing an essay in response to a test question such as "What were the causes of the Revolutionary War?" which requires that a student adopt an informative purpose, a student cannot write a truly
informative essay for his history teacher because the teacher is presumably already aware of the causes of the Revolutionary War. The student must therefore write a "pseudo-informative" essay which demonstrates that he can, if called upon to do so, write such an essay. As Britton notes, "Much school writing is functionally complicated by its double focus. On the one hand it appears to be normal transactional writing; on the other hand, behind the apparent transaction (for example, informing the uninformed) there lies another, that of showing the teacher that what has been taught has been learned" (104). Rather than assuming the role of participatory audience in a real rhetorical transaction, the teacher must assume the roles of spectator and judge of a hypothetical rhetorical transaction. Similarly, when a student writes an essay in response to an assignment that requires him to take a position and argue for one side or the other on some issue, his primary purpose is not to influence the teacher's attitudes or behavior regarding that issue, but to demonstrate that he can argue effectively. The dummy run is similar, except that it concerns skills or techniques rather than purposes. In a dummy run, "a student is called upon to perform a writing task in order (a) to exercise his capacity to perform that kind of task, and/or (b) to demonstrate to the teacher his proficiency in performing it" (104 - 105). A dummy run might
consist of anything from writing sonnets to doing sentence-combining exercises to writing a comparison/contrast essay.

Writing considered in relation to the demands of an educational context is not writing in the primary sense of symbolic transformation, but writing in the sense of demonstrating one's abilities with regard to specified skills. For this reason, it is similar to the ceremonial discourse practiced by Greek and Roman orators. When such an orator eulogized his dead friend, for instance, he had a dual purpose: first, to convince his audience of the true worth of his friend, and second, to demonstrate his own worthiness as a giver of praise. In the first instance, the audience assumes the role of decision-maker concerning the issue addressed by the discourse. In the second instance, the audience assumes the role of spectator; their interest is focused on the performance of the speaker. The issue in the second instance is seen in terms of the hypothetical context created by the performance rather than in terms of the larger context outside the performance. As in ceremony or ritual, the words and actions of the speaker are viewed as "pseudo-actions" rather than as trans-actions; their purpose is the enactment itself rather than achieving some end extrinsic to the enactment. In transactional discourse, the writing itself is seen as instrumental in gaining some end. The purpose of epideictic discourse is intrinsic to the act itself.
It is important to remember that any given piece of discourse can be both transactional and epideictic. The difference is not in the discourse itself (although a writer obviously has many purposes both intrinsic and extrinsic to the discourse when he writes), but in the way the discourse is being analyzed and interpreted. Teachers read, analyze, and interpret student texts in a number of ways, but students read, analyze and interpret teachers' texts in a number of ways also. When a reader views a piece of writing from an epideictic perspective, the participants in the rhetorical situation assume what might be called "ceremonial" roles. In ceremonial activity, according to Goffman, "the performer takes on the task of representing and epitomizing himself in some one of his central social roles" (58). Thus when viewed in this way, a student "epitomizes" himself as a student when he writes in an educational context, and a teacher who comments on a student's writing "epitomizes" himself as a teacher.

In responding to student papers, to sum up, teachers write comments that function in many different ways. Comments having different forms may serve different functions, but sometimes even comments having the same form may serve different functions. For instance, the comment "Good word choice" written on a student's paper may express the teacher's personal reaction to the word choice, or it may
praise the word choice as an example of a thing that is valued in a particular social setting, namely education. Thus, in the same comment the teacher may be presenting himself either as an individual or as a member of a group which he "epitomizes" at that moment.

In this study, teacher commentary has been divided into three rhetorical categories based on the roles assumed by speaker and hearer, the describable characteristics of the discourse, and the rhetorical purposes which can be inferred from those characteristics. This analysis has been made in order that a better understanding of teacher comments might be achieved. The first step in achieving understanding, according to Aristotle, is to describe and classify the phenomena under consideration. Teacher comments could probably be described and classified in a number of ways; however, I have chosen a rhetorical perspective, primarily because the rhetorical model of communication (speaker, speech, audience, and context) is the dominant paradigm in the field of composition today. In this model, the principal criterion for the success of any piece of discourse is something called "effectiveness." If, as previous research suggests, teacher comments are relatively "ineffective" in improving student writing, the reasons for this ineffectiveness should be sought. First, however, the meaning of the term must be clarified. In some research paradigms, the term
"effectiveness" means "having an observable and measurable effect on an audience." In this study, the term will mean "accomplishing or fulfilling its intended purpose." The emphasis is thus shifted from audience to speaker. Effects on an audience can be measured in various ways, but a speaker's intention must be inferred from his actions in speaking and writing in a given context. Because intentions are many and various, and because the interpretation of intention is so closely bound up with context, the possibilities for misunderstanding here are enormous, and this, I believe, is the main reason for the reported ineffectiveness of teacher commentary. It is not so much that a given comment can or cannot accomplish its purpose, but that a given purpose may be in conflict with another, it may be subordinate to another, or it may be interpreted as another. The fault does not lie in commentary itself but in its application. The fact that purposes are often arranged hierarchically, that a piece of discourse can have several purposes, and that one's interpretation of an intent or purpose is contingent upon context all have important implications for teacher commentary. In the following chapters, we will look at some ways that teacher comments may be rendered ineffective as a result of misunderstanding. "Rhetoric," as I.A. Richards says, "should be a study of misunderstanding and its remedies. We struggle all our days with misunderstandings
and no apology is required for any study which can prevent or remove them" (3).
CHAPTER THREE: THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

In Chapter Two, it was noted that the discourse produced by teachers can take many forms, three of which were described in terms of their purpose. In this chapter, some of the factors that influence a writer's selection of purpose will be described. These factors are not meant to be viewed as determinants of the features of a writing situation in a causal sense. Rather, they are intended to be viewed as influences upon the situation, elements that writers take into consideration in the process of writing.

A writer's purpose is not always consciously chosen prior to the act of writing. Instead, purpose often emerges in the act of writing as a result of the dynamic tension between the options or alternatives that are open to a writer and the constraints which limit those alternatives. The pattern of choices and limitations that help mold a writer's purpose may be "formulated" (to use a Burkean pun) in terms of what Lloyd Bitzer calls "the rhetorical situation." In the process of writing, these options and constraints are continually reviewed and revised in what Nancy Sommers calls the "recursive cycles" of writing, each successive cycle
altering the situation to some degree for the succeeding cycle. In order to study the factors influencing a writer at any stage of the writing process, we must "freeze" the process somewhat arbitrarily in order to formulate the elements at work there.

In addition to taking into account the shifting dynamics of the rhetorical situation, any analysis of teacher commentary must take into account the special nature of its subject matter. Teacher comments are usually about pieces of discourse that are commonly seen as "rhetorical," and they themselves have a rhetorical character in that their aim is to create some sort of change in the attitudes or the actions of their audience. Hence, teacher commentary might be thought of as "metarhetorical" discourse. The terminology used by Bitzer in describing rhetorical situations provides one way that such discourse might be analyzed. In using this method of analysis, I do not intend to imply that it is the only way or even the best way to do such analysis. The method has been chosen for its heuristic value. In spite of certain objections, which will be considered in the course of this chapter, I believe that Bitzer's method provides a way to describe writing situations in terms that throw light on potential problem areas for writing teachers. Although this method may oversimplify complex situations to some degree, and it may require that the reader begin with certain
premises or arrive at certain conclusions that seem rather obvious, it seems to me that their obviousness has not prevented them from being overlooked by many teachers.

One such obvious premise has been already introduced in Chapter Two: that writers act for many purposes and that achieving the purpose of one act may be merely a means for the achievement of another. For instance, a teacher might inform a student about some aspect of his writing in order to persuade him to change it, but just because the goal of informing is accomplished, that does not mean that the goal of persuading necessarily will be. And even if the goal of persuasion is achieved, that does not necessarily mean that the success of the effort can be attributed to the successful achievement of the subordinate goal of informing. This chapter will address the question of how one knows when such a goal has been accomplished. In other words, how does one determine the effectiveness of a piece of discourse in achieving its intended purpose?

We will begin by describing the rhetorical situations to which teachers and students respond. According to Bitzer, a rhetorical situation has three basic elements: an exigency, an audience, and a set of constraints. A situation is "rhetorical" when it requires oral or written discourse as a means of achieving some sort of change in an exigency that is perceived by both the speaker and the hearer. The
effectiveness of the discourse is thus determined by whether and/or to what extent change occurs. A critic or a researcher using this model must therefore establish a criterion by which he can say that he knows when change has occurred. In the past, researchers have measured the effectiveness of teachers' comments by measuring changes in student writing. I believe that this way of measuring effectiveness is limited by two factors. First, it does not take into account the fact that quantitative and qualitative change are not assessed in the same way. Discourse can have as its consequence both kinds of change, but in most cases quantitative changes are preceded by qualitative changes. Second, this method does not take into account shifts in the dynamics of the rhetorical situation at various stages in the writing process that result from feedback and response. At the very least, one's analysis should take into account that the rhetorical situation as experienced by the student differs from the rhetorical situation as experienced by the teacher. Even though the basic elements in the situation (teacher, student, discourse, context) might be the same in both cases, the way the elements function differs in each case.

In order to understand the relationship between writing and rhetorical situations, let us begin by considering a typical rhetorical act occurring outside the context of
education; by tracing this act through a series of situations, we can observe the resultant transformations in its character.

Say that a student who drives to school every day has to pass through a particularly difficult intersection where traffic is regulated only by stop signs. After being held up at this intersection many times, he perceives that a stoplight is needed there to help facilitate the flow of traffic. He decides to write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper in the hopes of rallying support for a stoplight. After doing a little research, he writes the letter, which is published. In it, he informs his audience of the facts of the case and attempts to persuade them that a new stoplight will remedy the problem.

In this example, we can observe all the elements of a typical rhetorical situation. The rhetor/student perceives an exigency; he selects an audience who can participate in the modification of the exigency; and in writing and publishing the letter, he manages the constraints that this context places upon him. A rhetorical situation "determines" the character of the discourse it calls forth, not in a historical, cause-and-effect way, but in the sense of setting the parameters by which the discourse may be described and analyzed. Bitzer states that "the situation controls the rhetorical response in the same sense that the question
controls the answer and the problem controls the solution" ("Rhetorical" 386). The situation "prescribes" a fitting response in that it provides the terms or conditions in which the response must be (almost literally) framed. Kenneth Burke also describes these works in terms of question and answer: "Critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose. They are not merely answers, they are *strategic* answers, *stylized* answers" (Burke "Philosophy" 1). When we analyze the features of such works, we are analyzing the strategies by which the works "encompass" the situation: "These strategies size up situations, name their structure and outstanding ingredients, and name them in a way that contains an attitude toward them" (1). When we therefore study the features of teacher commentary (word choice, sentence form and mode, argument, etc.), we are studying the strategies teachers choose for the encompassing of a situation that they perceive as posing a question that requires some sort of verbal response.

Now say that the student submits the same letter as an essay in response to an assignment calling for persuasion or argumentation. In what way is the rhetorical situation altered? In the first place, we can see that the exigency has changed. The letter is no longer solely a response to the need for a new stoplight; it is also a response to a need to fill certain requirements for a course. The audience has
also changed. No longer is the audience just those people who can participate in the civic processes by which such items as stoplights are acquired; a new audience appears in the form of a teacher. And the constraints laid down by civic institutions and public media are now overlain by the constraints of an educational context. Because the rhetorical situation has shifted, the factors which one must take into consideration in analyzing it are different.

Now say that the second audience, the teacher, reads the essay and expresses his own response to it in the form of commentary. Once again, the rhetorical situation shifts. The audience for the teacher's response is obviously the student. But what are the exigencies to which the teacher responds, and what are the constraints under which he operates? In answering these questions, we can see that the situation is considerably more complex than our original sketch of the letter to the editor might suggest.

When the teacher responds to the essay, he may address several different exigencies depending upon the audience role he assumed in reading the essay. He may, to begin with, address the same exigency that the student did: the problem of the intersection. If he does not understand something, he may ask for clarification; if he needs more information, he may request it. In addressing this exigency, the teacher is a participant in the rhetorical situation created by the
student. He is in fact assuming the role of a member of the original audience to whom the letter was directed and responding in terms of a dialogue on the original subject, since he apparently expects his questions or requests to be answered in some form. Because of this expectation, his commentary creates new exigencies for the student. If the student is not given the opportunity to answer the questions or to supply the missing information by revising the essay, the dialogue is cut short. If the new exigencies raised by the teacher's comments cannot be modified, the situation is thereby rendered a-rhetorical. The teacher appears to be asking questions merely for the sake of asking them, not because he wants to hear the answer.

The teacher may also perceive other exigencies in reading the essay that do not pertain to its subject matter, perceptions that result from his assuming an audience role keyed to the pedagogical situation. These exigencies may relate to the essay as an essay, as a certain type of verbal product or object. Under these conditions, the essay does not function as a message but as a factual condition or state of affairs to which the teacher can refer in the same way that the student first referred to the intersection. The student perceived that things could be otherwise regarding the condition of the intersection; the teacher perceives that things could be otherwise regarding the essay. The student
writes a piece of discourse informing his audience of the facts and suggesting an alternative; the teacher likewise informs the student of the facts concerning the essay and suggests alternatives. In doing so, the teacher may be increasing the student's chances of modifying the original exigency (that is, if the paper is better, it may be more likely to help the student to bring about the change he desires), but as mentioned earlier, that purpose cannot be achieved until more immediate ends are achieved first.

If these actions of teacher and student are "rhetorical," then some modification of the exigency must have taken place. Looking at the letter to the editor, we find that the exigency as originally defined has not in fact been modified: the condition of the intersection after the audience reads the letter is the same as it was before the letter was written. What then has been modified? If the exigency addressed by the student's letter was simply the lack of a stoplight, that need could have been fulfilled in the absence of any discourse at all. The student could have gone out and put one up himself if it were merely a matter of arranging the material aspects of the situation—equipment, money, labor, and so forth. What prevents him from doing this are not the physical but the mental constraints upon the situation, the laws and conventions regulating action in the civic sphere. Before physical action can occur in this area,
the significance or relevance of the action must be established, and this is accomplished through discourse. By reading the student's letter, the audience sees what it did not see before.

Bitzer points out that an exigency has two components: a factual condition and an interest ("Functional" 28). Interest can mean either "salience" or "vested interest." In any case, the interest is what is created through discourse: the salience of the factual condition is brought out and the vested interest of the audience in the alternative is established. Interest can be vested in several ways. In the case of the intersection, those among the audience who also travel that road obviously have a vested interest in an alternative situation, but other members of the audience may also have a vested interest in the general public good and wish that justice be done or that some general advantage be gained. The point, though, is that the success of the rhetorical act of writing the letter does not depend on the alteration of the factual condition; it depends upon the alteration of the audience's interest in the condition. If the student succeeds in establishing in his audience an interest in the factual condition, he has successfully modified the only exigency that is capable of being modified through discourse. Therefore, if we wish to analyze the effectiveness of the student's discourse, we cannot look to
an alteration in the state of the intersection as our sole
criterion for success. Before this purpose can be
accomplished, another purpose must be accomplished first, the
establishing of an interest on the part of the audience.

Let us now return to our teacher. The teacher has
perceived a certain factual condition in the paper he has
read. Like the student writing the letter, he wishes to
inform his audience of this condition and to persuade him or
her that it should be changed. But, as in the case of the
student, the factual condition does not have to be altered
for the rhetorical act to be successful, because the success
of his comment does not depend on such an alteration. It
depends merely upon the interest of the condition having been
created. The act of writing has created this interest. It's
like the old joke about the three umpires. The first umpire
says, "I calls 'em like I sees 'em." The second umpire says,
"I calls 'em like they is." But the third umpire says, "They
ain't nothin' til I calls 'em."

Since Lloyd Bitzer's original article appeared in 1968,
much has been written about the relationship between
rhetorical acts and rhetorical situations. Some writers,
such as E.W. Wilkerson and Richard Vatz, have criticized
Bitzer's theory of rhetorical situation on the grounds that
it implies a kind of determinism, i.e., that rhetorical acts
are determined by rhetorical situations, thus "obviating"
rhetoric as technique in favor of "fitting" responses to situations (Vatz 155). By **determined**, Robert L. Scott interprets Bitzer to mean that a rhetorical situation must exist as a "precondition" to rhetorical discourse (57). Scott, Vatz, and Wilkerson, I think, confuse **situation** with **exigency**. A factual condition must exist prior to the writing of discourse, but that condition alone does not constitute either an exigency or a rhetorical situation. Rhetorical situations are brought into being through the creation of discourse. As John Patton points out, exigency, audience, and constraints together constitute necessary conditions for the existence of a rhetorical situation, but each alone is insufficient (44). If rhetorical acts are preceded by rhetorical situations, it is in a logical rather than a temporal sense. Rhetorical situations are **inferred** from discourse in the same way that purpose or intention is. A rhetorical situation does not come into being until a rhetor creates a piece of discourse in which the situation is embodied or represented as a stylized response. The rhetorical situation is then inferred by the reader, who uses it in framing his own response to the discourse.

Other critics have questioned whether Bitzer's concept of fitting responses to rhetorical situations is meant to be descriptive or normative. That is, in pointing out the components of a rhetorical situation, is Bitzer describing
the features which give rhetorical acts their character, or
is he citing criteria by which rhetorical acts may be judged
successful? (Pomeroy 42). Alan Brinton rejects Vatz's
causal interpretation and chooses the "normative" view,
stating that "fitting response" is a normative concept and
that rhetorical acts derive their normative character from
situation. That is, a "good" response is one that "fits" the
situation. Brinton also addresses the question of whether
exigencies are "objective," i.e., whether they can be
empirically validated. He concludes that since only the
factual component of an exigency can be validated, a factual
condition alone constitutes an exigency. In his view, the
modification of the factual condition is the sole criterion
for evaluating the success of the rhetorical act, because the
"interest" component is purely subjective and therefore
cannot be validated.

What then do these issues of determinism and evaluation
have to do with teacher commentary? I contend that Vatz,
Brinton, and Wilkerson have misinterpreted Bitzer's theory,
and the results can be seen if we apply their causal and
normative interpretations to student writing and teacher
commentary. If, as Vatz and Wilkerson suggest, Bitzer's
theory implies a causal relation between rhetorical situation
and rhetorical act, two consequences for teachers emerge.
The first is that rhetorical acts can be predicted and
controlled by knowing the conditions under which they are produced. For teachers this means that the choices students make in producing texts would be less important as objects of study than the circumstances that called them into being. Text changes would be preceded by situation changes. It also means that Bitzer's theory would not be a theory of communication at all, but a theory of the sources of spontaneous or conventional utterances. Under this theory, as Wilkerson says, the "art" of rhetoric would be obviated because the theory would not take into account purposive or nonobligatory messages. In other words, the rhetor would not control the situation but be controlled by it. Viewed from this perspective, the "art" of teaching would be obviated as well; teaching would cease to be communication and become a matter of merely arranging circumstances so that predictable results will be obtained.

The second implication for teachers is that the success of a rhetorical act would have to be objectively verifiable in terms of the modification of a factual condition. To illustrate, let us return to our example of the student essay on the intersection. From Brinton's perspective, the success of the student's original act of writing a letter to the editor would be dependent on the modification of the factual condition addressed by that letter; hence, the letter would be successful only if some action were taken concerning the
intersection. The success of the student's second act, when he submits his letter as an essay, would likewise be dependent upon a change in a factual condition perceived as an exigency, in this case, an assignment that is part of a set of requirements for a course. In order to modify this exigency successfully, all he must do is to fulfill the assignment—how well he fulfills it is not relevant to this exigency. The point is that the change in the exigency would have to be observable, measurable, and independently verifiable.

The third rhetorical act involving the essay, the teacher's commentary on it, would also have to be evaluated in terms of a change in a factual condition. In this case, the factual condition would be a change in the student essay itself. If the teacher were to perceive some exigency in the essay such as a grammatical error or the need for some other alteration he perceives as desirable, then his commentary on the exigency would not be considered successful until that condition were changed or realized. As we have seen earlier, most of the empirical research on the effects of teacher commentary rest on this assumption, that the success of the teacher's discourse cannot be estimated until some factual condition in student writing can be observed.

However, as we have seen earlier, a causal or deterministic interpretation of Bitzer's theory fails to take
into account his specification that the modification of an exigency be accomplished through discourse, the discourse of the rhetor who originally perceived the exigency and sought to change it. The discourse itself alters the exigency by placing it in relation to a given audience.

The relationship between audience and act poses problems very similar to those involved in the relationship between exigency and act mentioned above. The crux of the matter as represented by the interpretations of Bitzer and Vatz seems to be whether situations control rhetorical acts or whether rhetorical acts create rhetorical situations. (In "Rhetoric and Its Situations," Scott Consigny attempts a resolution of these antinomies based on the classical concept of topoi.) Many analyses of audience tend to fall into similar antinomies on the question of whether audience controls the character of the rhetorical act or whether rhetors create audiences in the same way that they create literary points of view or narrators. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford designate these two concepts of audience as "audience addressed" and "audience invoked": "The `addressed´ audience refers to those actual or real-life people who read a discourse, while `invoked´ audience refers to the audience called up or imagined by the writer" (156 footnote). In either case, the "art" or technique of rhetoric has traditionally been seen as a matter of adapting the discourse to the real or imagined
audience. In their article, Ede and Lunsford note that the use of such broad and oversimplified concepts tends to misrepresent the complexity of the role of audience in the rhetorical situation, adding that, if one wishes to consider audience as one of the factors influencing a rhetorical act, then the term audience would refer "not just to the intended, actual, or eventual readers of a discourse, but to all those whose image, ideas, or actions influence a writer in the process of composition" (168). This would include other writers whose work the rhetor has read, as well as anyone with whom the rhetor has previously discussed the subject he is addressing in his discourse.

Clearly, if we wish to use the concept of audience in our discussion of the rhetorical situations involved in teacher commentary, some refinements of definition are called for. As Lisa Ede points out in her recent review of research on audience, Aristotle's Rhetoric "provides the foundation for many, though not all, contemporary systems of audience analysis" (141). In their emphasis on demographic variables as resources for rhetorical strategies, such systems treat audience primarily as a constraint upon rhetorical action. The facts concerning any given audience are something that the rhetor must take into account, work around, or manage, much as the rhetor is supposed to "manage" artistic and inartistic proofs. Constraints are matters over which the
rhetor has little control, matters that restrict whether or what kind of action is taken. Although the definition of audience set forth by Ede and Lunsford does serve to enlarge and enrich the concept, the fact remains that both invoked and addressed audiences are constraints as long as they are treated as "influences" on the rhetor rather than cooperative or participating agents in rhetorical action. In order to overcome or to transcend what Kenneth Burke calls the "antinomies" of action and passion, of acting and being acted upon, we need a concept of audience whose function is not defined purely in causal or deterministic terms.

In The Rhetorical Act, Karlyn Campbell cites four ways to define audience: "An audience is: (1) those exposed to the rhetorical act, the empirical audience; (2) the target audience, the ideal audience at whom the act is aimed; (3) the agents of change, those who have the capacity to do as the rhetor wishes, who can make changes; and (4) the role the audience is asked to play, the audience as it is created by rhetorical action" (71). By applying these four concepts to our four hypothetical situations, we can see how the rhetor/audience relationship constantly shifts and reverses itself as the process of writing and response proceeds, neither teacher nor student being confined to one role.

For example, when our hypothetical student originally wrote to the editor concerning the intersection, his
empirical audience was whoever read the letter. His target audience was the audience as he conceived or imagined it when writing the letter. Such an audience is "ideal" in the sense that it exists as a sort of a priori set of categories in the mind of the rhetor derived from his previous knowledge or experience. This is the sort of audience discussed by Aristotle in the Rhetoric, an audience that is known only with regard to the characteristics shared by certain groups of people. The agents of change are those members of either the empirical or the target audience who have the power to bring about the changes that the writer desires; they have, in Bitzer's terms, the power to modify the factual part of the exigency. In the case of the student's letter, they are the people either who have the power to see that a stoplight is erected, or who can influence those who do have such power. Other members of the target or empirical audience may have an interest in the exigency, but they may not have the power to modify it for one reason or another.

Campbell's fourth category, the audience as it is created by the rhetorical act, is the only one in which the audience does not function as some type of constraint on the rhetorical situation. Such an audience participates in the rhetorical act by assuming the role implied by the rhetorical situation. In the case just mentioned, the student's letter invites the audience to assume the role of decision-maker in
an informative or deliberative rhetorical situation. The audience, as Edwin Black notes, takes on a certain \textit{persona} which is a joint creation, implied by the writer and inferred by the audience.

When we turn to the second hypothetical situation, the student's submitting his letter as an essay for a course assignment, we can see how the rhetorical situation shifts in terms of audience. In the previous instance, the target and the empirical audience overlap to some degree; when the student writes his letter, he assumes that he will hit at least some of the targets at which he is aiming. In the second situation, however, the target audience and the empirical audience are two distinct entities. The target audience is still the ideal envisioned by the writer and invoked by the paper, but the empirical audience is the teacher. The teacher, moreover, cannot function as an agent of change in the situation as the student has conceived it, because a teacher does not usually play the role required by this rhetorical situation, i.e., the role of decision-maker with regard to the exigency addressed by the paper. Thus, in the second instance, the situation of the student's paper is not rhetorical, because the audience does not participate in the modification of the exigency. Just because a piece of discourse has an empirical audience, that is, just because someone reads or hears it, that does not mean that a
rhetorical situation exists. A rhetorical situation does not exist until the audience assumes the role called for by the situation, and informative and deliberative situations call for an audience who participates as a decision-maker.

In order for the situation to become rhetorical once again, the teacher and the student must shift ground to some other situation besides the informative or the deliberative. The student must intend his discourse not as information, not as deliberation, but as performance. If this happens, the teacher can assume the role demanded by this situation, that of spectator. This situation does not require that he participate in the modification of some factual condition, merely that he recognize and respond to the writer's intention to perform or act in a certain way. A shift in exigency creates the "keying" effect mentioned earlier by Erving Goffman. Keyed activities are characterized by having secondary or even tertiary exigencies in addition to the primary exigency upon which the keyed activity is based.

The rhetorical situation shifts a third time when we consider the student essay as the source of exigencies to which the teacher responds. When the teacher writes commentary on the essay, the student is his target audience, his empirical audience, and the agent of change having the power to modify the exigency perceived by the teacher. The essay itself can become an object, a factual condition to be
objectively observed and changed if the audience playing the role of decision-maker makes such a choice. If, however, the teacher views the paper as an act rather than as an object and comments in an epideictic rather than a deliberative or an informative way, then the student audience plays the role of spectator of his own performance, and no subsequent choice or action is expected or required.

The interesting thing about the epideictic perspective on teacher commentary is that the view of student writing as an act or performance implies that the teacher's commentary is also an act or performance. In fact, the whole process of writing in an educational setting may be viewed in this way: a student acts in response to perceived exigencies by writing a paper; a teacher acts in response to the exigencies he perceives in the paper by writing comments; and the student in turn is expected to act in response to the exigencies he perceives in the teacher's comments. In all these cases, the discourse produced is considered rhetorical because the rhetorical situation implied by the act modifies either the factual or the interest component of the exigency. This modification is accomplished through the participation of an audience who accepts the role required by the particular rhetorical situation at hand. The audience alone does not modify the exigency; the discourse itself modifies the exigency, and the audience participates in the modification
by entering into the rhetorical situation created by the discourse. In order to "key into" the situation, the audience must recognize what sort of act is being performed; he must understand the writer's intention in so acting. Otherwise the situation is a-rhetorical.

If we move to still a fourth rhetorical situation, in which the student reads the teacher's comments and decides whether or not to act in response to them, we can observe a parallel to the previous situation. There, the teacher began by playing various audience roles relative to the student's essay and ended by reversing his position and initiating a new rhetorical situation in which he played the role of writer instead of audience. The new rhetorical situation appeared as a result of the teacher's perceiving certain exigencies in the student essay. As we saw in Chapter One, the teacher had three different possibilities as to the type of discourse he might produce. In his commentary, he might give information concerning errors or rules; he might offer advice as to future actions or policies; or he might give his reactions to the content or substance of the text, whether it be relative to the primary or the secondary (keyed) exigency to which the student has responded.

This means that the student who reads the teacher's comments is now in possession of three possible types of responses from the teacher. The question is, which type is
most likely to move the student to further action? In the foregoing discussion we have seen that rhetorical action arises in response to perceived or construed exigencies; therefore, the type of discourse that produces the strongest exigencies for the student is the one likeliest to produce action. The first type of teacher commentary provides information for the student. Information alone, without the interest component, is not an exigency but a constraint. Information provided by the teacher constrains further action by the student because it reduces his possible choices. Once a student is in possession of a piece of information, he must take that information into account in making future decisions. The second type of discourse, the deliberative, has as its intention the adoption of new goals and policies by the student; therefore, it is intrinsically more likely to produce action. Whether or not it does, however, depends upon the strength of the arguments behind the recommendations, which will be discussed in another chapter. The third type of discourse, the epideictic response, seems most likely to produce spontaneous and unqualified response, not because it introduces new extrinsic exigencies for the student, but because it relates to the intrinsic exigency originally perceived by the student.

Informative and deliberative responses by a teacher are an indication that the teacher has, in the words of Lil
Brannon and Cy Knoblauch, "appropriated" the student's text. That is, the alternatives pointed out are the alternatives perceived by the teacher. The teacher has "re-created" the student's original rhetorical situation in his own terms. The ends desired by the student are superseded, in deliberative commentary, by the ends desired by the teacher. The means acceptable to the student are superseded in informative commentary by the means acceptable to the teacher. Only in the case of epideictic commentary do the intentions of the writer remain fully intact. Brannon and Knoblauch think that it is important for the writer to retain responsibility for his own choice of means and ends in order to create incentive to make meaningful choices at all. The "meaningfulness" of any given choice is determined by the writer's intentions. A choice that is meaningful to a teacher may not be to a student.

Brannon and Knoblauch think that retention of authorial control is also important because authorial intention provides the best criterion for the evaluation of a text. In responding in terms of the writer's intention at various stages in the writing process, the teacher gives the student a reading on how well he has succeeded in fulfilling his intention. Evaluation is "the natural conclusion of the process of response and negotiation, carried through successive drafts" (166).
Teachers often find it difficult to understand why students do not perceive the same exigencies that they do and alter their behavior accordingly. That is, when a teacher points out an error, why doesn't the student recognize the error as an exigency and modify it? Why do students not see errors in the first place, and why do they continue to make them even after they are pointed out? (See Laurence, for example.) Such recalcitrance is very hard to account for if, as Plato believed, people usually do not do wrong knowingly, and if uncorrected error (a factual condition) is obviously not in one's best interest.

Even more interesting, though, are teacher's perceptions of exigencies and their modification. The errors made by students are often perceived as exigencies by teachers; what teachers sometimes fail to understand, however, is that error itself is merely a factual condition. What makes the factual condition into a rhetorical exigency is the interest established by the discourse. For an error to become a rhetorical exigency, its correction must be experienced as a felt need: the feeling or belief that error should not go unrecognized, uncorrected, or unpunished. The fact that teachers experience both the factual condition and the felt need is not enough to make the situation rhetorical, however, because a teacher alone cannot modify the exigency, even if he corrects the errors himself. Rhetorical situations
require that exigencies be modified through discourse, discourse whose rhetorical situation involves not just exigencies and constraints, but also the mediating role of an audience. Rhetorically speaking, a teacher's correction of student errors is an admission of defeat, insofar as it implies that discourse cannot accomplish what the teacher desires.

"Communication of an exigency," says Bitzer, "is possible to the extent that apprehension of factual conditions and the experience of interests can be shared" ("Functional" 30). Thus, if two people such as a teacher and a student experience the same factual condition but have differing interests, then they can be said to be experiencing different exigencies. If a student does not share a teacher's felt need concerning errors, then the teacher's sense of error as exigency will simply not exist for that student. As Bitzer puts it, "When persons differ regarding the properties, qualities, or actuality of exigencies, disagreement usually results not from blindness or perversity but from differing perceptions of factual conditions and interests" (30).

Too, error may not exist as an exigency for a student because it may exist as some other feature of the rhetorical situation that the student is experiencing. The error that exists as an exigency for a teacher, for example, may exist
for a student as a constraint. If a student has made a specific error in a paper or has made that general type of error in previous papers, his knowledge of this may function merely as something to be taken into account or "worked around." For instance, if a teacher's comment informs him that he has used a semicolon incorrectly and advises him to correct this fault in future papers, in those future papers the student may simply avoid using sentences in which semicolons might be required, choosing instead simple or complex sentences rather than compound constructions. In this case, the knowledge of his semicolon error has functioned as a constraint upon his action: it has narrowed rather than enlarged his possible sphere of choice.

What moves people to act is not knowledge _per se_, but the values they attach to it. One acts, of course, in the light of the knowledge one has, but the character of one's act is determined by one's purpose or intention. Rhetorical acts bring about change in the world, not just physical or material change, for that can be brought about without discourse, but symbolic transformation. Because of the widespread and increasing use of empirical methods for making quantitative measurements, we tend to view change as what Aristotle would call "alteration": a temporal, linear, causal process. Certain aspects of the writing process do indeed involve this kind of change: the correction of
mechanical errors, the addition or deletion of materials, the rearrangement of parts. But these kinds of changes are preceded by change of another order entirely, the sort of change described by Aristotle as transformation or "coming-to-be." Transformation is qualitative change, which is assessed by relating the object not to consequent but to antecedent conditions—in short, to purpose.
In Chapter One, it was concluded that past research shows very little empirical evidence for the success of teacher commentary, when success is measured in terms of effects observable in student writing subsequent to the commentary. It was noted that there is some question as to whether this measure is the best test of effectiveness. However, if the conclusions of these studies, that teacher commentary as a whole is relatively ineffective in contributing to improvement in student writing, are granted for purposes of discussion, then we are faced with the question of why this is so. Since in commenting on student texts teachers are moved by what Douglas Ehninger has called the "patently 'rhetorical' purpose of influencing the belief or behavior of another," (89) the answer to this question has been framed in rhetorical terms.

In Chapter Two, three types of commentary were outlined, each governed by a different communicative purpose and each employing a different type of language. Commentary that points out what students did in their writing was called informative; commentary that advised students what they
should do in future writing was called deliberative; and commentary that praised or blamed was called evaluative or epideictic.

In Chapter Three, the rhetorical situation implied by each of these types of discourse was discussed. It was argued that the reported lack of effectiveness of teacher commentary could in some instances be accounted for by conflicting perceptions of what constitutes an exigency or a constraint upon a rhetorical situation. After an examination of the exigencies, audiences, and constraints involved in each type of commentary, it was concluded that effectiveness in producing a response in the form of change or action by the student depended on whether the commentary functioned as an exigency or a constraint on the student's subsequent writing and whether the audience assumed the role of spectator or participant in each case.

In this chapter, it will be argued that a student's lack of response to a teacher's comment may stem from a misunderstanding of its meaning. The concept of meaning that will be used is very similar to the one presented by E.D. Hirsch in *Validity in Interpretation*: that meaning is determined by authorial intention. A misunderstanding of meaning can therefore be seen as a misunderstanding of intention. We will thus be approaching commentary in terms of act intended rather than effect achieved. We will consider several
possible speech acts that a teacher might intend to perform in writing commentary and the conditions under which they may be judged successful.

In order for a student to respond to a comment made by a teacher, the student must first understand the meaning of the comment. The communication of meaning can be studied in many ways. Some writers restrict their analyses to lexicon, others to syntax. Some address meaning as a construct of the reader; others locate meaning in the intention of the speaker or writer. We will be taking as our theoretical framework the account of meaning presented by John Searle in *Speech Acts*. For Searle, like Hirsch, to understand the meaning of an utterance one must understand how the utterance is intended.

A speech act, according to John Searle, is the act of using language; it is a piece of intentional, rule-governed behavior. Searle distinguishes two types of speech acts, 1) perlocutionary acts, which are defined as having some necessary response on the part of the hearer, and 2) illocutionary acts, which do not by definition entail such a response. Distinguishing these two kinds of acts is the first step in understanding the apparent lack of response on the part of students to teachers' comments on their papers. If a speech act does not by definition entail an audience response in the form of altered beliefs or behavior, then it
does not make much sense to characterize such acts as unsuccessful when these changes do not occur, since the successful completion of the speech act is not dependent upon such changes.

Searle's account differs from the accounts of many modern philosophers in that he believes that the study of the meaning of sentences and the study of speech acts are not "irreducibly distinct studies" (17). The elements that link these two studies are, first, the matter of the writer's intention and, second, the fact that the rules of language use are rules that govern behavior.

Searle takes as his starting point the definition of meaning used by Paul Grice. Grice distinguishes two types of meaning, natural and non-natural. Natural meaning is what Richard Whately, following Aristotle, would call "signs": that is, "clouds mean rain" or "fever is a sign of illness." Non-natural meaning is defined as follows: "To say that a speaker S meant something by X is to say that S intended by the utterance of X to produce some effect in hearer H by means of the recognition of this intention" (Searle 43). Searle agrees with Grice's emphasis on the recognition of intention but says that the definition is lacking in two respects: "First, it fails to account for the extent to which meaning is a matter of rules or conventions. . . .
Second, by defining meaning in terms of intended effects it confuses illocutionary with perlocutionary acts" (43 - 44).

Perlocutionary acts are defined by J.L. Austin as speech acts whose successful completion entails consequences or effects on the actions or beliefs of a hearer. Persuading and convincing are examples of perlocutionary acts. The matter of the possible effect of an utterance on a hearer is nothing new in the field of rhetoric, which has been concerned with the idea of persuasion since classical times. Most rhetorical studies of persuasion have been empirical, involving the observation of the effects of different types of discourse on different audiences. The aim of such study, as with all traditional scientific investigation, is the elucidation of the laws of nature for purposes of prediction and control of future events. Such studies have as their object the knowledge of what Searle calls "brute facts"—independently verifiable observations of events which are reproducible under controlled conditions. While such studies are undoubtedly useful as descriptions of events, they give us no way to account for mistakes, errors, or misunderstandings in the communicative events being studied. To understand why a linguistic event succeeds or fails, we must consider the meaning of the event for the participants in the event. We must recognize what Searle calls the "institutional facts" as opposed to the "brute facts."
"Every institutional fact is underlain by a (system of) rule(s) of the form 'X counts as Y in context C'" (Searle 51-52). A home run, for example, can be either a brute fact or an institutional fact. If one observes a sufficient number of specified events (ball games) and notes certain regular patterns in the events, one can designate these regular patterns as home runs. The knowledge of these patterns is a knowledge of brute facts. The knowledge that an observer has, however, is not the same kind of knowledge that the participants in the event have. The participants, including the fans, know what counts as a home run before the events ever occur. Home runs, like touchdowns, divorces, felonies, and sonnets, exist by virtue of the arbitrary selection of conventions or rules governing what counts as such an entity in a given context.

Searle's thesis is that meaning is dependent not upon effects, but upon understanding. Not all speech acts depend upon perlocutionary effects to be meaningful; some depend merely upon understanding a speaker's intention. In performing speech acts, "we succeed in what we are trying to do by getting our audience to recognize what we are trying to do. But the 'effect' on the hearer is not a belief or a response, it consists simply in the hearer understanding the utterance of the speaker" (47). In performing a speech act, "the speaker intends to produce a certain effect by means of
getting the hearer to recognize his intention to produce that effect; and furthermore, . . . he intends this recognition to be achieved in virtue of the fact that the rules for using the expressions he utters associate the expression with the production of that effect" (45). The successful completion of a speech act, then, depends upon the audience's recognition of the conventions being used by the speaker; if the audience knows the rules of conventional verbal transactions and recognizes which rules the speaker is invoking, he has understood the meaning of the speech act. These rules are more than just lexical and syntactic rules. They are agreements between the participants in the speech act concerning modifying circumstances in the context. Once these conditions are agreed upon, the participants will be able to tell "what counts as what" in the speech act.

Meaning, then, is not solely a matter of lexicon and syntax; it is also a matter of what the speaker is trying to do in using words and sentences in particular situations. J.L. Austin was among the first to point out that certain utterances were not just saying something but also doing something. The former utterances he called locutionary acts; the latter, illocutionary acts. To illustrate what he means by illocutionary acts, Searle uses the example of promising. When a speaker says to a hearer, "I promise that X," the speaker is not only making a statement but also performing an
action. The successful completion of this action is contingent upon a number of factors. First, one must assume that "understanding a sentence is knowing its meaning" (48). Second, one must assume that "the meaning of a sentence is determined by rules, and those rules specify both conditions of utterance of the sentence and also what the utterance counts as" (48). When a speaker utters a sentence, the speaker intends to produce in the hearer the knowledge, recognition, or awareness that the state of affairs specified by the rules obtains. If the hearer achieves this recognition or awareness, then the speech act (illocutionary act) is successfully completed.

Thus, such illocutionary acts as advising, vowing, promising, asserting, requesting, thanking, etc., do not require a response on the part of the hearer other than the recognition of the speaker's intention. Recognizing the intention depends upon the hearer's knowing the conditions of the utterance, what the utterance counts as, and the rules governing those factors.

With these preliminaries in mind, let us examine some of the speech acts performed by teachers in their written comments on student papers. It is obvious that the activities of teaching a class and commenting on papers are not single activities, but many activities combined. In one sense, teaching and commenting are not activities at all, but
the contexts in which certain more specific speech acts occur. These contexts determine the rules and conventions by which specific speech acts may be said to be meaningful. In commenting on papers, a teacher may state, question, command, forbid, advise, praise, exclaim, or argue, to name just a few of the speech acts that may be performed. In this section, we will consider some speech acts that Douglas Ehninger calls "prescriptive." In the scheme I have outlined in Chapter Two, prescriptive discourse would be included in the category of deliberative commentary. Let us then begin with the act of instructing. Instructing is a speech act whose message takes the form of directions or procedures that tell someone how to do something, or, as Ehninger puts it, "how to make something the case" (90). Teachers often think of themselves as "instructors," but if we look at the rules governing the conditions for instructing, we can see that very little teacher commentary actually qualifies as instruction in the usual sense of the word.

The most important element in the conditions for the performance of any speech act is the relationship between writer and audience. In instructing, the relationship is not one of equals. The speaker or writer plays the role of specialist, one who is in possession of special knowledge that the hearer wants or needs. The hearer is the starting point of the transaction in that he must first acknowledge
his own inadequacy or lack and initiate a request for information. The first condition of the speech act of instructing is therefore that the hearer (the student) has decided on a goal or end to be gained and has communicated that desire to the speaker (the teacher). In Bitzer's terms, the hearer has perceived an exigency and has performed his own rhetorical act (requesting), which the speaker has understood. The instructor then provides the learner with instructions. These instructions often take the form of "if-then" statements, although the "if" clause is sometimes tacit. A writing instructor, for instance, might say, "If you want to make a paper less wordy, you can eliminate some of the 'which' clauses." Thus, instruction usually concerns means rather than ends. For that reason, Ehninger notes that instruction usually relates to practical matters rather than theories, concepts, or beliefs, which would be brought to bear in deciding on the end desired in the first place. The instructor is not required to give reasons or backing for the act of his giving instructions, since the reasons are usually assumed to relate to the end desired.

In the speech act of instructing, the nature of the relationship between speaker and hearer is somewhat contractual, since both parties have certain obligations that must be recognized if the speech act is to be successful. The instructor, because of his superior knowledge of the
process in question, is obligated to insure that the learner's goal will be reached if the instructions are correctly carried out. The learner, on the other hand, is obligated to perform as directed, otherwise the successful attainment of the goal cannot be guaranteed. These factors constitute some of the "conditions" for the successful performance of the act of instructing.

If these conditions are recognized by both parties, the act of instructing can be successfully completed. However, when these conditions are applied to teacher commentary on student papers, several interesting implications emerge. First of all, it is obvious that specific instructions by teachers are seldom requested by students. For a student to initiate a request such as "Tell me how to make my paper less wordy," the student must first recognize an exigency, namely that his paper is wordy and that wordiness needs to be corrected. It is true that some teachers have adopted the practice of asking students to tell them in a note on the first draft which areas they would like help with, but this practice is not widespread, for two reasons. First, it implies that the writing process involves successive revisions, which many teachers still do not allow. Second, many teachers do not trust students' judgment enough to allow them to evaluate their own writing for weaknesses, in spite of encouraging reports from teachers such as James Beck, who
incorporate student annotation of their own papers into their teaching as a regular part of the writing process. Teachers seem to feel that if students are making errors, they must be unaware of the errors, otherwise they wouldn't be making them. Consequently, "instruction" is thrust upon students whether they ask for it or not. According to Ehninger and Searle, such instruction cannot achieve its purpose because the intention of the discourse has not been recognized by both writer and audience. Mutual recognition of intent is a requisite for the successful consummation of any speech act, by definition.

It might be argued, of course, that a student's signing up for a course at all is a recognition of intent, a tacit request for instruction. This may be true, but it should be borne in mind that these exigencies are secondary and relate to the "keyed" aspects of the writing process. A student may want to become a better writer or he may want to fulfill a course requirement, but in order to do so he must first address the primary exigencies that control the substance of the writing itself.

Another implication that emerges from these theories is related to the fact that instructing, according to Ehninger, is an illocutionary act. That means that successful instruction does not necessarily involve a change in the learner's beliefs or actions. The learner does not have to
perform as directed by the instructions; the choice of whether or not to perform as directed is open. The learner merely has to recognize the instructor's intention and be aware of the conditions attendant upon that speech act. For instance, I might take a photography course in darkroom techniques, in which I request and pay for instructions on how to develop my film. I could take the entire course of instruction, plus examinations, and never enter a darkroom actually to develop film. I am paying merely for a set of instructions (and perhaps a demonstration or two) that guarantee that if I perform as directed, the results I desire will be achieved. (Perhaps I need not add that many composition textbooks imply that writing can be learned in precisely this way.)

The speech act of advising is similar to instructing in many respects. For instance, the request for advice, like the request for instruction, is usually initiated by the advisee, who recognizes a need or a lack and seeks information from someone who is expected to possess superior knowledge or experience. The advisee, like the learner, is not obligated to perform as advised; he or she is free to act on the advice or not. The difference between advising and instructing lies in the stronger prescriptive element in advising. Messages conveyed in instructing tend to take a more indicative form: "In order to obtain result X, one
should do Y." The should in advising messages has more the meaning of "ought." Thus Ann Landers might advise the parents of teenagers, "In order to avoid teenage pregnancies, teenagers should receive adequate sex education." This should tells someone that he or she should consider making something the case because it would be in someone's best interest; thus, more moral responsibility on the part of the speaker is implied, and the advice may be backed with convincing reasons. The results of the advice are not guaranteed, but they appear to be the probable or likely results of educated guesses grounded in prior experience.

Some teacher commentary of the deliberative type takes the form of advising, but as with instruction, the advice is not always sought by the hearer, and reasons are not always given to back it. More important, though, is the fact that successful advising does not depend on the condition that the hearer act on the advice. The hearer need only recognize that the advice sought is being given.

Another type of prescriptive discourse is arguing. Arguing, like instructing and advising, is an illocutionary speech act; that is, the action is completed in the act of arguing itself. However, arguing differs from the speech acts previously discussed in several important respects. First, in arguing, the discourse is initiated by the speaker rather than the hearer. The reason for the claim's being
initiated by the speaker is the speaker's perception of the hearer's being in error about something. The purpose of arguing, according to Ehninger, is to give reasons why one should reconsider one's position or plan. The ultimate goal of arguing, therefore, is an alteration of an existing state of affairs. Based on this factor alone, it would seem that teacher commentary is more akin to arguing than to instructing or advising, since most teacher commentary is a response to what is perceived by the teacher as needing alteration.

There are, however, other conditions attendant upon the act of arguing that would prevent most teacher commentary from falling under its rubric. For one thing, there is the relationship between speaker and hearer. In instructing and advising, the speaker is assumed to occupy a position of greater knowledge or experience; in arguing this is not necessarily so. Arguing is, as Ehninger notes, an essentially egalitarian enterprise. While possibly unequal in other respects, the relationship between speaker and hearer is, for purposes of arguing, equal, because an arguer must assume a basic or ideal rationality in his audience (the kind of rationality that Chaim Perelman describes as an attribute of his "universal audience"), a rationality that he himself possesses also. The equality of speaker and hearer is also reflected in the fact that it is up to the hearer to
judge the worth or effectiveness of the argument. The hearer has the final say in deciding whether or not the argument is accepted. Thus, in responding to a teacher's comment that argues for a certain change, the student does not necessarily have to comply with the teacher's suggestion. Rather, the student listens to the argument, judges it, and decides whether or not to act on it. If compliance by the student with the request were assumed, no argument would be necessary. Compliance would be assumed as a result of the unequal relationship between speaker and hearer.

Another reason that most teacher commentary cannot be considered as arguing is that arguing required reason-giving. Statements, questions, and commands without reasons are not arguments. Most messages in the act of arguing take the form of sentences using such words as because, since, or therefore, a form that is very seldom found in teacher commentary except when a grade is being justified. Furthermore, successful arguing, as good debaters know, demands that the speaker determine where the presumption lies before initiating the argument. Determining where the presumption lies, as Richard Whately so astutely pointed out many years ago, does not mean determining what is true, but what one's hearer's think is true. In composition, this would involve the teacher's trying to determine the student's intention in doing whatever he did in the paper, including
his intention in making errors. (This is the "archaeological" approach to error discussed by Mina Shaughnessy in *Errors and Expectations* and reviewed in further detail by David Bartholomae.) When a teacher first tries to determine a student's intention, the teacher is in effect trying to determine where the presumption lies in order to frame an appropriate response. If the response is to be a good argument, however, it must do more that merely make a claim; it must support the claim with good reasons. Furthermore, these reasons must seem good to the hearer, otherwise the argument is not effective. For teachers who are sorely pressed for time, this procedure must seem much too lengthy and involved, almost like writing a paper in response to a paper, but some teachers such as Sondra Perl have reported success in using a similar method in which teachers and student "correspond" with each other over a period of time on a given subject. In most teacher responses of the deliberative type, however, the reasons behind the claims made are likely to rest purely on the ethical appeal: "You should do this. Trust me." (Or, as we shall see in the next chapter, the arguments supporting a claim may be tacit or implied rather than explicitly laid out, which presents another set of problems.)

The aim of argument, as rhetoricians from Plato and Aristotle to Richard Weaver have insisted, is not merely to
alter the presumption or to shift the burden of proof, but to lead both speaker and hearer, through a dialectical process, to the truth. In genuine argumentation, the speaker has an obligation to the hearer to lay out options, to guide the hearer's reasoning, to consider the hearer's best interest in relation to the truth. Acting in the audience's best interest is what distinguishes genuine from sophistical argumentation, as Plato demonstrates in the *Phaedrus*. At the same time, however, it must be kept in mind that arguing per se is an illocutionary act, which may or may not exert perlocutionary force upon the hearer. A strong argument may change the mind of a hearer, but an equally strong argument may not. The success of the act of arguing depends only upon the hearer's recognizing the speaker's intention to argue and the conditions attendant upon that speech act.

In all of the speech acts mentioned thus far, the obligation seems to be primarily upon the speaker: the obligation to impart correct information, to speak the truth, to act in the hearer's best interest, etc. Let us now consider two other speech acts, ordering and forbidding, which would seem to involve an obligation to comply on the part of the hearer. In both of these acts, according to Ehninger, a decision is communicated to a hearer; that is, someone is told what he or she is obligated to do. As in advising and instructing, the relationship between speaker
and hearer is a somewhat contractual one between superior and inferior. The difference, however, is that in ordering and forbidding the speaker is superior in status or power rather than skill or understanding. The reason for ordering or forbidding is to make the superior's *will known*. Because the relationship is contractual in most cases (the military is a good example), the hearer is expected to obey. Compliance is expected because of the assymetrical relationship of speaker and hearer. However, the hearer's compliance is not required for the successful completion of the act of act. That compliance is still voluntary, given only when the hearer grants the speaker authority over him. It is possible, especially when the hearer knows that the order is illegal or immoral, for the hearer not to grant the speaker that authority.

Furthermore, the speaker's obligation in ordering and forbidding is merely to recognize which parties are appropriate objects to be ordered and to express the order clearly and exactly. Acting in the hearer's best interest is certainly not a necessary condition for ordering or forbidding; the major condition is merely making a decision known. Nor is reason-giving required, and asking for reasons is generally considered to be inappropriate behavior in such situations. As in the act of instruction, the concern of these acts is with behavior only, not with beliefs, opinions,
or theories. Orders can be either given or acted upon while holding beliefs that differ considerably from the other party's. If a hearer does decide to act upon an order, the hearer has decided to **implement** the decision that has been conveyed to him. The hearer's main reason for obeying is not that he thinks the decision is right or necessary relative to some goal—the person obeying may not even **know** the goal of the act he is performing—but that he has granted authority to the person issuing the order.

Further reflection upon these two speech acts lends fuel to my tendency to view the results of empirical studies on teacher commentary with skepticism. Consider the following scenario: A teacher assigns a paper, a student writes it, the teacher comments on it, the student revises the paper in response to the comments, and it is determined by some sort of holistic scoring that the final paper is indeed a better paper than the original draft. Can we conclude from this example, repeated enough times to insure statistical reliability, that the teacher's comments helped to improve the student's writing ability? What if, either in terms of the sentence mode or in terms of the student's perception of the teacher's intention, the comments were all commands? ("Move this paragraph to the beginning," "Change this comma to a period," "Substitute the word imply for infer," etc.) And suppose the student obeyed all these commands to the
letter. If the student's goal was merely to obey rather than to make changes in accordance with some set of principles that he has chosen and that he values, has anything really been gained? Will he be able to duplicate his success in the absence of a teacher? Because of the power structure in most classroom situations, we should be aware that students may interpret a teacher's comments as commands whether or not they appear in the imperative mode. Hence we should question studies that label change as improvement without investigating the motives for the change.

Finally, let us consider the act of persuading. As a perlocutionary act, this one differs from the acts previously considered in that its successful completion depends upon a change in the hearer's beliefs or behavior. Unlike ordering and forbidding, which require that the speaker's will be made known, persuading requires that the speaker's will be both known and done. The purpose of persuading, says Ehninger, is to cause a hearer to decide to do or believe as the speaker desires (94).

In describing the function of persuasion as causal, Ehninger (and probably Austin as well) seems to be mistaking a cause for an effect. The problem with treating persuasion as another sort of speech act is that the same effect can be brought about by many disparate means, as rhetoricians have been aware of for hundreds of years. Achieving an effect is
a matter of technique, of choice among competing alternatives; conveying an intended meaning is a matter of constraining choice through rules and conventions. Furthermore, the notion of "cause" introduced by Ehninger would seem to place persuasion in the realm of "brute" rather than "institutional" facts, because the terms, rules, and conditions of persuasion would not be specifiable from an institutional point of view. The "conditions" governing speech acts are agreements about certain modifying circumstances. Moreover, rhetoric, a field whose name has traditionally been associated with persuasion, is the study not of persuasion itself, but of the available means of persuasion, as Aristotle says in the Rhetoric. From a rhetorical perspective, persuasion cannot be considered an act; it is the apparent result of an act, which can only occur when the audience has the potential for being acted upon.

To summarize, teacher commentary is a type of discourse whose intention is to bring about change in the writing behavior of the students to whom it is directed. The work of Austin and Searle tells us that the process of communicating meaning is not a simple one describable in terms of physical cause and effect, because the meaning of utterances is a matter not of brute facts but of institutional facts. In order to understand the meaning of utterances, hearers must
recognize what speakers intend in making those utterances; They must recognize what type of act is being performed and the rules and conditions attendant upon the act. Furthermore, illocutionary acts are not necessarily dependent upon perlocutionary effects, by definition. A given illocutionary act may or may not produce such an effect, and even if it does, the effect may not be intentional. Many speech acts produce effects which are not intended, but that does not change their essential nature.

Research has shown that teacher commentary often does not produce the effect intended by the commenter. Researchers sometimes attribute this condition to the fact that students do not understand the comments (see Jean King's dissertation mentioned in Chapter One, for example). If we continue to use the frame of reference provided by speech act theory, we can see that such "misunderstanding" can happen in at least three different ways that correspond to the three elements that make up a speech act: the elements of reference, predication, and illocutionary mode. An examination of each of these elements will give a better understanding of the ways in which misunderstanding can occur.

Let us use as an example a typical comment such as "This sentence is wordy." Two things should be noticed at the outset about such a comment. First, the comment might consist of
the single word "wordy," which I take to be equivalent to the sentence mentioned above. Second, it should be noted that the term "wordy" might be replaced by any number of other qualities ranging from "incomplete," "run-on," or "unclear" to "effective," "interesting," or "wonderful." The sentence contains basically three elements: a subject that refers to some object, an adjective expressing some quality that is predicated of the subject, and an illocutionary mode that expresses the act intended by the writer, such as asserting, arguing, etc.

Let us begin with the speech act of referring. Searle considers the act of referring to be a separate act from the illocutionary act itself, referring having a more general or abstract nature, and the illocutionary mode being specific to each individual utterance. Searle points out that the rules of referring share an "abstract character" in that they "state what is common to all expressions used for singular identifying reference" (95). His "idealized model" of this act states the conditions and rules for the use of a referring expression.

A speaker or writer can successfully perform the act of reference if these conditions obtain. The recognition of the speaker's intention by the hearer is achieved by the hearer's knowing the rules governing reference and by his awareness of the context in which the reference takes place. Mina
Shaughnessy makes a similar point when she describes the conditions upon which a student's understanding of a deliberative comment such as "Make your subject and verb agree" are dependent. For a student to understand what a teacher means by such a comment, certain prior conditions must hold. The student must:

1. Understand what is meant by the term "agreement."
2. Identify the base words of the subject and predicate.
3. Determine whether the subject should be counted as one or more than one according to the conventions of formal English.
4. Know the appropriate form for indicating the number of a particular noun.
5. Know the appropriate form for indicating the number of a particular verb (Shaughnessy 130 - 131).

If a student correctly understood all of these conditions, it is difficult to see why he or she would make the error in the first place.

Reference in actual discourse always occurs as part of an illocutionary act; it is intentional behavior. The statement "This sentence is wordy," like the statement "This box is heavy," may express a brute fact, a piece of information that is true regardless of who says it, who hears it, or why, given that the entities referred to do exist and that the qualities predicated of them are definable in some framework or another. When a speaker utters such a sentence to a hearer in a specific context, however, the sentence ceases to be a brute fact and becomes an institutional fact,
a sentence whose meaning depends upon what the speaker intends in saying it.

Even if students do recognize that the teacher intends to perform an illocutionary act in writing comments, they may not know which illocutionary act is intended, whether it be advising, informing, commanding, or whatever. Searle points out that the same propositional content may occur in many different illocutionary modes. (Ross Winterowd makes this same point in his analysis of pedagogical stylistics, p. 257.) Take, for instance, the issue of Tom's leaving the room. This content may appear in any of the following illocutionary modes:

**Commanding:** "Tom, leave the room."

**Exclaiming:** "Would that Tom would leave the room!"

**Advising:** "If I were you, Tom, I would leave the room."

**Requesting:** "Tom, would you please leave the room?"

**Arguing:** "Tom, since the fire bell has rung, and the bell signals danger, and since I have no reason to believe that this is a false alarm, especially in the light of the smoke filling the hallways, I think that leaving the room would be the best course of action."

Students' uncertainty about illocutionary mode may be worsened by the abbreviated form in which comments often appear. Depending upon the student's previous experience
with the teacher and the conventions of marking papers, a comment such as DM (the abbreviation given in most handbooks for "dangling modifier") could mean "This is a dangling modifier" (a referential statement), "There exists here a dangling modifier" (an existential proposition), "Get rid of this dangling modifier" (a command), "Since dangling modifiers contribute to a lack of clarity, and clarity is a good thing for sentences to have, it would be a good course of action to correct the one in this sentence" (an argument), or even "This dangling modifier renders your sentence laughable" (a derisive criticism). Obviously a great deal depends upon the context which has been established in the classroom and whether or not the teacher has successfully communicated his or her intentions and expectations to the student.

Another way that misunderstanding can occur is in predication. As mentioned before, a statement such as "This sentence is wordy" involves three elements: the illocutionary mode that expresses the speaker's intention in performing the speech act, the reference from the word sentence to some existing entity, and the predication of the quality expressed by the term "wordy" of the subject of the sentence. The concept of predication has given philosophers and linguists much to argue about over the years. Searle examines and rejects several of the traditional arguments
concerning predication that rest upon the idea of predication as a relationship between particulars and universals (the subject of the sentence being the particular and the predicated quality being the universal). Searle rejects, for instance, the notion that a quality such as wordiness has a referent in the same way that the particular "this sentence" has. That is, just because two sentences might share a common quality (wordiness), that does not mean that the quality exists in the world or has "ontological status." He states that "...The existence of particulars depends on facts in the world and the existence of universals merely on the meaning of words" (105).

"The distinction between subject and predicate," according to Searle, "is one of function. The subject serves to identify an object, the predicate, if the total illocutionary act is one of describing or characterizing, serves to describe or characterize the object which has been identified" (119). Searle says that "We have throughout the analysis of speech acts been distinguishing between what we might call content and function. In the total illocutionary act the content is the proposition; the function is the illocutionary force with which the proposition is presented" (125). The content of a proposition can take many different forms, as we have seen, and even two propositions of the same form may serve different functions if they are uttered in the
performance of different illocutionary acts. For example, the remark "Nice day" could function as a literal or as a sarcastic comment, depending upon the context in which it was uttered.

Searle distinguishes between the meaning of propositions and the meaning of referring expressions, or words. Both words and propositions have meanings, but the meaning of words is subordinate to the meaning of sentences. "In many cases," says Searle, "the sense of the expression is not by itself sufficient to communicate a proposition, rather the utterance of the expression in a certain context communicates a proposition" (92). Thus, a single-word comment by a teacher can communicate a proposition to a student if the context supplies the necessary conditions. Even if it does not, a referring expression still has some meaning, which Searle designates "a descriptive content," but unless the utterance of the expression succeeds in communicating a true proposition to the hearer, the reference is not "fully consummated." "The older philosophers were not wrong when they said: to know the meaning of a proposition is to know under what conditions it is true or false" (125). Meaning is dependent upon the knowledge of the speaker and the hearer of the conditions under which the utterance occurs.

Meaning, Searle seems to be saying, is a function not of words (referring expressions) but of propositions. That is, in
determining the meaning of a comment such as "Wordy," the question is not what the word wordy means, but what the proposition "This sentence is wordy" means. Every reference is based on a proposition. Thus in the sentence "This sentence is wordy," the referring expression "this sentence" is really an existential proposition: "There is one and only one sentence having the characteristics predicated of it, namely wordiness." Searle states flatly that "... underlying our conception of any particular object is a true, uniquely existential proposition" (93). He refuses to make the distinction between objects and facts about objects that underlies traditional discussions of substance and that results in objects being able to be named independently of facts. To name an object is to state a fact or existential proposition. Thus, "meaning is prior to reference; reference is in virtue of meaning" (92).

Searle approaches the concept of predication in a unique way. Rather than discussing propositions from the point of view of general and specific terms, as mentioned earlier, he asks what is done in the act of predicating. His answer is that, "To predicate an expression 'P' of an object R is to raise the question of the truth of the predicate expression of the object referred to" (124). Thus, in the sentence "This sentence is wordy," the speaker is raising the question of the wordiness of the sentence referred to. The predicate
expression "wordy" is underlain by a proposition, and using this expression raises the question of its truth in relation to the subject. "To know the meaning of a general term and hence a predicate expression is to know under what conditions it is true of a given object. It is true under some conditions, false under others. . . . If a speaker asserts a proposition concerning an object, he commits himself to there being a state of affairs in the world in which the predicate is true of the object. . . . The predicate indicates which state of affairs concerning the object the speaker is committing himself to" (125).

When a teacher makes a comment such as "wordy" or "run-on" or "incomplete," then, he is raising the question of the quality in relation to an object referred to, a sentence. In order for both the speaker and the hearer to understand the meaning of the sentence, they must know under what conditions it is true or false. All statements are true under some conditions and false under others, but the point is especially important with respect to statements about language. Statements about grammatical errors, for instance, depend upon the condition that the speaker or writer is using standard American English. If the writer is not using this version of the language but, say, Black English, then a comment pointing out an error in verb inflection, for instance, will not necessarily be a true statement.
Whether or not the statement is true, to repeat, depends upon the conditions under which it is uttered. In order for the statement to have the same meaning for both speaker and hearer—that is, for the hearer to understand the speaker's utterance—both must recognize the conditions and rules governing that particular speech act. Since English teachers expend a great deal of their time in annotating papers upon the attribution of various qualities to them, it is important that students be aware of these rules and conditions. If teachers' remarks are to be effective, they must be true, and true here means more than just "corresponding to a given state of affairs in the world." If the hearer is to understand the remark, he must recognize its truth; he must know under what conditions it hold true. With predication, as with reference, meaning is prior, emerging from the utterance of propositions, not from the correspondence of terms to states in the world.

This account of the truth of propositions helps explain why supplementary activities to actual writing, such as exercises, drills, and testing of student's memorization of terms and rules, has been shown to contribute very little to improvement in students' writing ability (see Hartwell for studies supporting this contention). A teacher might reason that students do not understand his comments because they do not understand the terms he is using. For instance, a
student may not understand a comment about an error in pronoun case unless he understands the meaning of the terms pronoun and case; if such an understanding is not present, the student may not be able to make a correct reference. So the teacher requires the student to memorize definitions and practice applying them to sample sentences containing errors that the student is supposed to recognize and correct. The student is in effect testing the truth of a proposition such as "This is a sentence in which all of the pronouns are in correct case form." The definitions he has learned are supposed to supply the conditions under which such a statement can be judged true or false. So that when the teacher makes the comment "pronoun case" on his paper, he will be able to look at the sentence referred to and make the same judgment. In a similar way, when a quality such as "colloquial" is predicated of a given expression, the student is expected to be able to judge the truth of the sentence "This expression is colloquial," because predication raises the claim of colloquialness, and the claim is settled by knowing the conditions under which such a statement would be true.

The teacher mentioned above has focused upon problems of reference and predication. Although the reasoning seems valid, it does entail certain problems. The first is that the rules governing the conditions for reference are
abstractions; they "state what is common to all expressions used for singular identifying reference" (95). The same is true for predication: its rules may be abstracted or viewed separately from any particular speech act. Knowing the terms and grammatical rules is no guarantee that students will understand the teacher's comments unless they also recognize the illocutionary act he is performing, and even if students do grasp the illocutionary act, the successful performance of such an act does not require that the hearer change his behavior merely because he understands what is being said.

The second problem is that the teaching method described above is primarily a deductive procedure; with the rules and definitions as premises, one can deduce the truth or falsity of statements about the correctness of certain features of a sentence. Errors, then, appear to be errors of logic or syllogistic reasoning. Generating sentences, however, is not a matter of testing their validity but of creating meaning. The selection of any utterance is made on the basis of some rule or other, because language use is rule-governed behavior. Error is a matter not of misapplying the rules, but of having a different set of rules. (Shaughnessy gives many examples demonstrating how the logic of students' rules can result in error.)

In order to alter the writing behavior of a student, a teacher must, as Shaughnessy suggests, first try to ascertain
which rules the student is using, however bizarre or inconsistent those rules may seem. The rules students use have not, for the most part, been memorized from a textbook. They have been derived inductively, like all language rules, from observation and abstraction from specific utterances. Errors in language use often reflect weaknesses in the inductive derivation of the rules rather than in the deductive application of the rules, weaknesses such as overgeneralizing from too small a sample, etc. In order to generate meaningful utterances, as well as to correct errors, students must become conscious of the rules they themselves have created as well as the rules in the grammar book. The matter of rule use is important for teacher commentary because the rules students use in generating language constitute a kind of policy governing their actions. For instance, students who have trouble with commas often say that it is their "policy" to insert commas wherever they pause in a sentence. The result might be sentences such as "The main point of this essay, is high schools and colleges are not putting work out" (Shaughnessy 27). Or they may have a rule that says to put commas after all elements that introduce a sentence. This rule shows somewhat more refinement than the one mentioned above, in that it refers to the sentence instead of the writer. However, it can lead students to write such sentences as "I got an invitation,
but, I didn't go" or "I didn't try out this spring. Although, I wanted to." The student's rule requiring that commas be placed after introductory elements, in combination with his sense that the words however, but, and although share similar contrastive or reversal functions in a sentence, leads him to make comma errors when using conjunctions. (His rule works fine, however, with nonrestrictive sentence elements such as prepositional phrases and conjunctive adverbs.)

Deliberative comments suggesting that a student make changes in his writing therefore challenge these policies. The question, however, is how we know when such comments have been successful in accomplishing their aim. This chapter has described two ways that the success of a speech act might be judged: by illocutionary intent and by perlocutionary effect. Searle's analysis shows that these two elements of a speech act are not necessarily dependent on each other. An illocutionary act may result in some perlocutionary effect, but it also may not. The success of the illocutionary act does not depend upon such effects. And even if some perlocutionary effect does follow, it may not have been the one intended by the speaker. The same effect, moreover, can be brought about by many different illocutionary acts. Therefore, perlocutionary effect is not a reliable means of assessing the effectiveness of deliberative comments.
The other criterion for success, the understanding of illocutionary intent, implies that the success of an illocutionary act is dependent upon both parties in a verbal transaction knowing the conditions under which a given utterance holds true. Thus a deliberative comment (e.g., "You should eliminate these pronoun shifts") is successful when both teacher and student understand the meaning of the statement "It is true that you should eliminate these pronoun shifts." Under some conditions it is true that one should eliminate pronoun shifts, but under other conditions it is not true that one should do so. For the comment to be effective, the student would have to know these conditions before reading the comment, when in fact he probably made the error because he did not know the conditions, or perhaps knew only part of them. Therefore, if we measure the success of a deliberative comment in terms of understanding its illocutionary intent, it is difficult to see how such a comment could ever be called successful in communicating its intended meaning unless the student already know what the comment presupposes that he does not know.
In Chapter Two, it was noted that linguistic transactions can reflect a number of authorial purposes and intentions and that these purposes in turn reflect the hierarchy of values of the individual, the discipline, or the culture. By way of illustration, the purposes of informative were commentary were mentioned. The role of informative commentary in serving one type of purpose, justice, was discussed and the fact that this purpose is often seen as subordinate to a higher purpose, "the good," whether the good be defined in relative or absolute terms. In this chapter, we shall examine in greater detail the variety of purposes served by informative commentary in order to explain how and why teacher commentary can succeed or fail in rhetorical terms. It is my contention that if we wish to view informative commentary as a possible factor in improvement in student writing, its immediate goals and purposes must be subsumed by the larger purposes of deliberative and epideictic commentary. It was noted that the immediate purpose of informative commentary was to provide a just assessment of a true state of affairs in a student paper.
It must now be asked what purposes this assessment itself can serve.

The term "informative" indicates the immediate purposes of these comments: to report to students the errors they are making in their papers in an objective way. Another possible purpose is revealed in the fact that these comments can also be intended merely to record errors. If a comment's purpose is merely to record, this indicates that the audience can be someone other than the student: the teacher himself, another teacher, an administrator who might wish to review the teacher's marking methods—in short, almost anyone who might read the comment. Thus, the purpose of recording comments is subsumed under some other purpose relative to the audience.

As records of events for teachers, these comments can be used in at least two ways: as instances of errors to be measured or counted in the process of arriving at a grade, or as examples of things the student has done to which the teacher can refer in making deliberative comments. In short, informative commentary can function in three ways: as information for students, as records for teachers, and as examples of what students should or should not do in the future.

Let us begin with information for students. The fact that teachers feel the need to supply students with information implies that students do not have it; a student
presumably would not make an error if he knew it was an error. However, the information being supplied does not tell the student what he did, but that what he did was wrong. For instance, an sp beside the word thier does not convey the information that "You reversed the i and the e"; it conveys the information that a wrong was committed and that it was a certain type of wrong. Similarly, a sentence such as "A person needs a place of there own" could be marked as an error of pronoun agreement (agr), an error in spelling (sp), or an error in word choice (ww); in none of these cases, however, has the comment informed the writer of exactly what he did. A truly informative comment would say "You used the word there instead of the word their," or "You used a plural pronoun with a singular referent."

Informative comments generally tell students the type of things they do rather than the specific things they do. This choice is made by teachers on the basis of purposes extrinsic to the purposes of the writing itself. A comment stating the type of error is deemed more useful than one stating the specific error because the assumption is that it can be used to generate other instances of the type. Thus, in arriving at a grade, a teacher can calculate that a student made X number of spelling errors. In giving the student suggestions for future writing, the teacher can refer to the type of thing the student was wont to do in the past. In other
words, informative commentary is used as a kind of evidence from which teachers and students can draw certain conclusions.

The process of moving from evidence or data to claims or conclusions by virtue of certain warrants or reasons is a process of argumentation. (See Toulmin.) In teacher commentary, as in most discourse, the arguments by which conclusions are reached are seldom fully laid out for the reader's inspection. In particular, premises are often missing. The fact that premises are often inexplicit does not constitute a flaw in the reasoning process, however. The premises of the arguments in ordinary discourse are frequently truncated or suppressed; the success of the argument depends upon the reader's being able to supply the missing parts. In addition, the participation of the reader is thought to contribute to the persuasive effect of the argument. The argument is thus a construction of the reader as much as the writer. The writer may have intended to construct a certain argument, but the success of his effort depends upon the reader's ability to reconstruct the argument in his own terms. This process of truncation and reconstruction of arguments, a feature of most discourse of the non-demonstrative sort, is called enthymemetic reasoning.

An enthymeme is a sort of quasi-syllogism, which differs from a true syllogism in two respects. First, as mentioned
above, one of the premises may be unstated. Second, even if the premises are stated, they may be expressed in probable rather than absolute terms. To illustrate, let us consider a maxim such as "Once a thief, always a thief." Such a maxim may express a generally held notion, but the real force of the notion does not come into play until the maxim is applied to a specific case. That is, the truth of the maxim, which is arguable, is not so important as its rhetorical function in leading an audience to a desired conclusion. For instance, a prosecutor trying to establish the guilt of an accused thief may introduce in court the evidence of past convictions on this offense. In doing so, he is applying the maxim to the case, even though it may not be stated explicitly. The enthymeme would look something like this:

1) A man who has stolen before is likely to steal again.
2) This man has stolen before.
3) Therefore, he is likely to steal again.

The prosecutor may state only the second premise of the enthymeme rather than laying out the whole argument because he may want the audience to supply the first premise and the conclusion. Notice that the first premise and the conclusion state only the likelihood or probability of the event. The persuasive effect of the enthymeme does not depend on the validity of the syllogism constructed by the speaker; it depends rather on the audience's construction of an argument.
which in most cases is not conclusive or verdictive but merely one piece of evidence, one factor in an overall case which is being made.

The same is true for informative commentary. Each error pointed out to a student can be seen as one piece of evidence in an overall case which is being made by the teacher. In pointing out errors, teachers often use enthymemic reasoning, stating the second premise of a syllogism of which the first premise and conclusion are meant to be supplied by the student. To illustrate, let us consider a typical comment such as *frag*, which I take to be equivalent to the sentence, "This is a sentence fragment." Say that a teacher makes this comment on a preliminary draft with the intention that it will help the student to correct the error on the final draft. The chain of reasoning that the teacher hopes the student will reconstruct might look something like this:

A) 1. All units of discourse having X, Y, and Z characteristics are sentence fragments.
   2. This unit has X, Y, and Z characteristics.
   3. Therefore this unit is a sentence fragment.

B) 1. All sentence fragments are errors.
   2. This is a sentence fragment.
   3. Therefore this is an error.
C) 1. All errors in an essay should be corrected.
2. This is an error.
3. Therefore this should be corrected.

The teacher may point out the error by applying any one of the three second premises above. If he merely writes *frag*, he is stating the second premise of the second syllogism. If he writes "This sentence lacks a subject," he is stating the second premise of the first syllogism. If he merely circles the error or places a check mark beside it, he is stating the second premise of the third syllogism. In all three cases, the student is supposed to supply the first premise and the conclusion.

The success of this chain of reasoning in bringing about action on the part of the student is dependent upon at least three factors: the student's knowledge, his reasoning ability, and his values. The student's knowledge of the relevant facts and rules is presumably supplied prior to the writing in classroom instruction. It does not make much sense to expect students to correct errors about which they have not been instructed, and even less to punish them for committing errors that they do not know are errors in the hope that they will "go and sin no more," especially since the empirical research seems to indicate that this hope is vain.
The second factor, the student's reasoning ability, is often presumed by teachers to be enhanced and developed by traditional activities such as memorizing rules and definitions, testing, and practice in error recognition. However, the research of psychologists such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky indicates that successful performance in these areas may be the result or effect of cognitive development rather than its cause. Furthermore, students' levels of cognitive development may permit them to "perform a given task in a specific situation, but they may have great difficulty in abstracting from it or replicating it in another context" (Lunsford 39). That is, a student's ability to perform a deductive reasoning task in error recognition in one context is no guarantee that he will be able to recognize and correct the same type of error in another context if his powers of inferential reasoning have not been sufficiently developed.

The third factor, the student's values, is the most important of the three in the relationship between the argument implied by the teacher's comments and the student's subsequent action. If we look at the three conclusions of the arguments presented above (this is a sentence fragment; sentence fragments are errors; errors should be corrected), we can see that they form an argument of the following sort: "This sentence fragment should be corrected because it is an
error and errors are bad." If we lay out the argument in the
terms used by Stephen Toulmin, we can divide it into the
following components:
1) This sentence fragment - evidence or data
2) should be corrected - claim or conclusion
3) because it is an error - authoritative warrant based on
   convention
4) and errors are bad. - motivational warrant based on
   value.

Notice that the argument above is rhetorical rather than
dialectic in form. It is an argument intended to persuade
the hearer, to move him to action. The argument is, as Chaim
Perelman says, "directional," because the terms used in the
arguments are based on knowledge and values extrinsic
to the argument itself. In contrast, the three rhetorical
syllogisms mentioned earlier appear to have a demonstrative
form and appear to be based on substantive rather than
authoritative or motivational warrants. That is, the warrant
that "authorizes" their leap from data to claim concerns an
assumption about the world, namely that what is true of the
members of an examined class (all units of discourse having
XYZ characteristics) will be true of a hitherto unexamined
item (this unit of discourse) having such characteristics.
(See Brockriede and Ehninger.) However, such arguments only
appear to be substantive because the objects concerned are
not objects in the natural world. The relationship between natural objects and their qualities is a necessary one; the relationship between verbal objects and their qualities, on the other hand, is a conventional one (Olson 309). These assigned or conventional qualities represent values. Defining a sentence fragment as an error is a value judgment, whereas defining a horse as a mammal is not, because the relationship between the horse and its mammalian qualities is a necessary one. As Aristotle says, "There are few facts of the 'necessary' type that can form the basis of rhetorical syllogisms. Most of the things about which we make decisions, and into which therefore we inquire, present us with alternative possibilities. For it is about our actions that we deliberate and inquire, and all our actions have a contingent character; hardly any of them are determined by necessity" (1332).

The direction that a rhetorical argument takes is determined by the values implicit in the premises. These values are of interest with regard to teacher commentary because what constitutes a value for one person may constitute an item of knowledge or information for another. For example, a teacher may act in writing commentary in the light of the values has has. In reading a comment, a student may perceive the values implicit in it. If he shares these same values, he may be moved to act because he wishes to gain
the good or avoid the evil that such values imply. If he does not share the same values, that does not mean that he cannot perceive the values implicit in the comment. It merely means that the values are for him a piece of information about the person who wrote the comment, rather than a motive for action.

For example, say that a teacher marks a **there** for a **their** as a spelling error. He points out or informs the student of this error because a set of conventions that he values specifies that **their** is the correct spelling of the possessive pronoun. When the student reads this comment, he may or may not decide to correct the error, depending on whether or not he also values the observance of those conventions. If he does not value it, or if he does not value it sufficiently to make the effort of correcting the effort seem worthwhile, he may not correct the error. But even if he does not, he may still recognize that the teacher values such conventions. The teacher's comment then becomes a piece of information about the teacher: the student knows that the teacher values correct spelling. The student can use this piece of information as data or evidence in constructing a rationale for whether or not to correct the error, a piece of evidence that will be considered in conjunction with other factors, such as the cost in time and effort in relation to the possible gain (Shaughnessy 123-128).
A comment that conveys a value judgment that is received merely as an item of information is unlikely to produce action or change in the hearer because action, as Perelman points out, is generated by the creation of adherence to values rather than values per se. The aim of the type of argument in which informative comments are used is to create not adherence but thought or cognition. The teacher discourses upon the objects of his thought. However, "discourse is an act which, like every other act, can become an object of thought" (Perelman 189). A teacher's comment can thus become an object of thought for the student. Furthermore, "while the speaker is arguing, the hearer in turn tends to argue on his own account about the speech in order to take his own stand, to determine the credibility he ought to attach to it. The hearer who listens to the arguments not only understands them in his own way, but also creates new arguments of his own, which are usually unexpressed but which nevertheless intervene to modify the final results of the argumentation" (189). The arguments of the speaker create thought; the arguments constructed by the hearer create adherence.

Argumentation develops and proceeds in a given direction because of the values held by an audience (Perelman "New" 5). Therefore, in order to analyze the effectiveness of informative commentary used for argumentive purposes, we must
consider the rhetorical situation in those terms. We mentioned in Chapter Two that the rhetorical situation of informative commentary is analogous in some ways to judicial situations in which litigants argue before a judge and jury. The litigants attempt to establish the facts of the situation, and the judge and jury decide which version of the facts is true and whether or not that account of events is in accordance with the law. In rendering their judgments, they apply the rule of justice by deciding what is just (i.e., what persons and acts count as equals) and how justice is to be done (i.e., how the law is to be interpreted and administered).

If we turn from this model to the situation of teacher commentary, we can see that, from one perspective, the teacher plays the role of prosecutor and the student the accused. The teacher cites the evidence (the paper) and the law (the handbook) to support his claim of the student's guilt. But who are the judge and jury? In this case, the role can be filled in at least three different ways. It can be filled by the teacher himself, which puts him in the interesting position of playing the roles of both prosecutor and judge, a situation that hardly seems fair. Insofar as the teacher's comments are records of errors that are used in calculating a grade, and insofar as grades are administrative rather than instructional matters, the role of judge can also
be filled by any member of the empirical audience who happens to take an interest in the grade—not just the student, but also his parents, school administrators, prospective employers, etc.

From still a third perspective, the role can be filled by the student himself. When these comments are intended as examples of what a student should or shouldn't do (that is, if they are intended to persuade the student to alter his behavior), the student is placed in the curious position of being both defendant and judge. In order to change his future behavior, he must be convinced of the error of his past behavior. Thus he must judge the arguments asserted or implied by the teacher's comments. As Aristotle puts it, "... of the three elements in speech-making—speaker, subject, and person addressed—it is the last one, the hearer, that determines a speech's end and object. The hearer must be either a judge, with a decision to make about things past or future, or an observer. A member of an assembly decides about future events, a juryman about past events; while those who merely decide on the orator's skill are observers" (1335). The fact that a speechmaker addresses a group and a teacher an audience of one makes no difference to the audience-based nature of the argumentation: "The use of persuasive speech is to lead to decisions.... This is so even if one is addressing a single person and urging him
to do or not to do something, as when we scold a man for his conduct or try to change his views; the single person is as much your 'judge' as if he were one of many; we may say, without qualification, that anyone is your judge whom you have to persuade" (1408). This is true of epideictic discourse as well: "...the 'onlookers' for whom such a speech is put together are treated as judges of it" (1409).

In reviewing the evidence of his comments and deciding on a grade, a teacher is playing the role of judge. In reading a teacher's comments and deciding on a future course of action, a student is "judging the judge." As Perelman notes, "by attributing a certain value to a judgment, we are actually making an appraisal of its author" (298). In reading a teacher's comments, a student constructs an argument concerning the teacher as well as the content of the teacher's comments. What is the purpose of this argument?

In forensic argumentation, a great deal depends upon the distinction between an agent and his acts. For instance, a prosecutor may attempt to dissociate alleged illegal acts from a defendant whom he knows to possess money or influence or good reputation in order to gain a conviction, because he wants the judge and jury to concentrate on the act, not the man. The defense, on the other hand, will expend just as much energy in associating such an agent with his acts in order to exonerate him or to claim mitigating circumstances.
The judge and jury must do both: they must dissociate the agent from the act in order to make a just decision on the legality of the act, but they must then associate the agent with the act in order to impute responsibility or blame. In determining legality, act and agent are dissociated (i.e., acts are legal or illegal, not people), whereas in determining morality, act and agent are associated in order that moral responsibility can be assumed. Teachers go through similar associative and dissociative processes in marking and grading papers. What we may fail to notice, however, is that the student also goes through these processes in reacting to a teacher's comments. The difference, however, is that the process is exactly reversed. Whereas the teacher dissociates the student from his acts in order to apply the rule of justice fairly, a student must associate the teacher with his acts in order for the ethical or authoritative appeal of the teacher to exert its force. Whereas the teacher associates the student with his act in order to hold him responsible for it, the student must dissociate the teacher from his act in order that the act can be seen as representing law, tradition, or precedent rather than the teacher's personal values.

As Perelman explains, associating a person with an act creates a kind of stability. Acts assume consistency and coherence by virtue of their relation to a person. When a
student constructs an argument in which he associates the teacher's act (his comment) with the teacher as a person, he does so not in order to hold the teacher responsible for the comment. Rather, a student's interpretation of the act in terms of the agent is made in order to guess how the agent will behave in the future. If an act is perceived as characteristic of a person, it can be used as an indicator of what the person is likely to do in the future. Students, like teachers, assume a kind of inertia: that people will continue to act as they have acted in the past unless something happens to give them sufficient justification for changing their course. Teacher comments tell students what is characteristic of this teacher; they tell the student how this teacher marks papers and thus how papers are likely to be marked in the future. Such information is just that: information. Information concerning a teacher's acts will be significant to a student only if he knows the intention behind them.

Teachers often wonder why students continue to make the same errors even after they have been apprised of them, sometimes more than once. To understand this phenomenon, Aristotle says that we must study the nature of wrongdoing. The question is why a student would commit an error voluntarily if he know he would be punished for it sooner or later, either by having his grade lowered in the class, or by being subjected to negative social sanctions outside the
class. Every action, according to Aristotle, is the result of one of seven causes: chance, nature, and compulsion are the causes of involuntary actions; habit, reasoning, anger, and appetite are the causes of voluntary actions. The written acts for which teachers hold students accountable must, if their treatment is to be fair, be considered voluntary.

People undertake to perform voluntary actions for one simple reason, according to Aristotle: because these actions seem good or pleasant. What is good he counts as "escape from evils or apparent evils and the exchange of a greater evil for a less"; what is pleasant he counts as "escape from painful or apparently painful things and the exchange of a greater pain for a less" (1361).

Doing what gives us pleasure is easy, whereas the painful is not easy: "... all acts of concentration, strong effort, and strain are necessarily painful" (1362). Aristotle attributes pain in part to departures from whatever is normal: habit, he says, is pleasant. Thus any effort to depart from habitual behavior involves some pain, which most people will try to avoid. This simple behavioristic fact alone is enough to account for the supposedly mystifying behavior of most student responses to teacher comments. If students commit wrongs in their writing, "they must themselves suppose that the thing can be done, and done by them: either that they can do it without being found out, or
that if they are found out they can escape being punished, or that if they are punished the disadvantage will be less than the gain for themselves" (1366). What then is to be gained? The opportunity to continue in behavior that is normal and therefore pleasant. And what is painful? The departure from whatever is normal and therefore pleasant. In terms of student writing, habit may not be the cause of error, but it may be the reason for a student's persisting in it.

As if these very basic observations on human psychology were not enough, Aristotle adds a veritable encyclopedia of situations in which a wrongdoer may feel justified in doing wrong. Some of these situations that may be relevant to student behavior are as follows. (Notice how the use of the "you" creates a sense of identification between the speaker and the audience, in contrast to the section quoted above, where the use of "they" creates a certain distance between the audience and the malefactor.)

"You may feel that even if you are found out you can stave off a trial, or have it postponed, or corrupt your judges; or that even if you are sentenced you can avoid paying damages, or can at least postpone doing so for a long time; or that you are so badly off that you have nothing to lose. You may feel that the gain to be got by wrongdoing is great or certain or immediate, and that the penalty is small
or uncertain or distant. . . . You may consider your crimes as bringing you solid profit, while their punishment is nothing more than being called bad names. . . . You may be encouraged by having often escaped detection or punishment already; or by having often tried and failed; . . . You may feel able to make it appear that your crime was due to chance, or to necessity, or to natural causes, or to habit: in fact, to put it generally, as if you had failed to do right rather than actually done wrong. You may be able to trust other people to judge you equitably. . . . You may be encouraged by having a particularly good reputation, because that will save you from being suspected: or by having a particularly bad one, because nothing you are likely to do will make it worse" (1367-1368).

Although these examples constitute what we might today call "rationalizations," we can see that they are examples of certain types of reasoning. The fact that the reasoning is unacceptable and that the wrongdoer will be held accountable for his reasoning means that the actions that might follow from such reasoning are to be considered voluntary actions. The wrongdoer is punished because he has reasoned wrongly. Similarly, teachers must assume that the acts of students are voluntary acts if they expect to hold students responsible for the acts that they have performed in the past.
We make decisions about our future course of action based upon what we know of the past. Since forensics deals with the past and deliberation with the future, Aristotle considers the enthymeme to be the type of argument most suited to forensic discourse, whereas argument by example is best suited for deliberative discourse. We have seen how informative commentary can function as a type of enthymeme in arguments constructed by teachers. We pointed out how the success of these arguments in persuading students to change their writing behavior is dependent upon the manner in which the argument is reconstructed as grounds for his action, the teacher's comment being only one element in the construction of an overall case. Other elements include the student's knowledge and values. We pointed out how students may use teachers' comments as evidence in these arguments, in which case the comments function not as acts of communication by the teacher but as facts about the teacher. These facts then become constraints upon the student's action, or, as Aristotle would say, non-technical or "inartistic" elements in persuasion having the same status as laws, witnesses, contracts, oaths, etc. These facts, like all facts used in argumentation, are expected by the student to have certain consequences, and the student's interpretation of the comments depends upon what he sees those consequences to be.
The relationship between facts and their consequences is sometimes confused with the relationship between means and their ends, since both imply a kind of sequence. However, the kind of sequentiaity implied by facts and consequences is logical, whereas that of means and ends is temporal. Insofar as discourse itself is purposive or intentional, it can be seen as involving a relationship of means and ends, and the type of commentary that deals with means and ends is deliberative. Voluntary action, as we have just seen, is governed by what people perceive as good or conducive to their happiness and well-being. Therefore, discourse that attempts to influence future action must concern itself with goods or happiness and the means for their attainment. If a student is to follow the advice offered by a piece of deliberative commentary, he must perceive the consequences as being in some way good.

In writing, students employ certain means in order to gain ends they consider to be desirable. Likewise, the comments teachers write are means to ends that teachers consider desirable. These ends or purposes are called by various names, among them clarity, coherence, correctness, conciseness, etc.—in short, the qualities that one would attach to a text one considers good. In writing comments that advise students as to their future action, teachers imply that following their advice will enable the student to
gain one of these goods. So if a student does not follow the advice, it must be for one of two reasons: either the effort involved is not perceived as being worth the benefit received, as we have just seen; or the end is not seen as good by the student.

What things then are seen as good? "Now we are applying the term 'good' to that which is desirable for its own sake and not for the sake of something else; to that at which all things aim; to what they would choose if they could acquire understanding and practical wisdom; and to that which tends to produce or preserve such goods, or is always accompanied by them. Moreover, that for the sake of which things are done is the end (an end being that for the sake of which all else is done), and for each individual that thing is a good which fulfills these conditions in regard to himself" (Aristotle 1346). The question is whether the ends that teachers encourage students to act toward are desirable in themselves. Although coherence and clarity are often good things, they are not always good things; their goodness usually derives from some other good for which they are the means of attainment. Incoherence and opacity in a piece of discourse may also be good if they serve some higher good such as instruction or entertainment. If students therefore do not act according to the ends recognized as good by
teachers, it may be because they do not connect these ends with the higher ends from which their goodness is derived.

In writing deliberative commentary, teachers try to establish certain connections between the past, the present, and the future. The past has left them with a set of judgments concerning a perceived reality. The teacher's job is "to establish a solidarity between accepted judgments and others which one wishes to promote" concerning this reality (Perelman 261). The solidarity one creates in one's discourse "serves to overcome a resistance, to bring about acceptance of what one does not want in order to obtain what one wants" (262). The resistance is the sense of inertia or normalcy that one attaches to the status quo and that places the burden of proof on whoever wishes to alter an existing state of affairs. The argument of deliberative discourse relies on establishing one of the sequential relations mentioned above: of fact to consequence or of means to end.

Arguments linking fact to consequence or means to end are effective in persuading someone to action only insofar as some positive or negative value is attached to the consequence or end. For example, a teacher may note the lack of a transition between two paragraphs in a student paper because he attaches a positive value to a consequence of proper transitions, namely coherence. And he may also comment on a lack of coherence in, say, an informative paper
because he attaches a positive value to a consequence of coherence, namely expeditious or efficient communication. Such an argument is essentially pragmatic; it motivates the reader by offering him success or gain.

The problem with the pragmatic argument as a basis for verbal action is, as Perelman notes, that a single act can have many consequences, some of them entirely unlooked-for, and a single end can be gained by a multiplicity of means (271). For instance, a teacher may advise a student in the name of coherence to supply a transitional word, but the mere supplying of that word is no guarantee that coherence will be gained, since coherence, a quality usually assigned to a piece of discourse as a whole, is usually the result of a multiplicity of causes. Another example may be more familiar to teachers who encourage revision. Such teachers may make suggestions on early drafts, and students may follow them to the letter; yet the students may be very unhappy with the grades they receive on their papers. Their reasoning is that if they did everything they were told to do, they should receive a high grade. The success or gain that was promised, perhaps implicitly, by the pragmatic argument of the commentary never materialized, and they feel that the effort expended was wasted, since the value attached to the final product is expressed in terms of a grade.
However, as Hansen points out, the mere fact that a student revises a paper is no guarantee that the paper will improve in terms of the grade assigned, and for this reason many teachers and students alike feel that revision is, as Hansen's title suggests, "a waste of time." And it is a waste of time if the benefit gained is measured solely in terms of the grade the final product is awarded. The value of revision might lie elsewhere, in whether a student has made some progress in overcoming some recurrent problem, for example. The fact that progress has been made in one area such as spelling or punctuation may not be reflected in the grade at all, especially if the student's performance in the paper before revision was really substandard. A student's grade is unlikely to be raised merely for bringing his spelling and punctuation into line with conventional usage, but the student may have made considerable gains nonetheless. Furthermore, "if the value of the means is to be enhanced by the end, the means must obviously be effective; but this does not mean that it has to be the best" (Perelman 277). 

Consider the anecdote of the teacher who told her students that the purpose of the introduction to a paper was to get the reader's attention. Upon receiving a set of papers from one student, she discovered that each paper began with a sentence containing a curse word. When she asked the student why he did this, his answer was that using a curse word was
the best way he knew to get a teacher's attention. This anecdote illustrates another important point about commentary that advises students about means and ends: an effective means is not always the best means. Determining the best means is clearly a matter of audience and purpose. Both teacher and student must be in agreement about the end sought before the best means can be determined, and even if this agreement occurs, the best means is still a matter that concerns an overall case made about a particular text rather than any single factor that might be applicable to many cases. Determining the best means involves a combination of judgments about the speaker's purpose, the audience, the occasion that prompted the discourse, and the context in which the discourse is interpreted.

The effectiveness of informative and deliberative commentary, in summary, depends on several factors, including the logic of the arguments implied by the commentary, the values represented in the premises of the arguments, and the relationships between arguments. Teacher commentary, like most discourse whose intent is to persuade, involves many arguments of a quasi-logical kind. These arguments function differently from truly demonstrative arguments, even though their form may be similar. The purpose of demonstrative argumentation is to lead the reader to some necessary and inescapable conclusion. The purpose of
quasi-logical or enthymemetic argumentation is to engage the reader in the reasoning process so that it appears that the reader has constructed the argument instead of the writer. This purpose can only be accomplished when the reader possesses the knowledge required for the completion of the rhetorical syllogism. If, as readers of teacher commentary, students do not possess such knowledge, then they cannot participate in the reasoning process, and the purpose of the enthymemetic argument cannot be accomplished.

Even if students do possess the required knowledge, however, that does not mean that they will necessarily be persuaded by the argument unless they also possess the values implied in the premises. Just because a student knows that a teacher values correctness, that does not mean that he too values correctness. Also, many times the value that is placed on a particular feature or quality of writing is for the student a relative value. That is, he may not see correctness as a good in itself, but as a good that is instrumental in gaining some other good, such as getting a good grade or a particular job. As an instrumental good, correctness must compete with other things the student values. Because of competing interests and values, a student’s decision to change some feature of his writing is unlikely to be the result of any one particular comment or argument implied by that comment. Instead, the decision to
act will be based on an overall case that the student constructs for himself, a case in which competing claims will be weighed according to the values the student possesses.
CHAPTER SIX: COMMENTS ON FORM

We have been concentrating thus far on teacher commentary that addresses isolated features of a text, primarily mechanical errors as they figure in the enthymemes of informative commentary and the examples of deliberative commentary. We must now consider comments that relate to larger units of discourse or to the discourse as a whole, comments that concern, for the most part, form and style. Although form and style can mean many things to many people, in the argot of teacher commentary they usually boil down to organization, sentence structure, and word choice. (See the sections on form and style in Tate and Corbett's The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook or Winterowd's Contemporary Rhetoric, for example.) Comments on organization usually concern paragraph divisions and sequencing; comments on sentence structure usually concern length, variety, and the use of passive or wordy constructions; and comments on word choice usually concern vocabulary and usage.

Comments addressing form and style can be informative, deliberative, or epideictic in nature: whichever form they take, they involve the values associated with that type of
discourse. It was noted that the values implied by informative commentary related to what is considered obligatory according to the rules of grammar and usage; the values of deliberative commentary to what are considered desirable ends by a particular group, discipline, or culture; and the values of epideictic to the ends intrinsic to the discourse. This chapter will address some of the problems teachers might have in identifying and commenting on form in student papers, and the consequences of treating formal features as evaluative criteria.

Literary critics who are interested in form often begin with the concrete instance of the text and work backward to the formal pattern or "equation" of the work. Aristotle felt that form was closely related to purpose: the "cause [of objects], in the sense of their 'end', is their 'figure' or 'form'--and that is the formula expressing the essential nature of each of them" (Aristotle 524). In this passage, Aristotle is saying that what causes something to be what it is is ultimately its purpose rather than whatever it is made of (its "material" cause). The form of something is the principle by which the material is organized; this principle generates a set of relations among the materials and structures which make up the object. (See also Langer 238-239 for a discussion of form as equation.) In commenting on student papers, teachers also begin with the concrete
instance of the text, but instead of working backward in an attempt to infer the formal pattern that manifests itself in the surface features of the text, teachers tend to work outward, comparing the text to an external pattern, model, or paradigm. This model is often based on one of the four major rhetorical modes (exposition, description, narration, argumentation) or one of their subsidiaries (comparison, classification, definition, etc.).

This difference in procedure stems from the fact that, while both teachers and critics analyze texts, they generally have different purposes and operate from different sets of assumptions about the texts they analyze. When a critic studies a text, he assumes the existence of some underlying form, no matter how complex or inaccessible this form may seem to be. Furthermore, the critic believes that discovering the form of a work is worth the intellectual effort that is sometimes required for its elucidation. Once the form of a work is discovered, the work can be compared or grouped with other works of the same type to suit the critic’s purposes—historical, linguistic, psychological, etc.

A teacher’s assumptions may differ from a critic’s in several respects. First, many teachers (Mina Shaughnessy being one notable exception) often assume that the form of a student text is erroneous, incomplete, or entirely lacking
(which it may indeed be, but that, I think, is a conclusion to be reached as a result of a process of analysis and comparison, not an assumption to be adopted at the outset). Second, when student texts are grouped and compared—either with each other or with model texts—comparison is usually done for purposes of evaluation rather than analysis. That is, the teacher’s purpose is not to further our understanding of these texts in the same way that the critic’s is. And finally, evaluation seems to take precedence over analysis because some teachers seem to assume that student texts do not repay close scrutiny in the same way that other texts do; their intrinsic value is assumed to be less. Both of these assumptions, I contend, are mistaken. No piece of discourse can be without form and still be discourse, and the form that a piece of discourse has must be discovered before an evaluation of it can occur.

We have discussed two ways that the effectiveness of a piece of discourse, whether it be teacher comments or student writing, can be assessed: according to the writer’s intention or according to the effects of the discourse on an audience. When critics’ attempt to infer a formal principle, pattern, or equation from a piece of discourse, they are in a sense attempting to discover the writer’s intention, since form and intention are closely related in what Aristotle calls the "final cause" of an object. A text can be
evaluated according to how well it fulfills this governing purpose. Empirical studies, on the other hand, attempt to assess the effectiveness of a text by "measuring" subsequent changes in an audience. Some examples of this type of assessment have been given in the review of research on teacher commentary. Other studies, including those that are usually called "rhetorical criticism," attempt to assess the potential rather than the actual effect of a text on an audience through an examination of the rhetorical devices and stylistic techniques that are used in it.

In teaching, problems can arise because of a potential confusion between the principles of composition one teaches (i.e., the principles by which texts are generated) and the principles by which one evaluates texts. Intention or purpose is one principle by which texts are generated, and many composition textbooks concern themselves with a writer's intention, including both the traditional modal texts and what Connors calls "thesis texts," such as McCrimmon's *Writing with a Purpose*. The writer's intention is expressed in a text's form. When a teacher reads a text, he may discover its form and comment on it in a way that is intended to help the student better accomplish his purpose (i.e., "What is the central purpose of this paper? Does what you have done here serve this purpose? Does it serve it well, or would some other way be better?") But sometimes this sort of
intention can be supplanted by another: evaluation. That is, instead of discovering the text's form through an examination of what is actually there, the teacher may look for formal features that he expects to be there, certain structural patterns and certain stylistic choices that are generally associated with conventional forms. He looks for the presence or absence of these features because his intention is to evaluate. What are essentially descriptive features are thus set up as evaluative criteria. The goodness of the text is then assessed according to the extent to which it possesses these features. This method of evaluation might be called "formal" in the sense that it is formulaic and in the sense that its purpose is to evaluate form itself rather than the expression of that form in a particular text.

Formal evaluation is not a particularly difficult procedure. One merely specifies a set of characteristics one wishes a text to possess and asks whether or to what degree a given text possesses them. The only hitch is that the features specified must be describable or, as Ross Winterowd says, "point-at-able" ("Style" 257). If the features are not describable, the evaluation is tautological. For instance, the fourteen lines of a sonnet are describable; "good organization" is not. To state as an evaluative criterion that an essay must have "good organization" is tautological
because the goodness of the organization is not describable. The goodness of a text's organization is a conclusion that is arrived at through the process of evaluation. Therefore, to say that a text is good because it has good organization is merely to say that "What's good is good."

The problem with the formal criteria used by teachers, moreover, is that a text's possession of the features specified by these criteria is no guarantee of the text's worth; possession of the specified set of features merely guarantees that the text belongs to the category that the features generate. As every writing teacher knows, a student paper can have all the basic features that textbooks cite as necessary to a good essay—grammatical correctness, organization, a clearly stated thesis—and still be a bad essay. Such criteria provide necessary but not sufficient conditions for a complete evaluation of the worth of a text. It is not enough to say that a text must exhibit X, Y, and Z features to receive an A; the text must exhibit X, Y, and Z features and also be good. This obviously presents problems for teachers in assigning grades, but even more important is the fact that it presents problems for students who are writing papers. Presenting students with lists of "judgmental criteria" and orienting comments toward those criteria may make it easier for teachers to justify the grades they give, but it doesn't necessarily help students to
write better; indeed, it may make their writing worse if it takes their attention away from the matter of their own intended meaning or purpose.

Where then does a text's goodness come from, if not from the sum of its describable characteristics? To answer this question, we must consider the form/matter distinction upon which most teachers implicitly base their teaching practices. Many teachers assume that there is a "teachable" and a "gradable" element in writing apart from its content, an element that is variously seen as a skill, an art, or even a science. Indeed, some teachers think that they are supposed to ignore the content of the writing altogether because they are not supposed to let their personal opinions (i.e., whether or not they agree with what the student is saying) interfere with the evaluative process with which they are primarily concerned. Having eliminated content, teachers may think that they are addressing form, when in fact they may be addressing something else entirely.

To illustrate, let us consider one aspect of writing that many teachers emphasize: organization. "Translated into terms of the composition class, 'form' becomes 'organization' and brings with it overtones of outlining; orders of paragraph development; beginnings, middles, and endings" (Winterowd "Form" 163). Organization is used as a criterion for evaluating papers because it is assumed that
organization is a describable feature. Some confusion arises, however, when a teacher comments that an essay has "poor organization." Does this comment mean that the essay has no organization, that the organization it has is bad, or that the organization it has does not match the organization specified by a model or paradigm to which it is being compared? In a sense, no piece of discourse lacks organization as long as it has features whose arrangement can be described. What most teachers mean by "poor organization" is that the organization that the text has does not match the organization of the model to which it is being compared.

The same might be said of form. It is difficult to see how a piece of discourse having substance of any kind can lack form. Ross Winterowd points out, as we mentioned earlier, that "no discourse can be totally formless and still be discourse" (Winterowd "Form" 165). Keith Fort agrees that "all expression has form," adding that "the choice is between forms, not between form and formlessness" (Fort 638).

Incredible as it may seem to teachers, an apparently chaotic student essay does possess form; its lack of congruence with conventional or easily recognizable forms, however, can make the teacher's job very difficult. Nevertheless, a teacher must determine the form of a student essay if he expects the student to make changes in it, because the question of what something is must precede the question of what it should be.
As Aristotle says, all change is a moving from something to something. Before we ask a student to make changes, we should be sure what we are changing; otherwise we can never be sure of the quality of the change we have effected. Just because a student makes a change that brings his essay more into line with a conventional form doesn't mean that the change is improvement. It depends on what the student's intention was in the first place.

What then is the "form" we are seeking and how do we recognize it? Kenneth Burke describes form as a matter of psychology, having to do with the interaction of the writer's intention and the reader's expectation. Form is logically prior to its expression in a piece of discourse:

Thus, though forms need not be prior to experience, they certainly are prior to the work of art exemplifying them. Psychology and philosophy may decide whether they are innate or resultant; so far as the work of art is concerned they simply are: when one turns to the production or enjoyment of a work of art, a formal equipment is already present, and the effects of art are involved in its utilization. Such ultimate minor forms as contrast, comparison, metaphor, series, bathos, chiasmus, are based upon our modes of understanding anything; they are implicit in the process of abstraction and generalization by which we think" (Burke "Counter" 141-142).
Form, then, is what we can infer from the effects upon us of the writer's choices. Form cannot be directly perceived; to apprehend it, we must become passive, allowing the text to work upon us and listening to our own responses, or passions, if you will. What we perceive is the writer's style, the actual choices that the writer made; these choices are governed, however, by form, the conceptual pattern which they presuppose. Using a linguistic analogy derived from Noam Chomsky's *Language and Mind*, Winterowd likens our perception of form to "the apprehension of an underlying set of relationships [the "equation" or deep structure] that, for each work, are invariable and basic, but that are 'played off' against a variety of possible surface realizations" (Winterowd "Form" 165). Winterowd feels that our understanding of meaning at the discourse level is analogous to our understanding of meaning at the sentence level: both require the apprehension of form: "Sentence grammar indicates more and more forcefully that perception of meaning comes about through the interoperation of two concepts: 'deep structures' and grammatical transformations that bring about surface structures" ("Form" 166). Thus, in saying that sentences with the same meaning must have the same form, Winterowd would say that "same form" means "same deep structure." The following sentences, for example, have different surface
structures, but, according to Winterowd, they have the same deep structure and hence the same form:

(1) That he wears gloves is funny.
(2) For him to wear gloves is funny.
(3) His wearing gloves is funny. (257)

The form of the sentence is a matter of intended meaning; the writer's choice of surface structure is a matter of style.

We can see (or perhaps feel) the form underlying the three sentences above, and we can trace the transformation from deep structure to surface features. Can we use an analogous procedure for discourse beyond the sentence level? Kenneth Burke attempts to identify the basic forms of discourse in *Counter-Statement*. He begins by defining form as "an arousal and fulfillment of desires" (124). Thus his concept of form has both a synchronic and a diachronic dimension. Though form may be prior to its exemplification, form is made manifest only through the unfolding of a work through time. Thus, "a work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence" (124).

Form is therefore more closely associated with the discursive nature of texts rather than with any particular feature or features. However, the transformation from deep structure to surface representation is accomplished not by texts but by writers and readers. "A form is a way of
experiencing; and such a form is made available in art when, by the use of specific subject matter, it enables us to experience in this way" (Burke 143). Form is in fact a kind of rhetorical appeal to the reader: "Form, having to do with the creation and gratification of needs, is 'correct' in so far as it gratifies the need which it creates. The appeal of form in this sense is obvious: form is the appeal" (138). In a sense, form is similar to a capacity or a faculty that is manifest only when it is in use: "the formal aspects of art appeal in that they exercise the formal potentialities of the reader" (142). The formal properties of the work must in some way correspond to the formal capacities of the reader, that is the "ways of experiencing" that the reader possesses. Burke lists five such ways of experiencing: "progressive form (subdivided into syllogistic and qualitative progression), repetitive form, conventional form, and minor or incidental forms" (124).

These forms, Burke notes, can overlap, intermingle, and conflict, and any given piece of discourse may contain several of these forms. Because they are interrelated, it is not necessary to appeal to any one type of form in order to arrive at a satisfactory explanation of a given work. The important thing "is not to confine the explanation to one principle, but to formulate sufficient principles to make an explanation possible" (129). Burke feels that the five
principles above are sufficient for the explanation of the form of any work.

In noting the possible conflict of forms, we at last arrive at a method of evaluation that is neither tautological nor purely descriptive. This method is truly "rhetorical" in that it involves all three elements in a communication situation: writer, text, and audience. The writer's intention in producing a text and the formal features of the text produced are seen in relation to the appeal exerted on an audience (Crowley 90). Once we recognize the pattern that has been suggested in a given work, we can tell whether the work succeeds in fulfilling the audience expectations suggested by that particular form. If a work begins by suggesting a syllogistic progression and ends with a repetitive form, then the two forms are in conflict, and the work exerts conflicting appeals. (Burke 129-130).

In student compositions, the conflict of forms can appear in quite subtle ways that are often difficult for a teacher to explain to a student in a written comment. Because of this, and also because formal matters often appear to be matters of content, a student's problems in this area may not be addressed at all. To illustrate, let us consider a rather oversimplified example. Suppose a student is assigned to write a descriptive essay about a person he knows, description being one of the modes of discourse
discussed in traditional composition textbooks, the other modes being exposition, narration, and argumentation. Since the assignment does little in the way of creating an exigency to which the student can construct an appropriate response, the student creates one for himself. He decides to describe his friend Denise as an example of "the perfect redhead," intending to show that Denise has all the characteristics traditionally associated with redheads. Thus, the student's composition suggests a syllogistic form like the following:

1. All redheads are hot-tempered.
2. Denise is a redhead.
3. Therefore Denise must be hot-tempered.

The argument, however, is not intended to prove anything dialectically; its appeal is intended to be enthymemic. That is, the reader is supposed to supply the maxim that all redheads are hot-tempered and to recognize Denise as a type with which he is familiar. (This type of rhetorical purpose seems to be more common to oral discourse than to written; it is in any case a staple among stand-up comics.) The student begins with a description of Denise and then proceeds to add other examples of redheaded girls with hot tempers. The student feels he must do this because he has been enjoined to "support your main idea with specific examples." The student gets the paper back with the comment that his examples are weak because they do not support his thesis. He is confused
because he thought he was doing a good job of giving specific examples.

The problem is a conflict of forms: the student started with one form and then switched to another, possibly because of prior instruction that concerned extrinsic criteria ("A good essay is well-supported with concrete examples"). The student's attention was diverted from his original purpose, for which a syllogistic form was appropriate, to some extrinsic purpose relating to pedagogical constraints concerning classes or categories of texts. The purpose of a syllogistic form is to arrive at a conclusion about one member of a class (Denise, not redheaded girls). The purpose of the inductive or repetitive form is to suggest a conclusion about a type, category, or class (redheaded girls, not Denise). The form and the purpose of the discourse are thus related. Since the argument is enthymemic, the audience is supposed to already know the characteristics of the class. Supplying more examples of members of the class is superfluous, since it merely tells the audience what it already knows.

The point for composition teachers is that the form of the essay must be apprehended before appropriate commentary can be given. A comment that informs the student that his examples do not support his thesis may be true, but it does not provide an adequate diagnosis of the situation which is
to be changed or remedied. In the example above, the form of the essay cannot serve its purpose of fulfilling the reader's expectations. If the student is to learn from this writing experience, it is imperative that he make an attempt to follow through with whatever intention or purpose he settles on, but he cannot do this unless he is allowed to revise his paper in the light of commentary that brings to his attention what he has actually done.

A conflict of forms may exist not only within a single essay, but also between two different pieces of discourse. This is especially true in cases where one piece of discourse is written in response to another, as in writing classes where students use readers or anthologies as their sources of subject matter. Let us consider another example that illustrates something about the relationship of the form of one piece of discourse to another. Say that a student reads an essay by Richard Robinson, an avowed atheist, who uses a syllogistic form to arrive at the conclusion that religious faith is a vice. Robinson's argument looks something like this:

(1) Believing things without evidence is a vice.
(2) Religious faith according to St. Paul's definition is believing things without evidence.
(3) Therefore religious faith is a vice.
The student is asked to write an argumentive essay responding to Robinson's in which she agrees or disagrees with his argument. The student writes an inductive essay listing examples of cases in which her faith was rewarded and concluding that these examples are evidence for the existence of God. The teacher reading this essay is tempted, like the Arkansas farmer being asked directions by the stranger, to say "You can't get there from here." Putting aside for the moment that the student's essay begs the question of the existence of God, the teacher should first realize that the student doesn't know which form is appropriate for which purpose. Moreover, the student does not know that, in the world of written discourse, as in oral discourse, one form evokes or suggests another, that an ethical argument, which is usually syllogistic, cannot be answered by an inductive argument, which takes a repetitive form. No amount of repetition of examples is going to change the audience's participation in the logical progression of Robinson's argument, nor the expectations that have been set up as a result of this participation. And change is what we seek in writing. The argument of the student above cannot effect a change the beliefs, attitudes, or actions of a reader of the original essay because the essay did not set up any expectations in the reader concerning the existence of God. If the student's essay does not address the expectations of
the reader, it cannot be successful no matter how clear, correct, or well-organized it is.

The teacher, on the other hand, must recognize that the choice of form is to some degree an ideological choice, that it reflects what the writer and his audience desire or value as members of a particular culture (Burke, *Counter-Statement* 146-147). In American culture, both the belief in God and faith in reason are positive values, but these values can conflict, and so can the forms in which these values are expressed. The student above is not impressed by the subtle ironies of Robinson's essay (that the atheist is presenting what is essentially a moral argument) nor by the formal appeal of his reasoning. To the student, the important thing is whether or not God exists, not whether any unfortunate logical consequences issue from her religious belief.

In order for the student to complete the assignment, she must first recognize the syllogistic form of the essay to which she is responding. If she decides that she agrees with the writer's conclusion, she will presumably address one of the premises of the syllogism, giving additional examples or reasons in its support. If, on the other hand, she disagrees with the writer, she must still recognize the form of the writer's argument in order to attack one or both of its premises, presumably by citing exceptions to the writer's general proposition (cases in which faith is a virtue) or by
taking issue with his choice of terms or definitions (what does "vice" mean?). It is to be hoped that the student will learn such strategies in a good classroom discussion of the essay prior to writing about it, but if this is not the case, then the teacher has no choice but to address them in written commentary if he wishes the student to understand what she did wrong.

An examination of the published examples of teacher commentary reveals, however, that scarcely any of it addresses formal matters. Most commentary that concerns the text as a whole addresses style, that is, the features over which the student is presumed to have some choice, rather than the intentions which would limit those choices. Perhaps this is because the discovery of intention is often relegated to the realm of heuristics or invention, whose activities are often presented (at least in textbooks) as being appropriate to the prewriting stage, rather than to the stage of revision. Teacher comments that do address form usually relate to the conventional form to which the student's essay is being compared, rather than to the individual form of the student's essay.

Conventional forms are in fact often used as substitutes for heuristics or prewriting activities. With very few exceptions, most within the last few years, composition textbooks tend to encourage teachers to teach conventional
forms prior to the students' writing in them. Sometimes the five-paragraph essay is presented as a conventional form (e.g., in Sheridan Baker's *The Practical Stylist*); sometimes the "rhetorical modes" are presented as conventional forms. In this type of pedagogy, the form is chosen first, and the subject matter is adapted to the form. What reasons might teachers have for teaching form as a temporal rather than as a logical priority? Many teachers think that knowing the form in advance will help students to be better organized and that this will help them to write better essays. However, Janet Emig's well-known study, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*, revealed no correlation between the presence of such planning procedures, whether formal or informal, and the grades papers received on their organization. Emig's studies of professional writers also confirmed this finding: among professionals, seldom was a formal scheme a necessary prerequisite to producing a good piece of writing. The results of Emig's study may or may not be valid—the point is that some teachers reason about form in this way.

Another reason that teachers might want to teach form separate from and prior to content might be because they want to use the features of conventional forms as criteria for the evaluation of papers. If the teacher begins by teaching conventional form, then the student's writing becomes a test of whether or not the student has managed to incorporate the
features of the form that has been taught into his essay. The student must therefore key his writing to secondary pedagogical constraints rather than to primary exigencies related to content. Writing then becomes testing, and form becomes genre. The teacher has allowed his evaluative procedures to govern his instructional procedures. Hence the same problems emerge that were mentioned earlier in using generic features as evaluative criteria: just because an essay has all the features of a particular genre, that doesn’t mean that it is a good essay. "Is it good?" is not the same question as "Is it a good example of its kind?" As Elder Olson puts it, "a tragedy is not valuable merely because it is a tragedy" (318). "The values and standards by which we evaluate are contingent upon what we are evaluating" (314), and what we are evaluating is not form in general but form as it is expressed in a particular object, a text.

Perhaps we should point out in closing that whether form and content can be or should be separated is not the question here. We can apprehend the form of a discourse apart from its content in the same way that we can understand concepts like length and color apart from material objects, even thought it is in the concrete instance that such qualities are revealed. It seems clear that if we are to teach anything about form, we must separate the two for heuristic purposes. We should also remember that the question is not
whether we should teach conventional or non-conventional forms, because it is not always easy to make a clear distinction between the two. Indeed, as Burke notes, any form can become conventional. The question is whether form should be taught prior to and separate from content, and whether conventional forms provide adequate standards for evaluation when they are used as extrinsic criteria.

These questions need to be addressed if we are to analyze the effectiveness of teacher commentary because any commentary that goes beyond the purely descriptive involves a whole set of value judgments. Even a purely descriptive comment on form (e.g., "These two events are out of sequence in the chronological pattern you have established") implies some judgment—why should a teacher tell a student what he did unless his purpose in doing so is to set some positive or negative value on it? The problem is further complicated by the fact that each student text represents not just one value or good, but a multiplicity of goods hierarchically arranged, the lower being used as a means to the higher. A complete evaluation of the text—one that takes into account not only the necessary but also the sufficient conditions of the text's goodness—will use this hierarchy as a source of criteria by which the text may be judged. A good text will be one in which the distal serves the proximal, as it were. Olson describes the hierarchy as a series of criteria leading
to, and presupposed by, a sense of value relating to the text as a whole: "the particular has a good or goods which constitute its value; out of the experience of many like particulars we form a conception of a general projected excellence which becomes a criterion or standard, and we judge the particulars comparatively as the approximate to it. That criterion may have other criteria subordinate to it or may itself be subordinate to other criteria; for example, in literature criteria of style are generally regarded as subordinate to criteria relating to other aspects of a work which are considered more important than style, and criteria which relate to the work as a whole are regarded as superior to criteria which relate to the parts" (319).

Just because a concrete instance presupposes certain formal principles, that does not mean that those principles must be taught prior to their exemplification. They can, of course be so taught (for example, in a poetry class where the sonnet form is learned before a student tries to write a sonnet), but a correct assessment of the work does not presuppose the form and then check to see how well the instance fits the form. As Burke says in "Poetics in Particular, Language in General," "The principles of composition 'come first' in the sense of logical priority. Their formulation may or may not, and most often decidedly does not, come first in the sense of temporal priority" (36).
But even so, there remains the question of what the teacher's ability to evaluate a text has to do with the effectiveness of his commentary in improving student writing. What role does evaluation play in the rhetorical relationship between teacher and student? Since most teacher comments imply value judgments, we need to make some determination of the rhetorical effects of value judgments on an audience. How effective are value statements in persuading an audience to change? Are some types of value statements more effective than others? These are the questions we will address in the next chapter.
In Chapter Four, the fact that the same issue can be raised in many different forms depending on which speech act is intended was discussed. In a similar way, a given comment by a teacher may fall into any one of the three categories of teacher commentary that have been described, depending on how the comment is intended by the teacher and how it is construed by the student. For example, in a student paper discussing joy and pathos, a teacher may write in the margin, "What is joy?" (Brannon and Knight 135). This comment can be variously intended or construed as 1) informative, meaning "You have not defined joy"; 2) deliberative, meaning "Define joy" or "Explain what you mean by joy"; or 3) epideictic, meaning "Defining what you mean by joy would be a good thing to do." However, one can see that the first meaning above implies the second; that is, "You have not defined joy" implies that "You should define joy." But the second also implies the third: the student should define joy because defining it is in some way good or valuable, and what is good or valuable would be worthy of praise.
In Chapter Two, the type of teacher commentary whose purpose is to praise or blame was called epideictic, indicating its similarity in some respects to the type of public discourse described by Aristotle as being appropriate to ceremonial occasions. The principal function of epideictic commentary was defined as the expression of the reader's response to the text being read. This response often takes the form of statements expressing the opinion that something is good or bad, but in some cases the praise or blame may be implied rather than explicitly stated. For instance, the comment "Good opening paragraph" (Schwegler and Aaron 72) offers explicit praise, but the comment "I feel as though I hit paydirt here. . . . This point makes me sit up and take notice" (Brannon and Knight 136-137) suggests without explicitly saying so that a praiseworthy act has been performed.

In Chapter Two, two types of epideictic commentary were described: primary affective responses and responses keyed to the secondary context of pedagogy. The comment "Good!" is a primary response, whereas the comment "Good example!" is a keyed response. It was noted that epideictic comments have two potential weaknesses. Primary responses tend to be non-specific, thus making it difficult for a student to identify the good or bad thing that was done and thereby to repeat or avoid the same type of thing in the future. Keyed responses,
on the other hand, tend to focus on pedagogical constraints rather than the exigencies addressed by the discourse itself, thus providing little in the way of motivation for change. In spite of these potential weaknesses, however, epideictic commentary has the greatest potential for bringing about change in a student's writing behavior when it is skillfully phrased, applied at the appropriate stage of the writing process, and coordinated with classroom instruction. Skillful construction, appropriate application, and coordination with other activities are, of course, prerequisites for the success of any type of pedagogical activity, but, as mentioned earlier, just because certain conditions are necessary to the completion of an act, that does not mean that they are sufficient to ensure its success. None of the three types of commentary that have been discussed depends necessarily on subsequent changes in student writing for its success, insofar as informing, advising, and praising are speech acts that do not rely on perlocutionary effects for their successful consummation. However, epideictic commentary is more likely than the other types of commentary to result in the creation of a rhetorical situation that is conducive to action on the part of the student.

As rhetoricians, teachers have at their disposal three means of persuasion: "The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience
into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself" (Aristotle "Rhetoric" 1329). The third means of persuasion, logic or argumentation, has been discussed in Chapter Five. The first two can best be seen in epideictic commentary.

A teacher's personal character is revealed, of course, in everything that is said and done in the classroom, but in studying the effectiveness of teacher commentary, we must confine ourselves to character as it is revealed in written discourse. According to Aristotle, "Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided" (1329). Much teaching of the informative and deliberative sort is apparently not meant to convey personal character at all, but an impression is nonetheless conveyed whether or not the writer intends it. Informative commentary conveys the image of a judge—fair and impartial perhaps, but rather austere and forbidding and always on the lookout for infractions of the rules. Deliberative commentary conveys the image of a coach, advisor, or counsellor, whose concern is with the selection of the best means and strategies for gaining some desirable end relative to the activity at hand.
These images are important elements in the persuasive effects of teacher commentary. Indeed, says Aristotle, "his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion a speaker possesses" (1329). A set of comments that consists primarily of a set of commands, such as the one discussed by Sommers (152-153), presents the image of a reader whose demands on the writer seem to outweigh or preclude any acceptance of what the writer is trying to say. On the other hand, a simple comment such as "I like this phrase" (Brannon and Knight 136) does more than merely offer praise; it also conveys the impression that the reader is paying attention to what is being read and is willing to recognize its worth. Similarly, the comments "Show me" and "I don't follow you here" (137), even though the former is in the imperative mode, indicate by the use of the personal pronouns I and me the reader's involvement with the discourse. The writer is being asked to supply examples, details, or illustration because the reader has a need or desire for them, not because examples "ought" to be provided. The same is true for situations in which the writer has failed to qualify an overly general statement or has written a very complex or confusing sentence. Instead or writing the commands "Qualify" or "Clarify," a teacher can write "Are you sure?" or "I don't follow you here" (137), sentences that supply a response, a piece of information that the writer can
use in deciding what changes to make. These comments suggest that the reader is still listening, that his or her mind is still open to what the writer is saying. Labeling errors and issuing commands suggest that the reader's mind is already made up, that the matter is settled, and no further discussion is required. This is not to say that errors should not be pointed out, but that they should be pointed out in such a way that the writer is encouraged to correct them.

For example, in the student paper given by Brannon and Knight, the student writer ends a paragraph with a question that appears to be a transition to the next paragraph. The teacher writes "Your next paragraph doesn't answer this question. What is the answer?" This comment points out what the student did but also indicates to the student the teacher's expectation that something can be and should be done to remedy the situation. If the teacher had omitted the question "What is the answer?" the student might have thought that the transitional question should be deleted rather than developed further.

In addition to revealing the speaker's character, epideictic comments also serve to put the reader in a frame of mind that is conducive, fitting, or appropriate to further action. Praise is one of the strongest elements in producing this particular frame of mind. In considering comments that offer praise, we can see the close relationship between
epideictic and deliberative commentary. Deliberative commentary tells a writer what should be done, but epideictic commentary gives the writer a reason why it should be done, thus supplying the writer with a motive for change. As Aristotle puts it, "To praise a man is in one respect akin to urging a course of action. The suggestions which would be made in the latter case become encomiums when differently expressed. When we know what action or character is required, then, in order to express these facts as suggestions for action, we have to change and reverse our form of words" (1357-1358).

To illustrate, let us consider comments offering criticism or blame. For instance, one of the examples of teacher commentary given by Schwegler and Aaron includes the following remarks: "... the lack of concrete detail at the places I have noted weakens the essay. Work to add detail as you revise" (67). Notice how the informative comment leads directly into the deliberative, using the critical part of the comment ("weakens the essay") as a reason. The same comment could be cast into a positive form, however: "I'd like to see some details here" or "Some specific details would be good at this point." Both the positive and the negative forms imply certain values (i.e., detail is good; lack of detail is bad), and both suggest a course of action which would be in accordance with those values, but the
negative form implies that the reader has already judged the essay and found it wanting before it has reached its final form.

Another example can be seen in the case where the student in Brannon and Knight's example failed to qualify a general statement. A critical comment would say, "You have not adequately qualified this generalization" or "This is an over-generalization." The criticism might lead implicitly or explicitly to a deliberative comment: "Qualify your statement" or "You should qualify this." An effective epideictic comment would say, as Brannon and Knight's reader does, "Are you sure?" or "Always?" or "For everyone?" As in the previous example, a change in wording can accomplish the same goal of pointing out a mistake while at the same time implying a praiseworthy end to be achieved by future action.

Both deliberative and epideictic commentary select specific items from the text for discussion. They differ, however, in that deliberative commentary treats these items as means to be manipulated for the achievement of some further end, which may or may not be specified. Epideictic comments, on the other hand, treat the items selected from the text as ends, as examples of things that are in themselves virtuous or base. Epideictic commentary holds up or displays these items as examples of good things to be emulated or bad things to be avoided. The emphasis is on the
present instance rather than future action; that is, the good or the bad has already been accomplished, whereas in deliberative commentary the end is yet to be accomplished.

Although even a simple epideictic comment such as "I like this" can have its effect in helping to create a rhetorical situation that is conducive to change, the effects of epideictic commentary can be heightened by the use of certain rhetorical techniques that associate agent and act. The process of association, as mentioned in Chapter Five, establishes a kind of stability or continuity in which or out of which a writer can act. This continuity may extend from the present into the future, as when an epideictic comment is immediately followed by a suggestion for future action. For example: "Ah! A keen insight--develop this further?" (Brannon and Knight 137) or "This is a strong, effective example. Give me more" (136). Aristotle suggests several other ways that the effectiveness of epideictic discourse can be heightened through the association of agent and act. For example, a persuasive effect may be gained by showing that a good or a bad act is intentional rather than being merely a matter of luck. The best way to show that an act is intentional is to mention examples of the actor's having acted in similar ways in the past. That means, for teachers, that students' acts in writing should be related to previous acts. Relating mistakes to previous mistakes can establish a
pattern that, once recognized, can be broken; relating successes to previous successes shows that the present instance is not just a fluke. Furthermore, as Aristotle points out, relating present successes to previous ones has the effect of giving someone credit for continued effort. This is especially important for good writers whose efforts teachers can sometimes take for granted. These students need praise and encouragement just as much as poor writers do.

Associating writers with their actions also heightens the effect of epideictic commentary by showing that one's actions are the products of the good qualities one possesses. A paper that is praised for its insight or originality reflects the virtues of its writer, his wisdom or her inventiveness, according to Aristotle: "things productive of virtue are noble, as tending toward virtue; and also the effects of virtue, that is, the signs of its presence and the acts to which it leads" (1355). One's actions are the products of one's qualities; that is, "the actual deeds are the evidence of the doer's character" (1357). In praising a paper, a teacher implicitly praises its writer; in criticizing a paper, the teacher implicitly criticizes the character of the student, even though the teacher may not realize that this effect is being produced or want it to be produced. This is another reason that the form of the comment is an important factor in its effectiveness. The
comment "I don't see the connection here" takes away much of the blame implied by the comment "You didn't provide an adequate transition here." The blame implied by the latter may seem minor when the comment is considered in isolation, but when it is placed in relation to many such comments in a single paper and many papers over the course of a school term, the negative effect can be quite severe. Again, this is not to imply that errors should not be pointed out, merely that the manner in which the error is pointed out can have something to do with the comment's effectiveness in motivating students to make changes.

In addition to the general method of associating a speech with its speaker in order to heighten the effect of praise, Aristotle mentions three more specific techniques that teachers could borrow in order to increase the effectiveness of their comments. First, one can praise the act's singularity or uniqueness. For instance, a teacher can point out that a student is "the only one, or the first, or almost the only one who has done something, or that he has done it better than anyone else" (1358). Instead of saying merely that an essay is interesting, a teacher might say, "This is the most interesting essay I've read today." Or if the whole class is writing about a certain essay or poem or story, the teacher might say of an insightful comment that "You are the only one in the class who noticed this." Such
comments might seem gratuitous, but they are often remembered and remarked upon, at least in my experience. Not only do they increase the writer's sense of self-esteem, but they also reinforce the student's image of himself or herself as a writer, thereby strengthening the association between act and agent and increasing the student's commitment to and responsibility for his own writing.

Another specific technique for praising is to consider the writer's act in relation to some special circumstance such as age, class rank, or time period in the school term. A teacher can, as Aristotle says, "make much of the particular season and occasion of an action, arguing that we could hardly have looked for it just then" (1358). If a writer accomplishes on his or her own something difficult that has not yet been taught in the class, this can be commented on, even if it is so small a thing as the correct use of a semicolon in a complicated syntactical structure or as large a thing as the discovery that the student has already read something that one would not have expected him to at that point.

Finally, praise can be reinforced by comparison with other cases besides the writer's own previous performance. While a teacher might feel uncomfortable in comparing one student with another, it is not difficult to make other kinds of comparisons, with students in previous classes, with
people in general, or, as Aristotle suggests, with famous people. For instance, when a student makes an acute observation, one might recognize its worth by writing "Good observation," but the praise is heightened when one writes, "You'd be surprised how many intelligent people don't realize this." Similarly, a student who has written about the effects of peer pressure might be pleased to learn that a famous writer like Ralph Waldo Emerson shared his sentiments.

Having considered some aspects of the relationship between deliberative and epideictic commentary, we must now turn our attention to the relationship between epideictic and informative commentary. To begin with, an epideictic response such as "Poor example" might be misinterpreted as informative; that is, a teacher might think that he is informing a student of the existence of a poor example or informing a student of his opinion of the example. However, the difference between this comment and an informative one such as the symbol sp, which informs the student of the presence of one of a class of errors, or the more specific comment that "You reversed the i and the e in the word their," is that the informative comment points out in an objective way a state of affairs that is independently verifiable by other authorities or witnesses. The epideictic comment "Poor example" is not pointing out a state of affairs so much as asserting something about a state of affairs,
something that is arguable. An informative comment says "This is an example"; an epideictic comment says "This example is good or bad." Informative comments focus on the describable features of a text; epideictic comments focus on the reader's response to textual features or to the text as a whole. A teacher might inform a student of his opinion of some feature of the text, but that information is not independently verifiable because it concerns some inner state or feeling of the teacher.

Second, the term evaluation might be used in connection with both informative and epideictic commentary, but the processes to which it would refer in each case would be quite different. The sort of evaluation associated with informative commentary requires that the evaluator specify certain features of a paper as being of particular significance, count or measure those features, and arrive at an assessment of the paper by comparing the resultant profile to a set of fixed criteria. This process is carried out so that the paper may be compared to others of the same kind or so that some sort of ranking or sorting may be achieved. Such an evaluative process is similar to the rating of products in Consumer Reports: a numerical score, a letter or a symbol can be assigned to the object evaluated indicating its status relative to the criteria by which its was judged.
The process of evaluation associated with epideictic discourse, on the other hand, is more like judging a picture in an art gallery or the performance of a play. In neither case is the evaluator particularly concerned with arriving at some definite score or label to attach to the object, nor is he concerned with ranking all the pictures in the gallery or all the plays currently being performed. Instead, his purpose is to understand the essential nature of the object itself, and the steps by which he arrives at this understanding may remain tacit or unarticulated in much the same way that the steps in enthymemic reasoning do.

Whereas the kind of evaluation that uses informative commentary starts with the parts of a text and arrives at an assessment of the whole, epideictic commentary starts with the whole in order to understand the parts. The purpose of the former is to judge the extrinsic worth of the object; the purpose of the latter is to discover or recognize the object's intrinsic worth. Both types of evaluation aim at agreement, but they differ in what is being agreed upon. The former type of evaluation requires that agreement be reached on definitions, on what constitutes a given entity to be discussed. For instance, before the word judgement can be counted as a spelling error, the conditions under which it is a spelling error must be agreed upon: in American usage it is an error; in British usage it is not. The weight to be
assigned to each feature must also be agreed upon, for instance, whether spelling errors count as much as syntax errors. Once such matters are agreed upon, the outcome of the evaluation process (if it is just) should be a foregone conclusion. Examples of this type of evaluation would include Kellogg Hunt's criteria for syntactic maturity; the ranking of pieces of writing by matching them with models described by Charles Cooper as "holistic scoring"; Richard Lloyd Jones' Primary Trait Scoring; and the "analytic scale" described by Paul Diederich.

The aim of informative commentary, then, is agreement about the parts; agreement about the parts must precede agreement about the whole. The aim of epideictic commentary, on the other hand, is agreement about the whole. Agreement about the whole cannot be arrived at in an additive way from the parts because the whole which an epideictic response recognizes determines what counts as a part to be considered in the analysis. The holistic scoring procedures mentioned above begin with some of the assumptions of epideictic commentary in that they encourage scorers to react to the discourse as a whole in an impressionistic way and to compare their reactions to those of other scorers. However, the "calibration" (Lindemann 215) of reader responses to models, scoring guides, or lists of features relates the evaluation to extrinsic criteria.
As Daniel Marder says in "The Spectrum of Rhetoric," all discourse seeks some kind of understanding or agreement between speaker and hearer. Agreement is the goal of informative and deliberative discourse because the starting point of such discourse is disagreement; or, if disagreement is too strong a word, perhaps we might say that they begin with a perception of difference, principally the difference between how things are and how they could be. The perception of these differences leads to a sense of sides or of controversy. As mentioned in Chapter Five, informative and deliberative discourse aim to resolve such differences by persuasion. The strongest rhetorical appeal of such discourse, however, is the quasi-logical form of the arguments used rather than the conclusions of the arguments, which appear to follow by necessity. The goal of persuasion is action or change of some kind. If a quasi-logical argument is successful, action should appear to follow by necessity also. Indeed, the success of such argumentation is often measured by the probability of its outcome (hence the tendency to use empirical methods in the study of such discourse). However, the self-evidence of a conclusion derived from demonstrative argumentation is not sufficient motivation for action in most cases, as was shown in Chapter Five.

In addition to its conclusion's appearing to follow by logical necessity, the outcome of informative or deliberative
discourse is usually a matter of practical consequence. If the argument is successful, some desirable end is gained (correctness, clarity, orderliness, etc.). However, a desirable outcome or action does not always follow by necessity, hence the need for rhetorical techniques and audience adaptation. One of the greatest rhetorical weaknesses of teacher commentary is its reliance on apparently self-evident arguments at the expense of audience adaptation. Since audience adaptation would seem to be crucial to any type of discourse whose aim is to persuade an audience to change, the reasons for its lack in teacher commentary must be pursued further.

It was mentioned in Chapter Four that nearly all of the prescriptive speech acts performed by teachers in commenting on papers (with the exception of arguing) imply an asymmetrical relationship between speaker and hearer. That is, instructing, advising, commanding, etc., require that the teacher assume the role of specialist or superior and the student the role of nonspecialist or inferior. In a situation where the specialist is the speaker and the nonspecialist is the hearer, and the subject of the discourse is the area in which the speaker has expertise, then the rhetorical processes at work may take one of two directions. In one process, which Chaim Perelman calls "popularization," the direction of the rhetorical process is outward; in the other,
which he calls "initiation," the direction is inward ("New" 99-100). In the process of popularization, audience adaptation is absolutely essential because the speaker "goes out" to meet the audience on their terms; thus, he must adjust his language, his arguments, his figures of speech and maxims to them. In the process of initiation, audience adaptation is not as essential because the audience wishes to "move in" to the speaker's territory; the audience must accept the discourse on the speaker's terms, or the terms of the group to which the speaker belongs.

It seems likely that the processes at work in teacher commentary are much more akin to initiation than to popularization. Teachers generally use terms special to their discipline, which are not necessarily the terms students would use. In writing comments, a teacher seldom defends the language or the values of his discipline. The language he expects the initiate to master and the values he expects the initiate to accept. Values help to define a given discipline and thereby create, at least in part, the field-dependent nature of the arguments that take place within it. One cannot carry on discourse within a discipline unless its basic values are accepted, and the arguments implied by teacher commentary such as those mentioned in Chapter Five are clearly intra-disciplinary arguments.
For argument to begin (let alone to be concluded), values must be shared. An argument must have, as Perelman says, a starting point:

The unfolding as well as the starting point of the argumentation presuppose indeed the agreement of the audience. This agreement is sometimes on explicit premises, sometimes on the particular connecting links used in the argument or on the manner of using these links: from start to finish, analysis of argumentation is concerned with what is supposed to be accepted by the hearers. On the other hand, the actual choice of premises and their formulation, together with the adjustments involved, are rarely without argumentive value: it is a preparation for argument which not only establishes the elements but constitutes the first step in the utilization of these elements for persuasive purposes ("New" 65).

Many times the arguments implied by teacher commentary are quite cogent and compelling from the point of view of another teacher, but the problem is that sometimes for the student the argument has never begun. Intra-disciplinary arguments, as Patrick Hartwell mentions in describing technical writing, are often COIK: "clear only if known" (119). To an initiate, the syllogistic argument on sentence fragments presented in Chapter Five is clear to the point of being
simplistic, ordinary to the point of being tiresome. To the uninitiated, the argument doesn't even exist, and even if it did, the fact that a student might recognize the values implied by an intra-disciplinary argument does not mean that the student automatically has adherence to those values.

Hartwell suggests that "as hyperliterate adults we [teachers] are conscious of 'using rules' when we are in fact doing something else, something far more complex, assessing tacit heuristics honed by print literacy itself" (119). The tacit nature of the knowledge, rules, and values of a given discipline make argumentation possible between members of a group who share them. As Sam Watson points out, writing rules function as maxims by which we "access" heuristic procedures. These procedures are not demonstrative but enthymemic: agreement precedes argument rather than resulting necessarily from it. If knowledge, rules, and values were entirely explicit or self-evident, argument would not be necessary. More, discourse itself would be superfluous. As Kenneth Burke puts it, "If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity" ("Rhetoric" 546). It is by virtue of the fact that the materials of rhetoric are not self-evident that rhetoric exists as a discipline, and it is by virtue of the tacit nature of these materials that we can "access" them through enthymemes. But before such access can
be gained, the knowledge and values expressed in the maxims of the discipline must already be there, hence, the COIK or field-dependent nature of arguments within a specialized discipline.

For teacher commentary to be successful in persuading students to act in certain ways, it must therefore be preceded by something else. A student must be persuaded to be persuaded, as it were. Aristotle would say that before action can occur, the agent must first acquire the potentiality for being acted upon (Rosenfield "Aristotle" 27). Perelman puts the matter this way:

Entry into a specialized group required initiation. While a speaker must normally adapt himself to his audience, this is not true of a teacher responsible for teaching students what is accepted by the particular group they wish to join. In this case, persuasion is preliminary to initiation. It must secure submission to the requirements of the specialized group, for which the teacher is spokesman. Initiation into a given discipline consists of communicating its rules, techniques, specific ideas, and presuppositions, as well as the method of criticizing its results in terms of the discipline's own requirements (99-100).

Before initiation can take place (and hence, before the arguments of the initiated can be understood), the
representative of the specialized group must "secure submission." Since we are concerned here with neither physical compulsion nor the nondiscursive aspects of persuasion (both of which can be quite effective in securing submission), the question remains of how submission is to be gained through discursive means. I suggest that it is to be gained through the resources of epideictic discourse.

Epideictic discourse addresses values in a way that informative and deliberative discourse do not. Whereas the latter presume difference, epideictic presumes similarity. Its purpose is not to change values but to seek out and amplify the value that is present in the object so that all may see and recognize it. Epideictic is thus without practical consequences in the sense that its outcome is not measurable in terms of alteration or gain. Because of its apparent lack of immediate consequences, epideictic does not "persuade" in the sense of moving an audience to action. Rather, it "paves the way" for persuasion (Perelman "New" 54) by creating a disposition to act. Epideictic does this by defending and reinforcing values that are not a matter of controversy. Epideictic commentary defends and amplifies values that are seen as good in themselves (Aristotle 1354), rather than as prerequisites or means to some other good, as in the case of informative or deliberative discourse. The goal of epideictic is not to change or substitute these
values but to create or enhance an intensity of adherence to
to result.

Each of the three types of commentary that has been
corresponds to what Karl Wallace calls a "value
category," the value that attaches to the end or purpose of
the discourse. Informative commentary concerns what is
valued as obligatory; deliberative what is valued as
desirable; and epideictic, what is valued as praiseworthy.
Values act as constraints in a rhetorical situation, and in
writing comments, a teacher is basically assessing a
student's management of these constraints. Because of the
"keyed" nature of writing in a pedagogical setting,
constraints related to value categories are often mistaken
for exigencies. Knowing how he or she stands in relation to
the rest of the class or in relation to a set of fixed
criteria may create in a student a sense of exigency—for
instance, the competition associated with ranking by letter
grades may provide a stimulus for a student who is in a lower
rank to wish to be in a higher one—but these exigencies are
not "rhetorical" because they cannot be modified by
discourse. A student's response to a competitive situation
is a response to a constraint, because no response that the
student makes can alter the exigency. The competition is
still there no matter what the student does. If competition
were an exigency, it could be removed or changed by the student's action in concert with the actions of an audience. To recapitulate, in the discussion of rhetorical situation in Chapter Three, it was suggested that a piece of discourse may be considered effective if it succeeds in modifying directly or indirectly an exigency that is a shared perception of the writer and the reader. Because many teacher comments tend to address constraints (things that writers cannot change, such as rules and conventions) rather than exigencies (things that writers wish to change), and because as discourse they are incapable of modifying constraints, it was concluded that most teacher commentary cannot be considered effective from this perspective. In Chapter Four, it was mentioned that teacher comments might be considered by some to be ineffective because students often do not understand their meaning (i.e., what was intended by the teacher in making them). It was concluded that the effectiveness of the comments cannot be judged in terms of the students' understanding of their meaning because merely understanding the meaning does not necessarily involve any subsequent action on the part of the student. In Chapter Five, it was pointed out that most teacher comments imply certain arguments, and we hypothesized that the effectiveness of the comment might depend in some way on the success of the argumentation. It was concluded that the strength of these
arguments lies primarily in their quasi-logical form rather than in any necessary or highly probable conclusions that might be drawn from them, and that even if the success of an argument could be judged by the necessity of its outcome, the lack of a shared value system governing the selection of the premises would "short out" the enthymemic process and thereby render the comment ineffective. Thus, the concept of "effectiveness" has been discussed 1) in terms of altering a perceived exigency, 2) in terms of understanding an intended meaning, and 3) in terms of being persuaded by implicit or explicit argumentation. On all three counts, most teacher commentary has been shown to lack effectiveness in bringing about change or action. Why then should epideictic commentary succeed (in one respect, at least) where other types fail?

First of all, epideictic commentary is more likely to succeed because it closely approximates the adaptive process of feedback, adjustment, and response that is found in ordinary oral discourse. When a person makes an assertion in an ordinary conversation and receives a response from the person whom he is addressing, that response helps him to frame his next assertion in terms of the information he has received. This information includes not just the content of the response, but also the person's attitudes and values with respect to the content. As the conversation progresses, a
pattern of expectation or anticipation and fulfillment is set up. If one were to analyze the conversation, this pattern would constitute its "form." Thus, the pattern that a piece of discourse achieves in its creation is the joint product of an interaction between the writer and the reader. In commenting on student papers, teachers have a unique opportunity to participate in such an interaction and thereby to help the student's discourse achieve its final form.

Second, epideictic is more likely to succeed than other types of commentary because it recognizes the ends as well as the means implicit in the discourse. A comment that recognizes the end of a piece of discourse recognizes the exigency to which the writer was responding in creating the discourse. The very fact that a teacher expresses his or her recognition of this exigency is evidence of at least partial success by the student, because he has succeeded in getting the reader to participate in the rhetorical situation. By tacitly agreeing to address the subject as intended by the writer, the teacher will be much closer to being able to help the student realize that intention in revising the paper.

In the end, however, it is the student who must realize his or her own intention, not the teacher. A teacher's comments, no matter how astute, cannot change either the paper or the exigency which brought it into being. Commentary can at best provide only a motive for change, not
change itself. As Lawrence Rosenfield puts it, "... though the teacher may act as an agent in the learning process the teacher's energies require the cooperation of energies within the student if learning is to occur" ("Aristotle" 29). Teachers intervene in the writing process because they want to bring about change, not just quantitative change (what Aristotle would call "alteration") but qualitative ("transformation" or a change in "substance"). Only through the perception of change can the teacher know that learning has occurred.

Aristotle describes change as "motion," and it is interesting that the model he uses to explain his idea of motion is teaching and learning ("Physics" 256-257). Teaching and learning, he says, involve a set of complementary processes which he calls "agency" and "patiency," which are similar to our concepts of active and passive. In teaching, the teacher acts; in learning, the student is acted upon. Similarly, in writing, a student acts; but in reading, a teacher does not always allow himself or herself to be acted upon, because to be acted upon is to be influenced by one's passions. A passionate response is a subjective response, something that many teachers think should be avoided.

Aristotle's notion of motion or change is interesting with regard to teacher commentary for several reasons. First
is the fact that it implies that what is changed is substance. Texts have substance, but their substance is derived in part from the substance of their writers and readers. In teaching composition, we tend to concern ourselves with changes in the text, sometimes forgetting that these changes are merely signs (in the Aristotelian sense) of other types of changes. If the change we seek is learning, then we must remember that (to rephrase a cliché) texts don't learn, people do.

Second is the fact that one's desire for or expectancy of change is not enough to ensure that change occurs. Before change can occur, certain conditions must obtain, foremost among them being the capacity or potentiality for change in the object or person being acted upon. In their concern with the "effects" of discourse (including studies of stylistic effects, advertising methods, and political propaganda), teachers tend to overlook the fact that discourse alone cannot "cause" such effects. Before they can occur, certain predispositions must be present, among them the beliefs and values of the audience. As Kenneth Burke notes in Counter-Statement, "The artist's manipulations of the reader's desires involve his use of what the reader considers desirable. If the reader believes in monogamistic marriage, and the code of fidelity surrounding it, the poet can exploit this belief in writing an Othello. But the form of his drama
is implicated in the reader's belief, and Othello's conduct would hardly seem "syllogistic" in polyandrous Tibet" (146).

Discourse, being symbolic action rather than motion, can only create in its audience the disposition to act, not action itself. An audience is not inert matter; readers, hearers, learners, all have the capacity to act and to be acted upon. In teaching, especially teaching composition, we direct our attention to agent and agency, to the idea of using language as an instrument to gain certain ends that we desire. When as researchers we have studied linguistic acts, we have sometimes focused on the action involved in learning at the expense of the passion, that which predisposes an agent to act in the first place. What Rosenfield says of Aristotelian critics is doubly true of teachers and researchers who wish to understand the influence of one person's acts upon another's: "... the primary concern ... is not to assess the extent to which the speaker [i.e., the teacher] achieves his goals so much as it is to assess how listeners [students] utilize the message in fulfilling their own needs" ("Aristotle" 8). Both teacher and student possess "active" and "acquiescent" powers ("Rhetorical". 6). The teacher, in writing comments, exercises his active powers (his "will," if you will), but the type of comment that he writes will depend on whether he has exercised his acquiescent powers in reading the student's text, upon whether his passions have been moved
by what he has read. And the same applies to the student who reads the teacher's comments: the nature of his subsequent acts will depend upon whether the teacher's comments have created in him a disposition to act in certain ways.

Teaching is first and foremost communicating, and a good communicator does not treat his audience as a lump of clay to be shaped and molded by his discourse. An audience is made of people with goals and desires of their own which must be respected; otherwise, education is merely propaganda, as Perelman points out ("New" 51-54). Rosenfield says that "... the figure which best captures the communicator's role ... is not that of a puppeteer, who manipulates his audience according to his skill at persuasion, but that of a midwife, who focuses and directs energies inherent in the listener himself" ("Rhetorical" 8). Persuasion is "a function of the readiness to change on the part of the receiver of the message" (16). Discourse cannot literally create change, but by symbolic action it can create the readiness for change. Of all the types of discourse that have been discussed, epideictic seems best able to create this readiness or disposition.

Epideictic commentary serves as a reminder and an acknowledgment of intrinsic worth, of value in the concrete instance. However, as Rosenfield points out, "The pragmatic orientation of our society makes it natural to confuse
recognition and valuation" (134). Valuation suggests "independent criteria of measurement"; value is "conferred" upon an object as a result of the process of assessment. Epideictic discourse, in contrast, recognizes excellence or points the way toward it. The term epideictic comes from epideixis, meaning "to shine or show forth," hence the term's common association with display. However, the root of epideixis is epedexa, which means "to exhibit as one would a specimen or a paradigm" (Rosenfield "Practical" 135). A paradigm is a concrete example, "used as a force for inducing belief.... The example used to amplify does not support a contention so much as it inspires the listener by 'setting an example' before his eyes for admiration" (135). The example exists in the present, a success already achieved. The epideictic speaker is a "witness" to this success; he "gives voice to testimonial in the present tense. Judgment is demanded when judicial or deliberative issues are debated because the end is for the community to unite in consensus; persuasion in these instances becomes the basis for common action. However, future conduct is not the aim of epideictic" (140). The aim of epideictic is the recognition of excellence or intrinsic worth.

In writing comments, many teachers tend to treat praise as a reward for good conduct or as "icing" on the cake of more "substantive" comments. Far from being a treat or a
luxury, however, epideictic commentary furnishes the foundation upon which the other types of commentary are built. Informative and deliberative commentary rely upon the student's ability to engage in certain logical processes that are supposed to serve as the basis for his action. Epideictic commentary, however, determines the selection and acceptance of the premises upon which logical argumentation is built. Thus epideictic underlies all types of teacher commentary.

Although epideictic comments can appear anywhere on a student's paper, they are often included in terminal comments that assess past performance, advise as to the future, and explain or justify a grade. This linking of evaluation with praise tends to obscure the real function of epideictic commentary: to recognize examples that enact certain values considered desirable by the group into which a student is being initiated and to reinforce those values in order to gain adherence. By addressing these values, epideictic comments make it possible for the arguments of informative and deliberative commentary to begin.
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