Introduction—To the Student

We don't always admit it, but we usually admire the person who uses language well. There is something attractive about the person who has a way with words, the one who can make experiences vivid in a letter, who can write a clear and orderly account of an experiment or an event or an object, who can persuade by a forceful and convincing argument. Such a person, we recognize, has a power to enjoy life and to control life that the inarticulate person lacks. It is a power worth striving for. It is a power you want to develop.

But to many young people writing seems unnatural and complicated. Compared to talking, which we all do almost all day long, it *is* unnatural; and it *is* complicated. But writing is actually far less complicated than the talking that we all learned to do, and to do competently, before we ever went to school. Talking, though, we all learned naturally by imitation; we put our minds to it because we found that talking made it easier to get our way or to find our way in the world. Writing we have to learn in school, formally, with nothing like the intense motivation we had for learning to talk.

The way to tackle anything that is complicated is not to pretend, as is often done, that it is really simple and that you can master it in ten easy lessons. It won't do to tell you "Just write the way you talk" or "Look into your heart and write." Long ago the dramatist Sheridan said, "Easy writing is curst hard reading."

The way to deal with anything that is complicated is to break it down into its elements so that they can be tackled one by one (divide and conquer) and to arrange the elements in a workable sequence as is done in planning an assembly line. If the sequence is right, in each lesson you will be learning just one new thing, but you will be using again what you have already learned so that each newly learned writing skill becomes ingrained by almost unconscious repetition. With such practice, what you learn, awkwardly and perhaps even painfully, becomes second nature. When you want to write or have to write, the skill functions the same way as the maneuvers you learned, perhaps just as awkwardly, when you were learning to drive, or to swing a bat or a tennis racquet. Furthermore, the ability to put black marks in the correct boxes for an examination of *what you know* is no indication that you have learned your lesson; you have learned it only when the second nature of habit coordinates your efforts in *what you do*.

"Practice makes perfect," we like to think. But practice, like the rain that falls alike on the just and the unjust, can make us perfect in the wrong maneuvers as readily as in the right ones. It is as easy to learn the right maneuvers as the wrong ones. The question is which are the right ones—that is, what devices, what patterns will make you a truly able writer. The sequence worked out for this method of writing is intended to help you write like a professional writer—not like a schoolchild. The sentences and paragraphs that you will examine and discuss are the work of professional writers, men and women who make their living and their reputations by writing. None of them are textbook exercise sentences, prefabricated to avoid anything difficult, predigested to make everything look simple and easy. The exercises you will do yourself are based on assignments developed for—and by—students like yourself—students who have discovered that the only effective way to learn clarity and logical development in writing is to practice the skills used by the best writers in our culture.

The aim of this method embracing the sentence and the paragraph is to enable you to say well whatever it is you have to say. But it should help you also to see what there is to say about the world. Seeing is not saying, but without seeing there is not much to say. It should help you to see and think the way professional writers do. A writer is not just a person who writes, but a person who knows what to write.

If you have a hobby that you take seriously, you know that it has a language of its own and that you have to master this language to be accepted by the experts. Every field of study or action has its own technical language. It doesn't make sense to think that the craft of writing is different. The technical language of the writing craft is the language of grammar and rhetoric. The job of grammar is to discover the word classes of a language, the forms these classes take, and the patterns or structures they enter into

to make sentences. The job of rhetoric, in part, is to determine how these structures can best be used. Grammar tells us what is *possible* within the system of the language, rhetoric what is *effective*. Neither can tell us much unless we understand their language. So, before being shown how writers use the grammatical structures they do, you will have these structures named, defined, and described for you.

In the past, grammar has been taught, negatively and largely in vain, to enforce correctness—*It is I* not *It is me*; *To whom are you speaking?* not *Who are you speaking to?* It may surprise you, then, to learn that grammar can be used positively, to give you a fuller command of the structures of the language. And it will be a pleasant surprise for you to find that the grammar needed for positive instruction is far less than is needed for negative correction.

1) See form 5

2)