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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The low degree of literacy of high school and university students is a cause of increasing concern since educators are finding the acquired writing skills of students to be inadequate. With this decline in the quality of writing performance among students, there is a need for improved means of assessing writing ability and for more effective instruction in writing skills. The present study deals empirically with both of those problems. An instrument to measure composition writing is developed and tested. The test results, which assess various aspects of students' written compositions, are correlated with precis-writing skills.

Recent studies (Munday, 1976; Ferguson & Maxey, 1976) have shown that writing ability is indeed declining. The Association of Canadian University Teachers (ACUTE) issued a report in 1977, On Undergraduate Studies in English in Canadian Universities (Priestley & Kerpneck, Note 1), indicating that there was considerable documented evidence of a decline in the level of written performance and articulateness of undergraduates in Canadian schools. At Concordia University, a "Literate Academic Communication Enhancement Committee" (LACES) was formed to study the literacy problem within the university; the objective of this committee was to develop "a configuration of testing and learning activities, automated where appropriate, which will be adequate to enable university enrollees to attain criterion levels of performance in writing academic and technical papers" (Boyd, Note 2).

The assessment of written performance has long been of serious concern to those educators interested in appraising the ability of students in the use of the English language for the purpose of

communication" (Cartwright, 1969, p. 95). An accurate appraisal of written performance requires the selection of reliable and valid testing procedures. Test reliability, which represents the degree of test stability or consistency, and test validity, which represents the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure, are essential characteristics of standardized testing procedures (see Tuckman, 1972). Tests of writing ability rarely display both validity and reliability.

After an examination of the most commonly used standardized tests of writing ability, Della-Piana, Odell, Cooper, and Endo (1976) concluded that these tests lack validity; the tests fail to measure what they purport to measure, namely, the ability to write. Since standardized tests of writing ability consist almost entirely of multiple-choice items, the skills that are actually being measured are recognition skills, and not active production skills.

In addition to their lack of validity, objective tests measuring writing ability suffer from another serious drawback—they are not useful in the making of certain important educational decisions. The "ultimate" purpose of a standardized test is to aid decision-making, especially with regard to the following: diagnosis of learning difficulties, determination of the sequence of skills students need to learn, evaluation of learning outcomes and curriculum, and student placement (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1975, p. 8). Most of the widely used standardized tests of writing ability do not yield information specific enough to help in the making of educational decisions.

In a 1977 report issued to the Arts Faculty Committee of Concordia University by James Whitelaw (Note 3), the need for a standardized, valid, and reliable test of writing ability to aid in making decisions is stressed. The use of a good diagnostic tool would represent a significant step toward alleviating the problem of the declining quality in the writing performance of Concordia University students.

The most obvious way of measuring writing ability is to use

genuine samples of writing: "An adequate essay test of writing is valid by definition; that is to say, it has face validity since it requires the candidate to perform the actual behavior which is being measured" (Eley, 1955, p. 11). Reliability/problems arise, however, with the assessment of actual writing. Difficulties become evident in controlling the many variables which exert an influence on the writing of compositions, and on the subsequent evaluations of these compositions by raters. The writer variable, the rater variable, and the assignment variable are included among the basic sources of error in scores on tests measuring actual writing performance (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer; 1963).

There is a need for more adequate tests of writing ability; the first part of the present study is concerned with the development of an instrument for testing writing performance that is valid, reliable, and useful in educational decision-making. The second major concern of the study is to extend the existing body of information on written composition skills so as to have an impact upon the design of instruction in writing skills.

In a study conducted in 1974, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) project investigated the educational achievement of various age groups in ten different learning areas. In comparing the results with those of a 1969 NAEP study, the project revealed a decline in the quality of writing performance among students aged 13 and 17. Evidence of a widespread decline in writing ability is increasing. The College Entrance Examination Board found a decline in verbal scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) that began in 1965, and showed the largest drop from 1975 to 1976 (Harnischfeger & Wiley, 1976).

Students are thus entering university with lower levels of writing ability. In the NAEP (1974) study, it was found that the poor writers produced shorter, less coherent compositions which displayed less stylistic sophistication, simpler vocabulary, fewer complex sentences, more sentence fragments, and more run-on sentences. The percentage of compositions written by 17-year olds

that were shorter than four sentences rose from 13% in 1969 to 20% in 1974 (Beshoar, 1976).

Instruction in basic writing skills needs improvement for aiding students who are poor writers. The NAEP (1974) suggested that students have access to remedial writing classes in order to develop needed skills. To facilitate the design of effective instruction in writing skills, it is important to have a thorough knowledge of what these skills involve. There is a need for basic developmental work in the analysis of writing skills so that the groundwork could be laid for the improvement of instruction and for the improvement of the evaluation of skills (Della-Piana et al., 1976).

In this study it was thought that an investigation of the relationship between precis-writing and composition writing would be of value in shedding light on the analysis of writing skills, and would have implications for instruction in written composition. A precis is a concise restatement of the main points and essential information of a text, preserving the order, emphasis, and tone of the original (Kingston, 1958). According to Donley (1975), instruction in precis-writing has been neglected for too long, and the time has come for reinstating its importance.

The characteristics of a well-written precis are analogous to the characteristics of a well-written composition: coherence of ideas, clear expression of main ideas, conciseness and preciseness of language, effective organization of ideas, exclusion of irrelevant information, and syntactical accuracy (Ford, 1960). Donley (1975, p. 213) maintains that there is a "direct link" between written composition and precis writing, "the essay plan being a 'precis' done in advance."

In studying the effects of a precis-type of writing task on written performance, Minot (1975) found that the task of writing an assignment in 50 words or less, served to encourage conciseness and precision of expression. This may indicate that instruction in the precis form of writing would be of value, if the skills involved in precis writing transfer to other important forms of written expression, such as composition writing. There is a need to

examine more closely the relationship between precis writing and written composition; the second part of this study will focus on an exploration of this relationship.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Standardization and Validation of a Test Instrument To Measure Written Composition Skills

The problem to be investigated in the first part of the thesis is the development of a valid, reliable, and useful test instrument to measure writing ability. A test in written composition, consisting of a rewriting task and a set of explicit instructions, was developed. Measures of the test's validity and reliability were obtained.

The Relationship Between Precis-Writing Skills and Written Composition Skills

The second problem studied is the relationship of precise writing performance to composition-writing performance. Precis-writing performance is represented in the study by scores on a test measuring thirteen basic precis-writing skills:

1. Choosing the main idea of a paragraph.
2. Writing the main idea of a paragraph.
3. Recognizing the relationships among the main ideas of paragraphs.
4. Choosing the main idea of a text.
5. Writing the main idea of a text.
6. Choosing the best paraphrase.
7. Writing a good paraphrase.
8. Combining simple sentences.
9. Condensing a sentence to a required length.
10. Combining, condensing, and paraphrasing related sentences into one sentence of a required length.
11. Writing an outline of a given text.

12. Writing a clear sentence based on outline points.

13. Writing a precis of a passage to a required length.

Performance in written composition is represented by scores on the test instrument developed in the first part of the study. Each of the following ten aspects of the written composition were evaluated:

1. Organization
2. Clarity of main idea
3. Argument development
4. Effectiveness and logical development of conclusion
5. Paragraph development
6. Relevance of used information
7. Appropriateness of word choice
8. Grammatical and syntactical accuracy
9. Conciseness of language
10. Spelling accuracy

It was hypothesized that scores on the two tests measuring writing ability would be substantially correlated, so that it would be possible to get an indication of how precis skills contribute to written composition. In this study there is no investigation of the direct transfer of skills from precis writing to written composition. Before such a study is executed, it is important to first determine if there is a strong relationship between the two forms of writing, and if certain skills show greater degrees of relationship than others. Those are the concerns of the present study.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The Standardization and Validation of a Test Instrument To
Measure Written Composition Skills

Most of the standardized used to measure writing ability do not, in fact, measure what they purport to measure. Also, they

do not provide enough information that would be useful in the making of educational decisions, such as those dealing with student placement in English courses, and with instructional counseling. The tests do not reveal the student's specific weaknesses for diagnostic purposes or remedial work. The present study represents an attempt to develop a test of writing ability that is valid, reliable, and useful in educational decision-making.

The Relationship Between Precis-Writing Skills and Written Composition Skills

Effective instruction is needed in basic language skills for all levels of instruction. The focus of this study is on the undergaduate level of instruction in written composition. The intent of the second part of the thesis is to address the problem of declining writing skills by contributing information for basic developmental work in the improvement of instruction in written composition. Should a high degree of correlation be found between performance in precis-writing and performance in written composition, support would be given to the view that instruction in precis skills would be of value in improving the ability to write compositions. At the minimum, such a correlation would justify more conclusive experimentation and thorough study in the area.

General Significance of the Study

Both parts of the study are addressed to the problem of declining writing skills among university undergraduates. The first part involves the development of a test in written composition that would serve to improve the assessment of writing ability; the second part is an exploratory investigation of writing skills which will hopefully lay the groundwork for more effective instruction in written composition. Both of these concerns are in keeping with the definition of educational technology issued by the British National Council for Educational Technology (1972) as: "the development, application and evaluation of systems, techniques and aids to improve the process of human learning."

SUMMARY

As a result of the decline in the quality of student writing, there is a need for improved means of assessing writing ability, and for additional research in the realm of writing skills in order to improve instruction in written composition. These two needs constitute the focal points of this study, and have been described in the first chapter.

The next chapter will provide a comprehensive review of research relating to the two problems described in the chapter. Chapter Three will provide a detailed description of the methodology used in the study, including design and procedures, as well as a description of the test instrument developed for this study. The last two chapters will provide a description of the results obtained, and a discussion of their implications.

CHAPTER 2
RELATED RESEARCH

OVERVIEW

In the first chapter, the two problems of the present study were introduced: 1) the standardization and validation of a test instrument to measure written composition skills, and 2) the relationship between precis-writing skills and written composition skills. The second chapter will present related research on the following topics: the act of writing, the problem of validity in objective tests of writing, the problem of reliability in tests of actual writing, the task variable, criteria and scales, the rater variable, test construction, a test to measure syntactic maturity, the teaching of writing skills, precis writing and written composition.

THE ACT OF WRITING

An understanding of the writing process is of value in the undertaking of research in written composition. Most definitions of writing do not provide us with insight into the actual process of composing. In a typical definition, composition is described as including: "the mechanics of paragraphing, punctuating, and capitalizing, and it considers morphology, syntax, and semantics to the extent that they effect communication" (Hook, 1965, p. 13). This type of descriptive definition does not contribute to a real understanding of writing.

A description of the process of writing as a complex series of activities is provided by Cooper (1975, p. 113):

Composing involves prewriting gestation (varying from minutes to months or years); planning the particular piece (with or without notes or outline); getting started; making continuous

decisions about diction, syntax and rhetoric in relation to the intended meaning taking shape; reviewing what has accumulated and anticipating and rehearsing what comes next; tinkering and reformulating; stopping; contemplating the finished piece; and perhaps, finally, revising.

The complicated activities involved in writing are only now beginning to be studied; there are few studies on the act of writing available for information. A study by Stallard (1973) investigated the writing behavior of good student writers in high school. He found that better writers spent more time in the prewriting stage, the period before the actual commencement of writing, than did students randomly picked; the good writers utilized this time to think about the purpose of their writing. The better writers also spent significantly more time in revising what they had written. The significance of the prewriting and rewriting stages has been largely ignored in research on writing ability.

Sanders and Littlefield (1975) maintain that the lack of consideration for these phases of writing in the testing of writing performance account for the lack of improvement found in research involving pretest and posttest writing of compositions. In their study they found that writing improved significantly when students were allowed to engage in longer prewriting and rewriting stages during pretesting and posttesting.

In discussing the importance of the prewriting stage, Della-Piana et al. (1976, p. 35) describes prewriting as:

> a process in which we examine new information, search back through our own experience for relevant associations, sort out the values, feelings and ideas we bring to the task at hand. As we engage in prewriting, we begin to formulate the assertions or hypotheses that will become the substance of an initial draft...On relatively short notice we must decide how we think and feel and, hence, what we shall write about a given issue or problem. And sometimes we can't even assume that the topic has been neatly defined for us. We may have to define the problem in ways that will let us

think and write effectively.

This prewriting period, during which material is gathered and given form, is crucial in producing a good piece of writing:

A good essay can be produced only if the author considers the material that he has on hand, what he wants to do with it, and the audience for whom he is writing before he begins to write (Judy, 1970, p. 302).

The recording of sentences on paper is the final stage of the composing process, and it may be the least significant one (Douglas, 1970). According to Canby (1926, p. 25): "The moments of actual composition are those between the birth of an idea and the setting down of the first word." Little is known about the operations which occur at the time of this initial organization of thought into written word, and it should be an obvious focus of future research. More knowledge of this stage would help in the improvement of instruction in written composition, and also in the evaluation of writing ability.

Revision of one's initial attempts at writing a composition is another significant phase of writing (Douglas, 1970; Maxwell, 1974; Murray, 1975). Della-Piana et al. (1976, p. 34) describe rewriting as:

a continual process of discovery in which we make substantial changes in the initial draft, relating ideas in the draft to new information, re-thinking our initial sense of what our topic is, how we feel about it, and what we're trying to accomplish by writing about this topic.

With regard to the significance of rewriting in the the teaching of written composition, Douglas (1970) suggests that it be used as a teaching technique. The submission of rough drafts to an instructor for the purpose of receiving editorial comments, and the expected subsequent submission of second and third drafts, would result in a greater critical awareness of the writing process in the student.

Maxwell (1974) decries the fact that rewriting is not considered to be important in most tests of written composition.

He refers to the 1974 NAEP Writing Study as "The National Assessment of Rough Draft Writing" since there was no provision for students to revise their work, and observes that this factor must be borne in mind when interpreting the results of the study. What is measured is the ability to produce a rough draft within a limited amount of time, and not the ability to produce a polished final version of a composition.

The importance of the prewriting and rewriting stages in the production of a written composition was taken into account as part of the rationale for the development of the test instrument in this study. Briefly, it was thought that providing students with a "first draft of rough notes" within the test would serve to equalize prewriting conditions, and help provide a better measure of the ability to write than most other tests. The development of the test instrument, and its rationale, will be described in more detail in the chapter on methodology.

THE PROBLEM OF VALIDITY IN OBJECTIVE TESTS OF WRITING

Validity, broadly defined as "the degree to which a test is capable of achieving certain aims", is the most significant characteristic of a test (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1973, p. 124). A test which does not measure what it is intended to measure is not a valid test, and does not provide us with the useful information we need about students' ability. Two types of validity, criterion-related validity and content validity, are relevant to the present study. Criterion-related validity is established empirically by correlating test scores with an independent external criterion; content validity is determined by studying the relationship between the test and the domain which it is supposed to represent "or about which inferences are to be made" (Mehrens, 1976, p. 33).

Predictive validity, a type of criterion-related validity, involves correlating test scores with relevant measures obtained at a later date. Many standardized objective tests of writing claim to possess predictive validity, and are successful in predicting certain types of future performance. The Sequential Tests of.

Educational Progress: Writing (STEPW) and the Scholastic Aptitude
Test (SAT) have been noted for predicting success in undergraduate
English classes (Cooper, 1975). College Entrance Examination
Board Achievement Tests in English Composition (ECT) scores are
also used as predictors of first-year English grades (Foley, 1971).
The ability of these tests, like the SAT for example, to predict
school success is coming into question, however, as a recent de-
cline in the predictive ability of the SAT is being observed (Dal-
ton, 1976).

The most commonly used tests to measure writing ability among
sizable groups of students are the standardized objective tests,
and not tests which elicit student writing. The objective tests
consist largely of multiple-choice items, in which students are
asked to choose answers from a given set of fixed responses. A
less frequently used objective test of writing ability is the in-
terlinear test developed by the Educational Testing Service (God-
shalk, Swineford, & Coffman; 1966). In this type of test, students
must edit poorly written passages by correcting the errors, i.e.,
by crossing out the mistakes and inserting correct responses.

These objective tests of writing ability do not require the
student to produce a sample of writing. In reviewing three of the
most widely used standardized tests, the STEPW, the McGraw-Hill
Basic Skills System Writing Test (MHBSS), and the Missouri College
English Test (MCET), Della-Piana et al. (1976) maintain that these
tests serve to measure very limited aspects of the writing process.
Paying little attention to the importance of creating one's own
alternatives in writing, the tests focus on the ability to choose
correct responses, which is a recognition skill.

The basic problem with these tests is their lack of content
validity, defined by Lennon (1976, p. 46) as:

> the extent to which a subject's responses to the items of a
> test may be considered to be a representative sample of his
> responses to a real or hypothetical universe of situations
> which together constitute the area of concern to the person
> interpreting the test.

The objective tests of writing ability do not have content validity because multiple-choice items cannot adequately represent actual writing responses. It is claimed, for example, that the MHBSS "measures the student's skills in written composition", yet the student merely engages in recognition responses—it is not required of him to produce a sample of writing (Della-Piana et al., 1976, p. 32). Important skills of written composition, such as the development of an idea and the organization of thoughts, are not tapped in objective tests of writing.

Because of the lack of content validity in these tests, they have been discredited by researchers interested in a genuine evaluation of student writing ability (Stake, 1967; McColly, 1970; Cooper, 1975; Cohen, 1975). Maxwell (1974, p. 1254) puts it succinctly:

Nationally standardized tests of the ordinary variety are scandalously inadequate in that they try to measure something by not measuring it. Asking students whether the style in Passage A is better than that in Passage B cannot logically be called a gauge of whether the students themselves can actually write.

The lack of content validity of the objective tests of writing ability disqualifies them from use as diagnostic tools and in the making of educational decisions. Marshall and Hales (1972) note that standardized tests are useful in the measurement of growth of ability, in placing students in classes (for screening purposes), in grouping students on the basis of expected performance, and in identifying individual strengths and weaknesses. Mehrens and Lehmann (1975, p. 8) maintain that the "ultimate purpose" of standardized tests is to aid in the making of educational decisions, and include the following in their list of the purposes of standardized tests:

Instructional Purposes

    Evaluation of learning outcomes

    Evaluation of teaching

    Evaluation of curriculum

Instructional Purposes (cont.)

    Learning diagnosis

    Differential assignments within class

Administrative Purposes

    Selection

    Classification

    Placement

    Public relations (information)

    Curriculum planning and evaluation

Research Purposes

The information derived from standardized tests of writing ability is limited, and the single score that usually results is not of much use in making educational decisions (Della-Piana et al., 1976). Although some of the tests may be of use as predictors of success in school (in English classes), problems arise when the data obtained from these tests, such as the SAT, are interpreted as being true indications of writing ability (Daniels, 1974). Information derived from objective tests of writing ability should not be used to fulfill the instructional, administrative, and research purposes previously mentioned; if the tests lack content validity and do not measure what they purport to measure, namely, the ability to write, then they should not be used in the making of educational decisions that require a valid measure of writing ability.

After conducting a survey of published tests in English, Wood and Pooley (1967) advised school administrators to interpret test results carefully, keeping in mind that a limited number of skills is measured in such tests, and not the entire range of skills involved in the writing process.

THE PROBLEM OF RELIABILITY IN TESTS OF ACTUAL WRITING

Reliability, "the degree of consistency between two measures of the same thing", is the second significant characteristic of a test instrument (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1973, p. 102). The popularity of the standardized objective test of writing ability is largely due

to the ease in grading and the reliability of grading. Reliability, or reproducibility of test scores, is easy to achieve in objective tests if the test items are adequate, that is, if the test directions are clear and the test items are not ambiguous (Wesman, 1976). Also, the more samples of a student's performance that are available on a test, the more reliable will be the assessment. Objective tests usually include a large number of individual measures, or test items, while writing tests are limited to a small number of tasks (Harris, 1969). Other factors which influence the test reliability of an objective examination include the lack of uniformity in testing conditions and variations in the performance of the test taker due to conditions beyond the examiner's control (such as illness).

In using tests to make any type of educational decision, it is necessary to obtain an estimate of the reliability of the test instruments. Reliability in assessment has been the criterion in the selection of tests to measure writing ability rather than validity, because the value of reliability is thought to supercede the value of validity (McColly, 1970). Educational measurement specialists have criticized composition tests for being unreliable for two basic reasons: 1) the subjective nature of the task of grading compositions, and 2) variations in student performance due to the assignment of different topics and as a result of taking the test on different occasions (Harris, 1969).

After conducting an early experiment studying the assignment of values to written work, Starch and Elliot (1912, p. 454) noted that:

> The first and most startling fact brought out by this investigation is the tremendously wide range of variation.... It is almost shocking...to find that the range of marks given by different teachers to the same paper may be as large as 35 or 40 points (apparently out of a total of 100 points).

In tracing the historical development of the controversy over the use of the objective test of writing ability versus the use of

the essay-type examination, Pilkington (1967, p.8) notes the persistence of the problem of fairly evaluating the writing ability of students: "Attempts to find a more satisfactory solution have ranged from judging students on the basis of a single essay-type examination to the use of purely objective testing procedures."

Recent research (Braddock et al., 1963; McColly, 1970; Diederich, 1974) has shown that reliability can be achieved in test measuring writing ability that use actual samples of writing, when the following sources of error are taken into account: the task variable, the rater variable, and the writer variable. The writer variable is a source of error for which the examiner has no control; Braddock et al. (1963, p. 6) describe this variable:

> When one evaluates an example of a student's writing he cannot be sure that the student is fully using his ability, in writing as well as he can. Something may be causing the student to write below his capacity: a case of the sniffles, a gasoline lawmmotor outside the examination room, or some distracting personal concern.

Kinbaid (1953) and Anderson (1960) verified the existence of such fluctuations within an individual's writing performance. In order to obtain a measure of growth in writing ability, Braddock et al. suggest using the average score of the best two out of three papers written.

The task variable includes variations in test conditions and those variations which arise from the assignment of the topic. The rater variable includes within-rater variability and between-rater variability. Both the task variable and the rater variable will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

THE TASK VARIABLE

An important source of error which has not been thoroughly researched, although it appears to be a critical factor in performance variability, is the task, or assignment, variable. Braddock et al. (1963) identify four aspects of this source of error variance: the topic, the mode of discourse, the time afforded for

writing, and the testing situation.

A study by Wiseman and Wrigley (1958) shwed that the performance of eleven-year-old youngsters had a tendency to vary significantly from topic to topic. French (1962, p. 4), in comparing a composition test to a one-item test, remarked on the effect of differences in motivation: "Some students may happen to enjoy the topic assigned, while others may find it difficult and unstimulating, this results in error." One of the significant conclusions, related to the topic variable, drawn from the NAEP Writing Study (1970) results is that students write best when they are assigned topics they find interesting or important (Slotnick, 1973).

One way of controlling the reliability of a composition test is to provide the assigned topic with a great deal of structure; McColly (1970, p. 152) describes the rationale for this approach:

> If all the writers are given something to say, the effects
> of knowledge will be held more constant than otherwise from
> writer to writer, and genuine variability due to differences
> in writing ability will more clearly emerge.

In disagreeing with this view, McColly maintains that if the task becomes too highly structured, it becomes a task of logic rather than of writing ability. In a study testing the effect of various types of topics, McColly and Remstad (1965, p. 153) used the following topic as representing a task not highly structured, but providing students with content material:

> You have heard the saying, "The best things in life are
> free". Decide whether this is true or false, then write
> an essay in which you defend your opinion.

The researchers, however, did not find this task to be more valid than more structured ones.

The type of topic just described is subject to the same type of criticism as the type of task used in the NAEP Writing Study (1974), namely, that of stimulus task vagueness and ambiguity. The following topic was assigned (Beshoar, 1975, p. 20):

> Everybody knows of something that is worth talking about.
> Maybe you know about a famous building like the Empire State

Building in New York City or something like the Golden
Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Or you might know a lot about
the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City or the new sports
arena in Atlanta or St. Louis. Or you might be familiar with
something from nature, like Niagara Falls, a gigantic wheat
field, a grove of orange trees, or a part of a wide, muddy
river like the Mississippi.

There is probably something you can describe. Choose
something you know about. It may be something from around
where you live, or something you have studied in school.
Think about it for awhile and then write a description of what
it looks like so that it could be recognized by someone who
read your description.

Name what you are describing and try to use your best
writing.

This type of stimulus is not the best way to elicit written responses
that are representative of a student's writing ability (Slotnick,
1973; Della-Piana et al., 1976). Maxwell (1974, p. 1254) notes that
the NAEP writing model is "useful but still insufficient" for assess-
ing the writing performance of students; although praising the use
of actual writing by the NAEP, Maxwell observes "they've barely be-
gun to find the way to assess writing adequately."

The mode of discourse to be used, "narration, description, ex-
position, argument, or criticism", is another facet of the task
variable that needs to be controlled (Braddock et al., 1963, p. 8).
Braddock, in stressing the significance of this source of error
variance, criticizes the research in composition conducted without
any consideration for mode of discourse, and regards it skeptically.
Kincaid (1953), for example, found day-to-day performance variance
in writing tasks, yet failed to control for the mode of discourse
to be used in the writing tasks.

The last two sources of error variance with regard to the task
variable include the prescribed time limit and actual testing con-
ditions. The amount of time spent on the task should be kept const-
ant for everyone, and the testing conditions should be kept as

uniform as possible. Variations in test administration can contribute to a lack of consistency in test scores.

THE RATER VARIABLE

Rater reliability pertains to the consistency with which test performances are assessed. Research has shown that raters tend to be unreliable "in their own inconsistency and in their failure to agree with colleagues on the relative merits of a student's composition" (Heaton, 1975, p. 134).

The variability of a rater within his own evaluations may arise from his subjective feelings or expectations regarding the compositions. The rater's mood and the time of the scoring can be significant factors in evaluation (Marshall & Hales, 1972). In reading papers raters may become progressively less critical. Another source of variability is the fatigue experienced by the rater, although Coffman, McConville, and Myers (1966) report it to be a critical factor only on the fifth day of scoring compositions.

It is important that the rater not have previous knowledge of the student's performance, so that he would not have preconceived notions of the student's writing ability. The quality of the handwriting on the compositions is also a source of error in the evaluation of writing performance (Remondino, 1959; Chase, 1968; Klein & Hart, 1968). Marshall and Powers (1969) found that the neatness of handwriting was a critical factor in the assignment of grades. Typing the compositions before they are reviewed by raters serves as a control for this bias.

The knowledgeability, or competence, of the raters is a significant factor in the reliability of scoring between raters: "The more competent the judges of essays are, the more they will agree and the more valid will be their judgements" (McColly, 1970, p. 150). Diederich, French, and Carlton (1961) found that English professors attained a higher degree of reliability in the rating of compositions than individuals representing five other professions (professors of social science, natural science; businessmen; writers; editors).

The amount of agreement between raters is, to a large extent,
a function of the amount of training and practice received by the
raters. Using a common set of scoring criteria is also important.
A period of training during which the criteria for scoring are
clearly defined, and during which the raters have time to practice
application of the criteria, is critical for achieving a high degree
of rater reliability (Braddock et al., 1963; McColly, 1970). Died-
erich (1974) found that the cooperative efforts of at least two
teachers are needed to obtain a reliable measure of writing ability.
The use of multiple rating procedures (using more than one rater)
appears to significantly increase the consistency in scoring (God-
shalk et al., 1966; Keepes & Rechter, 1972).

The problem of lack of agreement among raters can best be
solved by using competent, knowledgeable raters who undergo a brief
training period with practice, and work cooperatively, using a com-
mon set of specific scoring criteria (Della-Piana et al., 1976).
In stressing the importance of a reliable assessment of ability,
Mehrens and Lehmann (1973, p. 228) maintain that, in the process
of scoring, it is necessary to:

1) use appropriate methods to minimize biases,
2) pay attention only to the significant and relevant aspects
   of the answer,
3) be careful not to let personal idiosyncracies affect
   grading,
4) apply uniform standards to all the papers.

The importance of the uniformity of scoring procedures will be
discussed in the next section.

METHODS OF SCORING COMPOSITIONS

There are two basic methods used in the rating of writing
performance on composition tests, the global method and the ana-
lytical method. The global method, also known as the holistic
method, or the rapid impression method, requires the rater to assign
a single mark to the composition, based on the impression of the
composition as a whole. The analytical, or descriptive, method

requires the rater to assign scores to various specified components of the composition. Using an analytic approach facilitates the diagnosis of the strengths and weaknesses of the writing performance, and thus could be of value in determining instructional needs for individual students and for classes (Cartwright, 1969).

The holistic method of scoring has steadily been gaining in popularity, and represents the type of scoring preferred by the College Entrance Examination Board (Godshalk et al., 1966). In the comparison of the global method of grading to the analytical method, the global method is considered to be more valid (Britton, Martin, & Rosen; 1966). No difference has been found with regard to consistency of scoring (Keepes & Rechter, 1972). There is, however, sometimes a tendency for a type of halo effect to occur in analytic scoring, causing the ratings of various components of the composition to be similar (Page, 1968). According to Pilkington (1967), high reliability and validity in scoring can best be attained by using a team of suitably paired markers, that is, raters paired according to opposite marking tendencies, and a global approach.

The success of the rating method in the evaluation of compositions is dependent on the utilization of carefully formulated criteria (Cartwright, 1969). There are various criteria used in the rating schemes that exemplify the analytic approach to scoring compositions. Some commonly used types of rating scales are shown in Figure 1 (Adler, 1972) and Figure 2 (Diederich, 1974). A more detailed scheme for evaluating written assignments is shown in Figure 3 (Collins, 1975).

McColly and Remstad (1965) performed a study to investigate the effects of having different numbers of points in rating scales. They found no significant differences in the distribution of ratings or in agreement among raters when using a four-point scale was compared to using a six-point scale. More research is needed to ascertain whether larger scales, allowing finer discriminations in ratings, or smaller scales, resulting in higher levels of reliability, are more useful in the evaluation of writing ability.

Five methods of rating compositions were compared in a study

Quality of ideas	0	1	2 3	4	5
Development of ideas	0	1	2 3	4	5
Organization, relevance, movement	0	1	2 3	4	5
Style, flavor, individuality	0	1	2 3	4	5
Wording (choice of words)	0	1	2 3	4	5

Total Score _____

Example of Analytic Rating Scale (Adler, 1972)

Figure 1

	Low		Middle		High
Ideas	2	4	6	8	10
Organization	2	4	6	8	10
Wording	1	2	3	4	5
Flavor	1	2	3	4	5
					_____
Usage	1	2	3	4	5
Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5
Spelling	1	2	3	4	5
Handwriting	1	2	3	4	5
					_____
				Sum	_____

Diederich's Rating Scale (Diederich, 1974)

Figure 2

I. ORGANIZATION, FORM, AND WRITING STYLE

(A) Well developed introduction and conclusion.   0 1 2 3 4 5

(B) Correct [illegible] consistent footnote form.   0 1 2 3 4 5

(C) Correct and consistent bibliographic form.   0 1 2 3 4 5

(D) Correct handling of quotations.   0 1 2 3 4 5

(E) Correct sentence structure.   0 1 2 3 4 5

(F) Correct paragraphing.   0 1 2 3 4 5

(G) Correct spelling.   0 1 2 3 4 5

(H) Overall impression–title page–proofreading.   0 1 2 3 4 5

II. KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF HISTORICAL INFORMATION

(A) Accuracy of information.   0 1 2 3 4 5

(B) Inclusion of essential information.   0 1 2 3 4 5

(C) Absence of irrelevant information.   0 1 2 3 4 5

III. COMPREHENSION OF THE TOPIC

(A) Sustained discussion of topic.   0 1 2 3 4 5

(B) Good selection of source material re the topic   0 1 2 3 4 5

(C) Ability to point out the major issue(s) and
related problems.   0 1 2 3 4 5

(D) Ability to see the topic in context.   0 1 2 3 4 5

IV. SYNTHESIS AND JUDGEMENT

(A) A clear thesis statement.   0 1 2 3 4 5

(B) The use of a wide variety of evidence to
support the thesis.   0 1 2 3 4 5

(C) A logical inter-relation of ideas.   0 1 2 3 4 5

(D) Ability to "weigh" the issues and evidence
in the development of conclusions.   0 1 2 3 4 5

Collins' Rating Scale (Collins, 1975)

Figure 3

conducted by Follman and Anderson (1967). Blount (1973, p. 1087) describes the five methods:

a) The California Essay Scale, in which 25 questions about content, organization, style and mechanics are asked; (b) the Cleveland Composition Rating Scale, in which content, conventions and style are rated on 10 scales such as "organized" versus "jumbled"; c) the Diederich Rating Scale, in which points are given in eight topics ranging from ideas and organization to spelling and handwriting; d) the Follman English Mechanics Guide, a checklist concerned with punctuation, sentence structure, paragraphing, diction and usage; and e) Everyman's Scale, in which the rater's own particular criteria are used.

There was no significant difference in the scores given to compositions across the five methods, indicating that most rating schemes probably measure the same general elements.

If analytic scales are to be used for particular tests of writing ability, however, Cooper (1975, p. 116) maintains that it is best to design one's own analytic scale measuring the main characteristics of the type of writing to be assessed: "There will be some overlap in all the scales, but there will be in each scale some unique components of the writing mode." There is no total agreement among educational measurement experts as to which scales are best, so it is left to the individual's discretion to decide which type of rating scheme is most suited to the composition task to be evaluated.

TEST CONSTRUCTION

Marshall and Hales (1972, p. 115) describe a standardized test as "a measuring device which is likely to yield reliable and valid scores—scores that are made meaningful by their relation to a relevant criterion group." The essential distinction between teacher-constructed achievement tests and standardized achievement tests is that in a standardized test, "the systematic sampling of performance (that is, the pupil's score) has been obtained under

prescribed directions of administration"; other distinctions include differences in "sampling of content, construction, norms, and purpose and use" (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1973, p. 455).

The construction of a valid and reliable test necessitates careful planning. The development and production stages of a test instrument are significant: "It is in these initial stages that answers are sought as to the specific abilities or skills the test is being designed to measure" (Morrison, 1974, p. 45). The test items must be developed that adequately represent the domain being investigated, so as to ensure content validity. Marshall and Hales (1972, p. 115) describe the development of a test as beginning with "a test plan" which includes "the behavioral manifestations to be measured". After the identification of objectives and possible consultation with subject-area experts, the constructors of the test must develop test items that are in keeping with the population to be tested and the scoring procedures to be used.

The test constructor must decide whether to use objective type items or essay questions. Objective type items consist of the supply type, also known as the short answer format, and the select type, which consists of multiple-choice, true-false, and matching items (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1973). Mehrens and Lehmann also classify essay questions into two types: the extended-response type, in which there are few limitations on how a topic will be discussed, and the restricted-response type, in which there are definite restrictions on the form of the response. Essay tests may be more appropriate in "assessing the quality of an examinee's higher-order mental processes: application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation" (Marshall, 1972, p. 23). Essay questions are inherently more unreliable with regard to scoring and assessment than are objective type items; this is essentially because of the need for subjective judgements to be made by raters in scoring written responses. In commenting on the usefulness of essay responses for the evaluation of certain performances, Sheridan (1974, p. 5) observes that: "There is a very marked absence of development work into ways of retaining the valuable qualities of open-

ended questions and at the same time reducing the sources of un-reliability."

The test instructions should be clearly stated, communicating to the students all the information germane to the testing situation, including the form of responses to be recorded, the type of information to be contained in the response, the relative weights of questions, and the time limit (Marshall and Hales, 1972). The length of the test should be such that most students could easily finish within the time limit. The layout of items and information in a test should demonstrate an effective use of space: the items should be clearly comprehensible without wasting available space.

After the test items and scoring procedures have been decided upon, preliminary versions of the test should be constructed and administered in experimental form. After analyzing the results, the final form of the test should be chosen for reproduction. Directions for the administration and scoring of the test must be finalized at this point.

The steps in the construction of an educational test are summarized by Harris (1969, p. 94):

1. Planning the test.
2. Preparing the test items and directions.
3. Submitting the test material to review and revising on the basis of review.
4. Pretesting the material and analyzing the results.
5. Assembling the final form of the test.
6. Reproducing the test.

These steps should lead to the development of a valid and reliable test instrument.

A TEST TO MEASURE SYNTACTIC MATURITY

Hunt (1965, 1970) and O'Donnell (1967) used a unique type of test, consisting of a rewriting task, in order to obtain measures of syntactic maturity. The average length of a T-unit, i.e., a main clause and all its modifying phrases and subordinate clauses, was used as an index of growth in writing ability; longer T-unit

lengths characterize more mature writers.

O'Donnell (1967) developed a test to measure syntactic maturity, consisting of a passage with 32 sentences of connected discourse. The sentences are short, single clauses, averaging about four-and-one-third words. The use of such short sentences provides the student with many opportunities to use sentence-combining transformations, which enable the students "to embed modifiers, make deletions, and perform a variety of other linguistic functions such as coordination and subordination" (Strong, 1976, p. 56).

Students were instructed to rewrite the given passage "in a better way", without leaving out any of the information in the passage (Hunt, 1970). In the evaluation of the students' work for syntactic maturity, sentences containing extraneous material were deleted. This type of test is to be preferred to a test of free writing, since it affords a great amount of control over the task variables.

Although this type of rewriting task may be an excellent means of measuring syntactic maturity, it is too highly structured for the assessment of free-writing performance. The student does not engage in much higher order thinking, such as analyzing and organizing paragraphs, or developing ideas. The rewriting task to measure syntactic maturity is only indirectly related to more sophisticated free writing.

THE TEACHING OF WRITING SKILLS

Evidence to support the notion of a "literacy crisis" across North America is growing as attention is being drawn to the number of undergraduate students displaying marked weaknesses in writing performance. Approximately half of the freshman class at the University of California at Berkeley were placed in remedial composition classes after failing placement exams (Lyons, 1976). In 1975, 40% of first year students at the University of British Columbia failed an English examination described as a "Grade Nine" test, in which they were asked to rewrite sentences with structural errors,

and to write an essay which was graded only on the basis of grammar, spelling, and formal organization (Berland & McGee, 1977).

Mencken, in 1926, wrote:

> The great majority of American high-school pupils, when they put their thoughts on paper, produce only a mass of confused and puerile nonsense...They express themselves so clumsily that it is often quite impossible to understand them at all (Lyons, 1976)..

In the past decade, the phenomenon of poor writing has become evident at the undergraduate level, resulting in concern over the extent to which today's students are actually "illiterate". Literacy is defined by Hillerich (1976, p. 53) as:

> that demonstrated competence in communication skills which enables the individual to function, appropriate to his age, independently in his society and with a potential for movement in that society.

An individual must be able to communicate in writing at an effective level in order to be considered literate, and the inability of many students to attain this level constitutes a serious problem.

The teaching of writing skills at both the high school and university levels has apparently not been effective. The traditional approach to the teaching of writing involves the assigning of compositions and handing them back with corrections (Squire & Applebee, 1968). This method may not be teaching anything about the actual process of writing, as Douglas (1970, p. 251) observes:

> We find ourselves "teaching" the abstract qualities of papers —such things as unity, coherence, and emphasis. In fact what we do is to adjure our students to achieve in their written work qualities which must be the result of operations of some sort. But what the operations are, what students should <u>do</u>, if their work is to have the qualities that we find good— about such questions we are silent.

The actual task of writing does not receive sufficient attention in composition classes; a great deal of energy is expended in the correction of errors (Douglas, 1970). In a 1963 study of

composition textbooks used in schools, Lynch and Evans found that
most of the text material was devoted to grammar, usage, and mech-
anics, rather than to the development and organization of composi-
tions. This approach is reflected in classroom instruction, re-
sulting in a "fragmentary" approach to the teaching of writing,
described by Squire and Applebee (1968, p. 130):

> Although course of study proclaim worthy enough objectives
> relating to "improving abilities" or "increasing writing
> skills",...little thought or effort is given to how a student's
> writing ability can be improved. As a result of this lack of
> focus on the process or sequence of writing, the writing ex-
> perience of students in most programs suffers from either re-
> dundancy or fragmentation. Students are therefore inclined to
> view the program in composition as a disconnected series of
> activities.... If growth and improvement are to be expected
> from the students, they must be built into the program itself.

Research on written composition has not had much of an effect
in the teaching of writing (Blount, 1973). Most of the research,
however, is flawed anyway with respect to either the methodology
employed or to the lack of applicability to classroom practice.
Braddock et al. (1963) found only five studies in written composi-
tion, out of more than 500 screened, that were worthy of being des-
cribed in length.

One avenue of successful research in written composition has
dealt with the effects of grammar instruction on writing ability.
Mellon (1969) and O'Hare (1973) found that practice in transforma-
tional sentence-combining improved the growth of syntactic fluency
of students. Valid research is needed in the improvement of other
aspects of written composition so as to effect a change in in-
structional practices. Blount (1973, p. 1091) is optimistic in
this regard: "It seems clearly possible to solve significant prob-
lems in the teaching of English by research."

PRECIS WRITING AND WRITTEN COMPOSITION

In the teaching of English as a second language, the teaching

of writing skills is approached in a more systematic fashion.
Chastain (1976) describes a typical instructional sequence to dev-
elop writing skills in a second language. The initial step of
practice in the writing of simple sentences is followed by a phase
of instruction in "sustained writing", in which students practice
the writing of paragraphs. It is at the beginning of this controlled
phase of writing that students are given assignments in precis writ-
ing. In working with a given content, students can practice the
basic precis skills involved in organizing information into clear,
coherent paragraphs.

Dinter (1970) advocates instruction in precis writing as the
means of introducing composition writing in second language courses.
Through precis writing, students can practice basic writing skills
without having the added worry of drawing from their own knowledge
of a subject. The information is given to the students; they must
give it form.

In Chastain's (1976, p. 376) instructional sequence the prelim-
inary stage of controlled writing is followed by "semi-controlled
writing" "in which students are given written, oral, or visual
guides to assist them in composing as well as to provide ideas to
stimulate their thinking." The highest level of writing ability in
this sequence of instruction involves free writing on a given topic.
The stages of controlled and semi-controlled writing are important
in reaching the goal of free writing for second language learners
(Dykstra and Paulston, 1967).

Outside the area of second language learning, precis writing
is, at present, not given a prominent role in the teaching of writ-
ing skills. In the past, precis writing was often used as an exer-
cise in English classes to improve writing ability (Kingston, 1961).
In a textbook on English composition, Ford (1956) observes that
practice in precis writing should develop such skills as the abili-
ty to write coherent prose. Donley (1975) also advocates practice
in precis writing as a means of developing good writing skills, name-
ly, the ability to organize thoughts, to express oneself concisely
and precisely, and to write coherently.

Donley (1975, p. 213) also maintains that there is a direct link between precis writing and composition writing, a link that should be exploited in the teaching of writing skills; he refers to the essay plan as a "'precis' done in advance". In attributing the underestimation of the value of precis writing to the general neglect of writing skills suffered during the past few years, Donley calls for a new look at precis writing and its value in the teaching of basic and advanced writing skills.

The ability to write a precis includes the following skills: condensing sentences to eliminate unnecessary details, writing paraphrases, combining sentences, choosing and writing the main ideas of paragraphs and longer passages, recognizing relationships between paragraphs, and identifying main ideas with significant details in proper order (an outlining skill) (Ford, 1956; Kingston, 1961).

Organization is one of the most important aspects of written expression (Hook, 1965). Saalbach (1958, p. 505) maintains that the lack of organization is always one of the biggest weaknesses in the writing performance of students: "No single idea holds their themes together; and, if there is the suggestion of an idea, it is usually lost in a mass of irrelevant detail." In recommending the use of precis writing to develop writing skills, Courtney (1965, p. 90) maintains that: "Exercise in precis writing requires a student to cut through illustration, detail, and trivia to the exact statement of the core idea." Such skills, when transferred to other forms of writing, should result in a more concise, clear, and orderly use of language.

Minot (1975) found that precis-type assignments , i.e., written assignments of 50 words or less, encouraged the development of conciseness and preciseness of expression. This seems to indicate that there may be a transfer of skills between precis writing and composition writing. Before more thorough research is conducted investigating this possible transfer of skills, the relationship between precis writing and composition writing must be explored. It is important to find out if the two forms of writing are related, and to discover in what ways they may be alike. It would be of value to

discover the precis skills that are most highly related to written composition skills.

SUMMARY

The act of writing a composition is comprised of a complicated series of activities, including prewriting and rewriting; the complexity of this process is usually not taken into account in the design of instruction and evaluation techniques. Objective tests of writing suffer from a lack of content validity, while subjective measures are marked by problems of reliability. Two major sources of error, contributing to this problem of reliability, originate in the task variable and the rater variable. Measures can be taken to control for these sources of error variance.

The basic methods of scoring compositions include the global method, based on a rapid impression marking of the composition as a whole, and the analytic method, based on the marking of various specified features of the composition. The steps in the construction of a test include the following: 1) planning, 2) preparing test items and directions, 3) reviewing and revising test material, 4) pretesting, 5) assembling the final version, and 6) reproducing the test. Hunt (1970) utilized a unique test of writing ability, based on a highly structured rewriting task, to measure syntactic maturity. Some basic principles involved in the design of the test could be applied to other writing tests.

Research in written composition, characterized by poor methodology and a lack of general applicability, has not had much of an effect in the university classroom, where poor writing is becoming more evident as a problem. Teaching of written composition should be more systematic, following the lead of second language classes, for which instructional sequences have been developed to facilitate the acquisition of these skills. Research in precis writing, used in second language classes to teach writing skills, may be of value in the design of a systematic approach to the instruction of written composition skills in regular composition classes.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

Chapter Two presented a review of the literature related to the two problems of the study: 1) the standardization and validation of a test instrument to measure written composition skills, and 2) the relationship between precis-writing skills and written composition skills. In this chapter the methodology used in investigating these problems will be described.

The approach to the problem of test standardization and validation will include: a comparison of global ratings with analytical ratings assigned to the written composition test, a comparison of the global ratings assigned to the test with an independent criterion measure, and a study of inter-rater reliability in the scoring of the test. The written composition test differs from most tests measuring writing performance in its focus on the rewriting of a given set of information. The test instrument (see Appendix A) will be described later on in this chapter. The test itself will be studied by investigating the relationship between the use of the information provided on the test and ratings assigned to the test. The study of the relationship between precis writing and composition writing will be approached by comparing scores on the composition test with scores on a test measuring precis-writing skills.

THE STANDARDIZATION AND VALIDATION OF A TEST INSTRUMENT TO MEASURE WRITTEN COMPOSITION SKILLS: OBJECTIVES

Statement of the Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. Each of the 10 subscores assigned in the analytical ratings of the composition are positively correlated

with the global score assigned to the composition.

Hypothesis 2. The composition subscores assigned in the analytical ratings of the composition are positively intercorrelated.

Hypothesis 3. Global scores assigned to the composition are positively correlated with grades for more traditional written composition assignments completed by each student.

Hypothesis 4. Global scores assigned by the regular composition teacher to the written composition test of the study are positively correlated with grades assigned by that teacher to more traditional written composition assignments completed by each student.

Hypothesis 5. There is a high degree of interrater reliability in in the assignment of global and analytical ratings to the composition.

The test instrument developed for the present study differs from most other tests of writing ability because it provides the student with specific information to use in writing about a given topic. There are eight separate sets of information or "arguments" provided in the test instrument. (See page 3 of Appendix A, entitled "'Your' First Rough Notes".) The arguments are given in the form of short, choppy sentences so that they could be combined and rewritten, somewhat similar to the sentences used by Hunt (1965, 1970) to measure syntactic maturity. Students were encouraged to add information to the material provided in the test of this study; this represents a departure from Hunt's methodology. In evaluating syntactic maturity, Hunt eliminated all material extraneous to that given.

Seven of the eight arguments presented in the written composition test of the present study contain information relevant to the given topic, "The Effects of Television on Children". One argument contains information irrelevant to an intelligent discussion of the issue.

To determine the relationship between the use of the given

information and scores assigned to the composition, the following
hypotheses were devised:

Hypothesis 6.   The number of given arguments used in the written
composition is positively correlated with the global
score assigned to the composition.

Hypothesis 7.   The number of given arguments used in the written
composition is positively correlated with subscores
in the analytical ratings measuring: a) argument
development, b) clarity of main idea, and c) rele-
vance of used information.

Hypothesis 8.   The total number of arguments used is positively cor-
related with subscores in the analytical ratings
measuring: a) argument development, b) clarity of
main idea, and c) relevance of used information.

Hypothesis 9.   The use of the irrelevant given argument in the writ-
ten composition is negatively correlated with the
subscore in the analytical ratings measuring relevance
of used information.

Rationale for the Hypotheses

The test constructed for the present study was developed in
response to the need for valid and reliable tests of writing ability
(Maxwell, 1974; Della-Piana et al., 1976). The prewriting stage of
the writing process, the time during which information on a topic
is gathered and assimilated (Judy, 1970; Stallard, 1973), is rarely
considered in the design of a test measuring writing ability (Sanders
& Littlefield, 1975). In the development of the test for this study,
the prewriting stage was taken into account; a given set of informa-
tion with which students could work was included as part of the test.
By the inclusion of this set of material, the prewriting conditions
for the students were equalized to a great extent, allowing the test
to provide a better measure of the actual writing phase of the three-
phase process of prewriting, writing, and rewriting (Rohman, 1965).
The writing performance elicited in the test would thus be more rep-

representative of the actual writing process than traditional written composition tests. Since validity is reflected by the extent to which test items are representaive of the domain about which conclusions are to be drawn (Lennon, 1976), the written composition test of this study should be a valid test of writing performance.

An analytic rating scale, similar to others used in composition evaluation (Follman & Anderson, 1967; Diederich, 1974), was designed in order to assess important traits of the writing performance. Independent of the analytical ratings, a global score was assigned to the composition. Global scores represent a valid measure of writing ability demonstrated in written compositions (Godshalk et al., 1966; Britton, Martin, & Rosen, 1966; Coffman & Kurfman, 1968). The judgement of writing performance, based on a global, rapid impression evaluation of a written composition, is most likely the result of a consideration of the composition's basic traits, whether this be a conscious effort or not (Nyberg, Note 5). Hypothesis 1 postulates a degree of relationship between the analytic ratings measuring these traits and the global score. The basic aspects of composition-writing performance must of necessity interact among themselves because of an inherent "overlap in content" of criteria in the assessment of written compositions (Foley, 1971); thus, a positive intercorrelation is predicted in the second hypothesis.

The third hypothesis represents a test of criterion-related validity, in which test scores are compared with an independent, relevant measure (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1973). In this case global ratings assigned to the composition are compared with an external measure of writing ability. Hypothesis 4 represents another check on the test's validity, by determining the extent to which the instructor's ratings of performance on the test agree with that instructor's ratings of the performance of a student in traditional written composition tasks. A test is valid to the degree in which it fulfills its purpose (Marshall and Hales, 1972); the composition test of the study is valid to the degree it measures written composition performance. Thus an appropriate external criterion is the instructor's assessment of the student's composition-writing performance.

In the design, administration, and scoring of the test, care
was exercised to maximize test objectivity (see Marshall and Hales, 1972).
On the basis of research undertaken to improve interrater reliabil-
ity (Ebel & Damrin, 1960; Braddock et al., 1963; McColly, 1970),
certain measures were taken. A short period of training was pro-
vided for the raters. During this time a common set of criteria was
clearly defined; working cooperatively, the raters practiced the ap-
plication of these criteria to sample compositions. On the basis
of these precautionary measures, a high degree of interrater relia-
bility was predicted in the fifth hypothesis.

Hypotheses 6 through 9 represent the position that the measure-
ment of the use of the information provided in the test instrument
can serve to predict the composition test scores. If the information
that students could use in the writing of a composition is provided
to them, then the way the information is used may serve as a valid
indicator of writing ability. An examination that tests students'
ability to use information, rather than their ability to remember
and use what they remember, is a more effective examination in meas-
uring certain writing skills (Macintosh, 1974). Hypotheses 6 through
9 stem from the assumption that the quality of a written composition,
as expressed in global and analytical ratings, is related to the
student's use of available information. The testing of these hypoth-
eses can be viewed as a manner of checking on the validity of this
type of approach to testing written composition skills, i.e., provid-
ing students with a given set of information with which they could
work.

Operational Definitions of the Variables

Subscore on the composition test: the average of two independent
ratings, based on an analytical scale ranging in value from
0 to 4 (0=low, 4=high) for each of the following ten aspects
of the written composition:

1. Organization
2. Clarity of main idea
3. Argument development

4. Effectiveness and logical development
   of conclusion.

5. Paragraph development

6. Relevance of used information

7. Appropriateness of word choice

8. Grammatical and syntactical accuracy

9. Conciseness of language

10. Spelling accuracy

Global rating on the composition test: a rating of the composition, based on a scale ranging in value from 0 to 4 (0=low, 4=high). A rater assigns a rating to the composition as a whole, on the basis of a general impression obtained from a rapid reading of the response. In all cases, with the exception of the composition teacher's global rating, the average of ratings assigned by two independent raters is used as the global rating score.

Grades for more traditional written composition assignments: the average percentage grades received by students for expository composition assignments or tests, which were administered by the composition instructor as normal class work during the course of the academic semester.

Interrater reliability: the amount of agreement in the ratings assigned between the two raters, as expressed in a correlation coefficient.

Given arguments: the eight arguments included in the section of the test entitled "'Your' First Rough Notes". See Appendix A, page 3.

Total number of arguments: the number of given arguments used by the student in the composition plus the number of arguments used that were generated by the student.

Irrelevant given argument: argument #5 on the test, in the section entitled "'Your' First Rough Notes". See Appendix A, page 3.

Argument: a unit of information providing enough information to illustrate a particular point of view.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRECIS-WRITING SKILLS AND WRITTEN
COMPOSITION SKILLS: OBJECTIVES

Statement of the Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1a. Total scores achieved on the precis-writing test will
be positively correlated with global scores assigned
to the written composition test.

Hypothesis 1b. Subscores, on the precis-writing test, measuring the
subskill of writing a precis will be positively cor-
related with global scores assigned to the written
composition test.

Hypothesis 2a. Total scores achieved on the precis-writing test will
be positively correlated with individual subscores
assigned in the analytical ratings of the written
composition test.

Hypothesis 2b. Subscores, on the precis-writing test, measuring the
subskill of writing a precis will be positively cor-
related with individual subscores assigned in the
analytical ratings of the written composition test.

Hypothesis 3. Subscores on the precis-writing test measuring in-
dividual subskills will be positively correlated
with all composition measures.

Hypothesis 4a. Total scores achieved on the precis-writing test will
be positively correlated with grades for more tradi-
tional written composition assignments completed by
each student.

Hypothesis 4b. Subscores, on the precis-writing test, measuring the
subskill of writing a precis will be positively cor-
related with grades for more traditional written
composition assignments completed by each student.

Rationale for the Hypotheses

A precis is a concise restatement of the main points and essen-
tial information of a text, preserving the order, emphasis, and tone
of the original (Kingston, 1958). Donley (1975) maintains that
precis writing and composition writing are integrally related skills.

It is predicted in Hypotheses 1a and 1b that the relationship between precis-writing performance and written-composition performance will be confirmed.

Many characteristics of a well-written precis appear to be analogous to the characteristics of a well-written composition: coherence of ideas, clear expression of main ideas, conciseness and precision of language, effective organization of ideas, exclusion of irrelevant information, and syntactical accuracy (Ford, 1960). In studying the transfer of writing skills, Minot (1975) found that practice in writing precis-type assignments served to encourage the conciseness and precision of expression in writing. It is postulated in Hypotheses 2a and 2b that overall performance in precis writing will be related to individual written composition skills. Since precis writing can be viewed as being comprised of various subskills, it is predicted in Hypothesis 3 that performance in individual precis subskills would be related to written composition scores.

Hypotheses 4a and 4b represent a prediction of the relationship between precis-writing performance and written composition performance, using a different criterion for the measurement of written composition skills. This criterion measure is represented by grades achieved by students on written composition assignments for class that are more traditional than the test designed for the study. This is a type of check on the validity of using the written composition test for such purposes.

There are two measures of precis-writing performance used in the study: 1) the overall score achieved on the precis-writing test, consisting of the sum of the subscores measuring precis-writing subskills, and 2) the subscore in the precis-writing test measuring the subskill of writing a precis. The former measure is referred to in Hypotheses 1a, 2a, and 4a; the latter measure is referred to in Hypotheses 1b, 2b, and 4b.

Operational Definitions of the Variables

Total score achieved on the precis-writing test: the sum of the 13
   subscores achieved on the test, each skill rated on a pass

or fail basis.

Subscore on the precis-writing test: a score of 1 (pass) or 0 (fail)
assigned to each of the following discrete precis-writing
subskills:

1. Choose the main idea of a paragraph.

2. Write the main idea of a paragraph.

3. Recognize relationships among the main
   ideas of paragraphs.

4. Choose the main idea of a text.

5. Write the main idea of a text.

6. Choose the best paraphrase.

7. Write a good paraphrase.

8. Combine simple sentences.

9. Condense a sentence to required length.

10. Combine, condense, and paraphrase related
    sentences into one sentence of a required length.

11. Write an outline of a given text.

12. Write a clear sentence based on outline points.

13. Write a precis of a passage to a required length.

The other variables used in this part of the study are the same as
those identified in the first part of the study. (See pages 38-39.)

SAMPLE POPULATION

Four intact remedial English classes being taught during the
same academic year (the spring semester of 1977) at both campuses
of Concordia University were used in the study. Enrollment in each
of these classes ranged from 15 to 25 students; data for the study
was collected from 19 members of Class 1, 14 members of Class 2,
16 members of Class 3, and 17 members of Class 4, with a total of
66 valid cases for most of the hypotheses of the study. Informa-
tion for some of the hypotheses could not be obtained from all of
the classes; these cases will be indicated in the "Results" chapter.

The use of the only classes available precluded the random sel-
ection of students. The use of the remedial English classes was

made available by the coordinators of the English Departments on both Concordia University campuses. The sample of students used in the study was made up of classes whose teachers volunteered to participate.

Students who were present for the administration of the precis-writing test and the composition test provided the data for the study. In order to control for the Hawthorne effect, described by Tuckman (1972, p. 128) as a "reactive effect of experimental arrangements", the testing was presented as part of the coursework. To ascertain the extent to which certain criteria of internal and external validity were satisfied, information regarding the composition of the classes, i.e., the percentage of native speakers of the English language, was obtained.

DESIGN

The two parts of the study, the standardization and validation of a test instrument to measure written composition skills, and the investigation of the relationship between precis-writing skills and written composition skills, have the design of an <u>ex post facto</u> correlational study, illustrated as follows (Tuckman, 1972, p. 124): $O_1 O_2$. The study involves the comparison of two sets of observations, separated by one week, for each of four intact classes. Observation 1 represents all variables that relate to precis-writing skills; observation 2 represents all written composition measures.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEST INSTRUMENT

The first phase described by Harris (1969) in the construction of an educational test is that of planning. Marshall and Hales (1972, p. 115) also describe the development of a test as beginning with a "test plan" to identify objectives and the "behavioral manifestations to be measured". According to Morrison (1974, p. 45), in the first stage of test development, "answers are sought as to the specific abilities or skills the test is being designed to measure".

The written composition test of the present study was developed as an attempt to respond to the need for valid and reliable tests of

writing ability. A survey of research in the area of written compos-
ition testing reveals that most available writing tests are inade-
quate (see section on Related Research). Tests using objective-type
items are not valid for measuring written composition skills (Della-
Piana et al., 1976); essay-type tests suffer from a failure to
control for the effects of various extraneous variables, and also
from problems related to rater reliability (Braddock et al., 1963;
Heaton, 1975).

In the development of the test for the present study it was de-
cided to construct a test that would use an actual sample of writing
for the basis of evaluation rather than objective-type items, since
it is generally agreed that such writing tests are more valid (Stake,
1967; McColly, 1970; Maxwell, 1974; Cooper, 1975; Cohen, 1975). Es-
say-type tests in general are "especially appropriate for measuring
higher-order mental processes, such as analysis, synthesis, evalua-
tion, and organization of materials" (Marshall and Hales, 1972, p. 28).
These higher-order skills cannot be measured in objective-type test items.

A composition can be defined as a "task which involves the stu-
dent in manipulating words in grammatically correct sentences and in
linking those sentences to form a piece of continuous writing which
successfully communicates the writer's thoughts and ideas on a certain
topic" (Heaton, 1975, p. 127). Essay-type examinations "require the
examinee independently to summon and organize his relevant knowledge"
(Huddleston, 1954, p. 165). Since most composition tasks require the
student to demonstrate a certain amount of knowledge in a given con-
tent area, in the evaluation of the composition, a student's grade is
partially dependent on his ability to recall material relevant to the
topic assigned (Goyer, 1967; Burton, 1970; Macintosh, 1974). In order
to better evaluate the actual ability to write, independent of the
ability to recall information, the author of the present study decided
to provide reference material for students to use in composing their
written responses. Thus, conditions are more equalized in the pre-
writing phase of the writing process (see section on Related Research)
in this test, than in tests which require the student to summon a body
of knowledge from recall.

The phase in test construction which follows planning involves the preparation of the test items (Harris, 1969). Tests used by Hunt (1965, 1970) and O'Donnell (1966) were used as models in designing the presentation format of the reference material to be used in the composition task. Presenting the information in short, single clauses provides the student with opportunities to use the material in different ways, including sentence-combining transformations. Also, presenting the reference material in the form of single clauses, shorter than those used in normal writing, serves to inhibit a direct imitation response on the part of the student.

The task assigned by Hunt (1970), namely, rewriting the passage in a better way, without leaving out any of the information provided in the task stimulus and without including any additional material, is too highly structured for the assessment of free-writing performance. The student is not required to engage in higher-order thinking, such as organizing and developing ideas. In developing the test for the present study, it was decided to present the reference material in a manner such that students could select, apply, and organize the information they needed to develop their ideas, and yet feel free to include additional information from their own recall. Thus, the sets of information representing the reference material is entitled "'Your' First Rough Notes".

In order to elicit samples of writing that can be used as valid measures of a student's ability to write, it is important that the assigned topic be of some interest to the students (Slotnick, 1973). For this study, the topic of "The Effects of Television on Children" was selected because it was thought to be interesting, topical, and controversial. Arguments were constructed to develop both sides of the issue, i.e., television has positive effects on children and television has negative effects on children. Three arguments for each side were chosen and reduced to given sets of essential information, written in the form of short, single-clause sentences, as previously mentioned. Two additional sets of information were included, one set providing basic content information to be used anywhere in the composition, and the other set consisting of information irrelevant to the

issue. These two sets of information were included so as to better simulate a writing situation in which students must discriminate among sets of available information in order to determine which material is to be used and in what fashion.

Test directions were clearly stated, communicating to the students all the information essential to the composition task, including the form of response to be recorded, the type of information to be contained in the response, the relative weights of various aspects of the written composition in the final evaluation, and time and wordage restrictions, as recommended by Marshall and Hales (1972).

After this preliminary version of the composition test was assembled, it was submitted to various subject-area experts, including instructors of composition courses, for review, as suggested by Harris (1969). On the basis of their recommendations final revisions of the composition test were made and a final form was assembled and reproduced, ready for use.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TEST INSTRUMENT

The test instrument designed for the study consists of six pages: pages one and two provide the directions to be read aloud by the instructor to the students; page three, entitled "'Your' First Rough Notes", consists of eight sets of information, or "arguments", randomly distributed and listed in numerical order; pages four through six consist of lined sheets of paper to be used for the students written responses. The six pages of the test instrument, printed on one side only, are stapled together. (See Appendix A for test copy.)

The test was designed to provide as much standardization as possible with regard to the testing of written composition skills. Provisions were made to control for the following test variables: topic, information about the topic, mode of discourse, time alloted to the completion of the task, and suggested number of words.

In the directions students are instructed to take a position on the issue of whether television has either good effects or bad effects (or both) on children, and to write a composition supporting the view adopted; control of the topic variable was thus provided.

The eight arguments presented on page three of the test instrument are written in sets of short sentences so as to facilitate the rewriting and use of the information. A description of the given sets of information follows: Set 1 provides basic content information to be used anywhere in the composition, i.e., in the introduction, in the main body to support a particular view, or in the conclusion. Sets 3, 4, and 7 provide information supporting the view that television has negative effects on children. Set 3 consists of the argument that television shows reinforce the stereotyping of sex-roles. The argument that television viewing fosters passive behavior in children is indicated in set 4. Set 7 provides information for the argument that watching television may reinforce the behavior of racial stereotyping. In contrast, sets 2, 6, and 8 provide information supporting the view that television has positive effects on children. The argument that watching television broadens a child's experience of the world is given in set 2. Set 6 consists of the argument that some television shows provide positive female models of behavior. The argument that children can learn basic skills from watching television is shown in set 8. Information irrelevant to an intelligent discussion of the topic is provided in set 5.

In order to control for the mode of discourse variable, students are given the following directions on page one:

1) contrast the opposing view with your own,

2) treat the main idea in your composition (try to come up with a precise statement of what you believe the main idea in your composition to be),

3) state clearly your conclusion as to the effects of television on children,

4) present your position clearly so that it will be obvious to the reader how you came to your conclusion.

In order to standardize the time variable, students are instructed to spend no more than one hour in completing the composition. Also specified is a suggested number of words, approximately 150-200 words.

A rating scale was developed for the evaluation of the written composition test designed for this study (see Figure 4). Various analytic rating schemes are used to measure different aspects of writing ability. In a study conducted by Follman and Anderson (1967), no significant differences were found in scores given to compositions using five different rating methods, indicating that various rating schemes most likely measure the same basic features of a composition. In accordance with Cooper's (1975) recommendation that it is best to design one's own analytic scale measuring the main characteristics of the type of writing to be assessed, an analytic rating scale was developed for the study. The scale integrates relevant aspects of the different rating scales surveyed, such as the measurement of organization and correct spelling, with the evaluation of such features as consiseness of language, relevance of information used and clarity of main idea.

The rating scale used to score the written composition test is comprised of five points. In research conducted comparing the use of four-point scales with six-point scales, no significant differences were found in the distribution of ratings or in agreement between raters (McColly & Remstad, 1965). Five points were chosen for the rating scale in the study because more points would have been un- wieldy, and fewer points would have discriminated less among levels of ability. Many scales used in the evaluation of compositions are based on five points (Adler, 1972; Diederich, 1974; Collins, 1975).

OTHER INSTRUMENTATION

The second part of this study, investigating the relationship between precis-writing skills and written composition skills, util- izes a precis-writing skill test. (See appendix B for copy of precis- writing skill test.) The precis-writing test, developed by Huntley, Farrell, Coleman, Northy, Siliauskas, and Stoloff (Note 6) measures the following thirteen precis-writing skills:

1. Choosing the main idea of a paragraph.
2. Writing the main idea of a paragraph.

ANALYTIC RATING SCALE FOR COMPOSITIONS

RATER:

SUBJECT NO.:

	Virtually None	Some	Middle	Much	Virtually Total
1. Organization	1	2	3	4	5
2. Argument development	1	2	3	4	5
3. Clarity of main idea	1	2	3	4	5
4. Effectiveness of conclusion	1	2	3	4	5
5. Logical development within paragraphs	1	2	3	4	5
6. Relevance of used information	1	2	3	4	5
7. Appropriateness of word choice	1	2	3	4	5
8. Grammatical and syn- tactical accuracy	1	2	3	4	5
9. Conciseness of language	1	2	3	4	5
10. Spelling accuracy	1	2	3	4	5

Analytic Rating Scale for Written Composition Test

Figure 4

3. Recognizing relationships among the main
   ideas of paragraphs.
4. Choosing the main idea of a text.
5. Writing the main idea of a text.
6. Choosing the best paraphrase.
7. Writing a good paraphrase.
8. Combining simple sentences.
9. Condensing a sentence to required length.
10. Combining, condensing, and paraphrasing related
    sentences into one sentence of required length.
11. Writing an outline of a given text.
12. Writing a clear sentence based on outline points.
13. Writing a precis of a passage to a required length.

The skills are arranged in hierarchical order, with the skill of
choosing the main idea of a paragraph (skill 1) representing the
lowest level precis-writing skill tested, and with the skill of
writing a precis of a passage to a required length (skill 13) rep-
resenting the highest level skill tested.

In measuring the skills of choosing the main idea of a paragraph,
writing the main idea of a paragraph, recognizing relationships
among the main ideas of paragraphs, choosing the main idea of a text,
and writing the main idea of a text, students are asked to respond
to questions based on short passages provided in the test. One test
item is used to obtain a measure for each of these skills. Two mul-
tiple-choice items are used to measure the skill of choosing the
best paraphrase; two items requiring short written answers are used
to measure the skill of writing a good paraphrase. To measure the
skill of combining simple sentences, two test items are used, re-
quiring the student to combine several short clauses into a single
meaningful sentence. The skill of condensing a sentence to required
length and the skill of combining, condensing, and paraphrasing
related sentences into one sentence of required length are each
measured by single items in which the student must produce a sent-
ence of given length. To test the skill of writing an outline of
a given text, students are given a short passage of approximately

180 words to outline. Two test items requiring the student to produce a written response are used to measure the skill of writing a clear sentence based on outline points. The students are provided with a passage of approximately 150 words to condense into precis form in the measurement of the highest level skill of precis writing.

The precis-writing test thus consists of multiple-choice test items to measure recognition skills and longer written responses to measure higher level production skills. It is to be administered in class, with a time limit of one hour.

PROCEDURE

a) Context of the procedure:

In a study conducted concurrently, Huntley et al. (1977, Note 6) were interested in investigating the effectiveness of systematically designed instruction and homework practice in precis writing. A hierarchy of precis-writing skills was constructed (Figure 5). Tests were then designed measuring thirteen of these precis-writing skills. In their study the administration of the pretest was followed one week later by two contact hours of instruction, and homework practice based on individual pretest results. The following week the posttest was administered. The posttest of the described study is the precis-writing test of the present study.

Four of the six instructors participating in the study by Huntley et al. consented to volunteer their classes for the purposes of the present study.

b) Administration of the precis-writing test:

1. Tests were delivered to the instructors before the scheduled class during which the test was to be administered. The instructors were requested to inform the students that the test grades would count towards their class averages. The instructors were also requested to make the test appear to be a "normal" class activity, rather than part of an experimental study.

2. The teacher handed out the tests to the students, subsequently

HIERARCHY OF PRECIS-WRITING SKILLS

*Write a precis of a passage to a required length.

*Write a clear sentence based on outline points.

*Combine, condense, and paraphrase related sentences into one sentence of required length.

*Combine sentences.

Use transitional phrases.

*Write good paraphrase.

*Choose good paraphrase.

Replace phrases by synonyms.

Choose synonyms.

Choose syntactic equivalents.

*Condense sentences to required length.

Recognize repetition.

Recognize parenthetical expressions.

Recognize excess detail.

Produce generic terms.

Choose generic terms.

*Write an outline of a given text.

*Write main idea of text.

*Choose main idea of text.

*Recognize relationships among paragraphs.

Recognize supportive details in paragraphs.

Write the main idea of a paragraph.

Choose topic sentence in a paragraph.

Recognize relationships between common facts.

Choose common facts for paragraphs.

(*Skills tested on precis-writing test.)

Figure 5

reading the directions aloud to them. The teacher was asked not to answer any questions during the test period, and to monitor the test so that disturbances would not occur.

3. After exactly one hour, the teacher asked the students to hand in their tests.

4. The tests were picked up by a member of the research team. After the tests were graded according to a prescribed set of criteria, the results were given back to students and instructors (within a period of two weeks).

The teachers were then asked if they could administer the written composition test during the week following the precis-writing test. They were also asked if it was possible to administer it as an examination within the scheduled class period. Two of the four participating teachers indicated that it was not possible to use the scheduled class period for the administration of the test, but that it was possible to assign the composition task as homework to be counted as a grade.

c) Administration of the written composition test within the scheduled class period:

1. Tests were delivered to the instructors before the scheduled class during which the test was to be administered. The instructors were requested to inform the the students that the test grades would count towards their final marks. Again, the teacher was also requested to make the test appear to be a "normal" class activity, rather than part of an experimental study.

2. After handing out the tests, the teacher was to read aloud the instructions on the first two pages of the test. In monitoring the test, the teacher was requested not to answer any questions during the test period and to ensure quiet test conditions.

3. After one hour, the teacher asked the students to hand in the tests.

4. The tests were graded according to a prescribed set of

criteria by two independent raters. Results were given
back to the students and instructors within a period of
two weeks.

d) Administration of the written composition test as a homework
   assignment:

   1. Tests were delivered to the instructors before the scheduled
      class during which the test was to be assigned as homework.
      The instructors were requested to inform the students that
      the grades obtained on the assignment would count towards
      their final marks. The written composition task was to
      appear to be a routine class activity, and not part of an
      experimental study.

   2. The teacher handed out the tests to the students and read
      the directions aloud to them. The students were told to
      spend no more than one hour on the assignment. They were
      also told to hand in the assignment the following week.

   3. The written compositions were collected the following week.
      After being graded according to a prescribed set of criteria
      by two independent raters, test results were returned to
      the students and their instructors within a period of two
      weeks.

e) Obtaining measures for the validation of the written composition
   test:

   1. Each of the participating instructors was asked by the author
      of the study to provide information about grades assigned
      by each of them to more traditional written composition as-
      signments completed by each student. Each of the instructors
      was able to comply with this request.

   2. One of the composition teachers was asked to assign a global
      rating to each of the written composition tests completed
      by her class. She was to use the same rating scale as that
      used by the two independent raters. To remove sources of
      bias, the compositions were typed and were identified by
      arbitrarily assigned numbers rather than by name.

DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected for the validation of the written composition test includes both the global and analytic ratings assigned to the compositions by two raters working independently. To increase rater reliability, a common set of criteria was used. Before assigning ratings to the compositions, the two raters spent a short training session together during which they practiced the application of the criteria on sample compositions. To remove sources of possible error bias the composition responses were typed, randomly distributed, and arbitrarily assigned an identification number to replace the name of the person writing the composition.

A scale based on five points (1=low, 5=high) was used in the global and analytic ratings. The average of the two independently assigned ratings was used in the analysis of data.

For the validation of the test instrument, grades assigned by the composition teachers to more traditional written composition assignments completed by each student were obtained. For two of the four classes one such grade for each student was obtained. For the other two classes it was possible to obtain two grades; in these cases the average of the two grades was used. In all cases numerical percentages were submitted for statistical analysis.

The data collected for studying the relationship between written composition skills and precis-writing skills includes the results of the precis-writing test. The items on the test measured 13 skills, each skill being scored on a pass or fail basis. A score of one signifies passing the skill and a score of zero signifies failure. A global measure of performance was obtained by summing the 13 scores for each student. Two raters working independently, sharing a common set of criteria, evaluated test performance. When the raters failed to agree on a particular score, the problem was resolved through discussion. For each of the thirteen precis-writing skills, a score of one or zero was used in the analysis of data; for the global performance a score from zero to 13, inclusive, was used.

The type of analysis used in the investigation of the hypotheses of the study is basically correlational. Regression analysis will be

used to determine more specifically: 1) the relationship between
the analytic ratings on the written composition test and the global
performance on the precis-writing test, and 2) the relationship
between subscores on the precis-writing test and global ratings
on the written composition test. The level of significance for all
of the statistical tests is .05.

The "Statistical Package For the Social Sciences" (SPSS) pro-
vided the statistical procedures for the analysis of the data in
the study. (See Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Bent, 1975.)
Veldman's (1967) program for determining the alpha coefficient of
internal consistency in tests was used as a means of assessing the
reliability of the written composition test.

The results obtained in the statistical analysis of the data
obtained in the study will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

Chapter Three presented the methodology used in the investigation of the hypotheses of the study. Described were: the objectives, sample population, design, instrumentation, procedures, and type of data analysis. This chapter will describe the results of the statistical analysis of the data.

The first section of the chapter will present the hypotheses and results pertaining to the problem of the standardization and validation of a test instrument to measure written composition skills. It is predicted that the written composition test designed for the study will be a valid and reliable measure of writing ability. The second section of the chapter will present the hypotheses and results for the investigation of the relationship between precis-writing skills and written composition skills. A significant correlation is predicted between precis-writing performance and written composition performance.

The hypotheses will be stated in shortened form; please refer to Chapter Three for more detailed versions of the hypotheses. In the narrative, only results that are statistically significant beyond the .05 level will be reported (unless otherwise indicated). Additional information will be reported in the tables.

STANDARDIZATION AND VALIDATION OF A TEST INSTRUMENT TO MEASURE
WRITTEN COMPOSITION SKILLS

Hypothesis 1. The analytic and global ratings assigned to the test
are positively correlated.

The existence of a positive correlation between the analytic ratings and the global ratings is confirmed, with correlation

coefficients ranging from a low of .25 for spelling accuracy and global performance, to a high of .82 for organization and global performance. With the exception of the rating on spelling accuracy, each of the analytic ratings was correlated with the global rating with coefficients greater than .60 and significant at the .001 level. See Table 1.

Hypothesis 2. The analytic ratings are positively intercorrelated.

The average correlation between the analytic ratings was found to be .51.

Hypothesis 3. Global ratings are positively correlated with grades for other written composition assignments.

There is a low positive correlation of .22 between the two variables. The mean for the global ratings is 2.42, from a possible 5, with a standard deviation of .80. (From a possible score of 100, the mean is 48.40, and the standard deviation is 16.) The mean score for other class composition assignments is 68.36, out of a total of 100 points, with a standard deviation of 11.26.

Hypothesis 4. Global ratings assigned by the instructor are positively correlated with grades assigned by that instructor to other composition assignments.

A correlation coefficient of .33 was found, not significant at the .05 level. The mean for the global ratings assigned by the instructor is .71, from a possible total of 5, with a standard deviation of .85. (From a total of 100, the mean is 14.20, standard deviation is 17.00.) For grades on other composition assignments, the mean is 60.18 from a total of 100 points, with a standard deviation of 10.76. Note: it was possible to receive the cooperation of one of the four instructors in the investigation of this hypothesis; the size of the sample is 17 students.

Hypothesis 5. There is a high degree of interrater reliability.

Table 2 lists the correlations obtained, indicating a moderate degree of correlation between the two raters. The highest degree of correlation is found in the ratings on spelling accuracy ($r = .87$) and grammatical and syntactical accuracy ($r = .83$); the lowest degree of correlation is found in the ratings on conciseness of language

Table 1

Data on Analytic and Global Ratings for Written Composition Test

Composition Feature	Mean Rating	S.D.	Correlation With Global Rating
Organization	2.69	.09	.82***
Clarity of main idea	2.40	.10	.81***
Argument development	2.39	.10	.81***
Effectiveness and logical development of conclusion	2.02	.11	.76***
Paragraph development	2.40	.09	.79***
Relevance of used information	2.69	.11	.66***
Appropriateness of word choice	2.76	.08	.67***
Grammatical and syntactical accuracy	2.42	.09	.63***
Conciseness of language	2.64	.08	.64***
Spelling accuracy	3.98	.11	.25*
Global rating	2.42	.60	N/A

* $p < .05$

*** $p < .001$

Table 2

Rater Data For Written Composition Test

Composition Feature	Rater 1		Rater 2		Interrater Correlation
	Mean Rating	S.D.	Mean Rating	S.D.	
Organization	2.85	.83	2.53	.83	.61***
Clarity of main idea	2.50	.74	2.30	.90	.54***
Argument development	2.44	.90	2.33	.90	.56***
Effectiveness and logical development of conclusion	2.08	.88	1.96	1.04	.61***
Paragraph development	2.52	.81	2.29	.82	.56***
Relevance of used information	2.64	.85	2.74	1.04	.66***
Appropriateness of word choice	2.80	.73	2.71	.78	.55***
Grammatical and syntactical accuracy	2.39	.76	2.46	.81	.83***
Conciseness of language	2.50	.71	2.77	.84	.38***
Spelling accuracy	3.93	1.00	4.03	.93	.87***
Global rating	2.52	.88	2.33	.85	.71***

*** $p < .001$

($r=.38$). All the correlations are significant at the .001 level.

Hypotheses 6-8. The number of arguments used is positively correlated with global and analytic ratings.

A correlation of .32 ($p < .01$) was found between the number of given arguments used and the global rating. The number of given arguments used is also significantly correlated with ratings on organization ($r=.25$), clarity of main idea ($r=.24$), argument development ($r=.37$, $p < .001$), effectiveness and logical development of conclusion ($r=.24$), paragraph development ($r=.26$), and relevance of used information ($r=.61$, $p < .001$). The mean number of given arguments used is 2.24, from a possible total of 7, with a standard deviation of 1.28.

A correlation of .32 ($p < .01$) was also found between the total number of arguments used (comprised of given arguments and student-generated arguments) and the global rating. The total number of arguments used is significantly correlated with ratings on clarity of main idea ($r=.24$), argument development ($r=.31$, $p < .01$), and relevance of used information ($r=.54$, $p < .001$). The mean of the total number of arguments used is 4.18, with a standard deviation of 1.78.

Additional information is provided in Table 3.

Hypothesis 9. The use of the irrelevant argument is negatively correlated with the rating on the relevance of used information.

No significant correlation was found to exist between these two variables. However, a significant correlation was found between the use of this argument and the rating on organization ($r=-.20$). A low significant correlation coefficient was also found for the relationship between the use of the irrelevant argument and the rating on grammatical and syntactical accuracy ($r=-.22$).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRECIS-WRITING SKILLS AND WRITTEN COMPOSITION SKILLS

Hypotheses 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b. Measures of precis-writing ability are positively correlated with composition test ratings.

The correlation between the global rating on the composition

Table 3

Data on Argument Usage in Written Composition Test

Composition Feature	Correlation With Number of:		
	Given Arguments Used	Self-Generated Arguments Used	Total Arguments Used
Organization	.25*	-.07	.12
Clarity of main idea	.24*	.13	.24*
Argument development	.37***	.08	.31**
Effectiveness and logical development of conclusion	.24*	.02	.17
Paragraph development	.26*	.02	.19
Relevance of used information	.61***	.16	.54***
Appropriateness of word choice	.01	.01	.01
Grammatical and syn-tactical accuracy	-.18	.01	-.13
Spelling accuracy	.03	.02	.04
Global rating	.32**	.14	.32**

* p < .05
** p < .01
*** p < .001

test and the individual score measuring the ability to write a precis is .07, not significant at the .05 level. A significant, low correlation of .37 was found between the global rating on the composition test and the sum of the skills passed in the precis-writing test.

The individual score on the precis-writing test measuring the ability to write a precis is not significantly correlated with any of the analytic ratings on the composition test. As Table 4 indicates, low degrees of correlation were found between the sum of the skills passed on the precis-writing test and the following analytic ratings on the composition test: organization ($r=.47$, $p < .001$), appropriateness of word choice ($r=.37$, $p < .01$), effectiveness and logical development of conclusion ($r=.34$, $p < .01$), grammatical and syntactical accuracy ($r=.32$, $p < .01$), argument development ($r=.24$), paragraph development ($r=.24$), and conciseness of language ($r=.21$). Refer to Table 4.

Hypothesis 3. Precis-writing subscores will be positively correlated with composition ratings.

In addition to the skill of writing a precis, the following skills have scores that are not significantly correlated with any of the composition measures: writing an outline; condensing, combining, and paraphrasing sentences; and writing a paraphrase. The subscore for writing a sentence from outline points is significantly correlated with composition ratings on effectiveness and logical development of conclusion ($r=.23$), organization ($r=.22$), paragraph development ($r=.21$), and global performance ($r=.21$). The subscore for the skill of condensing sentences is significantly correlated with the rating on organization ($r=.23$). The skill of combining simple sentences has scores correlated with the following composition measures: grammatical and syntactical accuracy ($r=.33$, $p < .01$), organization ($r=.31$, $p < .01$), global performance ($r=.28$), effectiveness and logical development of conclusion ($r=.28$), paragraph development ($r=.28$), appropriateness of word choice ($r=.26$), and clarity of main idea ($r=.25$). The subscore for the skill of choosing the best paraphrase is correlated with organization ($r=.27$), paragraph development ($r=.28$), effectiveness and logical development of conclusion ($r=.25$),

Table 4

Correlations Between Precis-Writing Test Scores and Written Composition Test Ratings

Precis Test Feature Rated	Correlation With Ratings on Composition Test Measuring:										
	Global Perform-ance	Organiza-tion	Clarity of Main Idea	Argument Develop-ment	Effective-ness and Logic of Conclusion	Paragraph Develop-ment	Relevance of Used Informa-tion	Appropri-ateness of Word Choice	Grammati-cal Accuracy	Concise-ness	Spelling
Sum of subskills passed	.37**	.47***	.20	.24*	.34***	.24*	.23*	.31**	.32**	.21*	.12
Write precis	.07	.14	.02	.01	.07	-.08	-.11	.05	.03	-.05	.10
Write sentence from outline points	.21*	.22*	.11	.14	.23*	.21*	.11	.11	.16	-.02	.10
Write outline	.19	.19	.03	.14	.08	.03	.12	.03	.00	.01	-.01
Condense, combine, and paraphrase sentences	.01	.09	-.19	.14	-.09	-.09	-.13	.18	.06	-.04	.07
Condense sentences	.08	.23*	.05	.02	.10	-.05	-.02	-.01	.01	.11	.07
Combine simple sentences	.28*	.31**	.25*	.18	.28*	.28*	.20	.26*	.33**	.17	-.08
Write paraphrase	.11	.20	.01	-.02	.12	.06	.10	.20	.12	.06	-.06
Choose best paraphrase	.20	.27*	.23*	.20	.25*	.28*	.22*	.13	.05	.02	-.11
Write main idea of text	.19	.16	.05	.09	.06	.03	.12	.23*	.24*	.16	.12
Choose main idea of text	.17	.31**	.10	.12	.17	.15	.18	.20	.24*	.11	-.08
Recognize relationships between main ideas of paragraphs	.43***	.39***	.27*	.38***	.32**	.26*	.30**	.39***	.35**	.32**	.23*
Write main idea of paragraph	.36**	.32**	.28*	.23*	.36**	.32**	.22*	.40***	.38***	.30**	.11
Choose main idea of paragraph	.15	.32**	.13	.18	.25*	.17	.20	.33**	.18	.24**	.21

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

clarity of main idea (r=.23), and relevance of used information
(r=.22). Writing the main idea of a text has scores correlated
with the composition ratings on grammatical and syntactical accura-
cy (r=.24) and appropriateness of word choice (r=.23). Subscores
on the precis-writing test measuring the skill of choosing the main
idea of a text are correlated with composition ratings on organiza-
tion (r=.31, p < .01) and grammatical and syntactical accuracy
(r=.24). Recognizing relationships between main ideas of paragraphs
is correlated with all composition measures: global performance
(r=.43, p < .001), organization (r=.39, p < .001), appropriateness
of word choice (r=.39, p < .001), argument development (r=.38,
p < .001), grammatical and syntactical accuracy (r=.35, p < .01),
effectiveness and logical development of conclusion (r=.32, p < .01),
relevance of used information (r=.30, p < .01), clarity of main idea
(r=.27), paragraph development (r=.26), and spelling (r=.23). The
skill of writing the main idea of a paragraph has scores correlated
with all composition features except spelling: appropriateness of
word choice (r=.40, p < .001), grammatical and syntactical accuracy
(r=.38, p < .01), global performance (r=.36, p < .01), effectiveness
and logical development of conclusion (r=.36, p < .01), organization
(r=.32, p < .01), paragraph development (r=.32, p < .01), conciseness
(r=.30, p < .01), clarity of main idea (r=.28), relevance of used in-
formation (r=.23), and argument development (r=.22). Choosing the
main idea of a paragraph is correlated with ratings on the composi-
tion features of appropriateness of word choice (r=.33, p < .01),
organization (r=.32, p < .01), effectiveness and logical development
of conclusion (r=.25), and conciseness (r=.24). See Table 4 for more
information.

Hypotheses 4a, 4b. Precis-writing test scores are correlated with
grades for other written composition assignments.

A correlation of .18, not significant at the .05 level, was
found between the sum of precis skills passed and grades for other
written composition assignments. A correlation of .07, also not sig-
nificant, was found between the individual subscore measuring the
skill of writing a precis and other composition grades. The other

composition grades are, however, correlated with scores for the precis-writing skills of combining simple sentences ($r=.27$), condensing, combining, and paraphrasing sentences ($r=.25$), and recognizing the relationships between main ideas of paragraphs ($r=.23$).

A multiple regression analysis, measuring prediction efficacy (see Ferguson, 1971), was performed with the global rating on the written composition as the dependent variable, and the 13 subscores on the precis-writing test comprising the predictor list of independent variables. A multiple r of .56 was obtained, which may be interpreted as indicating a low level of predictive accuracy. The skill of recognizing relationships between main ideas of paragraphs is the only significant predictor ($F=7.0$, $p < .05$).

Similarly, a multiple regression analysis was performed on the dependent variable of the total number of precis-writing skills passed on the test. The analytic ratings on the ten composition features functioned as independent predictor variables. A multiple r of .60 was found, again indicative of low predictive accuracy. Ratings on two composition features were found to be significant predictors: organization ($F=12.76$, $p < .001$) and clarity of main idea ($F=5.13$, $p < .05$).

The alpha coefficient of internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951) was calculated to be .10 for the precis-writing test, indicating a low degree of reliability among the test items.

SUMMARY

Bivariate correlation analysis provided the measures of relationship between the variables of the study. The written composition test was found to have a low degree of empirical validity and a low degree of reliability. The correlation between composition measures and precis-writing measures was low or nonsignificant.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

The preceding chapter described the results of the statistical analysis of the data collected in the study. The analysis revealed a low degree of empirical validity for the written composition test, as well as a low degree of test reliability. The correlation between composition measures and precis-writing measures was found to be either low or not significant. In Chapter Five these results, as well as their implications, will be discussed.

The first part of the chapter will be concerned with the results pertaining to the problem of the standardization and validation of a test instrument to measure written composition skills. This section will begin with the relevant findings summarized in the form of conclusions. A discussion of the limitations of the study and a section on recommendations for future research will follow.

The second half of the chapter will deal with the results of the study of the relationship between precis-writing skills and written composition skills. A discussion of the conclusions will be followed by sections on the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

STANDARDIZATION AND VALIDATION OF A TEST INSTRUMENT TO MEASURE WRITTEN COMPOSITION SKILLS: CONCLUSIONS

This section will deal with the results of the first part of the study, which may be summarized as follows:

1. Analytic ratings on written composition features were found to be moderately correlated with global ratings of written composition performance.

2. The reliability of the written composition test, as

measured by the average correlation between ratings, was low.

3. The criterion-related validity of the test was low.

4. Interrater reliability was found to be moderate.

5. There was little or no significant correlation between the number of given arguments on the written composition test used by each student and ratings assigned to the test. Similar results were found for the relationship between the total number of arguments used and assigned ratings.

In the comparison of each of the analytic ratings on the written composition test with the global rating of performance, the existence of a significant correlation was established. This finding gives support to Nyberg's (1968) contention that a global, rapid impression evaluation of a written composition probably takes into account the basic features of a composition, whether this consideration be a conscious effort or not. The composition features having ratings which were the most highly correlated with global ratings include organization, argument development, clarity of main idea, and paragraph development. This suggests that improvement in these areas may well be relected in the global rating of performance.

The global method of scoring, the type preferred by the College Entrance Examination Board (Godshalk et al., 1966) is considered to be a more valid method then the analytic method (Britton et al., 1966). The analytic method, however, is more useful than the global method in serving a diagnostic function. If the test is to be used for identifying individual strengths and weaknesses in written composition, information specific enough to help in the making of educational decisions is needed. Analytic ratings provide such information.

Since there is no prescribed technique of ascertaining the reliability of a one-item test with ten subscores rated on a Likert-type scale (see Kerlinger, 1964), and administered only once, the average correlation between the ratings ($r=.51$, $p > .05$) was taken as a measure of test reliability. This low correlation suggests that there is some consistency between the individual ratings of written

composition features. The finding of a correlation between ratings lends support to a position set forth by Foley (1971), indicating that there is an inherent overlap in the content of criteria in the analytic assessment of written compositions. It could also be indicative of a type of "halo effect", in which the rater's perception of certain composition features is influenced by ratings on other composition features.

In determining the criterion-related validity of the test, global ratings on the test were compared with grades assigned by the the English instructors to more traditional written composition assignments completed by each student. The low correlation (r=.22, p > .05) suggests that the writing task of the test designed for the study bears little similarity to the composition tasks assigned by the instructors. This conclusion is reinforced by the results of a second check on the test's empirical validity: the correlation between global ratings assigned to the written composition test by one of the English instructors and grades assigned by that instructor to a more traditional written composition assignment was found to be low (r=.32, p > .05).

In finding a low degree of association between the global performance rating on the written composition test and the independent criterion measure, it is important to bear in mind that a high reliability for each measure has not been established. The reliability of both test and criterion measures exerts an influence on a test's empirical validity (Harris, 1969). In addition to being reliable, the measure of the criterion should be relevant (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1973). Each of the four English instructors had been asked to provide grades for written compositions, completed by students who had taken the written composition test, similar in nature to the writing task of the test. Since the decision to provide certain grades was based on subjective value judgements, the relevance of the criterion measures is subject to variation and error.

In the case where there is no reliable and relevant external criterion measure readily available, the use of content analysis for judging the validity of a test is justified (Lennon, 1976). Content validity is defined by Lennon (p. 46) as:

the extent to which a subject's responses to the items of a
test may be considered to be a representative sample of his
responses to a real or hypothetical universe of situations
which together constitute the area of concern to the person
interpreting the test.

The use of content validity is appropriate for ascertaining the
validity of tests of writing ability. Since it is not possible to
describe content validity in quantitative terms, a qualitative ex-
pression becomes necessary; each of the four English instructors
participating in the study was asked to thoroughly inspect the test
and remark on its validity. All four of the instructors agreed
that the test did indeed provide a valid means of assessing the ab-
ility to write compositions.

In the investigation of the reliability associated with rating
the written composition tests, it was found that despite the pre-
cautions taken (a short practice session with training in the appli-
cation of clearly stated criteria), only a moderate degree of inter-
rater reliability was achieved. The highest correlations were found
in the ratings of spelling accuracy ($r=.87$, $p > .001$) and syntactical
and grammatical accuracy ($r=.83$, $p > .001$); the evaluation of these
features appears to be more objective in nature for measurement than
the evaluation of the other composition features.

The lack of a high degree of interrater reliability serves to
confirm the research indicating that the lack of agreement among
raters is a major problem in the evaluation of written work. Raters
tend to be unreliable "in their own inconsistency and in their fail-
ure to agree with colleagues on the relative merits of a student's
composition" (Heaton, 1975, p. 134). The precautions taken in this
study did not exert as great an influence on interrater reliability
as expected. This suggests that future precautions should be made
more stringent. One possibility is to include a more thorough prac-
tice session. Although the interrater reliability was only moderate-
ly high, the sum or average of the two ratings can be taken as an
accurate appraisal of student performance (Harris, 1969).

The use of the given information on the written composition
test ("'Your' First Rough Notes") was investigated in order to

determine whether it is related to actual test performance. It was found that the correlation between the number of given arguments used and performance on the written composition test was either low or nonsignificant. Low degrees of correlation were found between the number of given arguments used and ratings on global performance, argument development, and clarity of main idea. The highest degree of correlation ($r=.61$, $p > .001$) was found between the number of given arguments used and the rating on relevance of used information. Low correlations were also found between the total number of arguments used (the sum of the number of given arguments used and the number of arguments generated by the student) and the following ratings on the written composition test: global performance, clarity of main idea, organization, and relevance of used information.

It was hypothesized that the measurement of the use of the information provided in the test, i.e., the use of the given arguments, could be used in the prediction of test ratings. An underlying assumption was that an examination that tests the ability to use given information is more effective and valid in the measurement of writing ability than an examination that tests the ability to remember information, and and to use what can be remembered (Macintosh, 1974). Thus it was assumed that a better writer would use more of the available information than a poor writer. The quality of a student's performance was not, however, related to the student's use of available information, as measured quantitatively by the number of arguments used. Also, it was found that the total number of arguments used does not serve as a good indicator of test performance. The number of arguments used in a written composition cannot be used to predict the way in which it will be rated, at least not in this particular study.

The use of the irrelevant given argument was not found to be significantly correlated with any of the composition measures, including the rating on the use of relevant information; the use of this argument would not serve as a predictor for any aspect of performance on the written composition test. Also, since only four of 66 students writing the test actually used the irrelevant argument,

the inclusion of this particular type of argument on the test instrument should be reconsidered. If its inclusion serves no function, the argument should be discarded or redesigned so that it does serve a function. The irrelevant argument had been originally included so that the test would provide a better simulation of real-life situations in which students must sort out relevant information from irrelevant information. Although the use of this argument is not related to any composition measures, its function within the context of sorting relevant from irrelevant information still remains valid. It is suggested, however, that the argument be redesigned so as to include information that is not as obviously irrelevant as the information that is presently included.

STANDARDIZATION AND VALIDATION OF A TEST INSTRUMENT TO MEASURE WRITTEN COMPOSITION SKILLS: LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The major limitation of this study is the sample of subjects used; the students were enrolled in remedial English classes, and 44% of them were non-native speakers of the English language. The generalizability of the results may thus be restricted somewhat. There was little variability in the ratings assigned to the written composition—the expected range of scores was not attained.

Another important limitation concerns the difficulties involved in ascertaining the reliability of the written composition test. The lack of the opportunity to administer a parallel version of the test, and the lack of a means to assess the reliability of a one-item test administered only once, results in some ambiguity with regard to the measurement of the test's reliability. A limitation of the study related to the rating of the features of the composition, is the use of only two raters. Ideally, to obtain a more accurate appraisal of writing ability, more raters are needed. Due to financial and time constraints, it was not possible to use more raters in the assessment of the compositions.

The lack of a good and precise independent external criterion of written composition skills, in order to determine the empirical validity of the written composition test, constitutes a significant

limitation of the study. It is difficult to reach a conclusion
with regard to the criterion-related validity of the composition
test if the external criterion is not a dependable one. Another
limitation is the small sample used in the investigation of the
fourth hypothesis, postulating that global scores assigned by the
regular composition teacher to the written composition test are
positively correlated with grades assigned by that teacher to more
traditional written composition assignments completed by each stu-
dent. Only one class, yielding a sample of 17, was available for
the testing of this hypothesis.

Other limitations relate to the one-hour time restriction for
taking the test and to the fact that the test presents a new type
of task stimulus for the writing of compositions. One hour for writ-
ing the test may not be enough time to obtain valid measures of writ-
ing performance; within this time limit the student must read the
given information in the task stimulus—the section entitled "'Your
Rough Notes", assimilate the information, and write the composition.
More time may be necessary for the proper completion of this task.
Also, since the students are not familiar with this type of test,
practice with this type of assignment may be helpful if valid results
are to be obtained.

STANDARDIZATION AND VALIDATION OF A TEST INSTRUMENT TO MEASURE
WRITTEN COMPOSITION SKILLS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This section will suggest improvements for the replication of
the present study and possibilities for new areas of investigation.

In order to determine the reliability of the type of test des-
cribed in the study, it is best to develop a parallel version of the
written composition test, equivalent in format, length, and difficul-
ty. Both versions of the test should be administered under conditions
as similar to each other as possible. A large sample of native speak-
ers of English, displaying a wide range of writing abilities, should
be used in the testing. To improve interrater reliability it is sug-
gested that more raters be used, and that the practice training session
be more thorough. It may be helpful to formulate a more explicit
set of criteria for scoring the compositions.

The fact that the independent external criterion was not a timed written composition task may have influenced the relationship found between the criterion measure and the test of the study. The use of a dependable criterion based on a timed task of a nature similar to that of the written composition test would serve to provide better evidence of the empirical validity of the test.

With regard to the formative evaluation of the written composition test, which involves suggestions for improvement based on the collection of useful and relevant information (Foley, 1971), the main suggestion would be to increase the amount of time given to complete the task from one hour to 90 minutes or two hours. The task would then be a better approximation of a free-writing task.

Also, there is a need for research to help determine the best mode for presenting a set of given information in a task stimulus. The mode used in this study, i.e., the presentation of sets of arguments providing information in short clauses, should be compared with other modes of presenting information, such as short articles, or paragraphs written in normal sentences. An issue which requires further research clarification is whether the provision of a set of information in a task stimulus does indeed elicit a more valid sample of writing than when this information is not provided.

Comprehensive research is needed in the improvement of tests measuring writing ability. Knowledge of the writing process, including the prewriting and rewriting stages, should be used in the design of these tests. This knowledge itself needs to be greatly broadened through basic developmental research.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRECIS-WRITING SKILLS AND WRITTEN COMPOSITION SKILLS: CONCLUSIONS

This section will deal with the results of the second half of the study, which may be summarized as follows:

1. The score measuring the individual skill of writing a precis, on the precis-writing test, was not correlated with written composition measures.

2. The sum of the skills passed in the precis-writing test

was correlated to a low degree with certain composition measures.

3. Some of the scores measuring subskills on the precis-writing test were correlated to a low degree with composition test measures.

4. Precis-writing test scores were not correlated with grades for more traditional written composition assignments completed by each student.

In analyzing the relationship between the ability to write a precis and the ability to write a composition, two measures of precis-writing ability were used: 1) the score on the precis-writing test measuring the individual skill of writing a precis, and 2) the sum of the skills passed in the precis-writing test (a maximum of 13). The former measure was not significantly correlated with any of the composition ratings. There was a low correlation found between the sum of the skills passed on the precis-writing test and these composition measures: global performance, organization, appropriateness of word choice, effectiveness and logical development of conclusion, grammatical and syntactical accuracy, argument development, paragraph development, and conciseness of language. There was no evidence of a strong relationship between precis writing and composition writing, as hypothesized.

The scores in the precis-writing test measuring individual skills consisted of values of either one or zero, based upon whether the skill had been passed or failed. The variable was thus artificially dichotomized at an arbitrary cut-off of continuous scoring for various criteria set for each skill. The use of such scoring procedures precludes the determination of fine distinctions in test performance. It is possible that if a measure with continuous scores had been employed in assessing the ability to write a precis, a greater degree of relationship between precis writing and composition writing might have been established.

The lack of a demonstrated strong relationship between precis writing and composition writing may be due to an insensitivity of one or both measures of writing ability, in measuring what is supposed to be measured. The test reliability and empirical validity

of the written composition test was found to be low in the first part of the present study. In order to determine the reliability of the precis-writing test, a coefficient alpha analysis was performed, yielding a value of .10, which indicates a low reliability. Due to the difficulties involved in establishing the reliabilities of the test instruments used in the study, the results of the study cannot be viewed as providing conclusive evidence of a lack of a strong relationship between precis writing and composition writing.

In analyzing the relationship between analytic ratings on the written composition test and scores for skills on the precis-writing test, the following precis-writing skills were found to have no correlation with any composition measures: writing an outline; condensing, combining, and paraphrasing sentences; and writing a paraphrase. The other precis-writing skills showed low degrees of correlation with various composition ratings. No significant high correlations, however, were evident in the data analysis. The precis-writing subskills of recognizing relationships between the main ideas of paragraphs and writing the main ideas of paragraphs revealed a significant low correlation with most of the composition measures. In multiple regression analyses, scores on these two subskills emerged as significant predictors of global written composition performance. These results suggest that these two precis-writing subskills bear more of a relationship to written composition skills than the other precis-writing subskills. The possibility of such a relationship merits further, more thorough research.

In the comparison of the two measures of precis-writing ability, i.e., the score on the precis-writing test measuring the individual skill of writing a precis, and the sum of the skills passed in the precis-writing test, with grades for more traditional written composition assignments completed by each student, no significant correlations were found. Again, there is no evidence of a strong relationship between precis writing and composition writing. Since there was only a low correlation between the grades on other written composition assignments completed by each student and ratings on the written composition test designed for the study, and because

there was only a low correlation between ratings on the written composition test and measures of precis-writing ability, it appears that the written composition test, the other written composition assignments, and the precis-writing test represent different tasks of writing ability, bearing little similarity to each other.

In a multiple regression analysis, two composition features emerged as significant predictors of the sum of the precis-writing skills passed on the test: organization and clarity of main idea. The significance of this relationship should be investigated.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRECIS-WRITING SKILLS AND WRITTEN COMPOSITION SKILLS: LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As for the first part of the study, one of the main limitations of the study is the sample used; since 44% of the students were non-native speakers of the English language, the generalizability of conclusions may be restricted. A second limitation concerns the reliability of the written composition composition test, which needs substantiation. In terms of scoring the precis-writing test, a significant limitation is the lack of continuous scoring for the individual skill of writing a precis.

Due to the lack of conclusive results with regard to the relationship between precis-writing skills and written composition skills, it is not possible to set forth specific recommendations for a systematic approach to the teaching of written composition based on knowledge of precis skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As was suggested for the first part of the study, the reliability of the written composition test needs to be established by means of developing and evaluating a parallel version of the test, using a large sample of native English speakers with a wide range of writing abilities. The precis-writing test should be modified so as to utilize continuous scoring, in particular for the skill of writing a precis. With regard to the formative evaluation of the written composition test, it is suggested that, in addition to increasing the

amount of time to be spent on the test, the test could be modified so as to be more sensitive to precis-writing skills. Precis writing may not be related to the type of task set up in the written composition test; it may, however, be related to other types of writing tasks. The possibilities should be explored.

In this study an attempt was made to find a strong relationship between precis writing and composition writing. If such an association could be established in future research, the next step would be to conduct an experimental study investigating the possibility of a causal relationship between the two forms of writing. It is hypothesized that instruction in precis writing would improve composition skills, that the skills learned would transfer to the writing of compositions. In the proposed study, students would be given pretests in written composition skills and precis-writing skills. An experimental group would receive instruction in precis-writing skills. Posttests measuring both types of skills would then be administered to the experimental group and a control group, which had taken the pretests, but hadn't received precis instruction. Results would be examined to determine the degree of transfer from precis-writing skill instruction to composition writing.

SUMMARY

Both parts of this study were addressed to the problem of declining writing ability among university undergraduates. There is a need for improved means of assessing writing proficiency and for more effective instruction in writing skills. Both areas of concern were dealt with empirically in this study.

The first part of the study investigated the development of a valid and reliable test instrument measuring composition-writing ability. A test instrument was designed, in which students are to make use of a given set of information presented in single clauses. Students are free to utilize additional information in the writing of the compositions. Statistical analysis of data collected from 66 students, enrolled in remedial English classes, revealed a low degree of test reliability. Because of the difficulties involved

in ascertaining the reliability of a one-item essay-type test, it is suggested that a parallel version of the written composition test, equivalent in difficulty and format, be developed and administered.

In investigating the empirical validity of the test, global ratings were compared with grades assigned to more traditional written composition assignments; a low degree of correlation was found. The relevance and reliability of the criterion measure, which exert an influence on empirical validation, are subject to debate. The content validity of the written composition test was checked by conferring with the composition teachers participating in the study; all agreed that the test provides a valid means of assessing the ability to write compositions. Further testing of reliability and validity is necessary before conclusions can be drawn regarding the usefulness of the test designed for the study. The test is potentially useful in the diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses in written composition.

The intent of the second part of the study was to address the problem of declining writing skills by contributing information for basic developmental work in the improvement of instruction in written composition. An exploratory investigation of writing skills was conducted. It was hypothesized that there would be a high correlation between written composition performance and precis-writing performance. This would represent the first step in providing support for the view that instruction in precis skills is of value in improving the ability to write compositions. Correlations between composition measures and precis-writing measures , however, were found to be low or nonsignificant. Due to the difficulties in establishing the reliability and validity of measures used in the study, these results should not be viewed as providing conclusive evidence that precis writing and composition writing are not related.

Reference Notes

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APPENDIX B

PRECIS-WRITING SKILLS TEST

POST-TEST IN PRECIS-WRITING SKILLS

Directions: Please read these directions silently while your instructor reads them aloud. Do not turn the page until you are told to begin.

Now, write   YOUR NAME: _____, and

YOUR INSTRUCTOR'S NAME: _____.

Please hand in your homework and pre-tests at this time. Your instructor will tell you exactly how the following test may count towards your grade. Please do your best work, so that your instructor can find out how well last week's instruction in précis-writing has helped you.

You will need only a pencil or a pen to work on this test. It is a closed-book test.

This test has nine parts, labelled A through I. Some items may seem hard, and some may seem easy, but please do your best work on each one. You may have up to sixty (60) minutes to complete the test. The suggested working time for each part is written at the beginning of that part. The instructor should periodically write the time on the blackboard. Plan your work so that you can give every part a good try.

Some of the items ask you to circle the letter of the best answer, and some ask you to write phrases, sentences, or groups of sentences. Please follow the directions the best you can, and write clearly.

Your instructor should now answer any questions you may have about how to do the test.

When you begin the test, first check to see that you have all eight (8) pages, and that all pages are clearly printed. If your copy of the test is bad, immediately raise your hand so that your instructor can "trade" your copy for a good one. Unless you need to ask your instructor a question, there should be no reason for talking during the test. Your instructor is allowed to read a word to you if it is unclear, but is not allowed to interpret what the items mean, or how to do them. Please just do the best you can on each question.

You may begin now. Your instructor should note starting and stopping times on the blackboard, and periodically note the present time. Those finishing early may be allowed to take a short break, but others may want to take the full time to work on the test.

Good luck!

A.   In each item, one sentence comes closest to the meaning
of the underlined sentence. **Circle the letter beside**
that sentence.

1. The Masked Marvel was defeated by Fat Man at the Paul Sauvé Arena.

   (a) The Masked Marvel defeated Fat Man at the Paul Sauvé Arena.
   (b) At the Paul Sauvé Arena, Fat Man defeated the Masked Marvel.
   (c) It was at the Paul Sauvé Arena that Fat Man lost to the Masked Marvel.
   (d) The Paul Sauvé Arena was where Fat Man was defeated.

2. The children, singing a mysterious tune, followed the piper on the
road out of town.
   (a) The piper, singing a strange song, was led by the children on the path
        out of the town.
   (b) The pipe-player followed the children, singing a mysterious song on the
        road leaving the town.
   (c) The piper led the boys and girls, who were singing a mysterious melody,
        on the road out of town.
   (d) The boys and girls led the piper, singing a strange tune, on the street
        leaving the city.

B.   In each item, rewrite the sentences so as to make a single sentence.
Do not leave out or add any information. Do not use the words "and",
"or" or "but".

1. Raisins should be a food in everyone's diet. They are high
in protein and vitamins.

_____

_____

2. The swimmer was crossing the lake. She saw a bird. It
was carrying a fish.

_____

_____

C.   **Rewrite the sentence below so that it contains no more
than twenty (20) words and no fewer than ten (10) words.**
You may omit and replace words and phrases, but leave
in the important information.

Significant, large numbers of men, women and children from all our
provinces--north, south, east and west--are, in the truest sense of the
word, ignorant and uninformed about the basic origins of their ancestry,
and so, lack emotional feelings of pride in their country or their
homeland.

_____

_____

_____

(Approx. 5. minutes) D. For the following items, **write** a clear sentence. Include all points listed and be sure to maintain their relationships with the main idea.

1. Main idea: bee-keeping
   Details: -provides honey and wax
   -requires special equipment and patience
   -service to fruit-growers

SENTENCE: _____

_____

_____

2. Main idea: faucets in the bathroom of Louis XIV
   -were gold-plated
   -perfume, came out
   -no water for bathing

SENTENCE: _____

_____

_____

(Approx. 4 minutes) E. **Rewrite** the following group of sentences **into a single sentence with no more than 20 words.** Leave in the essential information.

1. It was a spring day that made you want to take your coat off. Unfortunately, the harried, over-worked student of English had to toil and strain over her texts, books, and reference materials to outline and select the key ideas for her research study. It dealt with the recreational use of the parks in the springtime.

_____

_____

_____

F. Below you will find a sentence (No. 1) and the beginning of another
sentence (No. 2) with blanks in it. These two sentences should mean
the same. Fill in the blanks using different words for each of the
underlined phrases. Your changes should have about the same number
of words as the original. One change - blank 2 - is already done for
you. Fill in the other three blanks using the numbers as a guide.

Sentence No. 1: "Telling tall tales" is a phase which the 1. majority of girls and boys

2. pass through and thus 3. should not be looked upon as a 4. grave concern.

Sentence No. 2: A phase of "telling tall tales" 2. is experienced by 1. _____

_____ but 3. _____ as a 4. _____

_____.

(Approx. 8
minutes)

G. Read the following passage.

The science of high-frequency sound, called ultrasonics, is one of the newest
and most exciting techniques of the space age. *Ultra* means "beyond the
range of hearing"; *sonics* means "sound." Produced by converting electrical
pulsations into mechanical ones, these sounds have such high frequency
that humans cannot hear them. Ultrasonics is the process that enables the
Navy to detect submarines, and fishermen to detect schools of fish. Many
uses have been found for ultrasonics.

Penetrating flesh and bone harmlessly, ultrasonic waves are a subject of
research that has contributed to medical science in several ways. At Chicago
State Mental Hospital the ultrasonic process enables physicians and
psychiatrists to make quick diagnoses. In contrast to the ten minutes that the
X-ray process demands, the ultrasonic process sends out echo patterns that
can be read within ten seconds. Unlike X rays, the ultrasonic process is not
dangerous, and therefore it can be administered to a patient repeatedly.
Doctors use ultrasonic devices to detect fetal heartbeats, to sterilize in-
struments, to clean teeth, and to detect blood clots.

Similarly, ultrasonics contributes significantly to industrial technology.
Cleaning processes, vegetable and fruit cultivation, milk homogenization,
mechanical dishwashers, burglar-alarm systems, riveting machines, and air
purifiers have all been revolutionized by this new science. There are now
approximately fifty American companies in the ultrasonics field. One
authority estimates that ultrasonics is a $50-million business annually and
that by 1973 the annual gross from ultrasonics will be $160 million.

Within a very short time ultrasonics will be as essential to human life as
the telephone is today.

1. Write in a phrase or short sentence the main idea of this passage.

_____

_____

2. In the space below, write in phrase form the passage found on page 4, part G. Use outline form similar to this:

   A. Main idea
       1. Supportive detail
       2. Supportive detail
       3.   (etc.)

   B. Main idea
       1. Supportive detail
       2. Supportive detail
       3.   (etc.)

H.   **Directions:** Read the following passage <u>carefully</u>. Answer the questions which follow.

There is a totalitarian conspiracy abroad in the land to deprive parents of a natural and fundamental right. This is the parental right to prattle baby talk to their infants. The conspirators are an influential Fascistic group of short-haired old maids and long-haired bachelors who have propagandized upon the credulity of parents by posing as authoritative child experts. The slogan of these conspirators is never, never speak to the baby except in language used by the best speakers and writers. To be sure, a certain amount of leeway is permitted. You do not have to use a Harvard accent, but your pronunciation should be pure, your choice of words impeccable, the syntax perfect, and the diction immaculate

For years I was just such an inhibited parent, intimidated by the possible tragic wages of the sin of prattling Just what the consequences would be was never clear to me but I had a vague uneasy sense that they would be visited until the third and possibly the fourth generation. Recently having done some research on the development of speech sounds of infants I have been led to an appreciation of the proper function of baby talk. It has also led to an emancipation from the anti-social inhibitions imposed by the above mentioned child-starved dictators. At any rate it is time to announce a new declaration of independence in regard to the freedom of baby talk. In place of the expert's slogan, parents should raise a new one—give me liberty to prattle or give me death. For in this world of dictators and experts one of the few joys left to fathers and mothers is the joy of babbling. Incidentally, my diagnosis of the mental limitations of Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini is that their parents did not prattle soft sounds and sweet nothings to them in infancy.

To be specific about this important matter, if you are quietly humming "Rock-a-bye Baby" to your three-month-old child and suddenly are seized by an overwhelming desire to say "goo-goo" to him, the proper thing is to say it. If he says "a di, di, di, di?" to you with a questioning rise in the last sound, don't stand before him helpless like a blocked stutterer, but answer in kind. Adding a few frills like the sound of a pained turtle dove or a turkey gobbler won't hurt either But for Heaven's sake don't look around furtively before indulging in this forbidden wisdom, don't consult the latest book on child psychology for the best enunciation or the most exquisite diction. Go ahead, be yourself, forget the inhibitions, and coo boldly. It will educate the baby and you'll get a lot of fun out of it.

1.   Circle the letter beside the sentence that <u>best</u> expresses the main idea of this <u>entire</u> selection.
A. The desire to prattle is considered abnormal by child experts.
B. One of the few joys left to babies is prattling.
C. Prattling is a parent's natural right and is not harmful to babies.
D. Parents should use proper English in addressing their children.
E. Children who hear no baby-talk have difficulties in developing language skills.

2.   Write the <u>main idea</u> expressed in the <u>first</u> paragraph.

_____

_____

_____

Circle the letter that best completes the sentence.

3.   The main idea of the second paragraph is best expressed as:
   A. The experts' opinions on prattling
   B. The freedom of a baby to prattle
   C. The detrimental effects of baby-talk
   D. The author's insistence that parents use baby-talk
   E. The author's insistence that prattling may not aid in teaching in-
      fants to speak

4.   The function of the last paragraph is:
   A. to prove the points expressed in the two preceding paragraphs.
   B. to restate the main idea expressed in paragraph 1.
   C. to provide a contrasting point of view to that in paragraph 2.
   D. to provide examples of the point made in paragraph 2.
   E. to illustrate the chronological development of the passage.