

What Should Colleges Teach?

Stanley Fish.

I write a third column on the teaching of writing in colleges and universities because **three important questions posed by a large number of posters** remain unanswered: (1) Isn't the mastery of forms something that should be taught in high school or earlier? (2) Isn't extensive reading the key to learning how to write? (3) What would a composition course based on the method I urge look like?

By all the evidence, high schools and middle schools are not teaching writing skills in an effective way, if they are teaching them at all. **The exception seems to be Catholic schools.**

...students in my classes who do have a grasp of the craft of writing are graduates of **parochial schools.**

If to wide reading were added daily dinner-table discussions of the **sophistication and wit found in many 18th and 19th century novels**, I might be more sanguine.

First, you must clear your mind of the orthodoxies that have taken hold in the composition world. The main orthodoxy is nicely encapsulated in this resolution adopted in **1974 by the Conference on College Composition and Communication**: "We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language — the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style."

If you're about to be fired because your memos reflect your "own **identity** and style," citing the CCC

resolution is not going to do you any good.

Statements like this one issue from the mistake of importing a **sociological/political** analysis of a craft into the teaching of it.

You don't strike a blow against a power structure by **making yourself vulnerable to its prejudices.**

And if students infected with the facile egalitarianism of soft multiculturalism... ” (Who could object to learning a second language?)

...getting them to see that the motor of meaning production is form, not content.

In-Class Activity:

Write a three sentences long introduction of Fish. (5 minutes)

Close Read the highlighted sentences/phrases/words in the above-given notes and annotate. (15 minutes).

Think about the power-language dynamic and infer Fish's stance on it (5-7 minutes).

Synthesize the viewpoints of Young, Christensen, and Fish on form vs content (10 minutes).