

# Homemade Bread & English Compositions

## (or An Alternative to Correcting Papers)

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Let's suppose for a minute that you are a married woman. For health and/or economic reasons, you and your husband decide to bake all of your family's bread from now on.

You buy a bread book and try a couple of loaves. They look a little lopsided and are burned on one side, but they taste pretty good. You are pleased.

Your husband, however, becomes fascinated with the art of bread baking. He starts taking classes, reading books, trying new recipes. After a while he knows a lot about baking bread, and his loaves are a lot better than yours.

That's okay with you. However, it's not okay with him. Whenever your loaves come out of the oven, he examines them carefully. He takes notes, giving you all kinds of helpful suggestions:

- Use only stone-ground flour.
- Add a bit more water next time.
- Be more careful about the temperature of the water before you add the yeast.
- Don't forget to check the expiration date on the yeast package.
- Knead longer.
- Place the pans further apart in the oven.
- Don't forget to brush the tops with melted butter.
- Don't let the loaves cool for longer than ten minutes in the pans.

As he goes over his notes, you don't pay much attention. Perhaps a suggestion or two registers in your brain. For example, you may remember to check the expiration date on the yeast package next time. Then again, you may not. You don't really care much. Your husband is the one who cares. He puts all the effort into improving your bread—analyzing, studying, criticizing, suggesting. You let him. You also pretty much ignore him.

The quality of your bread stays essentially the same.

So what does all this have to do with English compositions? In grading compositions, many of us play the role of the bread-baking husband. We spend hours correcting every little thing on every single paper. We do all the work—analyzing, studying and suggesting. The students let us. All they do is look at their grades and, if we are lucky, perhaps give our comments and notes a passing glance as they toss them into the wastebasket.

The quality of their work stays essentially the same.

Let's face it. It is a waste of time to spend hours correcting students' compositions, especially if you want them to become better writers. When you correct their papers for them, you

make them passive observers. No one becomes a better writer by glancing at someone else's corrections.

What is the alternative? A practical, easy approach is to get the students to do the correcting themselves, with your guidance.

Let's assume that you are already teaching writing as a process and that your students spend a lot of time with prewriting activities, writing and revision. You feel comfortable about all that goes into the content of your students' papers. However, you also want the students to learn to write papers that are technically correct, without errors in spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, etc. The following method is one easy way to get them actively involved in improving their own work:

- As you grade a student's paper, simply place an "x" in the margin on the line where an error occurs. An "x" in the margin means that something is wrong. (Some teachers prefer to give students more guidance at first, using "sp" for spelling errors, "frag" for sentence fragments, "?" for awkward or confusing sentences, etc. As students become more skilled at correcting their papers, the teachers switch to the more general "x.")
- When there are many errors, don't try to mark every single one of them. Instead, try to gear your marks to a student's skill level. For one student, you might use "x's" for only the worst spelling errors and for sentences that don't begin with capital letters. For another student, you might mark "x's" for more subtle things, like incorrectly punctuated dialogue. Sometimes you might decide to mark only one particular kind of error on a given paper, perhaps only run-on sentences for one student or errors in subject/verb agreement for another.

If you start to feel guilty about not marking everything, remember your "helpful" husband in the imaginary scenario above. Wouldn't he have been more effective if he had given only one or two suggestions at a time rather than attacking everything at once? Marking too many errors may defeat your goal, overwhelming students and causing them to give up in frustration.

And don't fall for the old argument that you must mark everything "for the parents. They will be upset if I don't. Or they will think I am lazy or that I'm not a good teacher." Your goal is not to help the parents; it is to help the students. If a parent questions your grading technique, explain what you are doing—and why. The method is perfectly defensible and gets results.

- After papers are returned, have students go over them to make corrections. Teach them to circle the place where an error occurs, writing the correction right above the circle. If a

# Thanksgiving “T” Time

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For a Thanksgiving challenge, try this game. Announce a category. Then have students, in small groups, list as many words as possible that begin with the letter *t* and fit the category. For example, if the category is *animals*, groups might list *tiger* and *tarantula*.

It is important to keep the game moving. As soon as you see students slowing down with a category, change it. One to three minutes per category usually works well. Groups score one point for each correct answer.

Below are some categories to try:

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| 1. Boys/girls names   | 24. Things you can do at a dance                     |
| 2. Adjectives used to describe a roller coaster ride                          | 25. Beverages  |
| 3. Things people are afraid of  | 26. Sounds   |
| 4. Foods that make your stomach turn  | 27. Words that begin with <i>trans</i>               |
| 5. Adjectives used to describe basketball player LeBron James                 | 28. Things you can do in the city                    |
| 6. Five-letter words  | 29. Things you can do in the country                 |
| 7. Names of sitcoms   | 30. Adjectives to describe the Empire State Building |
| 8. What you do on Saturday  | 31. Things you don't like about school               |
| 9. Verbs  | 32. Things you do like about school                  |
| 10. Words that end in <i>e</i>  |  |
| 11. Adjectives your grandmother might use to describe styles she doesn't like |  |
| 12. What you do in physical education   |  |
| 13. What you might bring if you go camping                                    |  |
| 14. Things used in sewing   |  |
| 15. Adjectives used to describe a cowboy                                      |  |
| 16. “Nice” words to describe your teacher                                     |  |
| 17. Words that end in <i>ly</i>   |  |
| 18. Synonyms for junk   |  |
| 19. What you do on an average school day                                      |  |
| 20. Baseball terms  |  |
| 21. Modes of transportation   |  |
| 22. Things that are annoying  |  |
| 23. Games (indoor and outdoor)  |  |

# Vocabulary Puzzle

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Use a dictionary or [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) to answer the questions below.

- Which of the following doesn't belong? Why?  
*yew, yohimbe, yagi, yarrow*
- List 25 words that begin with *t* and can be used as nouns.
- Put the following words in alphabetical order:  
*industrious, indented, gentle, immaculate, ink, intestine, inevitable, incredible, insight, cow, improbable*
- Which one of these would you definitely *not* find in a musical group?  
*theorbo, bodhran, ocarina, ocelot*
- Which one of these might be considered unsafe?  
*pannier, parapet, paraquat, patagium*
- Rewrite the following sentence so that it is easier to understand:  
*When the curmudgeon encountered the beneficent crone, he experienced transient tachycardia and became enamored.*
- Which of the following would best describe a good speaker? Why?  
*verbose, obtuse, articulate, sesquipedalian*
- List the 12 signs of the zodiac in alphabetical order.
- Define *adze*, and then name three professions that would be likely to use one.
- Use *rabbit* and *rabbet* correctly in one sentence.
- Which of the following words has one syllable? Two syllables? Three syllables? Four syllables?  
*emulate, mollusk, flapjack, salamander, grommet, squelch, pendulum, emu, goblin, spatula, oblong, haddock, knoll, smidgen, flipper, peppercorn*
- Would you rather be a *spelunker* or a *numismatist*? Tell what each does, and then explain your choice.
- Which word doesn't belong in the following list? Why not?  
*algid, hiemal, sweltering, gelid, brumal, rimy, niveous*
- Name ten things that are *xanthic*.
- Which two of the following words should you never use in writing or speech? Why?  
*exigency, exorbitant, expedite, exasperate, escape, exuberant, excerpt, exculpate, especially, excoriate*