

# "What Reading and Writing Skills Should College-Bound Students Have? High School and College Teachers Disagree"

The following information has been excerpted from a College Board Two-Day Conference presented at the San Antonio Omni Hotel in Jan. of 2004 by Leann West from Stephen F. Austin State University. The article she referenced can be located at <http://www.act.org/news/releases/2000/04-12-00.html>.

High school teachers ranked sub-areas related to reading content and skills in the following manner from "very important" to "not important":

- Organization
- Strategy
- Sentence structure
- Style
- Punctuation
- Grammar and usage

College instructors ranked the same items in the following manner:

- Grammar and usage
- Sentence structure
- Organization
- Punctuation
- Strategy
- Style

High school teachers also ranked "establishing logical order" and "knowing how to choose the appropriate transition word or phrase" extremely high; whereas, college teachers did not rank these as highly. According to the article, "The college teachers appear to want their students to arrive knowing basic punctuation and grammar so they don't have to re-teach those skills."

Another fundamental difference lies in the two views of important literature. High school teachers value fiction as the most important genre of literature while college teachers value readings in the social sciences as

the most important. Another discrepancy appears to be that high school teachers consider "predicting outcomes" as well as identifying both literal and figurative meanings as "very important" skills while college teachers did not value those as highly.

However, both groups highly rated the skills of "inferring main ideas" and "drawing conclusions."

West also mentioned an article in *The New York Times* (26 April 2003, late edition-final: A15) "Writing in Schools Is Found Both Dismal and Neglected." This report from the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges states that writing is "woefully ignored in most American Schools" citing that most 4<sup>th</sup> graders write less than three hours per week and that "75 percent of high school seniors never get a writing assignment from their history or social studies teachers." A 2002 study of California college freshman found that they could not "analyze arguments, synthesize information or write papers that were reasonably free of language errors."

What this means to us: Although we have gotten away from teaching grammar in the strict fashion that many of us grew up learning, we need to bring back into the classroom the study of grammar and usage. Many college teachers prefer to train their students in the style of writing they prefer, but they want their students to come to them prepared to write with the very basic skills of grammar and usage, sentence structure, organization, and punctuation. Those skills need to be enforced more in the grading rubrics of all pieces of writing we are asking our students to turn in.

High school teachers also need to place more emphasis on non-fiction and less on the fictional literature we all know and love dearly. Many teachers need a paradigm shift to accommodate these changes to help make the transition from high school to college more beneficial for more students. Many AP classes are already making these changes; our mission as AP teachers should be to get this word spread to the "academic" teachers.

Our mission should also be to get our students to write more and to write often. We do not need to feel that we need to "grade" every piece of writing a student does, but we need to make our students a community of writers sharing their pieces with peers in their own class, school, district, and even further through the internet.

Further readings on this issue can be found at the following websites:

"Why Can't Johnny Write" <http://chronicle.com/collequylive/2003/01/write>

"Writing Is Key" <http://www.ncte.org/print.asp?id=107804&node+403>

"Teaching Composition: A Position Statement"

<http://ncte.org/about/over/positions/category/write/107690.htm>

"How to Help Your Child Become a Better Writer: Suggestions for Parents  
from the National Council of Teachers of English"

<http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/category/write/107687.htm>