

can a human being. The book is not meant as a series of solutions to specific problems but as a view of language from those, not often quoted in the press, who have both a wide and a deep insight into what language is and what it can do.

If we are to avoid one of our alternate futures — that of Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, we need to listen occasionally to such traditional wisdom as is provided by the essays in this book and is admirably summed up by Gold in his Preface:

The theme that runs through these essays... is that language is inseparable from our humanity, that literature is its highest expression, and that the study and practice of writing, speaking, listening, and reading must once again become the central, nucleic, irreducible mainspring of our culture and of its formal educational system — that is, if we are to sustain the humanity of learning.

Amen.

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**Eric W. Johnson**  
**HOW TO ACHIEVE**  
**COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH**  
New York: Bantam Books, 1976.  
184 pp. \$1.50.

Like many books which fall into the "How To" category, the title of Johnson's book promises more than it could possibly achieve. The introduction indicates that the book is not a course of study; it is a reference book, as the subtitle but not the title states.

As a reference book, *How to Achieve Competence in English* has many virtues. It contains information, organized in dictionary format under specific headings such as "colons", "footnotes", and "prefixes", and also treats more general topics such as "plagiarism" and "debating". Its scope extends from definitions of the parts of speech to information on stylistic aspects of writing. Many of its entries are specific and accurate enough to be useful, but others, like those on "the gerund" and "clichés", are not definitive enough.

It is in the area of writing style that Johnson goes beyond the scope of his book as a quick reference guide. Although he is aware of the necessity of avoiding theoretical discussions on writing in a book of this nature, he does not refrain from offering advice on topics which are highly controversial. Many English teachers would consider his suggestions for paragraph-writing dangerous for even the most sophisticated writers. "I feel that much instruction given under the heading 'How to write a Paragraph' is not very useful or realistic. It leads a student to suppose that real people organize their writing by thinking of topic sentences, by supporting the topic sentences with a few points." (p. 43) This extension of scope in a few instances is the most serious flaw of the book.

Nevertheless Johnson has accomplished his task of compiling a quick reference guide, the format of which is quite attractive. The entries are arranged alphabetically and signposted by a large letter on the upper right hand corner of each page. The author claims that this arrangement facilitates "quick use", but I cannot help feeling that it has very little to offer over the practice of including an index at the end of a book.

Much useful information has been compressed into this slim, portable volume, which is aimed at readers who are already competent in English and not, as its title suggests, at those who are struggling to achieve this goal.

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**Wilson R. Thornley.**  
**SHORT STORY WRITING.**  
New York: Bantam Books, 1976.  
179 pp. \$1.25.

Divided into three parts, *Short Story Writing* deals first with the definition of a short story as "...a series of reported scenes in which a *causative situation* arises which requires a *deciding character* with a *governing characteristic* to try to solve some kind of *problem* along lines which he decides on as best for his purpose and to suffer *interruptions* or *intensifications* until he comes to the *result* of his final decisions." (p. 4) a definition which provides a sturdy framework for the rest of the exegesis.

In Part I Thornley amplifies what he means by "scene," spreading it out like a table top on the six sturdy legs of his definition. The table is then laid with the piquant fare of technique (characterization, point of view, dialogue, and organization) and garnished by carefully selected illustrations in Part II. From his well-stocked larder Thornley has chosen stories which not only serve to underline his points, but also appeal to the taste of high school pupils. With good pedago-

gical instinct he divides the pages in Part II, putting the text of his examples on the left-hand side and his comment on the right — a device which seems practical, since it both illustrates and reinforces his definition.

Part III contains "Five Short Stories for Reading and Analysis", followed by a "Guide to Analysis" and assignment exercises.

The technique of his presentation is methodical, even to the numbering of each separate scene, and the assignments are original and relevant: "Study your newspaper and list as many potential Story Situations as you can find. They needn't be spectacular," or "List some characters with problems," or "Select an actual problem which you are facing now. This is for real." Thornley also includes a sound list of readings.

Although the format seems somewhat clumsy at times, it strikes me as a clever expedient that one must read the whole text of a story in one part of the book to follow the propositions and illustrations in another part. The author thus ensures that the whole book gets read.

For the high school teacher interested in helping students write short stories, this book is a tidy and indispensable furnishing. The highest tribute I can pay is to acknowledge that from the moment I read the book for the purpose of reviewing it, I incorporated its ideas into my own teaching.

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