

THE MARKING OF COMPOSITIONS.

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THE reading and marking of compositions, however one may manage it, is so great a drain on the energies of the teacher of English that he may well strive to have it count as much as possible in the progress of the pupil. Few of our secondary school pupils are able to appreciate the niceties of composition, but almost all can be taught to express themselves with clearness, and to avoid the most obvious errors. In reading essays I have found it an advantage to employ a system of fines, the fine for each error being set down in the margin, and the sum deducted from what the writer would otherwise have received, so that he may clearly see the price he pays for lack of a little care and effort. The following scheme may prove of use to young teachers, and it can readily be modified to suit the particular conditions that obtain in any school :

I.—General Valuation of Essay.

- (a) Matter, 25 p.c. Information and ideas.
- (b) Plan, 25 p.c. Comprehensiveness and arrangement.
- (c) Expression, 50 p.c. Clearness, economy, aptness, movement.

II.—Fines for Positive Errors.

- (a) Titles, 1. (b) Capitals, 1. (c) Improper abbreviations, 1. (d) Spelling, 1.
- (e) Misuse of words, 1, 2, 3, (according to the gravity of the error).
- (f) Grammatical errors, 1, 2, 3.
- (g) Sentence structure, 1, 2.
- (h) Faulty transition, 1, 2.
- (i) Paragraphing, 1, 2, 3. Maximum deduction, (10).
- (j) Penmanship, 5 (max. ded.).
- (k) Periods, interrogation marks, exclamation marks, 1. (Max. ded., 5).

Other punctuation marks, 5. (Max. ded.)
(l) Undue shortness of essay, 1.

III.—Net Valuation of Essay.

$$(1 : a + b + c) - 2 = 3.$$

$$(20 + 15 + 35) - 25 = 45.$$

In practice the teacher may prefer not to mark separately for matter, plan and expression, but, instead, may reason that a particular essay, were it free from positive errors, would be worth, say, 70 marks. The fines for positive errors totalling, say, 25 marks, the net value of the composition would be 45 marks.

Occasionally, after examining an essay in this way, it is felt that adherence to the scheme would be an injustice to the pupil. In that case a special mark may be substituted for the valuation arrived at through the scheme.

To ensure attention on the pupil's part to the errors noted it is well to have the corrected essay; neatly copied into a blank book reserved for the purpose. From time to time these books may be collected and looked over by the teacher.

In my own experience the marking and valuation of essays in the way I have attempted to outline has proved a saving of time, since the pupil is definitely shown how he may improve, and is encouraged to do his best. I have found that two or three essays thoroughly dealt with effect as great improvement in the pupil's work as several times that number examined with less attention to detail.

Take time to be polite. A gentle "I thank you," "If you please," "Excuse me," etc., is no compromise of dignity.

Take time to be patient with children. Patience and kindness will open a way for good influence over almost any child.