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ENGLISH FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS

It is not an uncommon thing for an engineer to express regret that in his student days he spent so little of his time in the study of English. Occasionally an engineer goes further and urges that something be done to provide for better training for the engineers of the future. Some who have had occasion to feel their deficiency keenly are heard to criticize severely the colleges which send them out under a serious handicap. A few make suggestions as to just what should be done at the colleges where they were trained.

In recognition of the lack of training in writing which the average mining engineer has had, the Michigan College of Mines in 1911 engaged an English instructor, Mr. J. D. Black, and offered a course in technical writing. An interesting account of the result of three years' work is given by Mr. Black in a recent paper. First, regarding the student's standpoint, he says:

"How is it at the College of Mines after three years of the work? I do not think that the courses are any less popular here than in other engineering schools in the country; in fact, I think they are more popular. And I am not claiming much popularity at that! Some of the students think that the courses are a nuisance; others say that the work is useless, that they don't seem to be getting anywhere with it. Both of these sorts let the work trouble them just enough to escape a condition. Others say that perhaps a course in technical writing could be given that would be well worth while. Still some faith left! The good students are usually willing to grant that what little of the stuff they get is well worth the trouble—and even wish there might be more of it, especially if it could be managed without additional work on their part.

"But giving to the opinion of these earnest students all the weight it deserves, I am still forced to admit that those who have had one or two years of technical writing are far from being as eager for it as were those who began it three years ago."

The reason for the decrease in popularity of the courses was the recognition by the students that there was no fundamental difference between "technical writing" as taught to mining engineers and "composition" as taught to general students. "They have found that learning to write well on technical subjects is the same old grind that composition always was. And a good many of them are taking engineering just because they didn't like to write compositions in high school!"