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# Stages in the Development of Analytic/Argumentative Writing Abilities During the College Years

**Janice N. Hays**

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For over a decade now, we have been bombarded with public reports about the wretched state of high school and college students' writing skills. In response to such publicity, the general public has called for a "return to the basics" in writing instruction, by which most people seem to mean return to an emphasis on grammar, usage, and spelling. In response to such pressures, the competency-testing movement appears to be focusing upon sentence-level "correctness" as the criterion of competency in writing.

Yet research into the actual nature of college students' writing abilities reveals that only about 20 percent of entering freshmen are remedial-level writers. The remaining 80 percent write, on the whole, correctly. Further, if they are asked to produce narrative and descriptive writing—writing organized on the basis of chronology or spatial contiguity—they can compose lively and vivid papers.

However, most such students cannot perform well on an analytic writing task—one demanding hierarchical organization based upon concepts and requiring students to elaborate ideas, establish relationships among them, and then manipulate those relationships in ways characterizing complex thought. Faced with such a writing assignment, student writers produce essays that are banal, superficial, and

trivial in ways suggesting some fundamental inability to think in a sophisticated fashion about complex subjects (Miller, 1980),

Yet it is writing that requires analysis of and reasoning about ideas and data that students must produce throughout their college careers. Further, some researchers—Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner, for example—suggest that higher cognitive abilities, the abilities to think in and about concepts, may not develop at all apart from experience with written language and its systems of symbol manipulation (Bruner, 1975; Vygotsky, 1962).

Some researchers suspect that students' abilities to write in mature ways are related to cognitive maturity. This is a chicken-and-egg kind of question, for it may be that students think in immature ways in writing precisely because they have not done much analytic writing. Yet, if there are developmental factors involved in high school and college students' poor analytic writing abilities, we need to know what they are. Without such information we will, on the one hand, continue to confound our students with writing assignments way beyond their developmental levels—assignments at which they can only fail—or, on the other hand, lock them into those relatively simple kinds of writing tasks which they can do easily and well and which will never challenge them to progress further. For it is fairly clear that cognitive development at the higher levels is not automatic—a matter of simple chronology—but depends instead upon interaction between students' readiness for such development *and* an environment that elicits that growth through the right combination of "challenges and supports" (Sanford, 1967).

Further, the sequence in which writing abilities develop may not be identical to that of general cognitive development. Writing presents its own set of complex constraints, and we know that, in general, writing lags behind speaking ability. Perhaps writing development has its own timetable, one that may or may not coincide with general cognitive growth. Thus while programs that utilize what we know about college-level cognitive development may well be helpful in teaching writing, we need to know more than we do about the nature of writing development itself.

For the past two years, I have been working on a research project at a Colorado Springs high school and at the University of Colorado,

Colorado Springs, to study the development of analytic and argumentative writing abilities in late high school and college students. This is a cross-sectional study which makes inferences about development by studying differences in student writing abilities at several educational levels, much as did James Britton's study of secondary-school students' writing in Great Britain (Britton, 1977).

The study included 136 subjects—37 high school seniors, 64 college freshmen and sophomores, and 35 juniors and seniors: subjects' average age was 23.8 years, their average grade level was 13.5. All subjects wrote essays on two different occasions. The first session asked them to take a position on the tough drunk-driving laws then before the Colorado legislature. Students were to write, arguing their position, to an audience that would on the whole share their viewpoint; several such audiences were suggested to them. At the second session, they were to perform exactly the same assignment except that they were to write to an audience that would on the whole be hostile to their viewpoint (see Appendix). Subjects did not know the topic in advance. They were allowed as much time as they wished to write. All subjects also filled out a questionnaire about their experiences with and attitudes towards writing. A representative subgroup of about 35 subjects produced taped protocols of their composing processes as they wrote and were later interviewed.

Researchers rated papers holistically, using a criterion-referenced scale, and then coded a subset of papers and protocols for various cognitive, rhetorical, syntactic, and semantic indices. Preliminary statistical analysis shows significant correlations (.001 level) between age and scores, and educational level and scores, with educational level being the more significant, as revealed by a partial correlation. Academic major appears to be less important although the liberal arts major shows a significant correlation with score level.

A subset of "B" papers—that is, papers directed to hostile audience—was also rated for cognitive-developmental level by the Syracuse Rating Group, a research team which uses William Perry's model of intellectual and ethical development in college to assess cognitive developmental level (Perry, 1970; see Kurfiss, this volume). The Syracuse Group's ratings for cognitive level correlate very highly

with the writing evaluator's ratings of these same "B" papers (significance at the .01 level).

What is emerging from the project is a six-stage model for the development of analytic and argumentative writing abilities although the exact boundaries of these stages will be subject to considerable refinement as the analysis continues. The six stages correspond to Perry Scheme position high Two through Four and low Five, with one or two subjects placing higher on the Perry Scheme scale. The writing model's stages reveal many of the cognitive characteristics that Perry identifies in corresponding positions of his scheme. And indeed, in my thinking about writing I have been much influenced by Perry. However, I will discuss these and other traits primarily in terms of writing, not of cognition.

In general, no high school seniors scored in the model's highest stages and virtually no college students in the lowest. High school students place predominantly in Writing Stages One through Four, college freshmen and sophomores in Stages Two through Five, and juniors and seniors in Stages Two through Six. On the "B" topic, the paper directed to a hostile audience, the mean is almost two full points below that of the "A" paper. This difference is important, suggesting that the necessity of writing to a hostile audience, a constraint requiring writers to enter into frames of reference very different from their own, taxes them in ways that they often cannot deal with effectively. Since the ability to empathize with others—mentally to play the role of someone very different from ourselves—is considered an index of cognitive maturity, we may speculate that at least in this grade-range, audience constraints are among the most telling markers of cognitive level in writing.

The result of this study suggest that writing development proceeds along several different continua that include:

1. nature of *conceptualization of the problem* being considered;
2. nature of *writer's position*;
3. degree and kind of *planning* of essay;
4. type and basis of *argument* emphasized;
5. *structure*;
6. *rhetorical strategies*;
7. *dialectical movement*;

8. degree and nature of *questioning of one's own viewpoint*;
9. degree and nature of awareness of *self as writer*;
10. degree and kind of *relationship to reader*;
11. *syntactical* and other local strategies.

In this paper, I will mainly discuss the study's "B" papers, since they seem to be the more telling indices of writing maturity.

### *Stage One*

Just under 4 percent of the study's subjects score at the Stage One level; nearly 100 percent of these are high school students. Stage One subjects write with unsupported edicts that are both sweeping and didactic. They view the issue in simplistic and absolutist terms—of right and wrong, good and bad; in Perry's terms, they are dualistic. In general, in these lower stages, subjects assume moralistic posture—as distinguished from pragmatic or ethical—towards both their topic and readers, and such postures reflect immature cognitive functioning—the sort typical of Lawrence Kohlberg's levels of conventional and legalistic thinking (Kohlberg, 1981) as well as of Perry's dualism.

As they compose, Stage One writers have few strategies, purposes, or goals. They do not plan but, rather, put words down as words occur to them, and they are at the mercy of "inspiration," which all too often does not occur. Structurally, their papers are largely associational, displaying little or no hierarchical structure. In developing their ideas, these writers have few resources except edict and opinion. Apart from such assertions, they rely heavily upon concrete narrative examples (e.g., "A friend of mine went to a party and ended up driving home with another friend who had several drinks...") and concrete facts about drunk driving and alcohol. They engage in some casual analysis although this usually consists of simply giving reasons for assertions.

Stage One writers seldom question their own viewpoints or engage in the dialectical movement that systematically looks at several sides of any position and tries to achieve a synthesis among competing ideas. Rather, for Stage One writers, truth appears to be utterly uncomplicated. Stage One writers also have little sense of themselves as writers. Their protocols reveal little "monitoring," or critical, activity. Instead of shaping their writing to be effective with their

readers, they either ignore them or else rely upon crude emotional appeals. When they are not directing such appeals to their readers, they simply disgorge everything they know on the subject of drunk driving. Nor do they attempt to construct personae—credible presentations of themselves to their readers. In short, their writing is one-dimensional, simplistic, and self-referenced.

## ***Stage Two***

Around 12 percent of the subjects score at the stage Two level on the "A" papers, around 16 percent on the "B" papers. Over one third of those scoring in this range are high school students, while about half are college freshmen and sophomores; the rest are juniors and seniors.

Stage Two writers show many of the characteristics discussed under Stage One: moralism, didacticism, and even more heavily emotional appeals to the reader than are customary in Stage One papers. In general, they see drunk driving not as a problem to be solved but as a sin to be punished, and fill their "A" papers with calls for revenge against and punishment of drunk drivers. However, they modify this somewhat on the "B" papers, leaning more heavily on emotional than on didactic appeals. They also rely heavily on graphic illustrations which stress death and mutilation.

Once again, paper structure at this stage is largely random and associational. Like Stage One writers, Stage Two subjects seldom qualify their statements or question their own viewpoints although they do occasionally try to answer objections that someone might raise to their statement. Further, Stage Two writers use more examples and details than do Stage One subjects, and many of these are generalized (rather than specific) examples, a development suggesting writers' increasing abilities to abstract from the particular to the general—for instance, "Teenagers go to a party, get drunk, and pile into a car..." Stage Two writers also give more reasons for their assertions; the use of causal analysis more than doubles between Stage One and Stage Two. Thus the movement is towards more fully supported and developed ideas.

However, Stage Two writers have problems relating effectively

to their readers. On their "B" papers, they do not call for revenge and retribution, as do Stage One writers, but they do tend to blame tavern owners for the problem of drunk driving and try to "shame" them into support of the proposed laws: one Stage Two writer says, for example, "You (tavern owner) don't care how people abuse themselves or others...just as long as you make money from it." Yet in reality, such strategies would be anything but effective with their audiences, and Stage Two writers' difficulties relating realistically to their readers suggest cognitive immaturity. Yet on their "B" papers, a few Stage Two writers suggest alternative solutions that readers might consider to the drunk driving problem, engaging in some simple problem-solving activity, a strategy that becomes prominent in later stages.

### *Stage Three*

Around a third of the study's subjects score at the Stage Three level. Most Stage Three subjects are under the age of twenty-five, and the majority are college freshmen and sophomores while roughly a third are high school seniors and a fifth are college juniors and seniors. Low Stage Three papers show many Stage Two characteristics, especially in their largely emotional appeals to readers, their overextensive use of narrative examples patched together with the flimsiest of generalizations, and in their oversimplified and often moralistic conceptualizations of the problem. However, Stage Three writers occasionally see the drunk driver as needing treatment rather than punishment, a movement away from moralistic reasoning and towards analytic thought, and upper range Stage Three writers occasionally differentiate between the law and its enforcement and between drinking and drunkenness, differentiations apparently lost to less mature writers. Often Stage Three "B" papers are more moderate than the corresponding "A" essays; apparently the exercise of writing to a hostile audience forces writers to focus less on their own opinions and more on the rhetorical context than did the "A" assignment, which they largely took as an invitation simply to articulate their own ideas. Most Stage Three writers compose longer papers than do Stages One and Two subjects, and their discourse patterns include more questioning of their own viewpoints and qualification of their statements.



Protocols of Stage Three writers may reveal some simple monitoring activity. Although they do little advance planning before starting to write, they do give themselves directions as they compose. One Stage Three writer says, for example, "OK, now I should go into a little something about how these guys (the drunk drivers) deserve it (harsh treatment)—that's what we should talk about," or, "I kinda got off the track here, but that's ok; it's another example. . . ." Some of these writers complain a lot about the assignment, but they also occasionally congratulate themselves for doing something well. In other words, they have more sense of themselves as writers than do less mature writers although that sense does not include very complex strategies. As one Stage Three writer put it in his interview, "I just kind of let it flow through my head and wrote it the way it was."

Structure in Stage Three may be associational or it may achieve low level generalization, and some of the time Stage Three writers include middle-level statements as they move from general to particular. In developing their ideas, Stage Three writers rely heavily upon examples. Often, however, these are generalized examples. One Stage Three writer, for example, devotes the body of her paper to describing three representative bar patrons—a regular habitue, an alcoholic, and a social drinker. Thus, she moves to an abstraction level beyond that of many Stage Two writers, for she formulates hypothetical and typical examples rather than relying upon concrete incidents that have actually occurred.

The best sections of many low Stage Three papers suggest ways in which tavern owners can help solve the drunk-driving problem—for example, by providing alternate transportation to impaired patrons, by limiting customers' drinks, by installing breathalyzers to test patrons' levels of intoxication, and so on. Again and again, on the papers directed to hostile readers, writers in the middle stages resort to such problem-solving strategies; the use of this approach more than quadruples between Stages Two and Three and doubles again between Three and Four. Apparently it is the hostile audience that evokes this response, which is less frequent on the papers directed to a friendly audience. I suspect that such problem-solving activity provides a way-station on the road to mature analytic and argumentative writing. That is, middle-stage writers, aware of their readers' probable hostility

but still unable to engage those readers with a direct argument, evidently adopt the problem-solving approach as a compromise: with it they can suggest helpful gimmicks to their readers that will seem to diminish the potential threat of the drunk-driving laws. In effect, they, say, "You don't have to worry about the laws because you can do x, which will keep you from being hurt by them." Although realistically the ploys suggest simply detour around the central issues, they appear to engage the writers in creative thinking from multiple perspectives that in turn often produces the best parts of their papers. In the upper stages, problem-solving declines as a strategy while logical argument increases dramatically, and we may speculate that problem solving provides a transition into logical argument.

In addition to using problem-solving as a strategy, mid-range Stage Three's also give reasons for their assertions, establishing chains of cause and effect and sometimes acknowledging complexity of causation in the areas they examine. And in general, use of causal analysis continues to increase in stage Three, reaching its peak in Stage Four. Stage Three writers do better at establishing causation than at tracing effects or consequences, particularly hypothetical ones.

Middle-range Stage Three writers are also apt to draw more heavily upon objective data than do less mature writers: they cite statistics about accidents involving drunk drivers and facts about the physiological effects of alcohol, strategies that suggest their recognition of the need to support an argument on some basis other than that of their own opinion or of emotional appeal. And some of the time they argue from analogy. This latter rhetorical strategy scarcely appears before Stage Three, probably because it involves generalizing from one context to another in ways that are beyond less mature writers, who tend to write concretely.

Like Stage Two writers, low Stage Threes's may have trouble relating effectively to their readers, especially on the "B" papers. Often they too blame their readers for drunk driving: "If you would help to keep the intoxicated driver off the street, these laws would not be necessary," and so on. Yet many Three's are more effective with their audience than are Stage Two writers. In trying to mobilize their readers' emotions, they often appeal to bartenders' and tavern owners' parental feelings, a posture suggesting that writers have attempted to

place themselves in their readers' frames of reference and find some common ground with them (even younger writers seem able to imagine how it feels to be a parent).

Along with trying to arouse readers' guilt and emotions, these writers also speak in rudimentary ways to readers' self-interest, a strategy that grows increasingly prominent in later stages and which indicates growing ability to empathize with the audience. These Stage Three writers realize that tavern owners are worried about what drunk-driving laws will do to their profits, and they try to reassure them that "these laws do not prevent you from selling alcoholic beverages to anyone." One Stage Three writer indicates that she "doubts very seriously that these laws will prevent anyone from drinking" although she does not support this statement with any evidence or argument.

At the upper end of Stage three, writers also appeal to tavern owners as parents, but they buttress their arguments more heavily with statistics than do mid-level "Three's" and tend to identify themselves with their readers: "when three out of four accidents occur every weekend, in every area of the country, we absolutely must consider the fact that the tragic epidemic of drunken driving will most likely, someday, affect us personally." Such identification is always effective rhetorical strategy. Upper Three's make more effort than do earlier writers to exonerate their readers of responsibility for the drunk-driving problem, a strategy showing their awareness of readers' probable responses to the issue. Thus, Stage Three's show continued movement towards more rational analysis; although they still do not much question their own premises, their tone is moderate and reasonable throughout.

### *Stage Four*

On the "A" paper, 36 percent of the study's population scores in the Stage Four range; on the "B" paper, 32 percent place there. Of these, about half are college freshmen and sophomores, and a fourth are juniors and seniors.

Stage Four writers qualify their statements more carefully and differentiate among aspects of the problem more subtly than do less

mature writers; for example, one writer says, "Although I believe something should be done, tougher laws applied to those few people who will be caught are not the entire answer."

In addition to discriminating among facets of the problem, many Stage Four writers are very aware of themselves as writers. In his interviews, one Stage Four writer reported that he always "jots down ideas and then crosses out things that don't follow through logically or make a strong enough argument." This writer also says that he always writes a rough draft, and his protocol shows lots of monitoring activity plus a strong example, "to make it sound as if the rules would be good for them."

Stage Four writers generally appeal to readers on a pragmatic basis although we also find some writers basing their appeals upon social and ethical considerations, a trend that continues into the upper ranges and reaches its peak in Stage Six. This latter development suggests that writers are beginning to see both themselves and their readers as members of the larger human community; writers in Stages One and Two virtually never raise either social or ethical (as distinguished from moralistic) considerations.

Typically, the structure of most Stage Four papers is clearly—at times rigidly—hierarchical, and writers may even articulate their hostile readers' probable objections to the law so that they can systematically rebut them. In short, these papers are conceptually structured and dialectically argued. Often parts of the arguments are persuasive and parts are not. Many Stage Four writers appear to have mastered the structure of logical argument but not the substance that would flesh out that structure. In general, structure often seems to precede substance and to prepare the way for it, as Perry discovered in his Harvard study. For example, one Stage Four writer asserts that the new laws will not affect tavern owners' profits because it is already illegal to serve anyone who is intoxicated; thus the laws will change nothing. Although strictly speaking this statement is correct, most people know that in actual practice patrons often have to be falling off the bar stool before they are refused service. Thus, the argument seems legalistic rather than telling, an indication that even Stage Four level writers may find it difficult *genuinely* to confront the law's probably impact upon those on the opposite side of this issue. Further, Stage

Four writers' rebuttals of opposing arguments are often abrupt, their transitions clumsy.

Two rhetorical trends already noted peak in Stage Four—use of causal analysis and problem-solving. Further, these problem-solving sections are often quite effective, dealing well with feasibility. Probably paralleling the rise in ethical concerns, the strategy of evaluation—making a reasoned judgment about a point or issue—increases steadily across Stage Three through Six.

At the lower level of Stage Four, we find some papers that question the effectiveness of the proposed laws or argue with some of their provisions. Very few such responses appear before Stage Four; one can surmise that it does not occur to writers in lower ranges to question the authority of entities like "the law." One such writer constructs a complex hypothetical argument, showing a degree of abstract reasoning that earlier writers almost never achieve. He relies heavily upon tracing probable effects and engages in considerable dialectical reasoning, questioning his own statements, making concessions, and then counterarguing:

To be effective, the laws must stop the drivers *before* they have the chance to hurt someone. Granted, a heavy sentence is concomitant with vehicular homicide, but aren't the laws you are fighting for supposed to scare people ahead of time? In my opinion, they won't.

And, "we must stop the disease before its symptoms become obvious. I agree that some new laws must be instigated, but the laws you propose just aren't enough."

In general, both "A" and "B" Stage Four papers are directed towards their readers rather than being just a collection of writers' opinions, and they genuinely address readers' self-interests. Stage Four writers are often quite skillful at appealing to hostile readers; here is one writer's address to Mothers Against Drunk Drivers: "Get the drunk driver off the street. That's one less drunk you have to worry about. He can't hurt your family anymore...But for how long?...After he reacquires his license, he's once again posing a threat to our children."

In general, writers in Stage Four are moving towards complexity

of thought, structure, and strategy, and towards increasing awareness of the wider community as their context.

### *Stage Five*

Around 13 percent of the study's subjects place at the Stage Five level, only 6 percent of these are high school students. Just over half of the Stage Five "B" papers are written by college freshmen and sophomores.

Stage Five writers are highly aware of themselves as writers and of their audience as readers. Many Stage Five writers are also aware—perhaps too much so—of composition "rules"; often this focus interferes with their concentration upon topic, purpose and reader. Since earlier writers appear quite oblivious to formal writing constraints—except, perhaps, for that of spelling—I can only assume that this extreme self-consciousness about oneself as writer characterizes a necessary but awkward transitional stage to more skillful writing. Advanced writers, by contrast, focus entirely on their readers goals vis-a-vis the topic and give little attention to the more formal aspects of writing—probably because they have already mastered them.

Like Stage Four writers, those in Stage Five appeal to their readers on pragmatic grounds, but they also make logical and ethical appeals. Stage Five writers use quite complex discourse structures, engaging in considerable dialectical movement. Again, many of these papers have the structure of logical discourse but not always its substance. For example, one Stage Five writer sees the complexities of the drunk-driving issue and tries to discriminate between good and poor parts of the proposed law but cannot quite juggle all these complications at once. His paper is less coherent than earlier ones, probably because he is aware of far more complexity than are less mature writers.

This same writer utilizes extensive chains of cause and effect although sometimes these work a bit like the domino theory—for example, in one section, he argues that the Gross National Product will decline if we jail convicted drunk drivers: "If these people are in jail, they are less productive to society. The GNP could fall because these workers are not producing, which means less taxes are paid, and the

already sagging economy will fall even more." In general, Stage Five papers have greater depth of development than do papers in earlier stages, and this tendency can also lead to some incoherence or blurred focus if writers lose control of their materials. Yet these "lapses" are really signs of increasing complexity, a complexity that will come under writers' controls in Stage Six. Stage Five writers still rely on problem-solving strategies to make their arguments, but increasingly they also employ logical argumentation.

In relating to their readers, Stage Five writers deliberately try to enter into their audience's point of view; one such writer reminded himself not to "come on too harsh (sic)." His strategy is to come up with an argument for supporting tough laws *but* to be sure to respect his opponents' opinions and agree with some of their points. This writer also appeals to bartenders not as fellow parents but as fellow members of the Colorado Springs community—a strategy suggesting his awareness of social perspectives. Stage Five writers have taken a large step forward in complexity: the complexity with which they view the problem, the complexity with which they argue about it, and the subtlety of their strategies to influence their readers. Indeed, sometimes they are so aware of the issues' complexities that they cannot argue effectively for any one position. Although they are not yet fully in control of the writing process, they are moving towards the mature discourse that characterizes the writing produced in Stage Six.

### *Stage Six*

Only a small percentage of the study's subjects (around 3.5%) score in the Stage Six range; over 80 percent of these are college juniors and seniors, the rest freshmen and sophomores. We may speculate that most writers will not achieve Stage Six writing until they reach graduate school. Whether or not those writers leaving college after the baccalaureate will move ahead into Stage Six writing will probably depend upon whether or not they work in jobs requiring mature discursive writing.

We have a protocol for only one Stage Six writer, and so it would be risky to generalize about planning strategies at this level. The protocol we do have, however, shows the writer engaging in extensive

planning with regard to every aspect of the writing process. This writer is highly conscious of himself as a strategist and writer, and equally conscious of his readers as readers.

In general, Stage Six writing shows a dramatic increase in societal and ethical appeals and in the use of logical argument as a primary strategy. Stage six writers take clear positions and argue for them vigorously but also reasonably. They conduct effective arguments that are a mixture of their convictions and the exigencies of the rhetorical situation. That is, they see inconsistencies on all sides of this issue and the social costs involved in each position on it. Stage Six writers are aware of distinctions between public and private behavior and of the legal difficulties inherent in the proposed law. Often, they sympathize with both the victims of drunk drivers and the drivers themselves, whom they see as being sick rather than wicked. Yet they also realize that society must protect itself and therefore must take some action about drunk driving even though Stage Six writers differ considerably about what that action should be.

On their "B" papers, Stage Six writers mount sophisticated arguments directed at the self-interest of the alcoholic beverage industry. They face squarely the fact that the new laws will probably cause at least a temporary drop in beverage sales. Earlier writers have tried to dodge this unpalatable truth with gimmicks. Stage Six writers talk about trade-offs—for example, less business but better public relations, which would, in turn, reduce pressure for harsh tax laws directed at the beverage industry, or trade-offs between freedom and responsibility. One Stage Six writer places drunk driving in the context of other social problems involving constraint and therefore some loss of freedom. She rather skillfully puts the Colorado alcoholic beverage industry, with which she rhetorically identifies herself ("we"), on the side of responsibility and then reinforces that placement by citing actions of beverage industries in other states to assume responsibility for their patrons' uses of alcohol. Without ever seeming to threaten, she also manages to suggest to her readers that if the beverage industry does not regulate itself, it will be regulated by the government. Stage Six writers also frequently point to alcohol laws and their effects in several European countries; again, such strategies locate the problem in broad social contexts.



Stage Six writers approach (although only one writer actually places in) Perry's late positions of relativism and commitment. That is, Stage Six writers can argue with both reason and authority because they have realistically considered all facets of the subject about which they write regardless of whether some of those aspects will challenge their own position. The ability *genuinely* to consider all sides of an issue—and I stress *genuinely to consider*, as opposed to simply going through the motions—is an index of mature cognitive functioning, and it is an ability with which less mature students have great difficulty.

Mature writers have reached conclusions which they can endorse precisely because they know what their positions' weaknesses are and don't try to pretend that those weaknesses are strengths. Further, they hold their conclusions provisionally, not absolutely. Such dialectical reasoning to working conclusions is the kind of thinking that, ideally, a college education encourages, and I am persuaded that analytic/argumentative writing is one of the best methods of producing it.

What seems to emerge from this preliminary analysis of analytic/argumentative writing ability is a continuum from least to most mature that includes several kinds of transitions:

1. transition in complexity of thought from little or no perception of the issue's complexity, to some, to much and even overmuch, and back to much.
2. transition in writer's sense of own position from absolutist, to tentative, to firm but reasonable.
3. transitions in attention to planning from little or none, to some, to an excessive amount in some writers, to an efficient amount in the most mature writers;
4. transition in basis of argument most emphasized from moralistic, to emotional, to pragmatic, to social, to ethical;
5. transition in structure from associational to narrative to low-level generalization to hierarchical;
6. transition in type of argument most emphasized from edict, to narrative example, to explanation, to causal analysis and problem solving, to logical argument;
7. transition in writer's questioning of own position from none, to little, to some, to fully dialectical consideration of opposing views;

8. transition from no awareness of self as writer and strategist to some awareness, to over-awareness, to high awareness;
9. transition from little or no awareness of reader, to some, to much, to awareness of reader almost equal to that of subject matter; among less skilled writers, this awareness is higher in the papers to a hostile audience, probably because the terms of the "B" assignment make it difficult to overlook the paper's audience. On the "A" papers, by contrast, less mature writers could and often did pretty much ignore their readers. The most mature writers—those in Stages Five and Six—attend to their readers in both papers.

Further work will add to and refine these conclusions, but the data do suggest that in developing analytical/argumentative writing abilities, writers go through a sequence of identifiable stages that are related to their levels of cognitive development.

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## **Appendix Topic B**

### ***Writing About Tougher Drunk Driving Laws for a Hostile Audience***

#### **Background**

Last session, you wrote an essay in which you took a position on the issue of tough drunk driving laws. In that essay, you wrote to an audience that pretty much agreed with your point of view on the subject.

For this assignment, you are to write on the same topic, but this time for an audience that will *disagree* with your point of view and will probably feel some hostility towards it. Your job as writer is to persuade these unsympathetic readers to at least consider your point of view and maybe, even change some of their own thinking on the issue of drunk driving laws.

*If on the whole you favor tougher drunk driving laws*, write your essay for the newsletter or magazine of one of the following groups; these groups will probably be opposed to tougher drunk driving laws:

**Colorado Beverage Industry**

**Colorado Brewers Association**

**Colorado Springs Bar and Tavern Owners Association**

**Colorado Teamsters Union**

**Members of Playboy Clubs, Western Area**

*If on the whole you are opposed to tougher drunk driving laws*, write your essay for the newsletter or magazine of one of the following groups; these groups will probably be in favor of tougher drunk driving laws:

**Alcoholics Anonymous**

**Colorado Highway Patrol**

**Colorado Springs Alcohol and Drug Abuse Workers**

**Colorado Springs Council of Churches**

**Mothers Against Drunk Drivers**

## **Essay Assignment**

Write a well-organized essay of around 1000 words in which you present your position on tough drunk driving laws to readers who will disagree with you. Be sure to support your position with examples and illustrations. Note: the 1000 words length is a suggestion only; if you can make an effective argument in a shorter paper, that's fine, or if you need more than 1000 words to construct your argument, that's fine too. Use your common sense about length.

## **Reminder**

The proposed new drunk driving law would include a mandatory jail sentence for 24 hours for anyone found guilty on a first offense of driving under the influence of alcohol together with a stiff fine and suspension of the person's driving license for 30 days; second-time offenders would be sentenced to 30 days in jail, pay an even stiffer fine, and lost their driver's licenses for six months. They would also have to attend an Alcohol Education program for one year. Any person driving while under the influence of alcohol and involved in an accident resulting in a fatality would automatically be charged with manslaughter.