# TEACHING PROCEDURE WRITING: A LESSON PLAN

M.T. (JEAN) DOHANEY

I have always had difficulty seeing the significance of whatever it is I've been teaching. This certainly was the case when I was teaching language arts and literature. Even as I've applied the damning "F" to a student's paper, I asked myself whether in the whole scheme of the universe it mattered a whit whether the young person (whose ego was about to drown under a deluge of red ink) lacked knowledge of the difference between a compound sentence and a complex one or whether he could tell a Petrarchan sonnet from a Shakespearean one.

My quandary has not been lessened by my venture into technical writing, which we know is simply language arts elevated to a higher level. Actually my quandary has increased since I have begun to teach writing to students in the faculty of forestry. These young people are being trained to mould and shape our environment, and like Superman, they will one day bend trees with their bare hands and change the course of mighty rivers. In comparison to their contribution to the world, my own contribution--that of spreading the truth about not splicing with commas or dangling modifiers, appears paltry indeed.

It was this feeling of being a paltry contributor to the world that gave birth to an assignment on procedure writing--an assignment that proved both interesting and valuable to the students. It is this assignment that is the subject of my paper.

One day, enroute to my classroom--which is in the basement of the forestry and geology building--I took particular notice of what was going on in the laboratories along the way. In some laboratories, students in white coast were rushing trays of seedling specimens to the cold storage rooms; in others, they were peering into microscopes to determine superior seeds from inferior ones, and in still others, they were hunched over computers creating simulated forests and forecasting the number of trees in any given area at any given time.

Within five minutes, I knew these same students would be coming to my room and it worried me that when they learned that for the next three hours they would be writing instructions for using a can opener, riding a bike, or making a cake, their eagerness would disappear and one by one they would hunch down into the necks of their leather jackets and wait out the three hours. I wished, and not for the first time, that I had something more relevant to offer them.

Then it occurred to me. Why couldn't I make my procedure writing unit more relevant? Why couldn't I inject importance into it? I hastily revamped my lesson plan and when they took their seats I announced that the procedure they were going to learn that day could have life and death meaning for the forest or for some tree species in that forest.

I stated that there are rules for writing procedure and if these rules are followed, the possibility of incorrect interpretation on the part of the reader is minimized. I said I would pass out these rules and as well place them on the overhead projector and discuss each one. (See Appendix 1).

I explained the assignment. Each student was to take a tree species that carried the potential of being destroyed by some outside force. This force could be an invader, such as a disease or an insect. It could be a man-made force, such as would occur if a woodlot is not properly managed. It could even be an act of God, such as fire or flood. Each student was to write a procedure for either preventing, curing, or minimizing the effect of this outside force.

At this juncture I gave an example of a specific insect as an outside destructive force and solicited other examples from the class. Enthusiasm increased significantly when it became evident that this was not simply a make-work exercise. It increased even further when I explained that the information they would gather for this assignment could be used for their formal proposal and for their formal report. I gave several examples of how this assignment cold be incorporated into the two others that were to follow.

As is the case with each of my assignments, I give out a sheet containing the guidelines for that assignment. In this particular case, the sheet was constructed to resemble the form and format of this specific assignment. (See Appendix 2).

After the guideline sheet had been given out and the rules for writing procedures discussed, exercises were placed on the overhead projector. Many of these exercises violated one or more of the rules an students were

asked to detect where such violation occurred and to choose which exercise (whole or part) was correct. Some of these exercises appear below:

Exercise 1.
a. The knob may be turned now.
b. You may turn the knob counterclockwise now.
c. Turn the knob (B.6) counterclockwise.

Exercise 2.
a. Remove the jabberwocky from its case (A.1).
b. Turn the drive shaft (B.16) counterclockwise.

(Warning:) The jabberwocky case carries a potential 100 W. voltage. Make certain the switch (LB.2.) is in the OFF position before attempting to remove the jabberwocky.

Exercise 3.
a. Place the jabberwocky in third gear. (Note: if you heard a grinding sound when you selected third gear, this means you have stripped the gear shaft.)

CAUTION: Gently place the jabberwocky in third gear. Rapid movement through the gears will damage the gear sprockets.

Exercise 4.
a. Rotate the jabberwocky control (A.25). (Don't be afraid to press hard. It'll stand up to a pressure of 125 psi.)

A sample of the topics covered are listed below. As you can see, these topics covered a wide range of student interest and as the students later told me, they not only learned from this assignment, but enjoyed doing it as well.

SAMPLE TOPICS

Canadian Forestry Service — Procedure No. 135

Procedure for the Prevention and Control of the Forest Tent Caterpillar (Malacosoma distria Hdn.)

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Department of Pest Control — Procedure N. P102

Procedure for the Use of Diazinon to Destroy Ants (Formica spp.) which Damage Balsam Fir (Abies balsamea [L.} Mill.)

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J.M. Jones
Fraser Company — Procedure No. 17

Procedures for the Use of Skidders on Hilly Terrain

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# APPENDIX 1

## RULES FOR WRITING PROCEDURES

1. If a danger alert is necessary, give it at the beginning of the instructions.

2. Do not use CAUTION and WARNING interchangeable. "Caution" alerts the reader to the possibility of the development of a minor problem. "Warning" alerts the reader to the possibility of the development of a major problem.

3. Break up procedures into a series of steps, each step to correspond to a single action.

4. Ensure that a caution, warning or any other essential instruction precedes the step.

5. List the steps in column form.

6. Make the items in the list parallel.

7. Group related instructions together.

8. Use the imperative voice.

9. If clarity demands it, place a note beside the step.

10. Do not omit words, e.g., the, that, a if the omission of such words would contribute to the lack of clarity.

11. Be specific when parts are being identified.

12. Use whole words, not contractions.

APPENDIX 2

FROM: Dr. M.T. Dohaney
Faculty of Forestry
University of New Brunswick

PROCEDURE: Number 3

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING PROCEDURES

DATE: October 10, 1987



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## 1.0 PURPOSE

This procedure establishes the guidelines for carrying out the writing procedures assignment required for Forestry No. 2901.

## 2.0 FORMAT

### 2.1 Writing Style

The writing style will be in accordance with the rules for writing procedures. (See Attachment 1.) Whenever scientific nomenclature is to be used, this will be written in accordance with the Faculty of Forestry Style Manual.

### 2.2 Presentation

2.2.1. All text, with the exception of numerical or alphabetical designations on diagrams, must be type-written or keyboarded on the computer. Designations on diagrams may be done freehand.

2.2.2. At least one explanatory diagram will accompany each procedure.

2.2.3. All procedures will apply the format that was used to write these writing guideline procedures, i.e. similar heading, margins, spacing, paging, numerical outlining. Headings on all pages will repeat the key information from the first page. In addition, and in accordance with the Faculty of Forestry Style Manual, all procedures will be submitted bearing a cover and a title page.

2.3 Presentation Date. This assignment is due no later than 5 p.m. Tuesday, November 3rd. It must be placed in the "drop slot" marked For. 2901.

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