The effects of formal grammar instruction alternatives on student writing

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*Note — Please see MLK for related materials, such as tables, that are not included in the web version of this paper.

Rationale —
Since the early 1900s, the teaching of grammar in the English classroom has traditionally asked students to memorize and recite definitions, rules and examples, and other aspects of the language related to "traditional grammar," which, in itself, according to Patrick Basset, accounts for eight parts of speech, three parts of the sentence, five types of phrases, and three types of clauses — all in all, 19 items (1980). The teaching of these categories, functions, and rules of grammar through definitions, drills, recitals and exercises, otherwise known as "formal grammar instruction," suggests the production of students who can apply "traditional grammar" to their own writing, and thus become better users of the language, especially in the area of writing.

The assumption, though, has little if no truth attached to it, so says the world of research. Anti-grammar research studies have, by far, outnumbered the pro-grammar ones in the last 75 years or so. Patrick Hartwell in his article, "Grammar, Grammars and the Teaching of Grammar," cites the results of five research studies analyzed by Janice Neulib in "The Relation of Formal Grammar to Composition" and six research studies analyzed by Martha Kolln in "Closing the Books on Alchemy," all of which concluded that "formal grammar instruction has no effect on the quality of students' writing nor their ability to avoid error" (Hartwell, 1985).

Even with the overwhelming evidence mounted against formal grammar instruction, some informed teachers of English continue on with formal grammar instruction as part of their curriculum. The reasons are likely twofold: 1. The immense amount of surface errors they find in students' writings warrants some sort of instruction in grammar; 2. They are unaware that alternatives to formal grammar instruction exist. As a result of the abundance of anti-grammar research, however, many school districts, and subsequently, teachers of English, have abandoned the memorize-and-drill approach of formal grammar instruction as a means of improving writing — some decades ago.

At the forefront of that abandonment, or at least hovering near the front lines as captain-like-figures, are such educationalists as Constance Weaver and Don Killgallon. Weaver, obviously aware of the research, suggests that grammar taught in isolation, that is, through memorization, recitation and drills through mostly workbooks and exercise handouts results in little, if any, positive effect on student writing. She attests that the elements of grammar needed to help students use the English language are more aptly taught in the context of writing, such as through student writing, literature used in every-day English class, and even history and science texts. This process allows the students to reflect upon the familiar, both in their own writings, and the professional writings studied daily, possibly even weekly or monthly in a range of classes not limited to English.

Killgallon, also a proponent of teaching grammar in context, is one of the original founders of sentence composing, which is "the regular use of four techniques designed to teach students to write sentences with structures resembling those of professional writers" (1998 Weaver). In other words, sentence composing, which involves combining, imitating, unscrambling and expanding sentences, is the act of emulating professional writing in order to assist students in becoming better writers themselves — all while extraditing much of the ho-hum drilling of formal grammar instruction. "In Grammar Instruction in the Composition Class," Linda Pliskin exercises her thoughts on the advantages of sentence composing, particularly in the sub-category of sentence combining: "Teachers need not avoid grammar. Sentence combining addresses grammar in the classroom without resorting to endless drills on terminology and rules." (1993)

Still yet, as education begins swinging toward student-centered classrooms, it is important to note that traditional grammar is easily adaptable to a Constructivists' approach to teaching. In other words, allowing students to discover the tricks of the English language, if you will, through teacher direction and prompts, gives grammar instruction a new face — one with interesting features. Furthermore, those features are more easily transferable to the writing process. In "An Experiment in Teaching Grammar in Context," W. Scott Smoot, calling on Weaver's "Teaching Grammar in Context" for a little assistance, notes that. "'Constructivists' principles flow from the observation that learning-to-last 'involves not the mastery of isolated facts, but the construction of concepts.'" The construction of those concepts are discovered by students through teacher direction and discussion, rather than through the rules, definitions and examples of grammar handbooks, otherwise noted above as both "formal grammar instruction" and "isolated facts" (Smoot, 2001, 39; Weaver, 1996, 153).

The purpose of this study is to discover how the teaching of a grammatical concept using two non-traditional methodologies and a Constructivists' approach to teaching, followed by occasional review and exercise of that concept, impact students' use of that concept in future writing. The non-traditional methodologies referred to in the prior sentence are summarized above as teaching in context and sentence composing. The grammatical concept chosen for this study is the comma rule associated with long, introductory prepositional phrases. Students, though, are guided through a series of mini-lessons on prepositions before learning the comma rule associated with prepositional phrases.

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Formal grammar history and why it doesn't improve writing —
For a moment, attention is diverted back to formal grammar instruction, only because it has been the primary method for teaching English grammar for much of the past two centuries. During the early stages of this time period, formal grammar instruction, purposefully or not, appeared to have two goals:

1. To discipline and train the mind and soul
2. To teach grammatical forms and word usages that were considered correct or socially prestigious (Weaver, 1996, p. 3)

The latter of these two aims, as Rei Noguchi puts it, is an example of the protection of status most all primates of the animal kingdom take part in. For example, note the painstaking care we give our appearance, our clothes, our homes and our cars. Also consider wild animals, such as wolves, which strive to become the biggest and strongest of their pack, and thus gain breeding and eating rights, among other socially earned privileges. The care we as humans give our language is also a symbol of our social status. We consciencely extract from our language the use of words such as ain't and brung. We strive not to mispronounce words, such as "book-larning," and we strive to not use double negatives in a single sentence (Noguchi, 1991, p. 114). To further clarify this thought, consider Emily Bronte's 1847 classic novel for a moment:

In Wuthering Heights, Hareton is labeled a "colossal dunce" because, as his fragile cousin Linton describes it, "He does not know his letters." Hareton can not read, and he can not write. Therefore, his sentence structuring and pronunciation of words is ridiculed by cousins Linton and Catherine, both of whom are well read, and oftentimes speak with prestigious words that confuse poor Hareton. "My cousin fancies you are an idiot," Linton says to Hareton following his cousin's sorrowful attempt at conversing with his two relatives. "There you experience the consequence of scorning 'book-larning,' as you would say. Have you noticed, Catherine, his frightful Yorkshire pronunciation?" (p. 190)

While humans today still consider prominent uses of words and sentence structures socially prestigious, we have, fortunately, since expanded this aim to give grammar a more practical use — to improve our application of the language, particularly, but not limited to, our writing. While this particular goal of grammar instruction was evolved with the best intentions in mind, it is clear that grammar instruction, itself, failed to board the same practical ship as its aims. It failed to make the same journey through time. Consequently, it failed to evolve, leaving English teachers with, more or less, the same ol' formal grammar instruction.

While formal grammar instruction has been the primary tool for teaching grammar in the English classroom for well over a century now, it should be noted that other types of grammar instruction, such as generative and transformational grammar, have been taught in some classrooms since their developments in the 1950s by Noam Chomsky and Charles Fries. Students, however, have a difficult time

mastering the complex rules of generative and transformational grammar — even more so than the definitions and rules associated with formal grammar instruction.

Formal grammar instruction, according to Noguchi, has proved ineffective in improving writing for three reasons:
1. Formal grammar, being uninteresting or too difficult, is not adequately
learned by students.
2. Formal grammar, even if adequately learned, is not transferred to
writing.
3. Formal grammar, even if adequately learned, is not transferable to
writing situations. (1991, pg. 4)

Mr. Noguchi sums up bluntly, yet nicely, the reasons formal grammar instruction is not adequately learned by students:

With the exception of those few students who unwillingly and enthusiastically engage in any kind of academic pursuit, most students find the formal study of grammar, at best, dry and, at worst, tedious and boring. Such sentiments are not without cause if we consider the usual way syntactic categories, the rote memorization of constructions and their patterns, the seemingly endless drill and exercise. It is no wonder that many students end up hating grammar with a passion nor that the general populace comes to perceive grammar, in the words of W. Nelson Francis, as an academic subject "fit for only those in whose veins the red blood of life has long since turned to ink. (1991, pgs. 4-5)

If the memorization-and-drill approach of formal grammar is too boring, or too difficult to learn, it is obvious that grammar will not be learned. Furthermore, it goes without saying that if grammar is not learned through formal instruction, rules of grammar will not be applied successfully in writing situations.

In Developing Correctness in Student Writing: Alternatives to the Error Hunt, Louis Matz Rozen explains writing as "a complex process, recursive rather than linear in nature, involving thinking, planning, discovering what to say, drafting, and redrafting." In this well-put, one-sentence summary of the complexities of writing, though, Rozen only mentions (purposely) the processes that involve developing content, ideas, and thoughts. Isn't there more to writing than the development of content? Of course there is, but "writers who worry about mechanics while they are composing are not concentrating fully on what they have to say because it is too difficult to do two things well at the same time, especially if neither task is yet completely under the writer's control" (Rozen, 1987). Linda Flower might have said it best in "Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing" when she equated the writer to a "busy switchboard operator trying to juggle a number of demands on her attention and constraints on what she can do" (1981). Bereiter and Scardamalia, as cited in Kouider Makhtari and David Yellin's "Investigating College Students Recognition and Production Skills in Writing," noted that "writers can experience a 'disruption of performance' because of information-processing overload, given the number of demands with which they must contend" (1995). In other words, if a student cannot generate sufficient content to yield a well-though-out piece of writing, does that really leave the student a need for implementing a grammar that, at best, is only held onto with a mild grasp anyway?

Some educationalists believe the reason traditional grammar has been so difficult for students to learn, and thus, implement into writing, is because instruction has focused on too many of the 19 terms that compose the language. Some teachers have even gone so far as to chop that near score by more than half. "From my own experience," Smoot notes, "both as a student and an English teacher, I had concluded long ago that there are only a few useful terms for discussing reading or writing: noun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, phrase, clause, and subordinate clause." While limiting the amount of grammatical terms used in an English class reduces the amount of confusion in discussing writing, reducing the amount of ways to describe grammar itself has the reverse effect, and creates confusion about WHAT grammar is exactly.

Meanings of grammar —
To clarify the many meanings of grammar, Patrick Hartwell is called upon. Below are Hartwell's five meanings of "grammar," much of which was formulated in W. Nelson Francis' 1954 article "Three Meanings of Grammar."

Grammar 1 — "'is the set of formal patterns in which the words of a language are arranged in order to

convey larger meanings.' It is not necessary that we be able to discuss these patterns self-consciously in order to be able to use them. In fact, all speakers of the language above the age of five or six know how to use its complex forms of organization with considerable skill."

Grammar 2 — "'is the branch of linguistic science which is concerned with the description, analysis, and formulization of formal language patterns.' Just as gravity was in full operation before Newton's apple fell, so grammar in the first sense was in full operation before anyone formulated the first rule that began the history of grammar study."

Grammar 3 — involves rules of correctness or linguistic etiquette, syntax, word choice and phonemics. In its most simplest form, Grammar 3 is what we commonly refer to as usage. "It is bad grammar to say ain't" is Hartwell's example of Grammar 3.

Grammar 4 — is Grammar 2 simplified. It is the "unscientific grammar." It is the "school grammar," meaning quite literally "the grammar used in the schools." The rules of Grammar 4 are also used to explain grammar, but the rules of Grammar 4 are much simpler than Grammar 2, so to provide not only description, but, in many cases, prescription for avoiding or correcting error. Grammar 2, on the other hand, only provides description in an attempt to explain grammar. Two examples of Grammar 4 in the Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers: Fifth Edition are listed below:

A phrase is a word or group that contains a SUBJECT or a PREDICATE but not both. A phrase cannot stand alone as an independent unit.

When a phrase comes before an independent clause, use a comma after the phrase(165).

Grammar 5 — deals with rules associated with style. "Omit needless words," and "Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end" are examples of Grammar 5.

Grammar 4 is most critical in the following discussion, because it is the grammar most taught in schools. In other words, the definitions and prescriptive rules associated with Grammar 4 are what drives formal grammar instruction in the classroom.

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Examples in formal grammar instruction —
Consider, for example, the Simon & Schuster handbook for writers: fifth edition, listed by California State University at Northridge as an "essential reference for writers when considering diction, grammar and punctuation" (2001). The authors of this writing handbook, if not the revisor, explain in descriptive terms that "Prepositional phrases consist of a preposition and one or more other words, often used to set out relationships in time or space" (Tryoka, 165). This definition of a prepositional phrase is an example of the types of definitions that are the basis for formal grammar instruction. Furthermore, in dealing with the comma rule after long, introductory prepositional phrases, the handbook explains that "A phrase is a group of words that cannot stand alone as a sentence. When a phrase comes before an independent clause, use a comma after the phrase" (407). This rule for introductory phrases (not introductory prepositional phrases, mind you) is followed by one example of the comma rule associated with prepositional phrases: "Between 1544 and 1689, sugar refineries appeared in London and New York." This example is then followed by examples of the comma rule for past-and present-participial phrases, infinitive phrases and absolute phrases.(407).

It is important to note that in the second definition listed above students are expected to know what an independent clause is before understanding how to apply the comma rule for introductory phrases. Formal grammar instruction is notorious for violating the COIK rule, which, in the simplest terms, is an acronym for "Clear Only If Known." To define COIK by example, consider that Simon & Schuster violates COIK by asking students to understand all essential elements associated with prepositional phrases before providing instruction on prepositions. While a short list of common prepositions is provided (165), a chapter devoted to prepositions appears more than 20 chapters later. And prepositions, of course, are the essential building block for understanding prepositional phrases, not to mention the comma rule for introductory prepositional phrases.

It is also important to note that only one example of the comma rule for introductory prepositional phrases

is provided in this handbook, because this rule is arguably the essential rule for prepositional phrases students need a grasp of to improve their writing. Robert J. Connors and Andrea A. Lunsford would agree. In their 1988 study of 3,000 graded college essays collected from teachers across the United States, the researchers discovered that the No. 1 error found in the essays was no comma after an introductory element (1988). This error, of course, included no comma after introductory prepositional phrases.

Still yet, the Simon & Schuster provides one example of the comma rule for introductory prepositional phrases before students are asked to dive into exercises that not only asks them to add commas after introductory prepositional phrases, but to add commas after introductory absolute phrases, infinitive phrases, present- and past-participial phrases, introductory words, and introductory clauses (pg 408). The exercise asks students to do far too much, and at the same time, far too little. Just two of the ten exercises asks students to place a comma after introductory propositional phrases. The couple of Simon & Schuster exercises on comma rule for introductory prepositional phrase are not nearly enough for students to attain the skills associated with implementing the comma rule — at least not the long term skills. John R. Anderson, author of The architect of Cognition, emphasizes the importance of prior knowledge and experience in learning, and identifies three consecutive stages of learning and acquiring cognitive skills. Anderson explains that skill development begins as the "interpretive application of declarative knowledge." In stage two, the given skill undergoes a process of "continual refinement" and the application of that skill increases speed. As the given skill is developed in the third stage, the skill is 'better tuned" through experience and practice. In other words, the students first need a knowledge, if not a list, of prepositions, a knowledge of prepositional phrases, knowledge of the comma rule associated with introductory prepositional phrases, examples and practice, practice, practice in placing commas after introductory prepositional phrases. Then, and only then, will students grasp an understanding of the comma rule.

On the upside, the Simon & Schuster does ask students to combine sentences using introductory elements. The following is an example from the handbook that asks students to combine two sentences so that one sentence contains an introductory element requiring a comma. The students are asked to begin the sentence with the words in parentheses:

6. The computer operator punches a few keys on the computer in a virtual reality room. She transports you into a colorful make-believe world (phrase beginning by punching)

While No. 6 is useful in practicing the comma rule for introductory prepositional phrases, only three others in a set of ten sentence-combining exercises asks students to begin their combined sentences with introductory prepositional phrases. Again, as Anderson points out above, one exercise is not enough for students to attain long term skills for implementing the comma rule in introductory prepositional phrases. Furthermore, the handbook's comma rule for introductory phrases is incomplete. What are students to do once they complete No. 6 above? A correct combination leaves them with the following sentence: "By punching a few keys on the computer in a virtual reality room, she transports you into a colorful make-believe world." One can see that this combination leaves students with three prepositional phrases at the beginning of the sentence. Based on the Simon & Schuster rule ("When a phrase comes before an independent clause, use a comma after the phrase.") students could place commas after all three prepositional phrases in that sentence. After all, each comes before the independent clause in one way or another. One way or another students need to know that after multiple prepositional phrases at the beginning of a sentence a comma is required after the final phrase.

Still yet, the handbook, like much of formal grammar instruction, is separate from the context of the students' own writing and the literature of everyday English class. In other words, students are asked to complete writing exercises about the unfamiliar. We become proficient at tasks by practicing those tasks with tools that feel comfortable in our grasps. This is how self-efficacy is built. Rare is the time when students are asked to write about something they do not know about.

Finally, the handbook, like formal grammar instruction, does not allow students to find out what is interesting about the English language. For instance, instead of giving students a list of prepositions (742), students could find out that many common prepositions fit in one of the two following blanks: 1. I put it _____ the table; 2. I will talk _____ the table. This is a good test for when they have no list to refer to, but need to find out if a given word is a preposition. While the tests do not always work, they do work most of the time. Or, if students need to identify the object of the preposition in order to identify the entire prepositional phrase, they could discover through a series of questions that the object of

the preposition answers a what question. Take, for example, "In just a few days, I will be on a plane heading for Aruba." Students can find out that placing the preposition 'in' before 'what' gives them 'in what?' The answer is 'just a few days,' which is the object of the preposition 'in.' This what question could also be used to distinguish between prepositions and subordinating conjunctions. In each of these examples, students discover that grammar is simple and interesting. Most of all, they discover the language on their own — through a Constructivists' approach.

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Teaching in context —
With pressure mounted and still mounting on the shoulders of formal grammar instruction to produce writers who can apply what they've learned in English class, Pliskin, in her defense of grammar, explains that anti-grammarians and teachers alike should "take heed: Opposition to formal grammar instruction does not constitute opposition to some kind of grammar study." Lucy Calkins agrees, and attest to the effectiveness of "some kind of grammar study" other than formal grammar instruction. In "When Children Want to Punctuate: Basics Skills Belong in Context," Calkins describes two classroom teachers at a public school in rural New Hampshire — one that teaches grammar out of a handbook (Ms. West), and one that teachers grammar through the context of student writing (Ms. Beth Hoban). Ms. West taught language mechanics through daily drills and workbook exercises starting with simple sentences, periods and capital letters. She wrote sentences on the blackboard and asked students to insert missing punctuation. She gave pretests and post-tests. Ms. Hoban "let go" of the workbook exercises and drills and commenced to allow her children to write for an hour a day, three days a week. The results in the two classrooms were documented by Calkins:

The third grade 'writers' who had not had formal instruction in punctuation could define/explain an average of 8.66 kinds of punctuation. The children who had studied punctuation through classwork, drills and tests, but had rarely written, were only able to define/explain 3.85 kinds of punctuation (1980, pgs. 568-569).

As Unknown Author describes it and as both Calkins and Ms. Holban experienced it, "The theory is that students learn best at the moment they need to know something, and that lessons given at other times either do not transfer to the particular task being performed or even inhibit the free exploration of ideas required at earlier stages of composing" (McCleary — English Department). Although applied to writing, Unknown Author's point is true for most all learning experiences.

•••••••> Discussion of Philip Distefano and Joellen Killion's findings in their 1984 study on teaching grammar in context ("Assessing Writing Skills Through a Process Approach." English Education) <•••••••

Sentence composing —
Sentence composing, described earlier as "the regular use of four techniques designed to teach students to write sentences with structures resembling those of professional writers" has been hailed by Killgallon for is simplicity yet effectiveness in improving the writing of students. It all begins with the sentence, he says.

In the past, teachers neglected the sentence as a way to teach writing, using sentences instead as specimens for dissection, not as models for imitation. Only paragraphs, essays, and stories were used as models. After reading those longer models, students were told by their teachers, 'Go, thou, and do likewise.'

With sentence composing, the gap sharply narrows because the model is graspable: it is only one sentence long. Students here, too, are told, 'Go, though, and do likewise.' But this time, often amazingly, students raging from our most challenged to our most challenging succeed. Here, with only a single sentence as the model, and with frequent imitation activities through the four sentence composing techniques, students are far more likely to succeed."

In essay writing, for example, students are told, "work on your" thesis statement, topic sentences, and supporting sentences without a professional reference from which to work. With sentence composing, students are given such references through activities in sentence imitation, sentence combining, sentence unscrambling, and sentence expanding. In this study, unscrambling, expanding and combining activities are inter-mixed with student-centered grammar lessons and writing activities in the context of class

literature.

•••••••> In Frank O'Hare's 1973 study, "Sentence Combining: Improving Student Writing Skills Without Formal Grammar Instruction," he notes.....(Research Report) <•••••••

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The present study —
The present study compares student writings over a span of four weeks in an attempt to answer the following question: How does the teaching of a grammatical concept using two non-traditional methodologies and a Constructivists' approach to teaching, followed by occasional review and exercise of that concept, impact students' use of that concept in future writing? In addition, this study will explore whether or not regular review and practice of the concept has any effect on its use in future writing. The study begins with the examination of student writing samples in order to gage an understanding of their knowledge of the comma rule associated with introductory prepositional phrases. Because Connors and Lunsford discovered that the most occurring error in their study was no comma after introductory elements (including introductory prepositional phrases), I am assuming that I too will find errors concerning the comma rule for introductory prepositional phrases. Thus, a series of mini-lessons on prepositions and prepositional phrases is warranted.

Phase One
Using a Constructivists' approach, students are guided through the process of discovering prepositions in sentences about the current literature of the English class. Students are asked to find all words in the sentences that fit in the following blanks: 1. I put it _____ the table; 2. I will talk _____ the table. They are then given a handout containing a list of words and asked to compare what fit in the blanks to what is on the list. Students are then told the list of words are all the prepositions in the English language. Through discovery, they then find that prepositions are abundant in writing.

Phase Two
Using a Constructivists' approach, students are guided through the process of discovering objects of prepositions. They find that answering 'what' questions gives them the object of the preposition. For instance, consider the this sentence: I sat on the hard sofa. Students discover that 'on' is the preposition in that sentence, and that asking 'on what?' gives them 'the hard sofa,' the object of the preposition 'on.' After repeated 'what' questions, students discover that objects of prepositions are nouns. Students then attempt to replace prepositions in sentences based on the literature. Here they find that replacing prepositions is sometimes difficult because the preposition makes a connection with its object. Now that students have discovered prepositions and their objects, I explain that the two together make a prepositional phrase. Students are then asked to find prepositions and their objects in sentences and underline the entire prepositional phrase. Here is where students make an error in finding prepositional phrases. In a few cases they underline infinitives. I chart examples of infinitives and prepositional phrases that begin with 'to,' and students discover the difference — that the 'to' in an infinitive is followed by what looks like a verb, and that the 'to' in prepositional phrases is followed by its object, which is a noun. Students are given an exercise on distinguishing between the two.

Phase Three
Using a Constructivists' approach, students are guided through the process of distinguishing between prepositions and subordinating conjunctions. The same 'what' question technique is used, and results are charted in two columns so that students can see how their 'what' question answers differ. Then, students are asked to discover more prepositional phrases in sentences that deal with the literature. They are then asked to cross out all of the prepositional phrases they just found, and select students read the results aloud. What they discover is that the sentences still make sense, because prepositional phrases add detail and description to writing. Students are then given a sentence-expanding activity that asks students expand the sentence by adding to add detail, description or information in the form of prepositional phrases. Students are then asked to complete a writing assignment that asks them to use a certain number of prepositional phrases. This, of course, is to get them using prepositional phrases in their own writing, and to use prepositional phrases to expand their sentences. Or as Noguchi puts it, students either "use" their knowledge of prepositional phrases or "lose" their knowledge of prepositional phrases (1991).

Phase Four
Using a Constructivists' approach, students are guided through the process of discovering the comma rule for long, introductory prepositional phrases. Students are then asked to complete sentence-

unscrambling and sentence-combining exercises to make the sentences (based on the current literature) begin with introductory prepositional phrases. Furthermore, students are asked to determine whether or not a comma is required at the end of the introductory prepositional phrase. For instance, in really short ones (two words) a comma is not required if the sentence reads clearly without one. Students are then asked to complete a writing assignment (based on the current literature) using prepositional phrases. In particular, the assignment asks that students use at least five introductory prepositional phrases.

The final writing assignment will be examined by myself and another teacher to see if students applied the comma rule for introductory prepositional phrases correctly. Errors / introductory prepositional phrase will be counted.

Throughout the next three weeks, classes will occasionally review and practice the use of prepositional phrases. Review could consist of simply pointing out the comma rule in the current literature of study, asking students to expand sentences using prepositional phrases, asking students to find prepositional phrases in a given sentence, or even asking them to unscramble a sentence at the beginning of class — just to get them thinking about words and English. Some classes.

Finally, three weeks after the final writing assignment in Phase Four, students are asked to complete another writing assignment. The assignment, which will be considerably longer than those done in the last two phases, thus ensuring some introductory prepositional phrases will be used, will be examined by myself and another teacher to determine if students retained their knowledge of the comma rule. It is important to note that students will not be forewarned about their use of the comma rule in this writing assignment.

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