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Schools' teaching deficient

Business writing criticized

United Press International
NEW YORK — The teaching of writing in American high schools is sadly deficient and that is costing business a lot of wasted time and money and ruining people's careers, says Dianna Booher of Houston.

Booher is a writer and teacher who conducts seminars for blue chip companies on writing sensible, simple business English. She also has done some literary writing, including two novels and a number of works on popular psychology.

The trouble with teaching English in our high schools is that the emphasis all is on literary writing, she said, and usually this emphasis is misguided.

"I think there should be a drastic change," she said. "One of the four years of high school English should be devoted to the structure and psychology of business writing. You don't get

that until college now and that's too late for many persons."

She agrees that high school students should be encouraged to admire good literary writing but she doesn't think they should be encouraged to try to emulate it as so many teachers do.

She said this misguided emphasis leads to such absurdities as youngsters figuring if they get an "A" for a four-page letter, they should get "A plus" for six pages, or that because William Shakespeare used lots of adjectives, adverbs and dependent clauses, ordinary persons should do so.

Paradoxically, she said, high school English teachers also tend to be slaves to pedestrian rules such as: "Never start a sentence with 'and' or 'but' and every paragraph must have at least three sentences to support an idea." Also, she said, teachers

seem to have a mania for synonyms.

Unlike the writing handbooks used in college freshman courses, which concentrate on structure, Booher's new book, "Would You Put That in. Writing?" deals heavily with the psychological aspects of writing — how to decide on the audience you are trying to reach and tailoring the letter or document to that audience.

She lists for principal obstacles to succeeding at this: lazy thinking; using poor models from fiction, journalism, business and technical writing; poor technical writing training in high school, and addition to hedging and jargon.

Hedging means not being direct and specific. Jargon covers a vast multitude of sins, the biggest being pomposity and verbosity. Of course, the book has

the usual section of drills in grammar and syntax.

Booher got into teaching simpler writing somewhat by accident. She had taught in Texas schools for years. Her husband is an ordained Baptist minister and music director. She was teaching Spanish at Pampa in the Panhandle and the turn of writing so she wouldn't have to get up at six every morning and worry about whether the babysitter would show up.

She and her husband moved to Houston, where she took a master's degree in English and taught in a community college. While she was teaching class in fiction writing she discovered to her astonishment that more than half her students weren't interested in fiction at all; they just wanted to learn how to write better for their daily business affairs.

Sudan guerrillas abduct 2 Americans, 3 others

United Press International
NAIROBI, Kenya — Guerrillas abducted five foreign relief workers, including two Americans and a Canadian, in a national park in southern Sudan last week, a spokesman for the Kenya-based Across relief agency said Tuesday.

Western diplomats in Nairobi said a group calling itself the Southern Sudan Liberation Front had claimed responsibility

for the abductions and had made unspecified demands for their release.

Arthur Park, a spokesman for Across' international office in Nairobi, confirmed the relief workers were abducted by guerrillas shortly after arriving in the Boma National Park on a private plane from Nairobi.

Diplomats said the five also included a Dutch and West German national. Their identities were withheld pending notification of their next of kin.

"Details are still very sketchy about the actual abduction, but we know is that they were taken last week in the Boma National park in southern Sudan," she said.

The Southern Sudan Liberation Front is believed to be black secessionist group struggling for independence from the predominantly Arab northern part of the country.

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Thursday, July 14
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PHYSICS Department Curricula

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