

# PRACTICAL RHETORIC

350

O. B. HARDISON, JR.

# **Practical Rhetoric**

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THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

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# 1. Rhetoric

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To C.R.H. and S.F.H.

*"... in each  
Are nameless graces which no methods teach."*  
—POPE

## Preface: to the Teacher

The guiding principle of *Practical Rhetoric* is indicated by the first word of its title. Its purpose is to teach writing, not the history of rhetoric, the fundamentals of logic or the theory of general semantics. Its chief features are derived from this purpose, and its claim to offering something new to the teacher of composition rests primarily on the consistency with which the principles of rhetoric have been adapted to the practical business of improving student writing.

In general, the movement of the text is from fundamentals (organization, paragraphing, basic elements of style) to specialized techniques (methods of development, advanced principles of style, deductive logic, the term paper and rhetorical criticism). This sequence has been tested and found serviceable in the classroom, but it is not offered as a Procrustean formula to fit all needs and tastes. Variations are both possible and desirable. The order of the chapters can be changed to fit the requirements of the individual instructor, and there is, of course, no need to cover all of the material included.

## PREFACE: TO THE TEACHER

Most composition courses include a semester or quarter of rhetoric and a semester or quarter devoted to either the term paper or an introduction to literature. *Practical Rhetoric* is intended to serve as the basic text for the first semester or quarter of this sequence. It can also be used in the second semester in conjunction with supplementary materials—"sourcebooks" and library assignments intended to teach research techniques, or readings intended to enhance appreciation of literature and teach principles of literary criticism.

Each chapter is designed to be read by the student at a single sitting. Each can also serve as the basis for a group of assignments that may proceed, during a period of three or four days, from reading and discussion of the chapter proper, through exercises, to application in original essays. To assist comprehension, important sections are numbered and titled, key definitions are printed in bold-faced type, and "terms to be learned" are listed at the end of each chapter. The definitions are simple, concise, and phrased in such a way as to emphasize their practical relevance, that is, their application to writing. Involved theoretical discussions have been avoided in the belief that they usually confuse the beginning writer instead of encouraging him. A corollary advantage of this approach is that the student can be held responsible on quizzes and examinations for key definitions, so that a check is possible on his mastery of assigned reading.

Throughout the text numerous examples are provided in the chapters and the exercises. These examples have intentionally been selected to illustrate the widest possible cross section of types and styles. Many selections are from recognized classics, but an effort has been made to avoid a heavily "literary" bias. Selections from newspapers, popular magazines, government publications, textbooks and research reports are used to emphasize the fact that rhetoric is important to *all* types of writing, from the most humble to the most sophisticated. Illustrative passages within the chapters are kept brief to avoid interrupting the sequence of ideas. Selections in the exercises are longer, and where practical they are complete units or essays. No selection, however, is so long as to be incommensurate with the type of essay the student can reasonably be expected to write. Finally, student essays are often included in the exercises along with the work of professional writers. These are offered for discussion, evaluation and, at times, revision. They can be supplemented by essays written specifically for *Practical Rhetoric* assignments. The result of this

## PREFACE: TO THE TEACHER

approach is, it is hoped, a text that is explicit without being dogmatic, stimulating and instructive in its variety without being diffuse.

The ideas presented in this text have germinated over many enjoyable years of teaching. I owe a considerable debt to numerous colleagues who have provided specific suggestions as well as intellectual stimulation. My greatest debt, however, is to my students. *Practical Rhetoric* is an embodiment of what I have learned from them and an attempt to make the lessons they have so patiently taught available to others.

O. B. H., Jr.

## **Preface: to the Student**

The aim of this text and of the course using it is to teach effective writing. Only a few students plan careers in creative writing, but every student eventually finds himself deeply involved in problems of expression. Term papers, essay examinations and reports are regular parts of most of the courses you will take while in college. When you enter professional life, your need for writing skill will probably increase. Business correspondence will have to be answered, projects will have to be "written up," brochures and manuals will have to be composed and speeches delivered. Most of these jobs will have to be done on short notice, usually in the midst of other activities. If you write easily they are opportunities; if you write poorly they are at best unpleasant and at worst, episodes that can jeopardize advancement or threaten the success of an important project. For this reason your writing course is of central importance, both to your success as a student and to later success in your career.

The heart of any writing course is writing itself. Writing is an acquired skill, and we acquire a skill by doing, not by listening to lectures, although lectures make the process more efficient and far less painful



## PREFACE: TO THE STUDENT

than learning by trial and error. The advantage of a formal writing course over all other methods of learning to write effectively—over individual experimentation, correspondence courses and in-service training programs—is that it combines a review of writing principles with regular writing assignments read and criticized by an experienced instructor. Your instructor functions for you in somewhat the same way that an editor functions for a professional writer. He knows the difference between good and bad writing, and he also knows your own strong and weak points. He corrects errors, he gives advice and he offers, in the form of grades, evaluations of what you submit to him. To take advantage of the opportunities of your writing course, you must be willing to work hard and accept and benefit from criticism. You must also be willing to experiment. The rewards of a course in writing, which will make your efforts worthwhile, are the sense of assurance that comes from competence and the realization that writing can be an absorbing, deeply satisfying activity.

The present text is not a grammar but a rhetoric. That is, it assumes that you know the fundamentals of correct expression—even though you may be puzzled occasionally by fine points—and concentrates on matters relating to effectiveness. It consists essentially of definitions and illustrations of various writing principles, together with enough discussion to enable you to apply them in your own writing. Its principles are derived partly from the nature of written and spoken communication and partly from observation of how writers in the past have solved their problems. No principle is offered as a hard-and-fast rule to be applied mechanically in every situation. You should use each with tact and understand that each essay poses its own special problems. Writing principles must be adapted to each new situation, and any and all principles can be violated if there are good reasons to do so.

Traditionally, rhetoric has been divided into five “topics” and three “methods of appeal.” The topics are “invention” (discovering material), organization, style, delivery and memory—that is, ways to remember a complicated argument while speaking without notes. Because most of us express ourselves in writing instead of delivering formal speeches, modern rhetoric has abandoned “memory” and transferred “delivery” to courses in public speaking. “Invention” is still a part of rhetoric, but is usually treated in connection with organization and style rather than as a separate topic.

The “methods of appeal” recognized by traditional rhetoric are the character of the writer, the character of the audience and logical proof.

## PREFACE: TO THE STUDENT

They are just as essential today as ever. To be effective, you should obviously present yourself in a favorable light by appearing sympathetic, informed and reliable. Second, you should relate your presentation to the interests and limitations of your audience. If you are writing for an audience of "general readers," for example, you should strive for a popular style and avoid technicalities that only experts can be expected to understand; if you are writing for specialists, on the other hand, your style can be more formal and the discussion more complex. Third, you should support your case with logical proof. The methods of proof are discussed in the present text in the chapters on argumentation.

The focus of *Practical Rhetoric* is on practice, not theory, and on types of writing that everyone is likely to use frequently. While many of its examples are selected from recognized literary classics, it also includes examples taken from "working prose"—manuals, newspaper articles, textbooks and magazines. If you are a prospective creative writer, you will find that it provides a solid foundation on which to build, but its emphasis is on exposition and argument rather than fiction and poetry.

Above all, it aims at being clear and explicit. There will be complications enough as you translate principles into finished essays. The chapters are kept to the minimum length compatible with clarity, and each can be read at a single sitting. Important points are spelled out in bold-faced type and illustrated. You can memorize them just as you memorize the bones in a frog's skeleton, the five most important dates of the French Revolution, or the atomic weights of the elements. To bridge the gap between explanation and practice, each chapter includes exercises keyed to the topics discussed. At the end of each set of exercises comes the real point of the chapter—suggestions for themes. You can use these as given; or, better still, you can use them as a point of departure for developing your own topics.

The first questions an author asks are "What should I say?" and "Where should I begin?" Chapters 1 and 2 concentrate on principles that are helpful in answering these questions. After the "What?" and the "Where?" comes the "How?" Chapters 3 and following do not exhaust the answers to questions about style and method, but they give several standard ones. Equipped with these you can begin the task of working out your own. It is a task that will continue as long as you have a term paper to write, a speech to give, a report to complete or a letter to answer.

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# Organization



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**O**rganization is the writer's means of insuring the unity of his essay. We are all familiar with writing that wanders pointlessly from topic to topic, sometimes saying too little, sometimes too much and never seeming to get anywhere. Such writing lacks unity.

There are no ready-made ways of achieving unity. Each essay has its own special problems, and what is right for one many be wrong for

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