

THE LITTLE, BROWN

SECOND

COMPACT HANDBOOK

EDITION

JANE E. AARON

Includes 1995
MLA
Guidelines



The Little, Brown Compact Handbook

Second Edition



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Preface



Like its predecessor, this writer's handbook weds the breadth and authority of its parent, *The Little, Brown Handbook*, to a convenient and accessible format. Intended for writers of varying experience, *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook* concisely answers questions about the writing process, paragraphs, clarity and style, grammar, research writing, and more.

This second edition, while remaining trim, responds to instructors' and students' needs with changes both large and small.

- ❖ The format is even more convenient. A COMPLETE AT-A-GLANCE CONTENTS now appears inside the back cover. New durable notebook-style DIVIDERS make it easy to flip to any part of the book. And a sturdy COMB BINDING allows the book to lie flat for use.
- ❖ A new chapter on WRITING ARGUMENTS (51) introduces and illustrates assertions, evidence, and assumptions; reasoning and fallacies; and organization. The chapter includes an annotated student essay.
- ❖ A new chapter on WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE (52) comes from Sylvan Barnet, the author of *A Short Guide to Writing About Literature* and other texts. A concise introduction to the essentials of literary analysis, the chapter includes two student papers (one without and one with secondary sources), each accompanied by the literary work it discusses.

- ❖ NEW OR EXPANDED TOPICS include titling an essay, standard English and dialects, sexist language, parallelism, sentence fragments, and the ellipsis mark.
- ❖ Pointers for students using ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE have nearly doubled in this edition. They are integrated throughout the book's other material on grammar and usage, so that ESL students do not have to distinguish between special ESL problems and those shared by native speakers. Flagged with a small color block (ESL), the pointers are easy to find and easy to skip.
- ❖ In its discussion of research writing, this edition now emphasizes COMPUTERIZED SOURCES (including key-word searches) and CRITICAL READING OF SOURCES (including evaluation and synthesis). The four substantial chapters on research writing cover project planning, finding and using sources, and documenting sources in either MLA or APA style (with a sample paper in each style).

As before, the handbook strives to minimize terminology and to help students around unavoidable terms. The GUIDE TO THE BOOK inside the front cover pairs a brief contents with questions like those that students ask, using everyday language and examples in place of terms. Similarly, the DETAILED PART OUTLINES at each tabbed divider substitute examples for terms or use examples to clarify terms. Headings with the text do the same. Then the text itself avoids cross-references by defining principal terms in the running text and secondary terms in out-of-the-way white boxes at the bottoms of pages.

Students and instructors alike have many paths into *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook*. For a list and illustration of all the book's reference aids, see FINDING WHAT YOU NEED IN THIS BOOK on the page immediately before the back endpapers.

Supplements

Accompanying *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook* is an array of supplements for students and instructors.

- ❖ *Exercises to Accompany The Little, Brown Compact Handbook* is a booklet offering activities on everything from paragraph coherence to comma splices to capitals. Representing a wide range of academic disciplines, the exercises are all in connected discourse so that students work at the level of the paragraph rather than the isolated sentence. A separate answer key is also available.
- ❖ *53rd Street Writer* is a word-processing program (IBM or Macintosh) that includes an on-line *Little, Brown Compact Hand-*

book and *Documentor*, which helps students put citations in correct MLA or APA form. The on-line handbook is also available separately for use with other word-processing programs.

- ❖ *The Writer's Workshop* is an on-line writing aid for students as they compose essays, arguments, and research papers. Like *53rd Street Writer*, it is accompanied by an on-line handbook and *Documentor* and is available for both IBM and Macintosh computers.
- ❖ Several references can be packaged with the handbook: *The Oxford American Dictionary*, a hardcover desk dictionary, and the paperback *Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary*, *Roget's Thesaurus*, *Collins Gem Dictionary*, and *Collins Gem Thesaurus*.
- ❖ The HarperCollins Resources for Instructors and for Students include a range of helpful supplements, such as additional exercises, assessment packages, and an essay anthology.

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was itself adapted from Sylvan Barnet's *A Short Guide to Writing About Literature*, *Introduction to Literature* (with Morton Berman and William Burto), and *Literature for Composition* (with Morton Berman, William Burto, and Marcia Stubbs).

After several books in various editions, I have come to rely on "my" team at HarperCollins, a talented group that keeps me almost constantly occupied, but not without giving as much themselves. To Patricia Rossi, Ann Stypuloski, Steven Pisano, and Dorothy Bungert, once again, my thanks.

GUIDE TO THE BOOK

The chapter titles on the left list the book's main topics. Across from the titles are questions commonly asked about the topics. Follow either a chapter title or a question to the appropriate page in the book. Or follow a red bar to the appropriate tabbed divider, which contains a more detailed outline of that part of the book. For a complete detailed contents, see inside the back cover.

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The Writing Process and Paragraphs



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1 Subject, Purpose, and Audience

1a

No matter what you are writing, you will be working within a writing situation: writing on a particular subject, for a particular purpose, to a particular audience of readers.

1a Finding your subject

A subject for writing has several basic requirements:

- ❖ It should be suitable for the assignment.
- ❖ It should be neither too general nor too limited for the length of paper and deadline assigned.
- ❖ It should be something you care about.

When you receive a writing assignment, ask yourself these questions about it:

- ❖ What's wanted from you? Many writing assignments contain words such as *report*, *summarize*, *compare*, *define*, *analyze*, *interpret*, *evaluate*, or *argue*. These words specify the way you are to approach your subject and what your purpose is. (See 1b.)
- ❖ For whom are you writing? Some assignments will specify your readers, but usually you will have to figure out for yourself whether your audience is your boss, the college community, your instructor, or some other group or individual. (See 1c.)
- ❖ What kind of research is required? Sometimes an assignment specifies the kinds of sources you are expected to consult, and you can use such information to choose your subject. (If you are unsure whether research is expected, check with your instructor.)
- ❖ What is the length of the paper? The deadline? Having a week to write three pages or three weeks to write six pages can make a big difference in the subject you select.

Considering these questions will help set some boundaries for your choice of subject. Then, within those boundaries, you can explore your own interests and experiences to narrow the subject so that you can cover it adequately within the space and time assigned. Federal aid to college students could be the subject of a book; the kinds of aid available or why the government should increase aid would be a more appropriate subject for a four-page paper due in a week. Here are some guidelines for narrowing broad subjects:

1b

- ❖ Break your broad subject into as many specific topics as you can think of. Make a list.
- ❖ For each topic that interests you and fits the assignment, roughly sketch out the main ideas and consider how many paragraphs or pages of specific facts, examples, and other details you would need to pin those ideas down. This thinking should give you at least a vague idea of how much work you'd have to do and how long the resulting paper might be.
- ❖ If an interesting and appropriate topic is still too broad, break it down further and repeat the previous step.

1b Defining your purpose

YOUR PURPOSE in writing is your chief reason for communicating something about your subject to a particular audience of readers. Most writing you do will have one of four main purposes. Occasionally, you will *entertain* readers or *express yourself*—your feelings or ideas—to readers. More often you will *explain* something to readers or *persuade* readers to respect and accept, and sometimes even act on, your well-supported opinion. These purposes often overlap in a single essay, but usually one predominates. And the dominant purpose will influence your particular slant on your subject, the details you choose, and even the words you use.

Many writing assignments narrow the purpose by using a signal word, such as the following:

- ❖ *Report*: Survey, organize, and objectively present the available evidence on the subject.
- ❖ *Summarize*: Concisely state the main points in a text, argument, theory, or other work.
- ❖ *Discuss*: Examine the main points, competing views, or implications of the subject.
- ❖ *Compare and contrast*: Explain the similarities and differences between two subjects. (See also p. 39.)
- ❖ *Define*: Specify the meaning of a term or a concept—distinctive characteristics, boundaries, and so on. (See also pp. 37–38.)
- ❖ *Analyze*: Identify the elements of the subject, and discuss how they work together. (See also p. 38.)
- ❖ *Interpret*: Infer the subject's meaning or implications.
- ❖ *Evaluate*: Judge the quality or significance of the subject, considering pros and cons. (See also pp. 212–13.)
- ❖ *Argue*: Take a position on the subject, and support your position with evidence. (See also pp. 271–81.)

1c Considering your audience**1c**

The readers likely to see your work—your audience—may influence your choice of subject and your definition of purpose. Your audience certainly will influence what you say about your subject and how you say it—for instance, how much background information you give and whether you adopt a serious or a friendly tone.

The box below contains questions that can help you analyze and address your audience. Depending on your writing situation, some questions will be more helpful than others. For instance, your readers' knowledge of your topic will be important to consider if

Questions about audience

- ❖ Who *are* my readers?
- ❖ Why are readers going to read my writing? What will they expect?
- ❖ What do I want readers to know or do after reading my work, and how should I make that clear to them?
- ❖ How will readers' characteristics, such as those below, influence their attitudes toward my topic?

Age or sex

Occupation: students, professional colleagues, etc.

Social or economic role: adult children, car buyers, potential employers, etc.

Economic or educational background

Ethnic background

Political, religious, or moral beliefs and values

Hobbies or activities

- ❖ What do readers already know and *not* know about my topic? How much do I have to tell them?
 - ❖ If my topic involves specialized language, how much should I use and define?
 - ❖ What ideas, arguments, or information might surprise readers? excite them? offend them? How should I handle these points?
 - ❖ What misconceptions might readers have of my topic and/or my approach to the topic? How can I dispel these misconceptions?
 - ❖ What is my relationship to my readers? What role and tone should I assume? What role do I want readers to play?
 - ❖ What will readers do with my writing? Should I expect them to read every word from the top, to scan for information, or to look for conclusions? Can I help them with a summary, headings, illustrations, or other special features?
-

2b

you are trying to explain how a particular computer program works, whereas readers' beliefs and values may be important if you are trying to gather support for a change in welfare policy.

2 Invention

Writers use a host of techniques to help invent or discover ideas and information about their subjects. *Whichever of the following techniques you use, do your work in writing, not just in your head.* Your ideas will be retrievable, and the very act of writing will lead you to fresh insights.

2a Keeping a journal

A journal, or diary of ideas, gives you a place to record your reactions to courses, conversations, movies, and books. It gives you an outlet from the pressures of family, friends, studies, and work. It gives you a private place to find out what you think.

If you write in a journal every day, even for just a few minutes, the routine will loosen up your writing muscles and improve your confidence. And the writing you produce can supply ideas when you are seeking an essay subject or developing an essay. For example, two entries about arguments with your brother may suggest a psychology paper on sibling relations.

2b Observing your surroundings

Sometimes you can find a good subject or good ideas by looking around you, not in the half-conscious way most of us move from place to place in our daily lives but deliberately, all senses alert. On a bus, for instance, are there certain types of passengers? What seems to be on the driver's mind? To get the most from observation, you should have a tablet and pen or pencil handy for notes and sketches. Back at your desk, study your notes and sketches for oddities or patterns that you'd like to explore further.

2c Freewriting and brainstorming**2c**

A good way to find or explore a subject is to write without stopping for a certain amount of time (say, ten minutes) or to a certain length (say, one page). The goal of this **FREEWITING** is to generate ideas and information from *within* yourself by going around the part of your mind that doesn't want to write or can't think of anything to write. You let words themselves suggest other words. *What* you write is not important; that you *keep* writing is. Don't stop, even if that means repeating the same words until new words come. Don't go back to reread, don't censor ideas, and don't stop to edit: grammar, punctuation, and spelling are irrelevant at this stage.

The physical act of freewriting may give you access to ideas you were unaware of. For example, the following freewriting by a student, Robert Benday, gave him the subject of writing as a disguise.

Write to write. Seems pretty obvious, also weird. What to gain by writing? never anything before. Writing seems always—always—Getting corrected for trying too hard to please the teacher, getting corrected for not trying hard enuf. Frustration, nail biting, sometimes getting carried away making sentences to tell stories, not even true stories, *esp.* not true stories, *that* feels like creating something. Writing just pulls the story out of me. The story lets me be someone else, gives me a disguise.

(A later phase of Benday's writing process appears on p. 9.)

Freewriting is also useful to discover ideas about a specific subject, as the following example shows. The writer, Terry Perez, had an assignment to explore some aspect of cultural diversity in the United States. She had just read a statement by the writer Ishmael Reed that conflict among cultural groups "is played up and often encouraged by the media."

Cultural diversity in the media? The media has a one track mind, cultural diversity is bad. Like Reed says the media makes a big deal of conflict between racial and ethnic groups, it's almost constant in the papers, on TV. TV especially—the news vs. all the white bread programs, the sitcoms and ads. That's a whole other view—*no* conflict, *no* tension. No diversity. So we have all people the same except when they're not, then they're at war. Two unreal pictures.

(An outline and drafts of Perez's paper appear on pp. 14, 17–18, 21–22, and 23–26.)

A method similar to freewriting is **BRAINSTORMING**—focusing intently on a subject for a fixed amount of time (say, fifteen minutes), pushing yourself to list every idea and detail that comes to mind. Like freewriting, brainstorming requires turning off your internal

2e

editor so that you keep moving ahead. Here is an example by a student, Johanna Abrams, on what a summer job can teach:

summer work teaches—

how to look busy while doing nothing

how to avoid the sun in summer

seriously: discipline, budgeting money, value of money

which job? Burger King cashier? baby sitter? mail-room clerk?

mail room: how to sort mail into boxes: this is learning??

how to survive getting fired—humiliation, outrage

Mrs. King! the mail-room queen as learning experience

the shock of getting fired: what to tell parents, friends?

Mrs. K was so rigid—dumb procedures

initials instead of names on the mail boxes—confusion!

Mrs. K's anger, resentment: the disadvantages of being smarter than your boss

The odd thing about working in an office: a world with its own rules for how to act

what Mr. D said about the pecking order—big chick (Mrs. K) pecks on little chick (me)

a job can beat you down—make you be mean to other people

(A later phase of Abrams's writing process appears on p. 13.)

2d Clustering

Like freewriting and brainstorming, CLUSTERING also draws on free association and rapid, unedited work. But it emphasizes the relations between ideas by combining writing and nonlinear drawing. When clustering, you radiate outward from a center point—your topic. When an idea occurs, you pursue related ideas in a branching structure until they seem exhausted. Then you do the same with other ideas, staying open to connections, continuously branching out or drawing arrows.

The example of clustering on the next page shows how Robert Benday used the technique for ten minutes to expand on the topic of writing as a means of disguise, an idea he arrived at through freewriting (see the preceding page).

2e Asking questions

Asking yourself a set of questions about your subject—and writing out the answers—can help you look at the topic objectively and see fresh possibilities in it.