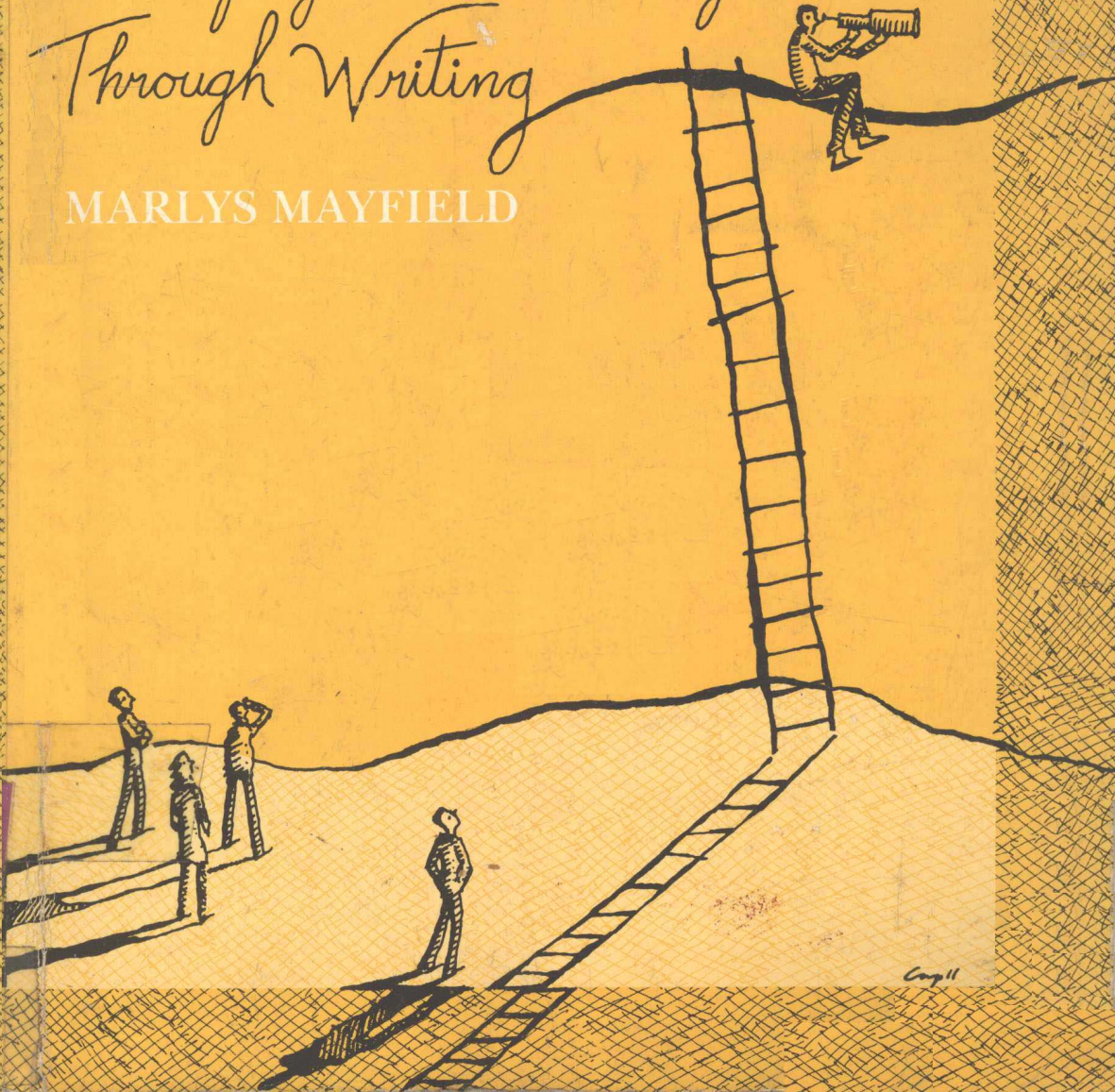

THINKING FOR YOURSELF

*Developing Critical Thinking Skills
Through Writing*

MARLYS MAYFIELD



Thinking for Yourself

**DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS
THROUGH WRITING**

Marlys Mayfield

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Preface

HISTORY OF THE TEXT

Critical thinking can feel like waking up. Sometimes it's in the momentous, and sometimes in the ordinary, but inevitably it's a discovery that we have been asleep.

This book originated in some acts of waking up. Its first stirrings came through a nagging dissatisfaction with the way I had been teaching English composition for fifteen years. Like my colleagues, I knew that writing was clear when thinking was clear. And so, I wondered, why not focus primarily on the thinking instead of the writing process? Why not use writing to show how we think, instead of thinking so much about how we write? It seemed to me that this approach would do more to improve writing in the long run. The problem was that none of us knew how to teach thinking, or even if that were possible.

By the late seventies, I learned it was possible: a number of educators were demonstrating some new theories and curricula for teaching thinking. They included foremost the work of J. P. Guilford and Mary Meeker in California and that of Reuven Feuerstein in Israel. In 1980 I received a small grant to undergo a teaching internship in the Feuerstein method, called "Instrumental Enrichment." I chose this program because it is based on a clearly identified hierarchy of thinking skills and because it teaches students an awareness of their thinking processes. By 1982 I was teaching two new experimental college courses; the first was a remedial course in thinking skills based on the Feuerstein system. The second was an English college transfer course, designed to fulfill the new California State University critical thinking course requirements. Since this requirement specified content but did not restrict critical thinking to any particular departments or types of courses, I used this opportunity to combine critical thinking with writing, calling the course *Critical Thinking in Reading and Writing*.

When I first looked for suitable textbooks for this course, I found there were none. When I resolved to compose the writing assignments myself, supplementing my instruction with a concise critical thinking text, I found my search for a suitable text disappointing. Because of my composition and thinking skills training, I had many questions about the teaching value of these critical thinking texts. Why were they so difficult to read and understand? Why did they try to teach critical thinking as though it were a subject rather than a skill? Why did they begin as well as end on so advanced a cognitive level as the analysis of argumentation? Why were they so weak in testing content understanding as well as application? Bringing all my questions together, I began to compose my own textbook. Whenever my students showed problems of understanding, I did more research, wrote new chapters and tests. Often I was surprised to discover what my students did not know: the difference between facts and inferences, reasons and conclusions, the meaning of assumptions, opinions, and evaluations. In the course of five years and the teaching of twenty-nine sections of this course, I completely revised and reprinted the textbook seven times, expanding it to five hundred pages. During this period I was also working with Wadsworth Publishing Company, whose editors and reviewers offered me suggestions and assistance that continued to shape the book's content, organization, and direction. The end product, which you now have before you, has become a unique text serving two purposes:

It teaches English composition through an emphasis on the thinking process, serving as a composition text.

It teaches critical thinking through writing applications, serving as a critical thinking course text.

APPROACH AND COVERAGE

1. This book assumes that all people prefer to think for themselves and not be dependent on the thinking of others.
2. The text teaches both critical thinking and composition by emphasizing awareness of the personal thinking process. From the training of personal awareness, it moves to the more advanced stages of analyzing the thinking of others.
3. This text begins on a more fundamental level than most other critical thinking texts, yet proceeds to a more advanced level than most, requiring students to develop and demonstrate highly sophisticated analytical skills.
4. The first half of the text works extensively with critical thinking in *nonverbal* problems, using photographs, cartoons, descriptive and report assignments. The second half moves into the more tradi-

tional application of critical thinking to *verbal* problems, analyses, and arguments.

5. The text provokes its readers constantly to think in order to work their way through the materials. Its problem and writing assignments force confrontation with the common tricks and defenses used to avoid thinking. Some of these include the use of glib phrases, stereotypes, fixed opinions, the disregard of instructions, the substitution of evaluations and imagination for facts, the use of unexamined assumptions, and acceptance of false authority.
6. In its style and pedagogy, this text shows consistent concern for the interaction of the cognitive and affective domains of learning. It also addresses directly the problems of distinguishing between feelings that clarify thinking and those that hinder it.
7. This text uses practical, everyday examples, bridging the concepts learned about thinking to life's problems. Direct quotations taken from the media are used extensively to illustrate the ubiquity and influence of arguments in our lives as well as the need for standards with which to judge them.
8. This text is *not* designed to serve as a critical reader but instead directs the students, through discussion and research assignments, to both mainstream and nonmainstream media sources, demonstrating that critical reading is not a canned academic subject but a practical skill for intelligent participation and survival in the world.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE BOOK

1. Each chapter begins with *Discovery Exercises*, which provide opportunities for students to uncover principles about thinking for themselves and to start out with the interest and motivation generated from their own experiences.
2. A study of the table of contents shows that Parts One and Two of the book cover basic material not usually presented in such depth in critical thinking texts, while Part Three still offers extensive treatment of the more traditional topics of critical thinking, such as inductive and deductive reasoning, the logical fallacies, and the critical analysis of arguments.
3. The text offers an extensive number of options for the evaluation of student progress. Each chapter ends with a summary and a true-false chapter test. These tests are intended not only to measure understanding, but also to provoke further thought, either in oral class review or written assignments. Part One and Part Two tests offer further review, while the Instructor's Manual contains further

tests on dictionary skills, logical fallacies, reasons and conclusions, as well as two additional final exams.

4. The *Writing Applications* are another special feature. They may be used in English courses or any other course that wishes to encourage more composition writing. The Writing Applications at the end of each chapter can be optional. These assignments are designed for practice of the skills learned in each chapter, as well as for mastering more and more complex rhetorical forms, ranging from the narrative and definition essay to the argumentative essay.
5. Regardless of whether the end-of-chapter Writing Applications are used, students will engage in an extensive amount of writing as they work through each chapter, moving from descriptive paragraph writing to more complex research assignments. Here again the design of the gradient of learning is based on my assessment of the thinking skills involved.
6. Accompanying the text is an Instructor's Manual, which provides teaching objectives and suggestions for working chapter by chapter in the classroom. The Manual also provides suggested answers for problem exercises, chapter tests, and supplementary tests. Finally, it contains models of student writings for some of the key assignments.

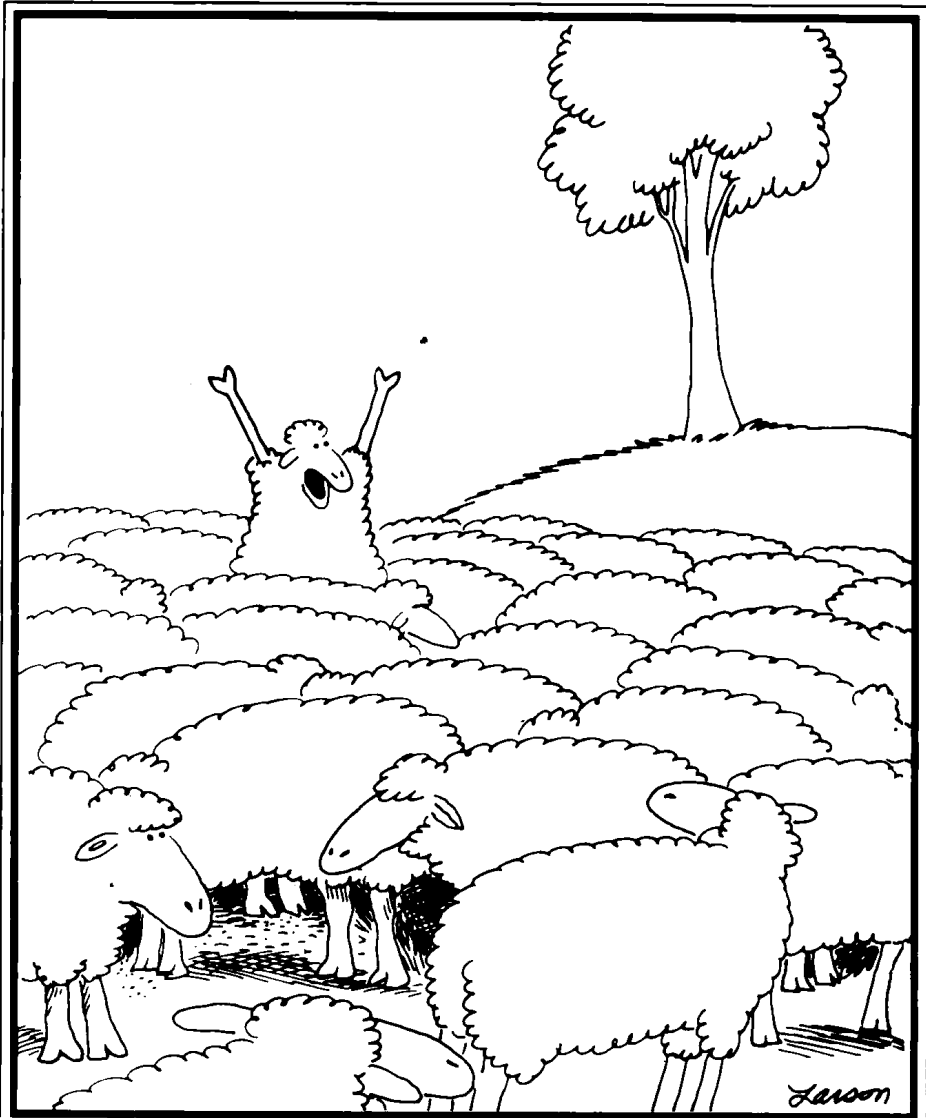
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Next I must mention my own teachers: Reuven Feuerstein, who deserves the Nobel Prize for developing an experiential curriculum for teaching both children and teachers thinking skills; Arthur Costa, California State University at Sacramento, under whose supervision I interned in the Feuerstein method; Dorr Bothwell, who taught me that knowing one's own perception could make an artist of anyone; Roderick Taunton, who taught me to study the root ideas of words; Don Fabun, whose book *Communica-*

tions: *The Transfer of Meaning* guided me early in my career to find such good results from teaching students the difference between facts and inferences.

Finally, I am grateful to the following colleague advisors and editors who gave many hours of their own creative support to this project. They include Lorraine Anderson, Walter Truett Anderson, Kristina Bear, Gunnar Carlsson, Jerry Fishman, Jon Ford, Walter Frey, Vicki Friedberg, Geoffrey Hirsch, Kay Lawson, Lisa Mirski, Connie Missimer, Bonnie Paul, William Cromartie, Alan Godfrey, Chuck Yannacone, Kevin Howat, Cedric Crocker, and John Strohmeier.



"Wait! Wait! Listen to me! . . . We don't HAVE to be just sheep!"

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