

WRITING

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Ninth Edition

Randy DeVillez

WRITING

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Randy DeVillez

Moraine Valley Community College



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Preface



Before you read this book, I think you should know something about its writer:

For the past thirty years (give or take), I have had the yearly pleasure of reading the private thoughts and feelings of several hundred student writers. If you think about it, this is rather remarkable. While I was walking the other day, I focused on what this has meant in my life. I came to several conclusions:

For one, I have learned a great deal. I have learned of the practical (such as how to make dog stew, from a paper by one of my international students; I read it to our dog Troubles, but he seemed offended); I have learned of the difficult (such as how to say goodbye to an aging father that one student was reluctantly placing into hospice care); I have learned of the illegal and immoral (such as how to run a credit card scam or how to have an affair and not get caught); I have learned of the tragic (such as having to deal with the death of a friend killed by a drunk driver); I have learned of the most-private (such as how it feels to have an abortion and to have to live with the lingering feelings); I have learned of the humorous (such as why it is not a good idea to wear a two-piece swim suit on a jet ski); I have learned of the all-too-familiar (such as you think you know who your real friends are, but . . .); I have learned of the truly determined (such as even though I am blind, I am going to become an auto mechanic. Bart did become one, by the way).

Two, although these student authors have ranged from mid-teens to mid-eighties, they share a trait. If I can meet the challenge and help each find his or her voice, that voice has much to say. I am not Superman; I cannot always find the way to help the student find the way. But there are more victories than defeats. The role of midwife is interesting. I help and I coach and I nurture. When one of my students wins a prize in a writing contest, I feel true joy. When one of my students fails, I feel like a failure. When a student offers a handshake and a sincere thanks, I find that those clichés about the joys of teaching have become truths. Although my colleagues think me mad when I say it, I just love teaching writing, so much so in fact, that I have quit teaching most other courses. I derive much satisfaction from being a literary midwife.

Three, writing and the teaching of writing have an impact which goes beyond the class and the classroom. On one level, this is practical: if you can communicate more clearly you might end up with a better job or a higher grade or a bigger paycheck. On another level, it transcends the practical. Writing is thinking. It is a way of focusing, of reaching decisions, of making choices, of reaffirming values and beliefs, of rekindling one's own imaginative fires. This is education in the truest sense.

Before you read this book, I think you should know something about its approach:

In its basic approach to writing, this book is a traditional rhetoric. It is unique, however, because all of the examples for study (writing teachers call this "a models approach") are student-written; the writing has not been edited or altered. This book is also unique in its

style. Most of the writing books I sort of read as a student were written by people who seemed to have no personality. My editors have graciously allowed me to be myself. Since I am more of a jeans and vest kind of guy, you'll not find the tone of this educational tome to be bow-tie and tweed-jacket, if you know what I mean. My textbook has frequently been referred to as either a student-friendly book or a book appreciated by most students—and some teachers. I take both to be compliments.

Each chapter presents clear steps (step-by-step, get it?!), directions, and explanations. There are also suggested topics and approaches. Tucked at the end of most chapters, you'll also find student examples, plan sheets, and evaluation forms for you and for a classmate.

Although designed primarily for classroom use, *Writing Step by Step* is a practical guide for any individual who wants to learn or review the basics of written communication.

The Ninth Edition

I trust that the following features of this new ninth edition will help you to improve your writing.

- New sample essays are included because I believe that students learn by studying and analyzing the work of other students.
- Examples of directed-audience writing help students avoid the dreaded “Burger-Weenie” syndrome. (See Chapter One.)
- Tearout sheets are included for self-evaluation and peer-evaluation.
- Brainstorming examples and invention strategies help to create subjects and topics.
- New illustrations are sprinkled throughout the book. (Thanks again to my son, Eric.) The illustrations in Chapter Two emphasize why “Close doesn’t count” in communication.
- Chapter Sixteen reflects technological changes in research and documenting electronic sources.

This edition has an updated interior format to aid students in locating important features and concepts. The student examples are screened for easy identification as in past editions. Various icons have been added to the presentation of the content to highlight concepts with a similar theme.



ASK YOURSELF . . . helpful hints to evaluate and plan a strategy for various writing components.



SUGGESTIONS . . . provide tips to help improve writing skills.



STRATEGIES . . . highlight methods for achieving writing goals.



HEADS UP . . . alerts you to potentially troublesome areas in the writing process.



CHECKLISTS . . . provide an opportunity to do a final analysis of your writing by double checking that the important elements of the writing assignment have been covered.



THUMBS UP . . . identifies the correct manner of presenting ideas.



THUMBS DOWN . . . identifies the incorrect manner of presenting ideas.



OUTLINE . . . indicates examples of outlining.



CAVEAT . . . warnings regarding writing strategies.

FINAL NOTE . . . This year as I revised this text, I worked hard at improving my writing. I hope that you are ready to work on improving your writing. If you are ready, let's turn the page and begin. . . .

Acknowledgments



By the time a textbook has reached its ninth edition (this book, in fact, is older than most of the students I teach), its writer has become indebted to many persons in many ways.

At this moment, I feel somewhat like the Academy Award recipient who stumbles through names and then ends by saying, “I know I have probably forgotten people who are important.” Therefore, I hesitate to begin a litany of names. However, there are thanks to be dispersed, folks to be granted gratitude.

I want to thank all of my colleagues, both part-time and full-time. You probably don’t realize just how encouraging it truly is when you take the time to deliver a positive comment about a new edition or a new feature. These comments—usually delivered as we gather around the departmental coffee pot seeking a caffeine fix between classes—motivate me not to murder my editors whenever they mention the subject of a new edition (translation: give up another year of nights and weekends to rewrite this baby).

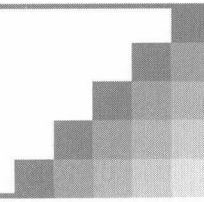
And speaking of editors—and the entire staff of Kendall/Hunt Publishing—we have been friends and family as well as business partners for a long time. (Honest! I didn’t really mean that “murder” comment in the last paragraph. . . .) I sincerely thank you for the professional relationship we have shared over the years.

I want to thank all of my students for all of the lessons you have taught me; I especially want to thank those of you who have consented to the publication of your writing. I thank you for the gift of sharing your thoughts, feelings, and voices.

I want to thank my family. As one of my editors at K/H once said to me at lunch, “I know a lot of people smart enough to write a textbook. I just don’t know many of them dumb enough to give up all their time to do it.” He was, of course, a prophet. So, pretty please accept the dedication of this manuscript in place of the few letters I didn’t have time to write, for the times I asked you to walk the dog when it was really my turn, and for the most-unforgivable offense of letting you talk to the answering machine (only once or twice, honest) instead of me when I was in the middle of typing one of the rare intelligent thoughts I’ve had in this lifetime. You are all loved.

Randy DeVillez
Palos Park, IL

To the Student



PLEASE READ THIS—EVEN IF YOU DO NOT READ THE REST OF THE BOOK

Although it was over thirty years ago, I remember vividly my first day as a student in a college writing class. I was experiencing all kinds of sensations, but more than anything, I was worried about the teacher who was soon to enter the room. I wasn't sure why exactly, because my high school English teacher (God bless Mary DeWitz) had prepared me well. Part of my insecurity was attributable to the overall newness of the college experience. Part was attributable to the fact that I was sitting in a writing class. I felt vulnerable; I felt like I was going to be judged . . . not only on my control of verbs and commas and other grammatical gizmos, but also judged on my thoughts and feelings. Eventually, as I gained confidence, these insecurities vanished, but it was a long time before I felt comfortable with my writing teacher and with my writing.

Now, as a teacher of writing, I have a ritual I perform whenever I am about to meet a class for the first time. As I walk down the hall toward the classroom, I stop just before I reach the door. I close my eyes briefly (not wanting anyone to begin CPR or anything drastic), and I reflect upon that rainy August morning when I was a college freshman sitting on the other side of the lectern in Ms. Carlson's English 101 class. My act of recalling those memories shapes my approach to the teaching of writing. I don't ever want to forget how I felt that morning.

Once I enter the room and begin an overview of the course, I try to convince my students that I am like any other professional whose help they might seek. Similar to the allergist, the wedding coordinator, the veterinarian, the lawyer, or the auto technician, I am but another professional trying to offer assistance in some aspect of their lives. Rendering this assistance, however, is not always easy. Most people who hire a wedding coordinator or seek the help of a mechanic are very direct and honest about why they want that person's assistance. When seeking the help of a writing professional, however, lots of folks react differently. Instead of candidly saying, "I know what I want to say, but. . . ." or, "I'll be damned if I can figure out how to paragraph an essay except to just divide it into hunks to create the illusion of paragraphs . . . Help me now, quick!", most students try to "hide" their writing problems and anxieties. Imagine visiting the doctor because you're ill. When she enters the examining room, you are most-likely prepared with a litany of symptoms and complaints which you quickly rattle off. You want a quick diagnosis, a prescription, and a start toward better health. Most people don't go to the doctor and say, "I'm not going to tell you why I'm here. You figure it out, give me a prescription, and then I'll probably get better. If I don't, I'll blame you." Consider your attitude about writing; if you are honest with yourself—and your writing teacher—you might get a bigger return for your tuition.

Since you're reading this, I have also entered your life. Like your classroom teacher, I am a consultant, a coach, a drill instructor, a midwife (pick your favorite metaphor)—anything but the grammar cop, the G.P.A. assassin, the enemy. As students, you don't really

hire us, and we don't guarantee you an A or three credit hours in exchange for your tuition. The good news is we are here to help you. The bad news is you will have some work to do. How much work depends upon your level of writing competency, your motivation, and your commitment to becoming a better writer.

Perhaps all this seems obvious to you, but after my thirty years in the teaching trenches, I am absolutely convinced that many students don't consciously perceive the student-professor relationship in this way. If you can engage in some honest self-evaluation and some appropriate attitude adjustment before beginning your writing course, you might gain more from it. The following suggestions are offered to help you in this process:

- ❖ **First:** I suggest—for the most part—you study the chapters in the order they appear. As this text's title implies, each chapter builds upon the concepts and skills developed in the previous chapters. Although many classes which study this text will not use all of the chapters, you probably will use most. (Keep in mind it is not illegal to read those chapters and sections which your professor chooses to omit.)
- ❖ **Second:** This text uses a models approach; that is, you are shown examples of writing which are models of what your teacher expects. All of the models in this textbook are student-authored, and they reflect the variety of human voices which the planet offers: long and short, formal and informal, tragic and humorous, serious and whimsical, etc. They are all presented to give you an idea of what is expected of you. Don't regard them as perfect models to mimic or copy. Like my writing (and yours) they are not perfect. Each example, however, represents a genuine attempt to communicate. I think they all succeed; I am proud of each entry.
- ❖ **Third:** Be yourself. Believe in yourself. Be willing to stretch yourself. Whether you have come to college as a mid-year high school graduate or after a forty year "vacation" from school, you are a person with thoughts and feelings to communicate. Inside of you are several voices waiting to be given the opportunity to present themselves on paper.
- ❖ **Fourth:** If you are given the opportunity, choose subject matter that is of interest to you. Chapter One presents some techniques for brainstorming and inventing. If "what to write about" is your biggest fear/problem, some of those techniques might make your life easier.
- ❖ **Fifth:** Ask for help when you need it. Don't wait. Asking for help means, "I want to improve; I care about what I am doing." Asking for help does not mean, "Geez, am I stupid, or what." Also, be selective in whose help you seek. Trained tutors and teachers and peer tutors will help you understand what you are struggling with. They lead you to answers instead of providing them. Friends, classmates, parents, main squeezes, and the family dog (if you are really desperate) don't always teach. They just make corrections. Some day, some time, that unlearned lesson will come back to haunt you when the person who corrected "things" for you is no longer around.
- ❖ **Sixth:** Writing is important. Many people with writing problems try to convince themselves otherwise, but most adults realize that the ability to communicate effectively is a necessity. Success in writing depends, in part, upon being able to spell, punctuate, and properly use grammar. If you need help with these skills, ask your teacher for assistance.

- ❖ **Seventh:** Learn to assess your strengths and weaknesses as a writer. Be realistic in the process and in the goals you set for improving your writing. Your instructor's job—in addition to teaching the mechanics and techniques of writing—is to give you a fair and honest evaluation of your writing skills. Your job is to take that feedback, study and analyze it, formulate some plans for the next assignment, and—if necessary—ask your instructor how to improve those areas where you are weak. This process is called learning how to write.

Once, at the end of a semester, a departing student told me that I had done a good job, but there was one area where my teaching needed improvement: every paper I evaluated and returned to him nagged him about the same problems. He said I should have used more variety in my comments! It never occurred to him that I “nagged” him each time because he repeated the same mistakes each time. That student taught me something about the process of writing (and giving feedback to students).

Now I require students to do a self-evaluation of each writing assignment they hand me to critique. I ask them to write what they perceive as the strengths and weaknesses of their performance. If it is a few weeks into the course, I ask them to “flashback” to the last assignment. What were its strong points? How were they carried over to this assignment? What were the weak points? (What caused the grade to go down?) How does this current assignment reflect an attempt to eliminate those weaknesses or problem areas? Then comes “the killer”: What have you done to improve your writing skills in this assignment? Although this process of self-evaluation is not always accepted with great joy, my students admit that it does help them improve and learn. And, that, of course, is why most of us get up and go to college several days a week.

If you would like to try this evaluation process (joyfully, of course), you will find Self-Evaluation Sheets to assist you in evaluating your writing.

If you are feeling very ambitious and very brave, you will also find Peer-Evaluation Sheets which you might ask a classmate to fill out—after reading your writing. For many student writers, this is anxiety producing. Choose wisely. Look for that student—like yourself—who always attends, who turns papers in on time, owns a textbook with frayed pages, knows the teacher's name, and carries around the handbook which the teacher suggested, not required. If you see high-lighting in the textbook and paper clips in the grammar book, you know you've chosen the right peer critic. This critic, like your teacher, can help you understand the strong and weak points of your writing, the effectiveness of your communication skills.

- ❖ **Eighth:** Do not give up; don't expect everything to happen at once. Writing, like most other skills, takes time, effort, and work to develop. If you strive to improve, you will. Many people become discouraged when miracles don't occur overnight. Not all students will become A writers, but all students who try to improve will finish the course writing at a more-competent level than when they began the course.

Good luck with your course and with your writing!

To the Teacher

AND ANYONE ELSE INTERESTED . . .

As I begin the ninth edition of this text and my thirtieth year of teaching writing to college and university students, I cannot help becoming somewhat philosophical—attributable to several factors, I'm certain, including senility: becoming a grandfather, inhaling chalk dust for thirty years, having read hundreds of thousands of student papers, and having endured an existential number of meaningless committee meetings. From the depths of my shadow self, however, comes a nagging voice proclaiming, "Now that you are about to retire, you have finally figured out what you are doing; pass it on." So, if you will indulge me while I wax poetic, I would like to share a few conclusions I have reached about this profession of ours:

- ❖ **One:** I think we (as teachers of writing) have to distinguish between what we do to help our students and what we do to help ourselves. To impress our peers, we have to use all the correct and latest jargon—even if we don't have a clue to its meaning. (Let me be the first to plead guilty.) We also have to adopt all the proper stances, approaches, and pedagogies: writing across the curriculum, writing as process, critical thinking, multi-cultural diversity, journaling, using the personal computer—you name it, in thirty years I've been there and done that—sometimes more than once! And to some extent, all of this is important and vital—but perhaps more so to us than to our students. I have observed that whether I am teaching the student who uses a half-chewed #2 pencil with no eraser or working with the student in one of our sparkling new IBM micro labs, my students learn best and most when I give them lots of practice, lots of room to experiment, and lots of honest and immediate feedback.
- ❖ **Two:** Feedback to students must be just that: honest. This is not always easy. It isn't easy in these student-as-consumer and grade-conscious times to look a student in the eyes and say, "I am sorry. I know you worked hard on this paper. I know you tried. But the grade still isn't where you and I would like for it to be—yet." It sometimes helps if the "bad news" comes in private conferences, especially if there is time to discuss *why* the grade is a reflection of the student's writing skills. This is why I feel it is so important to teach our students to analyze the strong and weak points of their writing; then they realize that they *earn* grades, that we don't *give* grades.
- ❖ **Three:** I feel it is important that we role model writing. We are not just teachers of writing; we are writers. All of us, of course, have the great American novel started in manuscript form. Every summer and Christmas break, we add a few more pages or chapters. Soon, however, we go back to teaching and the endless correcting of papers; eventually, the manuscript gets buried. But we don't stop writing. We write letters of recommendation. We write memos, budget reports, committee documents, etc. I feel we should share some of this writing with our students—not just the results, but the process. Last semester, for example, I was

one of several people asked by one of the deans to evaluate some software that he would be purchasing for one of our computer labs. Since I teach my classes in that lab, his choice of software would have a major impact on my teaching, my students, and my day-to-day life at the college. I wrote a report which compared and contrasted the two software packages under consideration; I wanted my voice heard on this issue. (It was, by the way.) While this was occurring, I was also teaching my students about comparison-contrast. In class, I referred to my experience with the software purchase to illustrate how a writer uses comparison-contrast as a method of communicating to a specific audience (in this case, my boss). I asked my students to attempt something similar, to write a directed-audience essay using comparison-contrast; I encouraged them to write about an issue that was real, a decision they were attempting to make or justify, or a recommendation they were proposing to someone specific in their lives. Their papers reflected an understanding that comparison-contrast wasn't the end (or goal) of this process, but rather the means. Most of my students had something to say to someone. Their papers had a personal investment which transcended "doing homework." I feel it is our responsibility to tear down those imaginary barriers between the classroom and the "real" world, between ourselves as teachers and ourselves as writers who teach writing.

- ❖ **Four:** If you are reading this, you must be somewhat like me in terms of your philosophy about the teaching of writing (or you teach under a sadistic department chair who forced my book upon you). If we are soul mates, I'd like to tell you that I worry about our profession. Some of us have lost sight of what we are after. For me, the "bottom line" is pretty clear: I want my students to write better when we part company than when we met. I want them to have their own voice (not mine—which is probably good). I want them to have confidence in their writing. I want them to be competent and confident with the grammar, punctuation and mechanics of their own writing (not exercises in a workbook). I want them to say to another teacher or a boss or a prospective employer, "Let me at that keyboard; I can express myself, in a couple of different styles, in fact." I want them to enjoy writing as much as I do, as much as they did when they wrote on walls with crayons. I want them to write appropriate to audience and purpose. . . . Or as one of my students once said, "You know, this writing stuff doesn't have to be so difficult."

For the past three semesters, meeting individually with my students, I have been asking them non-scientific, open-ended questions (no grant money backing this undertaking), such as, "If you could tell your last writing teacher to change one thing about how you were taught, what would it be?" or, "What could your last writing teacher have done differently that would have helped you to become a better writer?"

Their answers impress me. Students want to be held accountable for grammatical errors, but they want explanations, not marginal hieroglyphics. They want freedom in choosing topics. They want to be given more writing (not one student has requested less writing). They want to be able to write in more than one voice or style. So on and so forth, but the reality is: students know. They know when they are being taught. They also know when they aren't.

Their answers also worried me. Here are some "writing guidelines" my students have been previously taught: All paragraphs must have nine sentences. You can only have twenty-five commas on a page. You can't use contractions. You cannot use any single-syllable words. Sentences must alternate between periodic

and loose. All nouns must be preceded by three adjectives. (Wouldn't you love to read six pages of this kind of description?) I repeat: Some of us have lost sight of what we are after.

We have produced a generation (or more) of student writers who can write several pages without an **is** or a **was** or an **I** or a **you** or a contraction. They count their commas and their sentences, and they measure their margins. But they do not see themselves as having something to say. They lack confidence. They worry that they and their writing are boring. And they don't seem to be very interested in their own writing. . . . I sincerely believe that they can do better if we do better.

- ❖ **Five:** The computer is not going to be the savior of our students. Before you label me a Luddite, I am writing this (composing, in fact) on a computer. I require my students to use a computer. I do most of my teaching in a computer lab. In fact, I spend most of my on-campus time in a computer lab where I observe my own students and other teachers' students who use the lab to "write" their papers. Most students—the vast majority, in fact—use the computer as a typewriter; the backspace key is faster than waiting for the White Out to dry. And the spell check genie brings higher grades—if you use it. I see few students who compose at the keyboard (even though I show them how); most type from written copy. I also discover more errors in diction and usage since most students have become spell check dependent. Students who rely upon grammar checkers tend to have a "wooden" style. I think we need to teach our students word processing software; we also need to teach them to use and trust their own brains.

Well, I am wise enough to know there are as many philosophies of teaching writing as there are teachers of writing, that there are as many truths as there are truth sayers. So, I'll shut up now. Whatever your philosophy and/or approach to our craft, I wish you well, and I thank you for adopting (or at least teaching) my book. In closing, I share with you my fortune from yesterday's lunch at the Hunan Inn: "One learns most when teaching others." Amen.

A WORD ABOUT EVALUATION

SELF-EVALUATION:

Some suggestions and advice:

- Your perceptions of your writing and your writing process help your instructor understand you as a writer. By listing your perceived weaknesses, for example, you are not providing your instructor with ammunition to lower your grade. Nor are you bragging by listing your perceived strengths. Rather, if you listed structure as a strength, but you turned in a five page paper written in one huge paragraph, your instructor knows it is time for the two of you to chat about the concept of structure.
- Analyze your writing using the terminology of writing: unity, coherence, development, structure, organization, transition, etc. Use the language of the discipline.
- Think back: what was your grade on your previous writing assignment—and why? If you can't remember, look. Grades are a symbol of your writing skills and grammar skills. What did you do well? What did you need to improve? What concrete steps have you taken to improve?
- Think current: what makes this most-recent piece of writing a good effort for what was assigned?

PEER-EVALUATION:

Some suggestions and advice:

- You are evaluating another student's writing. You are **not** editing; you are **not** making corrections. Do **not** write on the paper. Rather, read it. Then write comments and suggestions on the peer-evaluation form. If you have questions about something you read, ask the writer.
- Analyze your peer's writing (as you did your own) using the terminology of writing.
- Be positive. Rather than writing, "Your punctuation stinks," phrase the comment, "I think maybe you need to check your commas."
- Review what the teacher assigned and make certain that the paper fits the requirements. If the assignment was to write a directed-audience persuasion paper, is that what the peer gave you to read? If not, he or she will be grateful to be told. (You might hold out for a free lunch if you save someone's grade!)
- Don't hesitate to compliment the writer. Here are some comments written on peer-evaluation forms currently on my desk: "Your opening story is a great hook. It really made me want to continue reading your paper," "This paper really made me think about this issue," "I really like how you expressed your ideas through the examples," and "I felt the same way when my parents said they were going to get divorced. Your essay gives me hope." Imagine you are the writer getting back your peer-evaluation form and reading these comments. What would they do to your desire to write?
- Tell the writer what makes him/her an effective communicator.
- What, in your opinion, might have been added, deleted, or done differently?

Although they might seem awkward—and definitely difficult at first—both types of evaluation will benefit you as a writer.

Illustrations by Eric DeVillez

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