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A SEQUENCE FOR
ACADEMIC
WRITING

A Sequence for Academic Writing

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Preface for Instructors

A Sequence for Academic Writing evolved out of another text, *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum* (WRAC). Through seven editions over the last twenty years, WRAC has helped hundreds of thousands of students prepare for the writing done well beyond the freshman composition course. WRAC features a rhetoric in which students are introduced to the core skills of summary, critique, and synthesis, and a reader that presents readings in the disciplines to which students can apply the skills learned in the earlier chapters. Because the skills of summary, critique, and synthesis are so central to academic thinking and writing, many instructors—both those teaching writing-across-the-curriculum and those using other approaches to composition instruction—have found WRAC a highly useful introduction to college-level writing. We therefore decided to adapt the rhetoric portion of WRAC into a separate book that instructors could use apart from any additional reading content they chose to incorporate in their writing courses. *A Sequence for Academic Writing* is both an adaptation of WRAC and an expansion: we have added the core skill of *analysis* to the mix because it, too, is an assignment type often encountered throughout the curriculum and beyond.

We proceed through a sequence from “Summary, Paraphrase, and Quotation” to “Critical Reading and Critique,” to “Explanatory Synthesis” and “Argument Synthesis” to “Analysis,” concluding with a chapter on “Research.” This final chapter presents the research process as the culmination of all the skills previously covered in the text. Along the way, we also include a chapter on “Writing as a Process,” which offers extended treatment of writing *theses*, *introductions*, and *conclusions*. We reinforce this emphasis on writing as process in all chapters through examples of student writing processes and exercises encouraging engagement with various steps in the processes.

Key features in *A Sequence for Academic Writing* include *boxes*, which sum up important concepts in each chapter; brief writing *exercises*, which prompt individual and group activities; *writing assignments*, which put each chapter’s skills into practice, and *model essays*, which provide examples of student responses to writing assignments discussed in the text. An *Instructor’s Manual* and *Companion Website* provide further resources for teaching with this text.

While we are keenly aware of the overlapping nature of the skills on which we focus and while we could all endlessly debate an appropriate order in which to cover these skills, a book is necessarily linear. We have chosen the sequence that makes the most sense to us, though individual instructors may choose to cover these skills in their own sequence. Teachers should feel perfectly free to use these chapters in whatever order they feel is most useful to their individual aims and philosophies. Understanding the material in a later chapter does not, in most cases, depend on students having read material in the earlier chapters.

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Introduction

In your sociology class, you are assigned to write a paper on the role of peer groups in influencing attitudes toward smoking. Your professor expects you to read some of the literature on the subject as well as to conduct interviews with members of such groups. For an environmental studies course, you must write a paper on how one or more industrial plants in a particular area have been affecting the local ecosystem. In your film studies class, you must select a contemporary filmmaker—you are trying to decide between Martin Scorsese and Spike Lee—and examine how at least three of his films demonstrate a distinctive point of view on a particular subject.

These writing assignments are typical of those you will undertake during your college years. In fact, such assignments are also common for those in professional life: scientists writing environmental impact statements, social scientists writing accounts of their research for professional journals, film critics showing how the latest effort by a filmmaker fits into the general body of his or her work.

Core Skills

To succeed in such assignments, you will need to develop and hone particular skills in critical reading, thinking, and writing. You must develop—not necessarily in this order—the ability to

- read and accurately *summarize* a selection of material on your subject;
- determine the quality and relevance of your sources through a process of *critical reading* and assessment;
- *synthesize* different sources by discovering the relationships among them and showing how these relationships produce insights about the subject under discussion;
- *analyze* sources by applying particular perspectives and theories to your data;
- develop effective techniques for (1) discovering and using pertinent, authoritative information and ideas and (2) presenting the results of your work in generally accepted disciplinary formats.

A Sequence for Academic Writing will help you to meet these goals. You will learn techniques for preparing and writing the summary, critique, analysis, and synthesis because we have found that these are the core skills you must master if you are to succeed as a writer, regardless of your major. In conversations with faculty across the curriculum, time and again we have been struck by a shared desire to see students thinking and writing in subject-appropriate ways. Psychology, biology, and engineering teachers want you to think, talk, and write like psychologists, biologists, and engineers. We set out, therefore, to learn the strategies writers use to enter conversations in their respective disciplines. We discovered that four readily

learned strategies—summary, critique, synthesis, and analysis—provided the basis for the great majority of writing in freshman- through senior-level courses, and in courses across disciplines. We therefore made these skills the centerpiece of instruction for this book.

Applications Beyond College

While summary, critique, synthesis, and analysis are primary critical thinking and writing skills practiced throughout the university, these skills are also crucial to the work you will do in your life outside the university. In the professional world, people write letters, memos, and reports in which they must summarize procedures and the like. Critical reading and critique are important skills for writing legal briefs, business plans, and policy briefs. In addition, these same types of documents—common in the legal, business, and political worlds, respectively—involve synthesis. A business plan, for example, will often include a synthesis of ideas and proposals in one coherent plan. Finally, the ability to analyze complex data, processes, or ideas, to apply theories or perspectives to particular subjects, and then to effectively convey the results of analysis in writing is integral to writing in medicine, law, politics, business—in short, just about any of the professions in which you may later find yourself.

Emphasis on Process

Our focus upon these four core skills culminates in a chapter on Research, in which you will draw upon your work in the previous chapters to write a research paper. This chapter leads you through the research process, from finding a subject and developing a research question, to conducting research and drafting a paper, complete with in-text and end citation in the most common formats (MLA and APA). In fact, all of the chapters include a focus upon the *processes* of summary, critique, synthesis, and analysis. We emphasize that these skills involve steps in a process, and we break the processes into their constituent steps. Thinking, reading, and writing are all different—although interconnected—processes, and throughout this text you will find references to the processes involved in these tasks. Further, we devote an entire chapter to writing itself as a process, and to crucial elements of that process for college writers: theses, introductions, and conclusions.

It is important to emphasize that while we have broken down the reading, thinking, and writing processes into steps, we don't mean to imply that there is only one way to approach these processes. Instead, our experience as instructors shows us that students who are presented with suggestions for engaging in the processes of academic writing can then go on to adapt these suggestions to their own learning and working styles. We encourage you to try our approaches, modifying and revising them as suits your particular needs and abilities.

Many key features in *A Sequence for Academic Writing* should enhance your understanding of the material. Scattered through the chapters are brief writing *exercises*, as well as longer *writing assignments*. *Boxed* material provides useful summaries and hints relating to points covered at greater

length in the text. *Model student papers* provide specific examples of student responses to writing assignments discussed in the text.

Students often view introductory college writing courses as unnecessary and irrelevant distractions from their subject-oriented courses. But success in these disciplinary courses is directly correlated to the ability to perform assigned reading and writing tasks. Professors in disciplinary courses generally do not teach reading and writing skills, though they do take such skills for granted in their students. (And if your college professors expect you to possess solid reading and writing skills, just imagine the expectations of your future employers, co-workers, and clients!) Beyond the need for developing your writing skills, however, don't underestimate the sense of satisfaction, even enjoyment, you will derive from becoming a more skillful reader and writer. You may not have chosen to enroll in your present writing course, but it could well become one of the most valuable—and interesting—of your college career.

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