

Writing Effectively

SECOND EDITION



Beth S. Neman



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Writing Effectively, Second Edition

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Writing Effectively

To my students and
my family,
Albert, David, and Dan



Preface

Writing Effectively, Second Edition, is a student-centered, process-based, reader-focused text. It is structured so that students are led companionably step by step through the process of writing expository compositions, compositions that effectively engage their readers.

The text is student centered in that its every feature is designed to meet specific student needs. I address the student-readers directly; try to anticipate their questions, doubts, and problems; and encourage them to experiment in their writing. The abundance of exercises permits students to “Try Out” for themselves the principles the text endorses and to form their own judgments. More important, the exercises offer students plentiful opportunities to explore various strategies to fit their varying purposes and to find those strategies with which they are most comfortable personally. Students also especially value the comprehensive guidelines and checklists that conclude each section.

Writing Effectively is process based. Approaching writing as a process rather than a product, it offers practical guidance in mastering all the steps of prewriting, writing, and revising and provides recursive opportunities as well. In terms of contemporary composition theory, *Writing Effectively* adopts an eclectic process approach, including appropriate useful material from both the expressionist and the new rhetorical (i.e., structural) process approaches. Expressionist thought is influential, for example, in the important section on invention with its emphasis on free writing and also in the exercise-filled section on sharpening observation techniques to develop

vivid and specific detail. On the other hand, because I believe that lack of focus and lack of adequate support are the most common and the most damaging problems inexperienced writers face, thesis, support, and other aspects of the structural perspective are central to this text.

Writing Effectively is reader focused, rhetorically oriented. Throughout, the text emphasizes writers' relationships with their readers. It conceives of the purpose of expository writing to be convincing readers that what the writer wants to say, the point he or she wants to make, is valid and worth their while. In the words of the text: "Convincing and satisfying your readers is the whole point of writing effectively."

NEW IN THE SECOND EDITION

The qualities that brought praise to the first edition have been retained in the second. The text's all-around teachability is intact, as is its research-based soundness. The companionable voice of its teacher-author remains, as does its ability to help students recognize, and thus avoid, the pitfalls that cause inexperienced writers to stumble. Remaining also are innovative features readers have found helpful, such as the "although" clause concept, exercises in sensual observation, the "George Washington"—inventory classroom exercise, a new approach to the precise use of imagery and other diction, an alphabetically accessible handbook, exemplification from essays available in the reader. And the volume is still comprehensive—including rhetoric, reader, and handbook, chapters on critical analyses and research papers, traditional and sentence-combining exercises.

The second edition should be even more teachable and more conducive to learning than the first because the text has been restructured and streamlined into a more pedagogically effective format. In addition, some changes have been made to build on the strengths of the original in response to suggestions of teachers and students. In the second edition, I make an even greater effort to accommodate individual styles of learning and teaching—in particular, to take into account both subjective and objective modes of thinking.

- The invention portion has been expanded in the second edition to serve the individual needs better both of those students who respond more readily to free writing and those who find inventorying and listing a greater spur to their creative thought.
- Furthermore, as early as Part One, the second edition offers students the option of outside sources by providing them information on how to use this material in their writing, thus freeing them from the limited confines of their own thoughts and experience.
- In order to accommodate a wide variety of learning interests, the research-paper chapter has been extensively revised toward an interdisciplinary focus. In the documentation portion, for instance,

the new MLA system is discussed in detail, and the systems of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Chemical Society (ACS) are also given significant mention.

- To vary the pace and add more pleasure to the learning experience, I have resequenced the contents of Part Two, interspersing sentence-combining chapters between the more overtly theoretical ones.
- Because many instructors like to teach from student samples and students often feel more comfortable with papers of those who are facing the same problems as they are themselves, I have expanded the student writing within the text and have added to the anthology of professional essays a selection of typical student papers, including a first-draft/revision sequence.
- A number of new exercises have been introduced, offering even more diversified opportunities for students to “try it out,” to think through on their own what the text has to say. In addition, the assignments at the chapters’ ends have been enriched by suggestions garnered from a survey of favorite assignments from faculty across the curriculum and across the nation.

CONTENTS

Part One: Writing the First Paper

Part One offers some exciting classroom experiences for those difficult first days. But the main purpose of this section is to help ease the first-paper paradox of students needing to be instantly familiar with the entire writing process. To give students the chance to build the confidence upon which their writing success depends, Part One provides, for the one or two weeks that precede the first assigned paper, the *essential* understandings for writing that paper—and indeed all others.

Part Two: Convincing Your Readers Through the Writing Process

Part Two sections that process into the three teachable—though admittedly somewhat artificial—writing stages of prewriting, writing, and revising so that instructor and students can approach specific writing problems analytically with appropriate exercises and activities. It then offers a final section, “Convincing Your Readers Through Style,” which helps students learn to create their style through their conscious choice of syntax and diction.

In “The Prewriting Stage,” Chapter 1 offers students a number of useful strategies to help them discover and organize their ideas. Chapter 2 breaks the pace and gives students what classroom experience indicates is a much-needed change in their intellectual activities with the introduction

of sentence-combining exercises. In Chapter 3 I direct the students' thinking toward their readers and suggest tactics for incorporating their rhetorical purposes into their prewriting planning and into the paper itself.

In "The Writing Stage," Chapter 4 gives students practical advice and practice in the difficult tasks of starting up and concluding their essays. It also provides insight and guidance in structuring paragraphs or paragraph clusters so students may present their points most clearly. But the main emphasis in this chapter is on students' developing vivid and specific support for their points and a set of proven exercises in observation techniques to help them do so. In Chapter 5, students have the opportunity to further their understanding of point and support with a set of sentence-combining exercises specifically tailored for that purpose.

"The Rewriting Stage" has been divided into two chapters to reflect the significant distinction between holistic revision, Chapter 6, and editing, Chapter 7. *Writing Effectively* assumes that revising (in the first sense) is a natural culmination of the writing process. Thus, all the preceding text, in some way, leads to the sixth chapter. It is a particularly important one, for I believe that it is while rewriting—especially after teacher intervention—that students actually learn to write.

Discussion of mechanics and grammar has been reserved for Chapter 7. Research has shown that too-careful attention to mechanics while composing inhibits creativity (and can even lead to blocking) and that aiming at total correctness in the first draft is wasted effort. Confused syntax is often a mere reflection of confused thinking that disappears when the thoughts are untangled. But at the end of the process, knowledgeable editing and then proofreading are, of course, essential; and Chapter 7 provides a thorough review of syntax and a detailed treatment of the most salient mechanical problems.

The final section of Part Two, "Convincing Your Readers Through Style," helps students learn to improve their style by practicing a conscious choice of diction in Chapter 9 and of syntax in the sentence-combining exercises in Chapter 8.

A word should be said here about sentence-combining exercises, which, having survived even the adoration of faddists who proclaimed them a universal panacea, are now considered, simply, as among the most useful composition exercises available. Having been part of the carefully controlled sentence-combining research at Miami University,* I can add a personal endorsement. There is, I think, a good reason that these exercises, especially the contextual ones, tend to improve student writing. In isolating technique from content, they provide opportunities for making—and later for discussing—conscious stylistic and structural decisions without the

*See Morenberg, Daiker, and Kerek, "Sentence-Combining at the College Level: An Experimental Study," *Research in the Teaching of English*, 12 Oct. 1978, 245–50.

often-crippling impediment of personal ego-involvement. The exercises thus help develop sound authorial judgment. In the new *Writing Effectively*, where chapters containing sentence combining are interspersed, heightened student interest can be maintained, and the exercises can be used with maximum pedagogical efficacy.

Part Three: Writing Special Kinds of Expository Essays

Part Three helps students apply the knowledge they have gained about writing expository essays in general to the two such essays most frequently assigned in college classes, the research paper (Chapter 10) and the critical analysis (Chapter 11). Both chapters offer detailed, practical guidance, and both include some especially helpful features. Chapter 10, for instance, introduces note-taking and documentation procedures that all but eliminate inadvertent plagiarism. Chapter 11 includes a section on close reading that gives students a definite sense of what the analytical process is all about.

Part Four: A Sampler of Professional Essays and Student Papers

Part Five offers a selection of brief essays by professional writers, parts of which are quoted extensively as examples throughout the text. Including these essays makes it possible for readers to study examples in context and also to check the validity of any point the text makes about writing. Part Four also includes a small section of student papers, which supply the substance for a number of Try It Out exercises.

Part Five: Revision Guide

Part Five consists of alphabetically arranged, brief entries to answer any question a student is likely to raise about grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, or spelling. Because of the alphabetical arrangement, full exemplification, and extensive cross-referencing, the Guide is easily accessible.

Writing Effectively is based on what I have learned about the needs of beginning writing students from my own years of classroom experience and from my research into the experience of other teachers. I hope that you who study from it and you who teach it will gain both knowledge and pleasure from using this book.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A second edition builds on a first edition, and I continue to be grateful to all those who contributed to and helped produce the first edition of *Writing*

Effectively. In particular, I again want to thank Nancy Bates, whose extensive knowledge enlightens and whose quick wit enlivens the Revision Guide; Daniel Neman, a student himself at the time, whose intelligent curiosity and humor are largely responsible for the quality of the exercises; and Beverly Kolz, the first edition's considerate, helpful, and able editor.

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Beth S. Neman



Before You Begin

Composition courses suffer from bad press; there is no question about it. Many students actually believe the bad notices and thus come into the course thinking of learning to write as either an impossibly difficult or a worthlessly easy task. Some of these students think it is impossible to learn to write because they see writing ability as a talent a person either has or has not, a gift with which only a few lucky geniuses have been blessed. Others think that learning to write is too mechanical a procedure to bother very much about. They believe that to write well a person need only follow an easily memorized formula that they are certain all composition teachers know but just fail to communicate. Though these views are widely held, they are both demonstrably false.

A well-written essay is derived neither from a mechanical formula nor from a stroke of genius. There is no magical way just to “fill in the blank” or “fulfill the specifications” and write anything but the dreariest of exercises. A glance at some of the articles in your favorite magazine (or at those in Part Four of this book) will convince you that no single formula or series of formulas could possibly account for the rich diversity of human thought they display. And although natural ability certainly helps a writer, the fact that a few people are particularly skilled does not suggest the futility of others’ trying to learn to write well any more than the performance of a superb Olympic diver should restrain the rest of us from learning to swim.

The truth is that writing—like swimming or playing bridge or driving

a car—is an activity that can be understood in terms of its overall purpose. Stripped of the mystique it has acquired, writing is simply the formulating of thought, the shaping of thought into sentences and arranging them on a page; its purpose—to convince readers that this thought is true or right or good.

Although writing is thus as learnable as any other skill, the process is rarely easy. For writing is inextricably bound up with thought, and thinking is just about the hardest thing we do. Nevertheless, I insist that learning to write, however strenuous the undertaking, will be worthwhile. First, if you learn to write effectively, you will be able to get your ideas across to others. Writing effectively will permit others not only to understand the essence of what you have to say, but also to appreciate its merits; and that means that never again should lack of writing skill prevent you from being credited for what you know or what you have accomplished. Second, you will increase your ability to think clearly and logically, for this kind of thinking necessarily precedes or coincides with the writing of effective, well-organized prose. And third, learning to write also offers a creative dividend: it puts you in touch with your own thought. For in exploring and ordering your thinking as you write, you will often discover exciting new ideas.



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