

THE SHORT HANDBOOK FOR

# Writers

Gerald J. Schiffhorst  
John F. Schell



**Gerald J. Schiffhorst**

*University of Central Florida*

**John F. Schell**

*University of Central Florida*

**THE SHORT  
HANDBOOK FOR**  
*Writers*

**McGraw-Hill, Inc.**

New York St. Louis San Francisco  
Auckland Bogotá Caracas  
Hamburg Lisbon London  
Madrid Mexico Milan Montreal  
New Delhi Paris San Juan  
São Paulo Singapore Sydney  
Tokyo Toronto

---

This book was developed by STEVEN PENSINGER, Inc.

## **The Short Handbook for Writers**

Copyright © 1991 by McGraw-Hill, Inc. All rights reserved. Previously published under the title of *Short English Handbook*. Copyright © 1986, 1982, 1979 by Scott, Foresman and Company. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Except as permitted under the United States Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a data base or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

9 10 FGRFGR 9 9 8 7 6

ISBN 0-07-055288-6

This book was set in Bookman Light by York Graphic Services, Inc.

The editors were Steve Pensinger and Curt Berkowitz;  
the designer was Robin Hoffman;  
the production supervisor was Kathryn Porzio.  
Arcata Graphics/Fairfield was printer and binder.

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Schiffhorst, Gerald J.

The short handbook for writers / Gerald J. Schiffhorst, John F. Schell.  
p. cm.

Rev. ed. of: *Short English handbook* / David E. Fear. 3rd ed. 1986.  
Includes index.

ISBN 0-07-055288-6

1. English language—Rhetoric. 2. English language—  
Grammar—1950- I. Schell, John. II. Fear, David E., (date).  
Short English handbook. III. Title.

PR1408.F38 1991

90-44129

808'.042 — dc20

---

## About the Authors

---

**Gerald J. Schiffhorst** is Professor of English at the University of Central Florida, where he has taught writing since 1970 and has chaired the composition program. He has degrees from St. Louis and Washington Universities and is the author of two books and numerous articles on Renaissance literature.

**John F. Schell** chairs the English Department at the University of Central Florida, where he has been Professor of English since 1987. He has degrees from Drew and Vanderbilt Universities. Among his other publications is *Writing on the Job* (with John Stratton).

---

## Preface

---

Our purpose in this book is to provide students with a handy source of reference as they write and an extensive guide to the composing process. As such, *The Short Handbook for Writers* can function both as a classroom text and as an independent tool for students responding to questions posed by their composition instructors. Readers familiar with the three successful editions of *Short English Handbook*, of which the present volume is a major revision, will see that our new title reflects not merely a new publisher but a more comprehensive view of writing. The first five chapters expand the earlier treatment of prewriting, composing, and revising to include separate discussions of the role of the reader and of persuasive writing. The three divisions of this text indicate its distinct purposes: Part I guides the student through the writing process, including rhetorical emphasis on the sentence and paragraph; Part II serves as

a source of reference on matters of grammar, punctuation, and diction; and Part III presents most of the major practical writing applications that composition students encounter, from letters and literary analyses to research papers. This section includes a sample student review, literary analysis, and research paper (in MLA style).

We provide a useful source of clear, brief answers to the major questions that arise during the composing process. We present these explanations and examples in an immediately accessible form that will apply to students' needs. In the Guide to Style (Part II), we have used concise entries that state a point, explain it briefly, then present examples clearly labelled "weak/improved" or "correct/incorrect." Examples here and elsewhere in the book come from student writing. Nearly every section includes exercises for classroom or independent application. We have tried to rely as little as possible on formal terminology, but we explain essential terms both in the text and in the Glossary of Terms.

We are pleased to acknowledge the assistance of many students and colleagues at the University of Central Florida and elsewhere. Stephen H. Goldman, University of Kansas; Charles Nash, Cottey College; Mitchell E. Summerlin, John C. Calhoun State Community College; and Jane Marmaduke Woodman, University of North Carolina at Asheville, provided helpful suggestions during the revision. And we are grateful to Russell Kesler for his special assistance, as well as to Richard Adicks, Vicky Brain, Eileen Oswald, Sharon Johnston, Gail Pentz, and Susan Strasshofer. Lynn Butler Schiffhorst made an invaluable contribution, along with our editors, Steve Pensinger and Curt Berkowitz, whose support and guidance made the book possible.

*Gerald J. Schiffhorst*

*John F. Schell*

---

## Contents

---

*Preface* xiii

### **PART I** **A GUIDE TO THE WRITING PROCESS**

#### **Chapter 1** **Discovering and Exploring Ideas 3**

*Overview* 3

1. *Exploring ideas* 5

#### **Chapter 2** **Considering Your Writing Context, Reader, and Role 16**

2. *Considering the writing context* 17

3. *Considering your readers* 18

4. *Considering your role as writer* 25

**Chapter 3**  
**Drafting the Essay 30**

- 5. *Limiting the topic* 31
- 6. *Clarifying your purpose with a thesis* 34
- 7. *Planning your draft with an outline* 39
- 8. *Writing the introductory paragraph* 44
- 9. *Writing the concluding paragraph* 47

**Chapter 4**  
**Revising and Editing 50**

- 10. *Revising for overall meaning* 52
- 11. *Revising for structure* 53
- 12. *Revising for style* 54
  - a. *Checking the point of view* 55
  - b. *Relying on topic sentences* 56
- 13. *Using collaboration in revising* 59
- 14. *Revising with a word processor* 60
- 15. *Editing for errors* 61

**Chapter 5**  
**Writing Persuasively 68**

- 16. *Defining your terms* 69
- 17. *Using solid evidence* 70
- 18. *Being reasonable* 74
- 19. *Using logical reasoning* 76
- 20. *Avoiding logical fallacies* 84

**Chapter 6**  
**Writing Paragraphs 90**

- 21. *Using a topic sentence* 91
- 22. *Unifying the paragraph* 95
- 23. *Achieving paragraph coherence* 98
  - a. *Following a clear order* 99
  - b. *Using transitional devices* 104
- 24. *Developing paragraphs fully* 111
  - a. *Examples* 111



- b. *Comparison and contrast* 115
- c. *Definition* 117
- d. *Analogy* 118
- e. *Classification* 118
- f. *Cause and effect* 119

## **Chapter 7**

### **Writing Sentences 121**

- 25. *Subordination* 122
- 26. *Coordination* 130
- 27. *Combining sentence elements* 130
- 28. *Emphasis* 135
- 29. *Avoiding awkwardness* 141
- 30. *Well-placed modifiers* 144
- 31. *Logical predicates* 150
- 32. *Logical comparisons* 152
- 33. *Parallel structures* 155

## **PART II**

### **A GUIDE TO STYLE**

## **Chapter 8**

### **Basic Grammar 161**

- 34. *Parts of speech* 162
- 35. *The elements of a sentence* 174
- 36. *Fragments* 178
- 37. *Fused sentences and comma splices* 182
- 38. *Subject-verb agreement* 186
- 39. *Pronoun-antecedent agreement* 192
- 40. *Pronoun reference* 196
- 41. *Cases of pronouns* 200
- 42. *Adjectives and adverbs* 204
- 43. *Tenses of verbs* 208
- 44. *Principal parts of verbs* 214
- 45. *Mood* 218
- 46. *Consistent verbs and pronouns* 220

## **Chapter 9**

### **Punctuation and Mechanics 225**

- 47. *Commas with separate elements* 226
  - a. *Coordinating conjunctions* 226
  - b. *Introductory phrases and clauses* 227
  - c. *Items in a series* 228
  - d. *Coordinate adjectives* 229
- 48. *Commas with interrupting elements* 231
  - a. *Nonrestrictive modifiers* 232
  - b. *Appositives* 234
  - c. *Parenthetical elements* 234
  - d. *Transitional expressions* 235
- 49. *Commas in numbers, addresses, titles, and quotations* 237
- 50. *Unnecessary commas* 240
- 51. *Period* 242
- 52. *Question mark* 243
- 53. *Exclamation point* 244
- 54. *Semicolon* 246
- 55. *Colon* 250
- 56. *Dash* 253
- 57. *Parentheses* 254
- 58. *Quotation marks* 255
  - a. *Direct quotations* 256
  - b. *Quotation within a quotation* 257
  - c. *With other punctuation* 258
  - d. *Ellipsis* 259
  - e. *Brackets* 260
- 59. *Italics* 262
- 60. *Apostrophe* 265
- 61. *Hyphen* 268
- 62. *Capitalization* 270
- 63. *Abbreviations* 274
- 64. *Numbers* 276
- 65. *Manuscript form* 279
- 66. *Spelling* 280

## **Chapter 10**

### **Appropriate Diction 284**

- 67. *Appropriate level* 285
- 68. *Consistent usage* 290
- 69. *Idiom* 292
- 70. *Specificity* 294
- 71. *Denotation* 298
- 72. *Connotation* 300
- 73. *Figures of speech* 305
- 74. *Consistent figures of speech* 308
- 75. *Triteness* 310
- 76. *Pretentiousness* 313
- 77. *Jargon* 315
- 78. *Repetition and wordiness* 317

## **PART III**

### **A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO WRITING**

## **Chapter 11**

### **The Research Paper 325**

- 79. *Selecting a topic* 327
- 80. *Exploring library resources* 329
- 81. *Evaluating sources* 334
- 82. *Preparing a preliminary thesis and outline* 337
- 83. *Taking notes* 339
- 84. *The rough draft* 351
- 85. *Documenting sources accurately* 354
  - a. *APA style* 360
  - b. *Alternate endnote/footnote style* 363
- 86. *Constructing the Works Cited list* 364
- 87. *Research paper format (MLA style)* 371

## **Chapter 12**

### **Special Types of Academic Writing 388**

- 88. *Writing essay examinations* 389

89. *Writing reviews* 394  
90. *Writing literary analyses* 400

**Chapter 13**

**Job-Related Writing 411**

91. *Business letters* 412  
92. *Résumés* 416  
93. *Writing memos* 419

*Glossary of Terms* 422

*Glossary of Usage* 430

*Acknowledgments* 447

*Index* 450

P A R T



A GUIDE  
TO THE  
WRITING  
PROCESS



## CHAPTER

# 1

**Discovering and**

**Exploring Ideas**

## **Overview**

Instead of reading this book straight through, you will probably refer to various chapters and entries as you need them. Even so, to put the individual entries in perspective and to help you get the most from the time you spend writing, we will begin with an overview of the whole subject of writing.

We are not going to present a simple, foolproof formula guaranteed to make you a competent writer. Unfortunately, there is no such formula. Writing is like playing tennis: you learn and improve by doing—by practicing, by listening to criticism, and by practicing some more. Good writing does more than just avoid blunders. It holds the reader's interest. When you write well, you begin by thinking out what you want to say. Then you say it, in clear, logical sentences and carefully chosen words, expressing your thoughts and feelings so that your audience will understand them just as you want them to be understood.

Most writing—certainly all the writing we will be concerned with here—has a purpose and a method suited to it. Writers tell stories: they say what happens (narration). Or they argue: they speak for or against something (argument). Or they describe: they tell how something looks or sounds or moves (description). Or they explain: they tell how something works (exposition) or why something happens (analysis). As you plan what you want to say in a paper, you will also be deciding which of these five approaches you will use. This does not mean that you will choose one approach and leave the rest in storage. You may be called on to explain, argue, describe, analyze, or narrate, or explain and argue, or describe and narrate, or do all of these in one paper. Nevertheless, the assignment or your own purpose or a combination of your purpose and your material will usually make one approach predominant. For example, you may start out by describing ways in which consumers are deceived by television commercials and then end up arguing that there should be stricter regulation of such advertising. Since the emphasis in this case should fall on the argument, your purpose in describing commercials is to prepare your reader to believe as you do about regulation.

In an essay on Al-A-Teen, for example, your main purpose might be to explain what this support group does and how it functions. In so doing, you might compare it with Alcoholics Anonymous, or you might classify various programs for substance abusers and their families in relation to in-patient or



out-patient treatment centers. You might also analyze different theories of teenage alcoholism and drug abuse, using quotations from magazine and newspaper articles dealing with the causes of these problems. Perhaps you could attend an Al-A-Teen meeting and then describe the range of people you met or write a narrative account of your visit. Finally, you might conclude an essay with your opinion of the issues involved: Is Al-A-Teen helping to solve the problems faced by adolescents who live with substance abusers? Still, your essay would remain mostly exploratory: to explain the role of Al-A-Teen, based on your experience and reading.

To a certain degree, all such writing must be persuasive. It must persuade readers that it is worth their time and attention. What you have to say will get a fair hearing only if you make sure it deserves one. Writing that deserves to be read is the kind we will be concerned with throughout this book.

Writing is a process of generating ideas; and the first four chapters divide this ongoing process, for convenience, into prewriting, drafting, and revising. At each stage, focus on a few things at a time. Allow time to plan and develop ideas by learning to think on paper, and do not worry about editing or correcting what you write until the composing process has run its course. Since writing is a complex activity, the stages often overlap or double back: you will simultaneously generate and react to your work while considering your purpose and reader. But you must first find something to say.

## 1

## Explore what you want to say.

Most writers have experienced the frustration of being unable to think of a fresh idea—or of discovering one too late. Thinking through some of the many possible subjects for writing and exploring what we already know about those subjects can keep us from becoming “stuck” with nothing to say. Any-