

ONE to ONE

RESOURCES FOR CONFERENCE-CENTERED WRITING

T H I R D
E D I T I O N



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Resources for Conference-Centered Writing
Third Edition

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PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

As in the first and second editions, the changes in the third edition of *One to One* reflect the suggestions of teachers and students who have used the book over the past several years. Our meetings with teachers at workshops, conventions, and informal get-togethers have reaffirmed our belief that the personal interaction between student and teacher that one-to-one instruction promotes is an effective and rewarding way to teach composition.

In each edition of the text we tried to make the explanations, sample papers, and writing task directions thorough enough and clear enough to allow the teacher to devote class time (always precious) to the instruction of individual writers rather than to the explanation of assignments. In the third edition we continue to refine that aspect of the text and also to add fresh student and professional examples throughout Part One, Getting Started, and Part Two, Writing Tasks. We also revised Part Three, Daily Writing, to make this section even more independent of teacher direction. And, finally, we refined Part Four, Index for Writers, and added a full usage glossary.

Beyond such refinements, we also revised the text by integrating current research in the composing process and in audience analysis in such key chapters as "Listing and Writing for a Reader," "The Composing Process," and "Deductive Essay." Furthermore, to stress the composing process, we expanded the deductive essay chapter to include a second student essay and a professional essay, both with commentary in the margin that traces each writer's strategy.

In order to involve students more deeply in the writing process, we made one other significant change in this edition. Wherever possible, we have had student writers speak about their writing themselves — both in introductory comments and in comments in the margins alongside their works. We hope the addition of these additional voices in *One to One* deepens the lessons that student writers will draw from the examples.

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TO THE STUDENT

Two activities are important to learn to write well. First is to write, and to write a lot. Second is to get sound advice about your writing from someone who knows how to write. The class you're in will bring these two activities together.

Your teacher has probably selected *One to One* in order to support conference-centered instruction. Although *conference-centered instruction* might sound a little fancy, the concept behind the phrase is quite simple. It involves nothing more than you and your teacher sitting side-by-side and talking about each paper you write. The conference will last from three to fifteen minutes, depending on the length of the assignment. But no matter how long the conference lasts, the major activities will be the same — the teacher will read your work, listen to your comments, and offer advice and directions to help you develop your writing strengths and weaknesses. Simple enough, but to make it work takes some effort. We want to give you a few suggestions that will make that effort easier.

First, we suggest you become an active participant in the conference. Don't just put yourself in the teacher's hands and wait for your fate. Instead, identify and talk about the problems you faced in the assignment. Ask specific questions about solving the problems. Take some brief notes that capture your teacher's responses and recheck them when the conference ends.

We also suggest you try to see your instructor as a writing coach rather than as a judge. Just as a coach wants an athlete to win in competition, your teacher wants you to succeed at writing. If you don't agree with a particular comment about your work, say so and present your view as clearly as you can without arguing or being defensive. Then let your teacher explain the reasons behind the comment. This way the two of you will be building a working relationship that fosters success.

Third, make an effort to treat your papers as works in progress. If you follow the advice of many successful writers who claim that to learn

to write well, the beginning writer must learn to rewrite, then you'll have no difficulty improving your writing. But if you come to a conference convinced that you've attained perfection in your writing, you'll have some trouble because a conference will often end with an assignment that requires you either to revise or rewrite a paper. Our best advice is to relax and keep in mind that the purpose of the conference is not just to get your work accepted but to improve your skills. View each assignment as a stage in the process of mastering different kinds of writing. Sometimes that mastery comes faster by rewriting a flawed paper rather than by starting a new one.

Finally, you can help make your conferences work by carefully studying the material your instructor assigns. Read the explanations, analyze the illustrations, review the marginal notes — do all this before you start to write. If you work in this way, you'll save valuable conference time by keeping the focus on your writing and not on explanations of the assignments you didn't read thoroughly.

A quick glance at the book will show you it's divided into four main parts and that the first three are subdivided into several sections, each identified by number or week. (The fourth part is arranged alphabetically.) Since the book teaches writing by getting you to write, each sub-section ends with an assignment called a "Writing Task" that's designed to help you learn the information presented in the section. In Part One, *Getting Started*, you'll learn to write for a reader, how to work through a four-step composing process, and how to combine the particulars of an experience with your reactions to it. In Part Two, *Writing Tasks*, you'll learn different ways to develop paragraphs and several ways to develop essays. In Part Three, *Daily Writing*, you'll go through nine weeks of writing practice that will help you overcome the fears you might have when facing a blank page. By working through daily writing tasks you'll also generate subjects and material for the more formal assignments in the course. In Part Four, *Index for Writers*, you'll find help with common problems beginning writers face: how to get sentences to flow together; where to put commas, semicolons, and apostrophes; when to use quotation marks, and so on.

In closing we'd like to offer one last thought. Soon after completing Part One, *Getting Started*, you may discover that you are doing writing tasks that are different from the ones your neighbor is doing. Don't be concerned about that. In one-to-one instruction individual students work on what they need at the moment. Our advice is to take advantage of the flexibility in one-to-one instruction and use this text to help you find your own path to the common goal — good writing.

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PART ONE

GETTING STARTED

This part will introduce you — in three chapters, with Writing Tasks included in each — to the process of putting your thoughts on paper. You will base the writing you do in this section on your own observation and experience, not on your ability to collect material from other writers' thoughts. In other words, you will not be researching but will be collecting, recording, and organizing your personal experiences.

Besides the primary question that plagues most beginning writers — “What should I write about?” — there is a second question usually linked to it — “How should I get started?” A third question, probably as fundamental as the other two, seldom gets consciously asked yet is important for the success of any written communication: “For whom am I writing?”

As for the first question, for every Writing Task you do in this part of the book we will guide you to something to write about. So for now that problem is solved. Our main goals in this section are to give you a simple way to start writing and to make you aware of your reader.

1 LISTING AND WRITING FOR A READER

Getting started on a written project may be the most critical point in the entire enterprise. Perhaps the difficulty has something to do with facing a blank page and knowing that page, and most likely many other blank pages, will have to be filled with words. Moreover, the words must be nudged into sentences. The sentences must link logically together and be fitted into paragraphs. The paragraphs must be assembled into a coherent essay, report, or letter. Besides all the nudging, fitting, and assembling, you must put in the squiggles called punctuation. And then there is spelling — the mind shudders. The part of the brain that sends energy to the arm freezes. Writer's elbow sets in. It's too painful to shape the words with a pen. You're blocked.

There is a way to overcome the block. Instead of worrying about all the meticulous arranging you have to do to finish a piece of writing, concentrate on randomly collecting the raw material that will make up the content. One way to do the collecting is to draw up a list.

Listing

Everyone is familiar with grocery lists. Consumer advocates often advise shoppers to make grocery lists before shopping. With a list in hand, the expedition won't turn into a spending spree. Well, the advice is equally valid for a writer.

A list works as an ordering device through which you can quickly gather the material you want to communicate to a reader. By writing a list you can rapidly capture fleeting details. A list can also fire your imagination and guide your direction. No doubt you can see how a piece of writing could easily form around a list of joyful or frightening experiences or around a list of dreams, fears, or memories. Now let's see how a list works.

Imagine a homemaker who is planning an Italian supper. After surveying the cupboard, she realizes she needs a few items to complete the menu and sees she's also short of juice and coffee. She quickly makes a simple list to remind herself to get what she needs.

juice
tomatoes
coffee
bread
onions

Five simple items. About a ten-minute trip with the list in hand to keep her on target. Of course, the plan may change — she may rearrange the list as she goes. For instance, she would probably pick up the tomatoes and onions at the same time because they would be in the produce section, then go to the nearby frozen-food compartment before stopping for coffee located somewhere near the center of the market, and end up at the bread rack near the checkout counter. The simple list makes her shopping a breeze.

Now imagine that our homemaker is going to use this simple list to write a note to someone else who plans to stop at the grocery store for her. She must now communicate with an audience — a reader. Somehow, to make the communication clear, the writer must anticipate the reader's mind.

Audience

The reader you address will influence choices you make about content and vocabulary when writing. If you were separately to tell a police officer, a parent, and a friend about the events at a party, you would select different details to emphasize for each person and different words to describe what you experienced. In speech you make this adaptation instantly and naturally, but when writing you must actively adjust your thinking to make the adaptation. It is essential, therefore, that before you move too far into planning a piece of writing, you should identify who the reader will be and anticipate what he or she needs to know to understand what you are trying to communicate.