

# Writings from Life

Tom Tyner



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*Breadan Publishing*

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# *Preface*

Writings from Life is a process-oriented writing textbook that helps students continue to grow and improve as writers. Students learn by writing, and the textbook provides a variety of writing assignments that require students to develop and apply different writing and thinking skills as they progress through the book.

## **Writing Process**

In each unit, students use the writing process in the text to develop their paper. The basic process of prewriting, drafting, revision, and editing is repeated in each unit, with new instructional elements introduced in each section that apply to the type of writing the students are doing. The process is repeated in each unit so that students become familiar and comfortable with the approach to use for any writing they may do.

The text also recognizes the individual differences among writers. For some writers, prewriting may involve detailed planning while for others, it may involve coming up with an idea to get started. The text acknowledges such differences and allows for individual flexibility within the writing process rather than a one-size-fits-all model. The textbook also recognizes that some students come to the course with considerable writing experience, and they are encouraged to meld what they learn from the text with their previous experiences to create the most effective personalized writing process.

## **Writing Assignments**

The title Writings from Life indicates the kind of writing students will do: writings based on their personal experiences, interests, observations, knowledge, beliefs, and opinions. They write about aspects of their lives, and the world around them, that they find most important, significant, and interesting. They use the writing process in the textbook, along with the instructional guides, to develop and express their ideas most effectively.

## **Writing as Communication**

Writings from Life also emphasizes writing as a form of communication. To that end, students write for different reading audiences, such as their classmates, and for a particular purpose: to inform, entertain, influence, educate, or move readers to action. The writing assignments in the text are *real* in that they are written for others and for a purpose, which is more meaningful than writing as a textbook exercise.

## Importance of Revision

Writings for Life also strongly emphasizes the role of *revision* in the writing process. Throughout the text, students work on revising and improving their writing in a number of areas: wording, organization, content development, paragraphing, openings and conclusions, transitional wording, and so on. The text provides specific revision guidelines for the type of writing students do in each unit.

## Commonality of Writers

The text also emphasizes to students the commonality of writers and the writing experience. It is assuring to students to discover that all writers share similar challenges: struggling to come up with a topic; figuring out how to begin a paper; rereading previous sentences to decide what to write next; working to stay on topic; considering the best way to end a particular paper. Once students understand that writing is a messy, non-linear process shared by all writers, they understand that the head scratching, the long pauses, the failure to find the right word, or the constant rereading of sentences is all a part of the writing experience. Instead of thinking, “I am wasting so much time,” they realize, “This is what writers do.” Such assurance leads to greater confidence and better writing.

## Writing Correctness

As the last step in the writing process in each unit, students proofread and edit their papers to eliminate errors. Correct writing is emphasized as the best way to showcase a writer’s ideas, as a courtesy to readers, and as a goal that all writer share.

Within each unit, the text provides instruction in the areas of punctuation, grammar usage, and spelling where writers have the most problems: run-on sentences and comma splices, sentence fragments, comma usage, subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, and so on. Students are also taught to proofread a paper several times, looking for a different kind of error each time. In addition, the text provides an editing checklist in each unit for students to apply to the paper they are working on.

## Writing Samples

Throughout the text are writing samples that students use in number of ways: to get ideas for their writing, to see how writers develop, organize, and paragraph their papers, to read and evaluate different openings and conclusions, to see how writers develop a thesis statement, to see how writers work dialogue into their writing effectively, and so on. The sample writings provide models for the type of writing that students are doing and material for class or group discussion.



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# Unit One

## *Experiences*

Our lives are made up of thousands of experiences, most of which we forget over time. However, some experiences remain etched in our minds, forever memorable due to the impact they made on our lives.

Such experiences are a valuable part of our backgrounds, often shaping the way that we think and feel about life. For writers, life experiences are a rich source for writing, one that you will tap for your writing assignment in this unit.

Experiences can have a powerful effect on us for different reasons. They may be painful, thrilling, disappointing, fulfilling, frightening, or amusing, or trigger a range of different emotions. They may affect us in ways that we are very aware of and in other more subtle ways. Analyzing the impact of a particular experience is a valuable part of the writing process.

Writing about a personal experience, called *narrative* writing, is your first writing assignment for several reasons. First, since you have a number of experiences to draw from, finding a topic should not be too difficult. Second, since you will select an experience that you remember well, you can draw on your recall of the experience to write the paper. Third, you will write about the experience *chronologically*, in the time order that it occurred, one of the most natural organizations for a paper. Fourth, writing about a personal experience allows you to tell, or *narrate*, a “true” story in a vivid, interesting way, and to analyze the impact that it had on you. Finally, narrative writing provides readers with an interesting story, a glimpse into the life of the writer, and an experience that they may relate to or learn from.

The papers that you write during the course will be for a reading audience, frequently your own classmates, along with your instructor. One writing consideration will be the impact that your writing may have on others: what they may find interesting, what they may learn, how they may react or respond, or how they may relate. As a writer, you share your thoughts with readers in ways that may affect their own lives.

## Why Write?

Writing texts often launch into writing activities without answering a question that is on some students’ minds: why write? While the value of effective writing may be evident to some students, it isn’t to all, and some may say, “I’m not going to write much beyond school, so why should I waste my time now? Writing has little to do

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with my future.” Such concerns certainly deserve a response, and there are good reasons for all students, and for people in general, to develop their writing skills. Here are a few you may or may not have considered:

1. Being able to write well is one mark of an educated person. All students should leave college with the writing skills to communicate effectively. If students don't develop these skills in college, they may always struggle with their writing.
2. For better or worse, other people judge us by the way that we write. Employers, for example, make critical judgments about job candidates based on their writing ability, often selecting the person with the best-written resume over all others.
3. Writing can be a rewarding activity. Whether people write journals, fiction, letters to the editor, or e-mails to friends, they often derive enjoyment and a sense of accomplishment from their writing.
4. There are not many jobs today that don't require some writing, particularly those that require at the least a four-year college degree or a two-year degree or certification. Report writing, self-evaluations, memos, e-mail communications, work-site improvement suggestions, questionnaires, inventory assessments, research write-ups, grant requests, letters to customers, suppliers, or clients, in-house studies, analysis of competitors, and marketing studies are commonplace writing tasks across the job market.
5. The age of electronic mail has put an added emphasis and value on writing. With the ease of e-mailing, more written communication is occurring today than ever, both personal and business. Never in recent times has the ability to write effectively been more useful or important.
6. Writing is often the most effective mode of communication, and in many instances, the best means to an end. People use writing for many purposes: to inquire into a health insurance billing; to request copies of college transcripts; to rally supporters for a peace demonstration; to convince trustees not to raise tuition; to provide experiences and work attributes to a potential employer. The written word is a powerful tool for which people find many uses.
7. Writing well builds self-confidence. Writers who are confident in their ability welcome educational and professional situations where writing is required. They are more apt to take courses that involve writing and to consider professions where writing skills are an asset. As writers improve their skills, they find more and more doors that open to them.

8. Writing well leads to college success. Good writers are at a great advantage in the classroom, often performing well in the many courses across the curriculum that require writing.
9. Good writing and sound thinking go together. Though some people can get by verbally with more style than substance, writers have only the quality of their thoughts and their ability to express them to rely upon. When an illogical thought sits on the page, no stylish flourishes can hide it from discerning readers. With writing, weak thinking is most easily exposed and sound thinking most highly valued. Writing also helps to develop sound thinking as writers learn to support their ideas convincingly, dissect an unsound argument, and organize and express their thoughts effectively.

## Writing Process

As you write your first paper, you will be using a writing process that is similar for most writers and that involves *prewriting*, *drafting*, *revising*, and *editing* steps. While all writers don't follow the same process, and may combine and configure parts of the process in individual ways, there are enough similarities about how people write to conclude that writing, at its best, is a process-oriented task.

The writing assignment for each unit will be divided into different parts beginning with pre-writing activities and followed by writing a first draft, revising and improving the draft, proofreading and editing the draft to eliminate errors, and writing the final paper. In each unit, you will be introduced to new writing considerations based on the writing task at hand, but the process itself will be duplicated and become a natural part of how you write.

The text also assumes that you have had other writing experiences both in school and out. The process approach in the text may be similar to your current writing practices, or it may extend or alter what you are doing. In the end, you may take what is most useful from the process approach in the text, combine it with what already works for you, and create a most effective writing process. If you have done little writing in the past, or have not used a process approach, the text will provide you with a writing process that will serve you well for most writing that you may do.

## Prewriting

In each prewriting section, you prepare to write the first draft of your paper by selecting a topic to write on and giving some thought to what you may want to include in your paper. In the prewriting sections of the text, you will use a variety of prewriting strategies that you will find useful for different writing tasks.

### Writing Assignment 1

The title of this text, Writings from Life, indicates the kind of writing you will do for the course: papers that are based on your experiences, interests, beliefs, and opinions. You are writing about aspects of your life, and the world around you, that you find important and significant. This first writing assignment begins your exploration.

You will select a particular experience from your life that you remember well and that has had an impact on you. As you recall memorable experiences, consider those that you remember best and that have affected you most profoundly. Through such experiences, you may have experienced a variety of emotions: excitement, joy, shock, anger, disappointment, sadness, regret, satisfaction, relief, shame, or a mixture of feelings. You will write about one particular experience that stands out and analyze its impact on you.

### Free Writing

Free writing is a prewriting activity that helps writers decide what experience to write about, what they may want to write about the experience, and how much they may remember about it. When you free write, you write whatever comes to your mind without concern for order, logic, or correctness. Free writing allows you to get thoughts on paper without being judged on your writing, and you take from your free writing whatever might help you write your paper.

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#### Prewriting Activity 1.1

Write freely for ten minutes or so on three or four different experiences that you remember well and that made an impact on your life. You may write about experiences from any time in your life. Write without hesitation or concern for what you are putting on paper. From your free writing, you may decide on a topic for your first paper and create some material that you will use in your first draft.

Sample free writing:

#1

When my daughter was about three, she ran into a brick that was part of the top of a low bookcase. I was in the room at the time. She screamed and I ran over and saw her forehead covered with blood. It scared the heck out of me and knowing that she was in pain hurt me even more. We rushed her to the doctor's office and they got her in fast. She had cut a good gash in her forehead and needed stitches. I remember feeling so terrible for her and not being able to do anything to help. They had to give her a shot in the forehead and that's when I lost it. I blacked out and fell on the floor. I couldn't stand seeing my baby in pain like that. Once I was revived and sitting in a chair, the stitches were in place and my daughter was no longer crying. The shot had numbed the cut area and she felt no pain. She got over the accident and was fine but I'll never forget it.

#2

I was on a relay in high school and our team won so I jumped in the pool to celebrate. Trouble was, one other team on an outside lane wasn't finished swimming yet, so because I jumped in, our team was disqualified. The referee came over and disqualified us because of my jumping in, and I swore at him, including the f word. The words just came out before I could think. He wasn't just the referee, he was also the principal of the high school that was hosting the meet. There were other consequences. I was kicked out of the rest of the meet. I was also suspended from the team after the referee called our principal and told him what had happened. One big slip of the tongue got me in a lot of trouble.

#3

I'd been working at this place for two years, and a job came up that had some oversight duties, like a supervisor although I'd still do what I was doing. I'd been there two years and thought I had a good chance for this job, which paid more money. But I didn't get the job. Instead, they gave it to a woman who hadn't been there as long as me. I thought I should have gotten it instead of her, and it messed me up for a while. I didn't understand why she got it and not me and I blamed my boss for not hiring me. I almost quit. But I finally confronted my boss on it, which wasn't easy, and what he said kind of opened my eyes. He saw me differently than I saw myself.

#4

When I was a young child, I remember my cousin had a little car that he rode on top of. It was a little car, but it would go almost ten miles an hour. Riding up and down in front of his house, he made it look easy, so I wanted to try. My uncle showed me how to use the hand throttle and break and warned me not to turn the hand throttle hard because the car would jump forward and go up on its back tires. I got on and slowly moved forward. I went down the street a ways, turned around, and then went back by my uncle the other way. I started to turn around again to come back, and

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somehow I turned the throttle handle hard. The car jumped forward and I slid off the back. Trouble was, I held onto the handle bars, so I was dragging on the street behind the moving car. It stopped when it hit the curb, and my uncle ran over. I was in shock and crying, and my legs and stomach were burning. I ended up with some good road burns and more pain than I'd ever experienced. To this day I remember that accident clearly and the days that followed in the doctor's office and the long nights when I couldn't sleep. I learned a painful lesson.

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### Prewriting Activity 1.2

Take some time to reflect on your free writing and also on other experiences that you may have not included. In the end, select an experience to write about following these suggestions.

1. Choose an experience that you want to write about and that you remember clearly.
  2. Choose an experience that readers - your classmates - may find interesting or get something out of.
  3. Choose an experience that had a powerful effect on your life, or that may still affect you.
- 

### Prewriting Activity 1.3

After you have decided upon a particular experience to write about, spend some time thinking about the impact of that experience on your life. Consider what you may have learned from it, how it may have changed you or your life circumstances, what you may have learned about yourself or other people, or how it may have changed your way of thinking about someone or something. Then write freely for a few minutes about the impact the experience has had on you, and include anything that comes to your mind.

#### Sample Freewriting

From #1

The horror of the moment is something I'll never forget, all of the blood and my little daughter screaming and crying and my not knowing how badly she was hurt. I think all of my love for her was crystallized in that moment of fear and pain. I also later realized that I can't protect my daughter from all of life's hurts, and that she's going

to go through some bad things like we all do. I probably need to prepare her better for that, but maybe this accident was proof enough. I also realized, although I already knew it, how precious she was to me, how any pain she felt I felt even greater, and how all I wanted was for her to be happy all the time. But I realize that isn't possible, and while I've tried more than anything to protect her from all of life's bad things, that maybe doesn't make her stronger, and I've got to not be so overly protective all the time so she can get stronger and be able to face more things as she gets older. I also realized that I have to be stronger for her, and my fainting in the doctor's office wasn't showing any strength but rather my really not being there and being strong for her when she needed to be strong. So I've got to get stronger myself and handle these situations better. These are some of the things I think about.

From #2

I realized that I really have to watch my mouth, that bad language comes out of it really easy when I get mad or upset and that I don't even think about it. I think that's because that's the way I've often responded around my brothers, just cussed them out when I get mad, and then I did it to the principal without thinking at all - it just happened. But more than that, I realized that when I mess up like I did, it affects more people than just me, and that made me feel ashamed of myself. I was ashamed at how my coach felt about what I did and our principal and of course my mom and dad and even my grandma found out about it. It was like a bad chain reaction and that really made it seem like a really big thing and I felt like I let everyone down. I read in the sports section when pro athletes mess up bad how they apologize to the coach and players and their family and all, and it always sounded phony to me, like they were just trying to get off the hook, but that's the way I felt, and I wanted everyone to know I was still a good person but something like what I did can mark you, at least for awhile, except there were always some kids at school who thought it was really cool and I admit I enjoyed their attention, so it went both ways, I felt ashamed and humiliated but then some guys made me feel like I'd done a cool thing but I know I didn't. Since that experience I've really watched myself and haven't let out the swearing when I get mad or frustrated. Really it's just a bad habit I need to break and I'm working on it. I don't really want to go through all that hassle again.

From #3

After that talk with my boss I really reevaluated myself as a worker and a fellow worker. My boss saw me as someone who got the job done but was basically at work just to punch the clock. I didn't interact much with the other workers or ever volunteer to do anything extra or help anyone else out who maybe got behind. The person he wanted for the promotion job was someone who was liked by the other workers and who made an effort to know them and even help someone out when they needed it. The woman that he hired he said had these qualities, and I didn't. The way I had looked at it, I had always been a good worker, got my job done, not messed



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around, and was a good employee for a few years. To me that should have been good for a promotion. But the boss saw it totally different. I wasn't someone who was going to lose her job but I wasn't someone that was going to get promoted either. That really hurt me bad and I was resentful and bitter and wanted to quit. But I stuck it out awhile and after a while I realized that the woman who was promoted was a nice person, someone I'd never taken the trouble to know, and the other workers liked her and didn't resent her getting promoted, and she was a fair person and tried to help make things better for the employees. So I had to really look at myself and the way people saw me, and being honest, I decided that I pretty much was who I was. I wasn't the kind of person to make a lot of friends or to go around wanting to help other workers. That just wasn't me. I had a couple good friends at work and that was enough. I did my job well, didn't complain, and that's what I wanted out of work. I wasn't going to change to get some promotion, and I probably wouldn't have been good for that job anyway. So I decided in the end that I'm ok with who I am and what I'm doing and I can live with that.

From #4

The pain I think is what I remember the most. I knew as a young child that I didn't want to experience that kind of pain again. I was afraid to ride any kind of a motorized car or bike or scooter after that, and I still am. I realized as I got a little older that it only takes one bad fall to really mess you up, and you never know when that's going to happen. So I've been pretty cautious because of that experience, and I still am today. It took me longer than most kids to learn to ride a bike, and I never got good on a skateboard or a scooter, probably because I was so cautious and anxious about falling. I realized that an accident like that, even at an early age, can stay with you for a long time, maybe a lifetime. I know it will also affect how I raise my own children if I have any. I know I'm not going to let them do anything like I did with that car. I also know that when they do ride a bike or something, they're going to wear helmets and pads and long pants, all the things I didn't have on when I took my spill. I can still remember the feeling of getting dragged along the street behind that car and it was like I wasn't able to let go of the handles. That was one scary experience for a six year old.

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## First Drafts

After you have completed your prewriting work, you are ready to write the first draft of your paper. This draft is the first version of your paper, the first time you put the complete experience into words. It will be followed by a second *revised* draft, and other subsequent drafts may follow until you are satisfied with the finished product. Writing drafts is a part of the writing process for most writers, and the writing usually improves with each draft.

Why do writers write drafts of a paper? Writing is a complex task, and seldom can any writer create a final, polished paper in one writing. The complexities of writing include choosing the best words to express your thoughts, organizing your thoughts in the most effective manner, including the best details and examples to develop your thoughts, adding new ideas as you write that you hadn't previously considered, assessing the impact of your writing on readers, and making sure that your paper is free of spelling, punctuation, or grammar errors.

Even the most experienced writers can't accomplish everything they want in a single writing. The drafting process is the natural way that many people improve their writing. Writers create drafts because that is how they write best. We have learned that through years of research that analyzed how people write, including effective student writers.

Of course, writing drafts without understanding how to improve them from one draft to the next is rather a waste of time. During this course, you will be provided specific *revision* guidelines to help you change and improve your drafts. Revision is a critical part of the writing process, and it leads ultimately to the best paper you can write.

### First Draft Guidelines

As you begin writing the first draft of your paper, keep the following in mind.

1. The purpose of your first draft is to get the experience on paper as clearly as you recall it. Don't worry about how you word your sentences or whether you make an occasional error.

Writing is a *recursive* activity, where writers continually go back and reread what they have written in a previous sentence or sentences to help them decide what to write next. Rereading sentences is not a waste of time; it provides you the momentum to continue writing and to make sure your next sentence follows logically from the previous ones.

2. Begin by providing some background information to prepare readers for the experience lying ahead. You might include your age at the time and describe