



SECOND EDITION

PASSAGES
A BEGINNING WRITER'S GUIDE

RICHARD
NORDQUIST

Passages

A BEGINNING WRITER'S GUIDE

Second Edition

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Preface

To become a better writer, a student needs to write—and rewrite and keep on writing—on a wide range of topics, for various audiences, and with different aims in mind. Based on this assumption, *Passages* guides students through the writing process, teaching strategies and skills in the context of particular assignments. In conventional terms, Part One is a rhetoric, Part Two a grammar. But neither part of the book is wholly conventional.

In terms of both structure and subject, the assignments in Part One progress from the fairly simple to the more complex. For example, the list of observations called for in the first chapter reappears as a discovery (or prewriting) strategy in later assignments. Likewise, the methods of paragraph development discussed in Chapters Two through Nine are recalled in the essay-length assignments in Chapters Ten through Fifteen. Thematically, the assignments proceed from the personal world of the student in the early chapters to more public concerns later on. Nonetheless, all of the assignments are broad enough to accommodate the particular interests of each writer. And, while the sequence of assignments is incremental, it is not inflexible: instructors can alter and reorder assignments to suit their own teaching needs.

Each chapter in Part One offers numerous examples and exercises to guide students through all stages of the assignment: discovering and exploring a topic, writing a rough draft, and revising (perhaps several times). This approach does not ignore the recursive nature of the writing process, nor is it an attempt to prescribe a single method of writing. On the contrary, by gradually introducing a wide variety of composing strategies, the assignments help students gain greater control over the way they write. What this book cannot provide, of course, is a sympathetic, sharp-eyed reader—someone to encourage, question, and commend students as they work their way through each assignment. What *Passages* does offer are abundant opportunities for the instructor—and for the students themselves—to perform these important tasks. The

Instructor's Manual (available from the publisher) suggests how the text can be used effectively in conferences and writing workshops as well as in more formal classroom settings.

Part Two of *Passages* entitled *A Guide to Writing Sentences*, is unique in its blending of sentence-combining exercises with more traditional methods of grammar instruction. Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen give students practice in manipulating sentence structures to help them achieve clarity, variety, and coherence in their own writing. Succeeding chapters reinforce these skills while also demonstrating how to eliminate the most common types of errors. The various combining, editing, and proofreading exercises are far more intensive than those found in standard handbooks and workbooks. The Instructor's Manual, in addition to supplying sample answers, explains how the exercises can be used to supplement the assignments in Part One. Additional exercises appear in the software package that accompanies the text.

Following Part Two are four brief appendices. The diagnostic tests in Appendix A will help students determine which chapters in Part Two they need to concentrate on. Appendix B explains how the skills needed to write effective examination essays are closely related to the skills discussed in Part One. Appendix C, which provides practical advice on writing a résumé and letter of application, may be used with the assignment on *Work* in Chapter Nine. And finally, Appendix D contains the paragraphs that served as models for the paragraph-building exercises in Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen.

This short survey has pointed out the chief aims and approaches of *Passages*, but it has not yet identified the most distinctive quality of the book. The instructions are clear, the advice is sound, the exercises work, but none of these things would matter if the illustrative writings were not lively, thoughtful, and carefully crafted. This second edition of *Passages* contains numerous short selections from the works of various contemporary authors. Just as significant, however, are the many paragraphs and essays written by students who have since completed their passage through freshman composition. These writings should serve as encouraging guides to those students who must still take the journey.

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Overview

The Writer and the Writing Process

PREVIEW

Each chapter in *Passages* begins with a “Preview” like this one to let you see at a glance what writing assignment you will be working on and what skills you will be practicing. In this chapter, you will consider how your attitudes toward writing can help or hinder your development as a writer. After examining your writing background, your methods of writing, and the kinds of writing you do, you will take a look ahead at the design and purpose of the rest of the book.

Your Attitudes toward Writing

Be honest: how do you feel about having to write? Is a blank sheet of paper an invitation to scribble or a cause for despair? Do you tend to view a writing assignment as a challenge or as a nerve-wracking chore? Or is it merely a dull duty, one you have no strong feelings about at all? Whatever your attitude may be, one thing is certain: how you feel about writing both affects and reflects how well you can write.

Let's compare the attitudes expressed by two students:

- I love to write and I always have, even in elementary school--when there wasn't any paper I would write on the walls. I keep a journal and write a lot of letters. And I always get pretty good grades from teachers who let me write.
- My writing stinks, hate doing it. I avoid it. I put off taking course for two terms; my attitude is very poor on writing. I am not a very good writer.

Although your own feelings may fall somewhere between these two extremes, you should be able to recognize what these students have in

common: their attitudes toward writing are directly related to their abilities. The one who enjoys writing does well because she practices often—and she practices because she does well. On the other hand, the one who hates writing avoids opportunities to improve. Therefore, as you begin working to become a better writer, you must first examine—and perhaps reconsider—your attitudes toward writing.

The questionnaire that follows will give you a chance to examine your attitudes carefully. Respond to each statement by circling one of the numbers at the right:

1. I agree strongly.
2. I agree.
3. I am unsure or indifferent.
4. I disagree.
5. I disagree strongly.

Respond to the statements thoughtfully and honestly. Your aim is not to impress an instructor but to understand yourself.

Your Writing: Public and Private

1. I enjoy writing.
2. The only time I write is when I'm required to.
3. Writing something well gives me a sense of satisfaction.
4. I don't think I write as well as most other people do.
5. I sometimes write just for myself—to express my feelings or think out my problems on paper.
6. Having to write makes me nervous or afraid.

Agree		Unsure		Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5

Your Background in Writing

Answer questions 7 through 10 only if you graduated from high school within the past four years.

7. I wish I had been made to do more writing in high school.
8. My teachers in high school put a lot of emphasis on good writing skills.
9. In my senior year, I was required to write at least one essay every two weeks.
10. Recent high school graduates should not be required to take a writing course in college.

1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5