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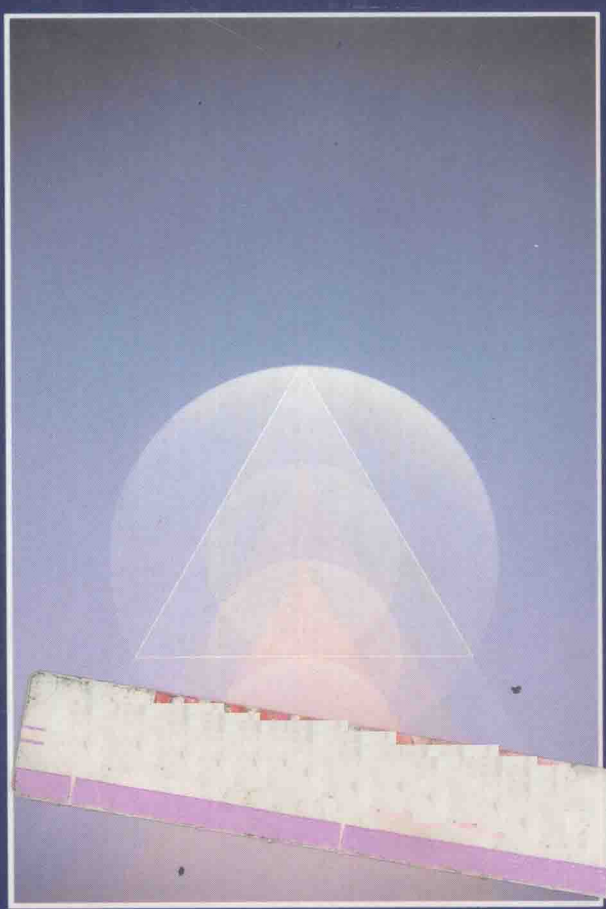

W. ROSS WINTEROWD
GEOFFREY R. WINTEROWD

The Critical Reader, Thinker, and Writer

W. ROSS WINTEROWD
University of Southern California

GEOFFREY R. WINTEROWD
University of Southern California

Mayfield Publishing Company
Mountain View, California
London · Toronto

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA
Winterowd, W. Ross.
The critical reader, thinker, and writer / W. Ross Winterowd, Geoffrey R. Winterowd.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-87484-926-8
1. College readers. 2. English language — Rhetoric. 3. Critical thinking. I. Winterowd, Geoffrey R. II. Title.
PE1417.W557 1991 91-36784
428.6 — dc20 CIP

Manufactured in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Mayfield Publishing Company
1240 Villa Street
Mountain View, CA 94041

Sponsoring editor, Thomas V. Broadbent; managing editor, Linda Toy; production editor, Sharon Montooth; text and cover designer, David Bullen; art director, Jeanne M. Schreiber; manufacturing manager, Martha Branch; cover illustration, Gabriel Molano. The text was set in 10.5/12 Bembo and printed on 50# Finch Opaque by the Maple-Vail Book Manufacturing Group.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PREFACE

In a fundamental sense, *The Critical Reader, Thinker, and Writer* is not radical; nothing in it is experimental or untried. On the other hand, no other book provides such breadth and depth of resources for critical reading, thinking, and writing. However, the table of contents makes the book appear more traditional than in fact it is. Though the organization seems to result from the conventional types of written discourse, the apparently sharp distinctions between modes quickly disappear as students become engaged with the book. For example, Chapter 2, "Thinking Critically about Narratives," resolves a fundamental misunderstanding about the traditional categories of writing (narration, exposition, argumentation, and persuasion): "stories" can be used to explain, to argue, and to persuade. And since stories are dramas—characters (whether fictional or factual) performing actions in scenes for some purpose—critical reading involves a dramatistic method of analysis and evaluation. Even more important: the concepts and methods that students learn in each chapter, although explained in relation to particular types of discourse, are applicable pretty much across the board to all kinds of texts.

In the first chapter, "Critical Reading, Thinking, and Writing," students learn that reading, like writing, is a constructive process and that readers must bring a great deal of information to the text if they expect to take anything out. Even when the reader is uncritical, reading is not the passive absorption of what is "in" the text.

As we have just pointed out, the second chapter, "Thinking Critically about Narratives," gives students a dramatistic method of analysis (adapted, obviously, from the work of Kenneth Burke).

Chapter 3, "Thinking Critically about Exposition," focuses on the unwritten "contract" that the writer establishes with the reader. The reader has certain expectations concerning a text and its author, and judging the text on the basis of these expectations is a powerful aspect of critical reading. (It will hardly surprise instructors who use this book that much of the substance of Chapter 3 derives from speech act theory.)

Chapter 4 teaches students how to evaluate argumentative and persuasive discourse by analyzing the claims an author makes, the backing for those claims, the evidence for the conclusions drawn, and necessary qualifications or hedges. (Here our debt to Stephen Toulmin is obvious.) The chapter also contains an exceptionally rich section on that tried-and-true, extremely useful checklist for critical thinking: the informal fallacies.

The final chapter, a guide to writing based on library research, should be invaluable to students. First, an overview outlines the resources available and explains how to use them. Second, students can follow, step by step, as a research paper comes into being, from the initial survey of bibliographic resources to the placement and function of footnotes. We want to state, however, that our last chapter presents library research and researched writing as important aspects of critical thinking, not as the mechanical skills of learning footnote and bibliographic forms.

We have spent many hours searching for and thinking about the reading selections that we have included with each chapter. In the first place, we think all of them are interesting and that they will engage students. Second, the readings are balanced in a number of ways: current interest (for example, "The Creation of Patriarchy," by Gerda Lerner) with timeless issues (Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience"); contemporary authors (for instance, Barbara Mellix, John McPhee) with old masters (Swift, Emerson); the literature of fact with that of fiction and poetry.

We admit it's not coincidence that we have the same last name. In fact, W. Ross is the father of Geoffrey R. This coauthorship has had great advantages for us, and it will have even more value for the students and teachers who use *The Critical Reader, Thinker, and Writer*. W. Ross has taught reading and writing for some thirty years now, first at the University of Montana and, since 1966, at the University of Southern California. Geoffrey R., an administrator at the University of Southern California, has never taught. Thus, in writing the chapters of this book, in choosing the selections to be anthologized, and in developing learning aids such as discussion questions, headnotes, and exercises, the perceptions and tastes of a young layperson served to balance (and even, at times, counteract) the wonts and usages of an aging academic whose conservatism on occasion checked the untoward ebullience of his coauthor. The result, we think, is a book that has contemporary verve yet meets the criteria of theoretical soundness and classroom practicality. It will engage its readers and will be an effective teaching instrument.

For their reviews of the project in its various stages, we thank especially Robert Keith Miller, Suzanne S. Webb, and Blake Smith. Their reactions and suggestions had appreciable salutary influence on the development of this book.

Our relationship with Mayfield has been the kind authors dream of but seldom are lucky enough to experience, especially nowadays. We could not possibly thank by name everyone who has made a contribution, but we must single out a few. Sharon Montooth and Sally Peyrefitte smoothed the rough spots in our manuscript, banged out and touched up some of the dents, filled in lacunae and, in general, contributed their meticulous care and unfailing good taste.

Though the names of two authors appear on the spine of this book, we admit that a third person deserves as much credit as either of us. That

is our editor and Mayfield's editorial director, Tom Broadbent. Tom is, simply, the best in the business, and either his spirit or his person hovered over us during the whole course of our planning, our search for readings, and our drafting and then redrafting of the chapters. Tom should be given a good deal of the credit for whatever virtues teachers and students attribute to *The Critical Reader, Thinker, and Writer.*

W. Ross Winterowd
Geoffrey R. Winterowd

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Critical Reading, Thinking, and Writing

This book is designed to help you sharpen your ability to understand and evaluate texts. By *texts* we mean not only books but also newspaper reports and editorials, magazine articles, government documents, advertisements, political tracts, letters—in short, all the written materials that are the basis of your lifelong education and probably your career as well.

Developing the ability to read and think critically is the most important objective of a college education. A critical reader is not a cynic or perpetual objector. Rather, a critical reader assumes that most writers are reliable but knows that some are not; such a reader enters into a "mental dialogue" with the text, asking questions such as these: Are the data reliable? What is their source? Is the author's argument sound, or does its logic break down? What is the author *really* trying to accomplish with this text? What do other experts say about the author's ideas? What arguments might one advance *against* the author's point? What arguments might one advance *in favor of* the author's point? Do I understand the text in its overall purpose as well as in its details? What can I do to gain a better understanding?

Some texts contain misinformation, included either intentionally (to delude readers) or unintentionally (because the writer was not adequately informed). You should always evaluate the information in texts, asking yourself whether it is credible or not, probable or improbable; whether the sources of that information are reliable or unreliable; whether the reporting is accurate or inaccurate. Even if information is reliable, however, arguments based upon it may be faulty. For instance, it is a fact that young male drivers have a higher accident rate than young

female drivers, but an argument that males should therefore be licensed to drive at a later age than females would not necessarily be valid. Critical reading entails the ability to analyze arguments and to judge whether or not they hold up.

Sometimes, however, you may have to choose between opposing points of view that are advanced by equally qualified writers who are using reliable data and arguing flawlessly. In such situations, you must examine your own fundamental values and choose one position or another in light of these value systems; self-examination, too, is a part of critical reading and thinking.

Almost all of the principles relating to critical thinking and reading apply also to effective writing. For example, a critical reader asks, Is the author reliable, and does he know what he's talking about? A good writer asks, How can I convince my reader that I'm reliable and know what I'm talking about? A critical reader asks, Are these data reliable? What is their source? A writer asks exactly the same questions. This book, then, is about effective writing as well as critical reading. *Critical thinking* is the basis for both.

HOW WE READ

If you know something about the *what* and the *how* of reading—the nature of written text and the process of arriving at the meaning—the strategies for critical reading presented throughout this book will be easier to understand.

One way to think about reading is to compare it with mining. With pick and shovel, the miner digs to find the treasure buried in the earth; with eyes and brain, the reader digs to discover the meaning buried in the text. Another way to think about reading is to compare it with the work of a detective. The detective reconstructs what happened by gathering bits of evidence and putting together a coherent picture, filling in the gaps by using logic and intuition. The meaning does not exist until the detective constructs it. That is, it is not "buried" in the materials the detective gathers, but comes into being through the detective's decisions about how to use and connect those materials.

Does the reader, like the miner, dig meaning out or, like the detective, construct (or reconstruct) meaning? The following sections of this chapter help you answer that question.

Exercise: Miner or Detective?

In your opinion at this point, is the reader more like a miner, digging meaning out, or like a detective, constructing meaning? Explain your opinion. The following questions might help you.

1. *If you pronounce the words in a text but don't understand the information or ideas, can you say that you have read the text? (What if someone asks you to summarize what you have read?)*
2. *No machine—even the most sophisticated computer—can "read" a text and then summarize the meaning. Do you think that at some time in the future, machines will be able to read, in the full sense of that word? Why, or why not?*
3. *If someone asks you to summarize a text that you have read, do you simply repeat the words and sentences of the text, or do you express the meaning in your own words? What does your answer imply about your reading process?*

Filling Gaps in Text

No text supplies the reader with every detail; all contain gaps that the reader must fill. Take the following brief text, for example:

> Ellen brought the lunch. The sandwiches were delicious.

Nothing in the text explicitly states that sandwiches were a part of the lunch, but the reader fills that gap automatically, like this:

> Ellen brought the lunch. *[The lunch consisted of sandwiches (and probably other things as well).]* The sandwiches were delicious.

The reader has supplied information that relates the parts of the text to one another.

The gaps that we are talking about here are not the result of sloppy writing or bad thinking; they are part of any text (and any coherent spoken discourse), for the writer could not possibly give readers every single detail about the subject. A good writer would not even try; the result would be something like this:

> Ellen brought the lunch. Lunch is the meal that people usually eat at noon. The lunch that Ellen brought contained sandwiches. Sandwiches are two pieces of bread with some kind of filling between them. The sandwiches that Ellen brought were delicious. . . .

You can perform an experiment that demonstrates how readers fill gaps in texts. Ask a friend or family member to read the following text quickly, but give the person no other information or instructions.

> The company outing was held on the shores of Lake Crystal. George arrived late, after the festivities were in full swing. He got a hot dog and soda and wandered out on the dock, joining a group who were chatting there. Soon the members of the group were shouting, and several of the people, including George, were gesturing violently.
>
> Just thirty minutes after he arrived, George, soaking wet, stomped back to his car and roared away from the lake.

After five minutes or so, ask the person to summarize the story. Here is a typical response:

> George went to the company outing at Lake Crystal. He got into an argument with some people, *and they threw him into the lake,* so he left the party in anger.

The original story gives no explanation for George's being wet when he leaves the outing. Nevertheless, the implication that he was thrown into the lake is very strong, and most readers fill the gap with that assumption to make the text coherent.

Here are further examples of information readers must supply to make texts coherent:

> The little girl was just learning to roller-skate. *[While she was learning, she fell down and injured her knees.]* She had bandages on both knees.

> When I last visited my parents, I had trouble falling asleep, too big for the hills and valleys scooped in the mattress by child-bodies. *[The author was sleeping in the bed that had been used by the children in the family. Probably she had slept in that same bed when she was a child.]* I heard my mother come in *[to my bedroom].* What did she want?
>
> —*Maxine Hong Kingston*

> Between San Jose and the turnoff to Monterey, *[Highway]* 101 rolls gracefully through the rich farming foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains. The Hell's Angels, riding two abreast in each lane *[of Highway 101],* seemed out of place in little towns like Coyote and Gilroy. *[Highway 101 passes through the little towns of Coyote and Gilroy.]*
>
> —*Hunter S. Thompson*

As you can see, *every* text requires the reader to supply some of the information necessary to make for coherence. We will return to this basic concept from time to time throughout this book.

Exercise: Filling Gaps in Texts

What are the most important gap fillers you supply when you read the following text? To get you started, some of the gaps at the beginning have been filled in.

> *I came to a ramshackle place called Smitty's Trading Post. Smitty* [who must have been the proprietor] *was a merchant of relics. He could sell you a Frankfort, Kentucky, city bus that made its last run down Shively Street, or an ice cream wagon made of a golf cart, or a used bulldozer, or a bent horseshoe* [which were the relics he could sell you]. *I stopped to look* [at the relics]. *Lying flat as the ground, a piebald mongrel too tired to lift its head gave a one-eyed stare. I pulled on the locked door, peered through the windows grimed like coalminers' goggles, but I couldn't find*

Smitty. A pickup rattled in. A man with a wen above his eye said, "Smitty ain't here."
"Where is he?" I was just making talk.
"You the feller wantin' the harness?"
"Already got one."
"What'd you come for then?"
"I don't know. Have to talk to Smitty to find out."
"That's one I ain't heard," he said.

— *William Least Heat Moon,* Blue Highways

Cues: The Text as a Set of Instructions

Exactly how does the reader fill gaps in text? To answer this question, think for a moment about what happens when you read the following texts:

Misanthropy is a philistinic cogency.

The tenor wouldn't yell through the screen door. He was afraid it would strain his voice.

You can view the text as a set of cues or instructions that guide you in filling the gaps; some of these cues prompt you to look outside the text for meaning, whereas others prompt you to look within the text. Consider the first example. Most of the words may be unfamiliar to you. To find the meaning of the whole sentence, therefore, you would first have to find the meanings of the individual words by consulting a dictionary. Now consider the second example. Some of the words are cues that prompt you to search your "mental dictionary" for meanings: *tenor* (a male singer), *yell* (to use the vocal cords strenuously to produce a loud sound), *screen door* (a frame covered with a mesh of wire or plastic), *afraid* (fearful or very apprehensive), *strain* (to use a part of the body so vigorously that it is injured; or, to sift a substance to remove the large particles), and *voice* (the human sound-making capability).

Other words are cues that prompt you to look *within* the text for meaning. For example, the *he* that begins the second sentence gains its meaning from *the tenor* in the first sentence, and *it* in the second sentence gains its meaning from *yell through the screen door* in the first sentence. You refer to other parts of the text to find the meaning of *he* and *it*. To take another instance, consider what the following sentences prompt you to do.

"What is the solution to the problem on page ninety-eight?" asked the professor.
"How should I know?" replied the student.

To understand the student's reply, you must "fill out" the answer with the information contained in the professor's question: "How should I know *[what the solution to the problem on page ninety-eight is]*?"

In short, you can view the text as a set of cues that prompt you to look outside of the text for some meanings and within it for others. With most texts, your responses to the cues are automatic, unconscious, and instantaneous. But as a critical reader, you can analyze this process whenever you need to in order to see what is occurring. When you have trouble understanding a text, you can ask the following questions about the cues in the text.

1. Do I understand the meanings of technical terms that the author uses? For example, a discussion about economics might contain the important term *laissez-faire;* to understand an explanation of the sound systems of languages, you would need to know the meaning of *phoneme.*
2. Does the author use any common terms in special ways? In discussions of composition and rhetoric, for example, *invention* means finding or generating subject matter. It does not mean creating new mechanical or electronic devices, as it does in the more traditional sense.
3. Does the author supply the cues I need to see how one part of the text relates to the others? For example, the following text would puzzle any reader: "The cost of housing has risen so dramatically that families with moderate incomes cannot afford to own a home and must rent inadequate apartments in increasingly undesirable areas of the city. It must be a first priority of the new mayor." The reader asks, Precisely what must be a first priority of the new mayor?

Reconstructing the Text

Let's begin with two axioms:

1. We read to gain meaning, not to pronounce the text. It is possible to learn to pronounce the words in a text without knowing their meanings—which is exactly what most opera singers do with librettos in languages they do not understand. Moreover, some readers cannot speak and therefore cannot "read" the text aloud at all, yet they can still gain meaning from the text.
2. We read with our minds, not our eyes. (Sightless people learn to read braille with their fingertips.) Merely being able to see the text is not enough to enable us to read it.

As we saw in our discussion of filling gaps, reading is a constructive process, the reader always attempting to see how the parts of the text fit together to make a whole and using his or her own knowledge of the world to fill in what is left unstated. Cues provided by the language system prompt and guide the reader.

The writer constructs the text, but the readers must *re*construct it to make the meaning for themselves. Readers try very hard to find ways

of making the text coherent—of seeing the overall relationships among the elements in a text. As you read the following passage (quoted in Herbert H. Clark and Eve V. Clark's *Psychology and Language*), you will find that you are attempting to make sense of the whole thing, not just of each individual sentence.

> The two of them glanced nervously at one another as they approached the man standing there expectantly. He talked to them for about ten minutes, but spoke loudly enough that everyone else in the room could hear too. Eventually he handed over two objects he had been given, one to each of them. After he had said a few more words, the ordeal was over. With her veil lifted, the two of them kissed, turned around, and rushed from the room arm in arm, with everyone else falling in behind.

When you finally realize that the passage is about a wedding, the sentences seem almost magically to come together as a unified whole. If the passage had been titled "A Wedding," it would have been much easier to understand.

To reconstruct a text that a writer has constructed, the reader must bring to the text two kinds of knowledge: *knowledge of the language system* and what might be called *world knowledge*.

Knowledge of the Language System

If you have been able to understand this chapter so far, or if you are able to understand the daily newspaper, *you have what amounts to a complete knowledge of the language system.* Granted, the type of knowledge you have may not enable you to analyze or describe the system (that is a job for professional linguists), but it does enable you to use the system.

Here is a brief demonstration that you have an extremely sophisticated knowledge of the language system. Which of the following two phrases is "correct" English?

> the first thirty pretty brown cows
> the first brown pretty thirty cows

You undoubtedly chose the first one, because that is the way a native English speaker would arrange the words in the phrase. You probably could not state the linguistic principle that explains why the first is preferable, but being able to do so is obviously not important, since you are able to recognize and use the "natural" order. [In case you are interested, the rule goes something like this: the sequence of modifiers for a noun in English is (1) article (*the*), (2) ordinal number (*first*), (3) cardinal number (*thirty*), (4) general attribute (*pretty*), and (5) specific attribute (*brown*).]

Exercise: Your Knowledge of the Language System

One member of each of the following pairs is "correct," or idiomatic, *English—that is, what a person whose native language is English would say or*