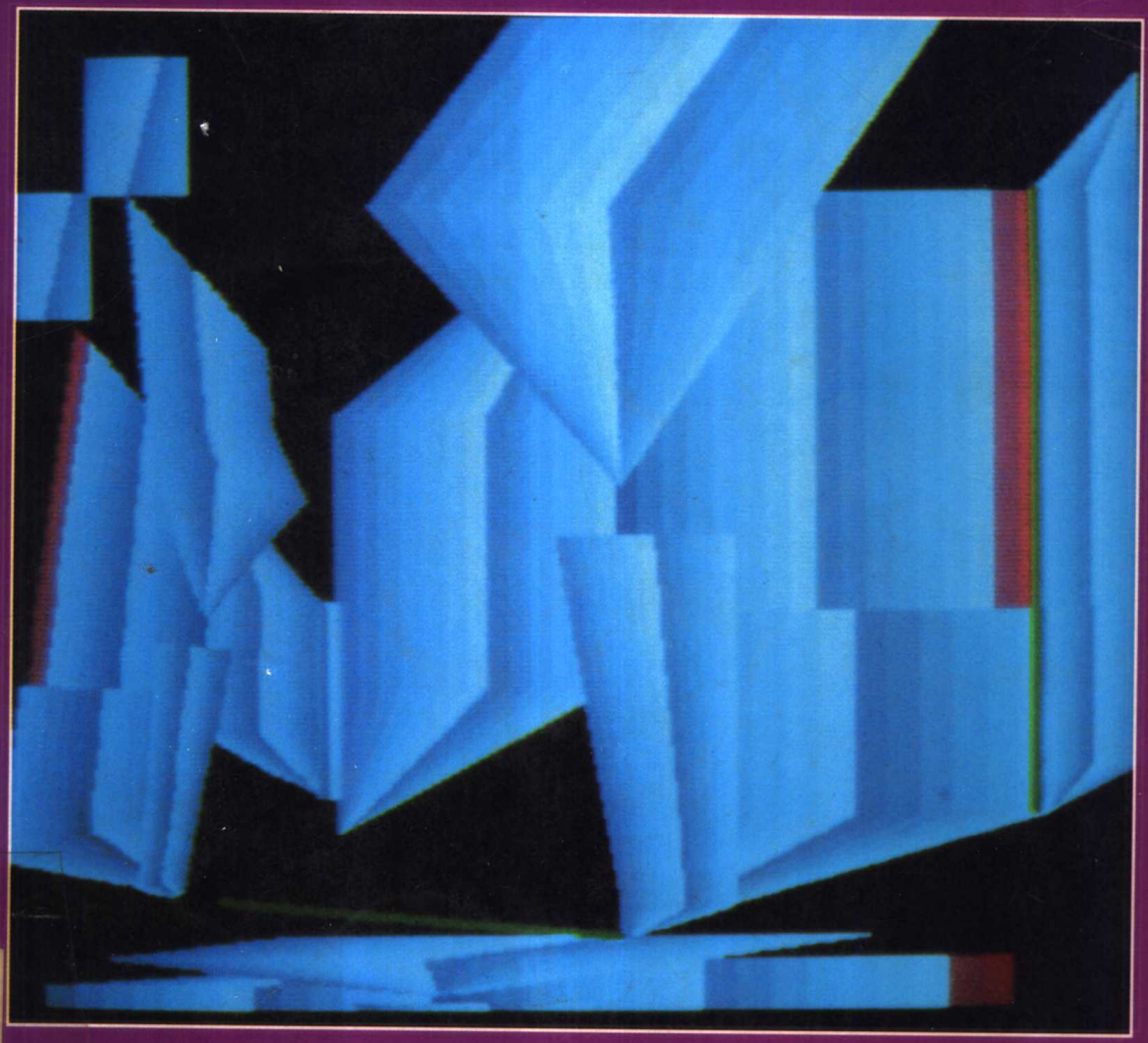
WRITING IN ORGANIZATIONS

PURPOSES, STRATEGIES, & PROCESSES



PEGGY MAKI / CAROL SCHILLING

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PURPOSES, STRATEGIES, AND PROCESSES

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About the Author

PEGGY MAKI is Assistant Professor and Chair of the English, Theatre Arts, and Communications Department at Beaver College where she teaches writing courses in the Writing Across the Curriculum program, undergraduate and graduate courses in professional writing, and in theories of written communication, the teaching of writing, and linguistics. She has also directed the College's Writing Center. Since 1981 she has been on the faculty of NEH summer institutes in the teaching of writing and has consulted with colleges, universities, and elementary and secondary schools as they developed writing programs. She has served on the faculty of several colleges and universities and developed workshops on professional writing for government, business, industry, and health organizations. In 1983 she was Chair of the Eastern Regional ABCA Conference. She has delivered papers at CCCC, national and international ABCA Conferences, the Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, NEMLA, the International Conference on Computers in the Humanities, the Mid-American Linguistics Conference, and the Penn Linguistics Colloquium. In 1984 she received the Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching.

CAROL SCHILLING served as Assistant Professor of English at Beaver College while teaching the writing course from which this text grew. She worked with the Beaver College faculty to create its Writing Across the Curriculum program and taught graduate and undergraduate courses in cross-disciplinary and professional writing, literature, and theories of written communication. She is currently teaching courses in writing, the humanities, and literature at the University of Pennsylvania in the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. At Penn, she has been designated a Senior Fellow and a Research Fellow in the Writing Across the University Program, for which she has researched and designed writing courses and worked with faculty, TAs, and students in the Wharton, Engineering, and Arts and Sciences schools. She has studied literature and rhetoric and has a diverse background in teaching, which has included appointments in several colleges and universities. She has served as a consultant to NEH summer institutes in writing, and she has presented papers at MLA, CCCC, the International ABCA Conference, and the Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition.

"It would be easy to describe the courses of lectures that have been read to classes, and methods of conducting the critical exercises in composition. But how insufficient do all these appear to account for what we see [students] do when [they pass] from the rudiments at school to responsible writing in the real work of life."

Edward Tyrell Channing

Lectures Read to the Seniors in Harvard College (1856)

PREFACE

Background: Principles and Practices

This book has grown out of our experiences teaching an advanced writing course at Beaver College. Our goal for this course has been to prepare juniors and seniors to make the transition from writing as students to writing as professionals. Our aim is to challenge students to transfer their growing expertise in their chosen disciplines to the kinds of problems and issues they will encounter during their professional lives. We emphasize that writing enables students to translate their understanding *of* the world into what we hope will be useful and responsible actions *in* the world, where words and actions are linked.

Like our course, this book focuses on principles of rhetoric, problem solving, and critical thinking that apply to composing various organizational documents. As we developed the course, we were immensely fortunate to be able to participate in cross-disciplinary faculty seminars in teaching writing which the National Endowment for the Humanities sponsored at Beaver College. These seminars introduced us to a remarkable array of scholars and writers from several disciplines who taught us recent theories of language, discourse, composing, and critical thinking, as well as ancient and modern theories of rhetoric.

As we applied these theories, which were rapidly being absorbed by freshman composition courses and texts, to our professional writing course, we conducted our own first-hand investigation of writing that occurs in organizational settings. As we taught and shaped our courses over the years, we discovered we had accumulated the makings of a book that could enable others to put current research into practice. The first five chapters of this book introduce the principles that inform our teaching of writing; the remaining ten chapters apply those principles to particular kinds of writing.

Collaborative Writing

As we surveyed organizational writing, we quickly discovered that documents composed in organizations are frequently the products of two or more writers—often from different disciplines—working together. Such collaborative efforts are more successful when participants can listen to and accommodate different points of view. As a result, we guide students through various strategies for working and writing together. For example, throughout this book, we teach students how to review each other's work in progress. We also introduce them to some principles of working together to produce a single document with a multiple authorship. Although Chapter 15—"Writing Collaboratively"—is the final chapter, the principles in it can be applied to any genre of writing at any point in the course.

Classifying Organizational Writing

Our readers may wonder why we have included genres of professional writing under the rubric of organizational writing. One reason is our discovery that no matter what careers our students choose, the common shaper of their writing will be the organizational setting in which they work. Although it is difficult to replicate the context of organizational writing in classrooms, we can recreate some of its essential features. For example, we have found two useful ways to simulate work-sponsored writing. First, we have directed students to work on problems and issues within their own fields or on their own campuses. Second, we have emphasized the rhetorical principles of writing *to various readers, for various purposes,* and *within various situational contexts.*

We have further classified organizational writing according to both its rhetorical purposes and its conventional genres. The latter include letters, memos, instructions, directives, reports, and proposals. We found that the conventional genres of workplace writing frequently overlap. For example, a "report" may follow the format for long, formal reports or it may be more like a memo.

We also discovered that documents classified under different genres, or even covered in different courses, can share some important rhetorical principles. For example, directives are considered a form of "business" writing carried out by executives, while instructions are usually considered a form of "technical" writing carried out by engineers. Yet both kinds of writing follow the rhetorical principles of writing that instructs. In addition, engineers work within organizational contexts and often carry out executive functions—such as writing directives.

For these reasons, we have initially classified the documents considered in Chapters 6 through 14 according to four commonly accepted genres—correspondence, directions, reports, and proposals—and we have then classified the documents within each genre according to their primary and secondary purposes—to express, inform, explore, document, instruct, and persuade).

Processes of Writing

In addition to emphasizing the organizational context that both generates and shapes career writing, we pay careful attention to the *processes of composing* documents intended to fulfill a particular purpose. We frequently show a composing process in slow motion and pause to consider both large and small steps, often recursive ones, along the way. We also stop to suggest an array of strategies for managing the complexities of that process. As a result, we often make these "steps" look more discrete than they often are in practice.

Our readers may wonder if the models of composing we present, workable though they are for classroom writing, are realistic for career writing. After all, deadlines, a mainstay of life in organizations, shorten and simplify any writer's process. Our own observations support the research that concludes that writers in an organization frequently write only one draft. Yet many documents go through numerous drafts, including several reviews and extensive revisions, before being sent.

Furthermore, we have learned that when writers tackle a new genre of writing or write about a new problem or issue, they compose more slowly than when they write in familiar modes about familiar subjects. Since we introduce students to new genres and new problems to solve, we find that slowing down the process is pedagogically wise. We tell our students, however, that as they become more experienced, they will collapse the detailed process that we outline.

An overview of processes of composing and problem solving is introduced in the first five chapters of this book. Chapters 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, and 14 show individual writers shaping their own composing processes in accordance with their experiences, talents, and intuitions as they write within the constraints of deadlines, policies, and the vagaries of life in organizations.

Acknowledgments

Transferring our actual classroom interactions onto paper and making our principles and practices accessible to others has been a lengthy and challenging process. Along the way, we discovered that we couldn't have managed without extensive collaboration—first of all, with each other. We have also benefited from the compelling responses of our students and the generosity of our colleagues, reviewers, and publisher.

We have borrowed from the thinking and research of many teachers and scholars. Their work has reached us through the media of printed pages, university and faculty seminars (including ones sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1979, 1980, and 1981 and by the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education in 1982 and 1983), lectures, conference presentations, and conversations. Many of those we name already know how indebted we are to them; others may be surprised to find their names listed here. Those whose work

has been particularly helpful include Kenneth Bruffee, Edward P. J. Corbett, Peter Elbow, Linda Flower, M. A. K. Halliday and Rugaiya Hasan, Maxine Hairston, John R. Hayes, E. D. Hirsch, James Kinneavy, Richard Lanham, Walter Ong, Joseph Williams, and Richard Young. Our colleagues at Beaver College have been a sustained source of ideas and expertise. We thank Elaine Maimon for encouraging us in our triple endeavors of teaching, researching, and writing. We have benefited from her leadership in the teaching of writing, especially her exploration of relationships between writing and thinking. We would also like to thank our resident philosopher, Barry O'Connor, social scientists Elizabeth Clark, Edith Gross, Norman Johnston, and Barbara Nodine for sharing their expertise when we called on them. Suzanne Kinard of the Atwood Library also contributed her informed assistance. We are especially grateful to Maryanne Bowers of the English Department for reading a draft of our manuscript thoughtfully and critically and for testing it in her classes.

In addition, our publisher provided us with several rounds of reviews from the time we began generating ideas until we had a finished manuscript. We continue to appreciate the efforts and suggestions of all our reviewers: Vivian Davis, Joseph Dunne, Larry Fiber, Robert Gieselman, Earl Harbert, Dennis Kawaharada, Gloria Lewis, Robin Bell Markels, Elaine Palm, Thomas Reigstad, Philip Rubins, Kathryn Seidel, Jack Selzer, Annette Shelby, and Michele Souda. Their range of responses enlightened us as we worked.

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Over the years our students in Writing for Careers (EN/BA 215) have illuminated our work more than they may realize. A number of them, currently successful writers in organizations, have kept in touch and shared their work with us. We offer a special thanks to Gayle Assetto, Wanda Burke, Michele DiCarlo, Suzanne Eckert, Marie Lawrence, Andrew Leschak, Gena Recigno, Lynn Rogers, and Mimi Seyfert for allowing us to include their classroom and work-sponsored writing in this text.

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The editorial staff at McGraw-Hill remained committed to what turned out to be a complex project. Phillip Butcher, editor-in-chief for social science and humanities texts in the College Division, got our project under way. Emily Barrosse, our sponsoring editor, and Barry Benjamin, the area editing supervisor, made thoughtful suggestions and practiced extraordinary patience as we moved from drafts to final copy. Mel Haber, art director, initiated novices into the *art* of

textbook production. We are grateful to the entire McGraw-Hill staff for their sensitivity and professionalism.

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Carol Schilling

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