

# Reading Critically, Writing Well

A Reader and Guide

Fifth Edition



Rise B. Axelrod  
Charles R. Cooper

With 1999 MLA Update

# Reading Critically, Writing Well

*A Reader and Guide*

F I F T H • E D I T I O N

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## Preface

*Read, read, read. . . . Just like a carpenter who works  
as an apprentice and studies the master. Read!*

—WILLIAM FAULKNER

*I went back to the good nature books that I had read. And I analyzed them. I  
wrote outlines of whole books—outlines of chapters—so that I could see their  
structure. And I copied down their transitional sentences or their main sen-  
tences or their closing sentences or their lead sentences. I especially paid at-  
tention to how these writers made transitions between paragraphs and scenes.*

—ANNIE DILLARD

In these quotes, the novelist William Faulkner and essayist Annie Dillard tell us what many authors know intuitively—that reading critically helps writers learn to write well. By reading critically, of course, we mean more than just reading for enjoyment or reading to get the gist. Reading critically, as Faulkner and Dillard suggest, requires readers to pay close attention to how texts work.

Our goal throughout the fifth edition of *Reading Critically, Writing Well* continues to be to teach students practical strategies for critical reading. We believe that as college students become better critical readers, they will also become more effective writers. To help students improve in both areas, we provide extensive instruction in reading as well as comprehensive guidance in writing.

## FEATURES

The special features of this edition of *Reading Critically, Writing Well* include:

### **Eight Different Types of Real-World Writing**

Each assignment chapter (Chapters Two through Nine) focuses on a specific genre or type of writing that students will encounter during college and on the

job. There are four personal and explanatory genres (autobiography, observation, reflection, and explanation of concepts) and four argumentative genres (evaluation, speculation about causes or effects, proposal to solve a problem, and taking a position on an issue). Some of the reading and writing assignments give students opportunities to think deeply about their own experiences and perceptions, while other assignments require them to think about points of view other than their own.

## **Combining Methods of Development for Various Purposes**

Although some of the assignment chapters emphasize particular writing strategies or methods of development (such as narration in autobiography, description in observation, and argument in position papers), all of the essays included in this book as well as the essays students will write reflect reality by showing how writers use a combination of writing strategies to achieve their purposes.

## **Engaging Readings That Provoke Response and Reward Analysis**

The readings have been carefully selected to show students how other writers—published authors as well as students—have approached each type of writing presented in *Reading Critically*, *Writing Well*. Varying in length and difficulty, the readings encompass interesting topics that are likely to stimulate lively class discussion and student writing, such as whether teenagers should work while attending school, why some people like horror films, how divorce affects children's relationships with parents, how gender expectations impact individuals, and whether talk shows promote democracy.

- *New Readings*. A third of the readings in the book are new to this edition.
- *New Voices*. Many talented writers, including Chang-Rae Lee, Amanda Coyne, and Natalie Angier, are introduced in this edition.
- *Trusted Favorites*. Audre Lorde, Annie Dillard, Russell Baker, Shelby Steele, John McPhee, Deborah Tannen, Charles Krauthammer, Michael Kinsley, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Brent Staples are among the many distinguished writers whose work appears in this edition.
- *Essays by Student Writers*. To show students strong writing by their peers, every chapter includes one essay written by a student in a composition course. Two of the student essays are new to this edition.

## **Guided Activities That Teach Critical Reading**

This text brings critical reading and writing together by teaching students two fundamental ways of reading: **Reading for Meaning** and **Reading Like a Writer**. While Reading for Meaning gives students insight into how readers will construct meanings from their writing, Reading Like a Writer teaches them how to construct their own texts rhetorically to influence their readers' understanding

and response. The two strategies are introduced in Chapter One, developed further in the Guide to Reading at the beginning of each chapter, and applied to every reading selection throughout the text. Mastering these two critical reading strategies, students gain confidence in their ability to write essays of their own in the same genres this book explores.

## READING FOR MEANING ACTIVITIES

As writing instructors, we recognize that many students need help reading for meaning. Some students read superficially, barely skimming the surface, while others do not go beyond the meanings that resonate with their own experience. We developed the Reading for Meaning activities to help students get the gist of a reading, but also to suggest how they can reread for further meanings. We want students to gain confidence that they can construct meanings from any text, and we want them to persist at constructing meanings beyond initial impressions and personal connections.

Although the Reading for Meaning activities that follow each reading are organized identically, each one is designed specifically to help students explore and develop the particular meanings of the reading it accompanies. As students complete these activities they learn to perform an active role in constructing meaning. Reading for Meaning activities ask students to write to explore and develop a reading's meanings. This kind of exploratory writing stimulates thinking, especially when it is sustained for at least a page.

We prompt exploratory writing in two ways:

*Start Making Meaning.* Students are first asked to write about a particular aspect of a reading, such as the significance of an autobiographical event or the main reasons for taking a position on an issue. We designed this part of the activity to ensure that students get the gist of the reading. Students are then asked to continue writing about anything else, either in the reading itself or in their own experience, that contributes to their understanding of the reading. This part of the activity gives students a point of departure to explore additional meanings.

*If You Are Stuck.* If students are unable to extend their meaning-making for a page, they may skim a variety of suggestions offered in *If You Are Stuck*. We designed this part of the activity to draw attention to different aspects of a reading, such as problematic assertions, intriguing examples, and provocative word choices. This activity also encourages students to explore ways in which their own points of view differ from or correspond to the points of view in the reading. Furthermore, it invites students to relate the reading to their own experience in a way that deepens their understanding of the reading.

The Reading for Meaning activities—in addition to teaching students to read closely and critically—also give students useful insights about writing. Students nearly always recognize, for example, that writers seek to influence readers' thinking and feeling in particular ways and that writers choose their words and writing strategies carefully to achieve these purposes. Students usually notice that writers attempt to direct readers' attention to key ideas and that the more precisely these ideas are named, defined, and supported, the more likely readers are to understand them. These and other insights, absorbed through much reading for

meaning, complement the more recognizably rhetorical principles students learn from our Reading Like a Writer activities.

### READING LIKE A WRITER ACTIVITIES

These activities shift student focus from exploring the meanings of a reading selection to analyzing and evaluating how the writer presents those ideas. By completing these activities, students learn how to read rhetorically, examining and assessing the effectiveness of the writer's choices in light of the purpose and audience.

The Guide to Reading at the beginning of each chapter presents several Reading Like a Writer activities that introduce the rhetorical strategies typical of the genre. Each subsequent essay in a chapter is followed by one Reading Like a Writer activity, inviting students to learn more about a particular strategy introduced in the Guide to Reading. Altogether, each chapter invites students to complete nine or ten focused rhetorical analyses of a genre.

Every Reading Like a Writer activity directs students to a specific part of a reading—a few sentences or paragraphs—so that students lose no time wondering where to begin their analysis. Many activities show students the first step to take. At least one activity in every chapter invites students to compare two or more readings in the chapter. Because they are focused and accessible, these activities make it possible for even the most inexperienced readers to complete them and engage in a serious program of rhetorical learning. Each Reading Like a Writer activity has two parts:

*Analyze.* Students note and annotate a rhetorical feature of the reading. For example, they may be asked to underline the active verbs in several paragraphs to see how a writer dramatizes an autobiographical event or to outline a causal argument to see how the writer sequences causes in order of importance or plausibility. Students may also be asked to consider the strategy's possible effect on the intended readers—for example, judging the persuasiveness of a counterargument in a position paper or deciding whether a comparison/contrast helps explain a concept. This part of the activity teaches students how to identify and think about writers' use of rhetorical strategies.

*Write.* Students write to present what they have learned by analyzing one particular feature of a reading. They explain or describe what they have noticed and evaluate its effectiveness by citing examples from the reading. Thus they learn to illustrate and support their generalizations with specific details from the text.

### Guides to Writing That Support Students' Composing Processes

As writing instructors, we know that students need help writing essays. To provide support for students, each *Reading Critically*, *Writing Well* chapter concludes with a comprehensive Guide to Writing that escorts students through every stage of the composing process from choosing a topic and gathering information and ideas, to offering constructive criticism of a classmate's draft, to revising and then editing and proofreading an essay. In our experience, all students—

from the most anxious, inexperienced writers to the most confident, expert writers—benefit in some way from the Guides to Writing.

#### STUDENTS LEARN TO WRITE WELL BY DEVELOPING A SYSTEMATIC PROCESS

Grounded in research on composing and in learning theory, each Guide to Writing is effective because it:

- scaffolds the writing process, providing temporary support so that students can focus on one part of the process at a time.
- provides prompts so that students can learn the kinds of questions they need to ask themselves.
- applies the rhetorical knowledge gleaned from reading to writing an essay in a genre.
- helps students engage in constructive critical readings of their classmates' writing.
- systematizes the writing process so that students can learn to organize their work and follow through to the end.

#### GUIDES TO WRITING REDESIGNED FOR THIS EDITION

Following are some of the ways the Guides to Writing have been improved:

- *Easy-to-Follow Sequence of Invention Activities.* Activities for every phase of the invention process have been divided into smaller, more manageable tasks.
- *A New Section on Thesis Statements.* The new section helps students write a strong thesis. Example thesis statements from the chapter's readings illustrate possibilities.
- *New Section on Planning and Organizing.* This section helps students consider how to organize an essay and suggests possible plans for developing their ideas.
- *More Specific Guidelines for Peer Review.* The section called Reading a Draft Critically helps students read each other's drafts, encouraging constructive, practical group work.
- *More Specific Advice for Revising.* Keyed to peer review from the Reading a Draft Critically section, this advice helps students carry out a comprehensive revision of their drafts.
- *Added Advice on Editing and Proofreading.* This section alerts students to common errors in each essay genre. Each Editing and Proofreading section is based on our research into errors college students typically make writing the types of essays in this book.
- *Enhanced Visibility and Ease of Use.* A user-friendly system of headings and bullets helps to orient students throughout the guide. Italics clearly signal actions students are asked to take.



## **Activities That Ask Students to Reflect on Their Learning**

Research has shown that when students reflect on their learning, they clarify their understanding and remember what they have learned longer. Reflecting also enables students to think critically about what they have learned and how they have learned it. *Reading Critically, Writing Well* provides two opportunities for students to reflect on their learning and also to discuss what they have learned with others. These activities are placed at important transitions in each chapter:

- *Reviewing What Makes [this kind of essay] Effective* appears after the readings and before the Guide to Writing. It invites students to look back at one essay they admire and to think about how it achieves its purpose.
- *Reflecting on What You Have Learned* appears at the end of the chapter and invites students to think about the essay they wrote and what influenced their writing.

## **Complete Catalog of Proven Critical Reading Strategies**

In addition to the two critical reading strategies—Reading for Meaning and Reading Like a Writer—highlighted in every chapter, *Reading Critically, Writing Well* offers students an array of additional reading strategies. These strategies include annotating, outlining, summarizing, paraphrasing, contextualizing, and evaluating the logic of an argument. They are presented in Appendix One, A Catalog of Critical Reading Strategies, where they are briefly illustrated. Following a reading in each assignment chapter, one of these various strategies is introduced, encouraging students to use this additional strategy to extend meaning or to deepen their rhetorical analyses.

## **Expanded Guidelines for Finding and Evaluating Internet Sources**

Appendix Two has been redesigned and updated to include guidelines for finding and evaluating Internet sources as well as the most current MLA and APA guidelines for documenting them. It also includes complete coverage of library and field research.

## **New Index to Methods of Development**

The readings in *Reading Critically, Writing Well* are categorized by genre—by social function or writer's purpose. Writers usually employ a combination of rhetorical strategies to achieve their purposes but may emphasize a specific method of development in a particular genre, such as narration in autobiographical event essays (Chapter Two) and argument in position papers (Chapter Nine). The new Index to Methods of Development categorizes entire readings as well as specific passages within readings that employ particular methods of development that instructors may want to emphasize.

## Comprehensive Instructor's Manual

The Instructor's Manual has been revised substantially for this edition. In addition to offering a variety of course plans for teaching with *Reading Critically*, *Writing Well*, the manual includes practical suggestions for using the Reading Like a Writer activities together with the Guide to Writing to help students develop their analysis of the readings and apply what they have learned to the essays they are writing. There is also a discussion of general teaching strategies, such as using reading journals, small groups, portfolios, and computers, as well as an annotated bibliography of research and theory that has influenced *Reading Critically*, *Writing Well*.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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work on the permissions and to Karen Melton for her enthusiasm in marketing the book.

Finally, Charles dedicates this book to his daughter Laura, an artist with recent shows in Los Angeles, New York, and Bruges. She is also an art teacher, a gardener and specialist in gardening history, a lively conversationalist, and an instigator of a writing course for senior art majors at Pasadena College of Art and Design. In addition to thanking her husband Steven for his love and support, Rise wishes to dedicate this book to her nephews Gregory Borenstein, who has just started college, and Max Borenstein, who will be starting college soon. Remember Annie Dillard's provocative advice to writers: "You know when you think about writing a book, you think it is overwhelming. But, actually, you break it down into tiny little tasks any moron could do."

Rise B. Axelrod  
Charles R. Cooper

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