
A stylized, geometric illustration of a desk setup. A yellow conical lamp hangs from a black cord. On a light brown desk sits a green typewriter with a red keyboard and a white sheet of paper. The background is a solid green color. The overall style is mid-century modern.

# JOHN LANGAN COLLEGE WRITING SKILLS

THIRD EDITION



**USED**



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THIRD EDITION

JOHN LANGAN

*Atlantic Community College*

**McGraw-Hill, Inc.**

New York St. Louis San Francisco Auckland Bogota  
Caracas Lisbon London Madrid Mexico City Milan  
Montreal New Delhi San Juan Singapore  
Sydney Tokyo Toronto

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

COLLEGE WRITING SKILLS

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publisher.

11 12 13 14 15 DOC DOC 9 8 7 6 5

ISBN 0-07-036382-X

This book was set in Times Roman by Monotype Composition Company.  
The editors were Lesley Denton and Susan Gamer.  
The cover was designed by Rafael Hernandez.  
R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company was printer and binder.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Langan, John. (date).

College writing skills / John Langan. — 3rd ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-07-036382-X

1. English language—Rhetoric. 2. English language—  
Grammar—1950- 3. Essay. I. Title.  
PE1471.L34 1992  
808'.042'0711—dc20

91-23765

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Langan has taught reading and writing at Atlantic Community College near Atlantic City, New Jersey, for over twenty years. The author of a popular series of college textbooks on both subjects, he enjoys the challenge of developing materials that teach skills in an especially clear and lively way. Before teaching, he earned advanced degrees in writing at Rutgers University and in reading at Glassboro State College. He also spent a year writing fiction that, he says, "is now at the back of a drawer waiting to be discovered and acclaimed posthumously." While in school, he supported himself by working as a truck driver, machinist, battery assembler, hospital attendant, and apple packer. He presently lives with his wife, Judith Nadell, near Philadelphia. Among his everyday pleasures are running, working on his Macintosh computer, and watching Philadelphia sports teams or *L.A. Law* on TV. He also loves to read: newspapers at breakfast, magazines at lunch, and a chapter or two of a recent book ("preferably an autobiography") at night.

# TO THE INSTRUCTOR

*College Writing Skills* will help students master the traditional five-paragraph essay. It is a very practical book with a number of special features to aid teachers and their students.

## KEY FEATURES

- ***Four principles are presented as keys to effective writing.*** These four principles—unity, support, coherence, and sentence skills—are highlighted on the inside front cover and reinforced throughout the book. Part One focuses on the first three principles; Part Four serves as a concise handbook of sentence skills. The other parts of the book show how the four principles apply in different types of essay development (Part Two) and in specialized types of writing (Part Three).
- ***Activities and assignments are numerous and varied.*** For example, in the opening two chapters there are over twenty activities to help students learn how to advance and support a thesis. There are over one hundred activities in the entire book. Such activities serve as an essential step between the explanation of a skill and a student's full understanding of that skill.

A variety of writing assignments follows each of the types of essay development in Part Two. Some topics are highly structured, for students

needing such support; others require more work on the part of the student. Instructors thus have the option of selecting those assignments most suited to the individual needs of their students.

- **Clear thinking is stressed throughout.** This focus on logic starts with the section “To the Student” on page xvii. Then, in an early chapter (see page 34), students are introduced to the two principles that are the bedrock of clear thinking: *making a point* and *providing support to back up that point*. The focus on these principles continues throughout the book: a section on outlining in Part One offers practice in distinguishing between main and supporting ideas; writing assignments in Part Two provide direction in planning papers that support and develop a central point; many other activities in the book require students to develop basic thinking skills; a form that will help students prepare a well-thought-out essay appears on the inside back cover of the book. In short, students learn that clear writing is inseparable from clear thinking.
- **The traditional essay is emphasized.** Students are asked to write formal essays with an introduction, three supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion. Anyone who has tried to write a solidly reasoned essay knows how much work is involved. A logical essay requires a great deal of mental discipline and close attention to a set of logical rules. Writing an essay in which there is an overall thesis statement and in which each of three supporting paragraphs begins with a topic sentence is more challenging than writing a free-form or expressive essay. The demands are significant, but the rewards are great.

Such a rigorous approach may seem limiting. But students discover quickly enough on their own that the rules can be broken. Indeed, in the general media they are exposed to daily, they see those rules being broken all the time (at times to the detriment of clear communication and sound thinking). First-year college students do not need to work on breaking or going beyond the rules; they need to learn the rules thoroughly and practice using them. Freedom to move beyond the rules effectively is possible only when they know what the rules are. Mastering the rules is, in fact, the cornerstone that students can build on to become powerful and versatile writers.

- **Writing is treated as a process.** The second chapter, “Important Factors in Writing,” discusses prewriting, rewriting, and editing. In addition, many writing assignments are accompanied by “Suggestions on How to Proceed” that give step-by-step directions in the process of writing a paper.
- **Lively models are provided.** One (though by no means the only) way that students learn is by imitation. *College Writing Skills* thus provides several high-interest essays with each assignment. Students read and evaluate these

essays in terms of the four standards: unity, support, coherence, and sentence skills. Student essays appear in place of professional ones, which typically run longer than five hundred words and vary widely from the regular five-paragraph format. The book assumes that students are especially interested in and challenged by the writing of their peers. After reading vigorous papers composed by other students and experiencing the power that good writing can have, students will be more encouraged to aim for similar honesty, realism, and detail in their own work.

- **The book is versatile.** Since no two people use an English text in exactly the same way, the material has been organized in a highly accessible manner. Each of the five parts of the book deals with a distinct area of writing. Instructors can therefore turn quickly and easily to the skills they want to present.
- **Helpful learning aids accompany the book.** Instructors will find useful the checklist of the four steps in essay writing on page 119 and the inside front cover. Also helpful will be the form for planning an essay on the inside back cover and the list of correction symbols on the last page. A thorough *Instructor's Manual* includes a model syllabus, suggestions for using the book, a detailed answer key, and mastery tests for a number of key skills in essay writing. In addition, a revised *set of thirty ditto master tests* is provided free to those adopting the text. These tests offer practice in a wide range of skills covered in the book, from generating and narrowing a thesis to outlining essays to editing papers for such common mistakes as fragments, verb problems, and run-ons. Both the Instructor's Manual and the ditto masters are available from the local McGraw-Hill representative or by writing to the College English Editor, McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10020.

## CHANGES IN THE THIRD EDITION

There are some significant changes in, and additions to, the new edition of *College Writing Skills*:

- The chapter "*Important Factors in Writing*" has been revised and relocated; it is now the second chapter of the book. There are new sections on keeping a journal, writing as a process of discovery, prewriting in the form of diagramming or "mapping," and distinctions between editing and proofreading, as well as additional practice activities.
- "*Introduction to Essay Development*"—the first chapter in Part Two—has been greatly expanded. Sections added are "Point of View in Writing,"

“Writing for a Specific Purpose and Audience,” “Using Peer Review,” and “Using a Personal Checklist.”

- A new writing assignment is now included with each type of essay development in Part Two. This new assignment requires *writing with a specific purpose and for a specific audience*. (The student is asked, for example, to imagine himself or herself as an author of a campus newspaper column giving advice on romance.) This assignment helps round out a sequence of writing activities that progress from personal to objective topics.
- The chapter “*Using the Library*” has been substantially revised. It emphasizes the basic steps that students need to take in exploring possible topics for a research paper. It also describes the computerized search facilities that are a part of today’s libraries.
- The chapter “*Writing a Research Paper*” has been expanded to include careful guidelines for MLA documentation and a complete model research paper.
- There are additions to many of the chapters in Part Four, “Sentence Skills.” The chapter on *run-on sentences* now distinguishes clearly between fused sentences and comma splices and includes more activities. One of the chapters on verbs has been revised to include *standard and irregular verbs*; *wordiness* is now treated as part of a chapter on effective word use; a new chapter covers *adjectives and adverbs*. There are more practice materials for sentence fragments, subject-verb agreement, consistent verb tense, misplaced and dangling modifiers, parallelism, the comma, and commonly confused words.
- A newly designed Instructor’s Manual includes, whenever possible, separate answer sheets for each skill. Teachers can easily copy the appropriate sheets and pass them out to students for self-teaching. And an expanded set of ditto masters provides more tests and activities than were previously available.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Reviewers who have contributed to this edition through their helpful comments include Gale Alston, Roxbury Community College; Edna Boykin, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University; John Covolo, Lakeland Community College; Linda Wheeler Donahue, Mattatuck Community College; Evelyn Etheridge, Paine College; Elaine Fitzpatrick, Massasoit Community College; Cara Fuchs, Fairleigh Dickinson University; Daniel B. Gallagher, Laredo Junior College; Cyril M. Leder, Mott Community College; Patricia Maida, University of the District of Columbia; Kathleen L. Pickard, Cuayahoga Community College;



Betty Slifer, College of Southern Idaho; and Linda Suddeth Smith, Midlands Technical College.

I wish to expecially acknowledge the review of June W. Siegel—the latest of many I have received over the years that have always been as lively as they are insightful. I also thank my McGraw-Hill editors, Lesley Denton and Sue Gamer, for their talented support. Finally, I am grateful to Janet M. Goldstein, Elaine J. Lessig, Carole Mohr, and my wife Judy Nadell, all writers and colleagues who provided ideas as I worked on the third edition.

**JOHN LANGAN**

# TO THE STUDENT

The experience I had writing my first college essay has helped shape this book. I received a C- for the essay. Scrawled beside the grade was the comment, "Not badly written, but ill-conceived." I remember going to the instructor after class, asking about his comment as well as the word *Log* that he had added in the margin at various spots. "What are all these logs you put in my paper?" I asked, trying to make a joke of it. He looked at me a little wonderingly. "Logic, Mr. Langan," he answered, "logic." He went on to explain that I had not thought out my paper clearly. There were actually two ideas rather than one in my thesis, one supporting paragraph had nothing to do with either idea, another paragraph lacked a topic sentence, and so on. I've never forgotten his last words. "If you don't think clearly," he said, "you won't write clearly."

I was speechless, and I felt confused and angry. I didn't like being told that I didn't know how to think. I went back to my room and read over my paper several times. Eventually, I decided that my teacher was right. "No more logs," I said to myself. "I'm going to get these logs out of my papers."

My instructor's advice was invaluable. I learned that if you plan and think through an essay first, you'll have completed a major stage of the work. *College Writing Skills* develops this idea by breaking down the writing process into a series of easily followed steps.

Part One of the book presents the four basic steps or principles you'll need to write strong essays:

- 1 Begin with a clearly stated point or thesis.
- 2 Provide logical, detailed support for your thesis.
- 3 Organize your supporting material effectively.
- 4 Revise and edit carefully so that the material is presented in clear, error-free sentences.

Part Two describes a number of different ways you can organize and develop essays. Each chapter opens with a brief introduction followed by several essays written by students. Then comes a series of questions so that you can evaluate the essays in terms of the basic principles explained in Part One. Finally, a number of writing topics are presented, along with hints about prewriting to help you plan and write an effective paper.

Part Three helps with the many types of writing you will do in college: exam essays, summaries, reports, the résumé and job application letter, and the research paper. You will see that all these kinds of writing are variations of the essay form you have already learned.

Finally, Part Four offers review and practice in the skills needed to write sentences that are clear, error-free, and varied. Included is a series of selections to sharpen your proofreading and editing ability.

For your convenience, the book contains the following:

- On page 119 and the inside front cover, there is a checklist of the four basic steps in effective writing.
- On the inside back cover, there is an outline form to use when planning an essay.
- On the last page, there is a list of correction symbols.

Get into the habit of referring to these guides on a regular basis; they can help ensure that you'll produce clearly thought out, well-written essays.

*College Writing Skills* will help you learn, practice, and apply the thinking and writing skills you need to communicate effectively. But your starting point must be a determination to do the work needed to become a strong writer. The ability to express yourself clearly and logically can open doors for you, both in school and in your career. If you decide—and only you can decide—that you want this kind of power, this book will help you reach that goal.

**JOHN LANGAN**

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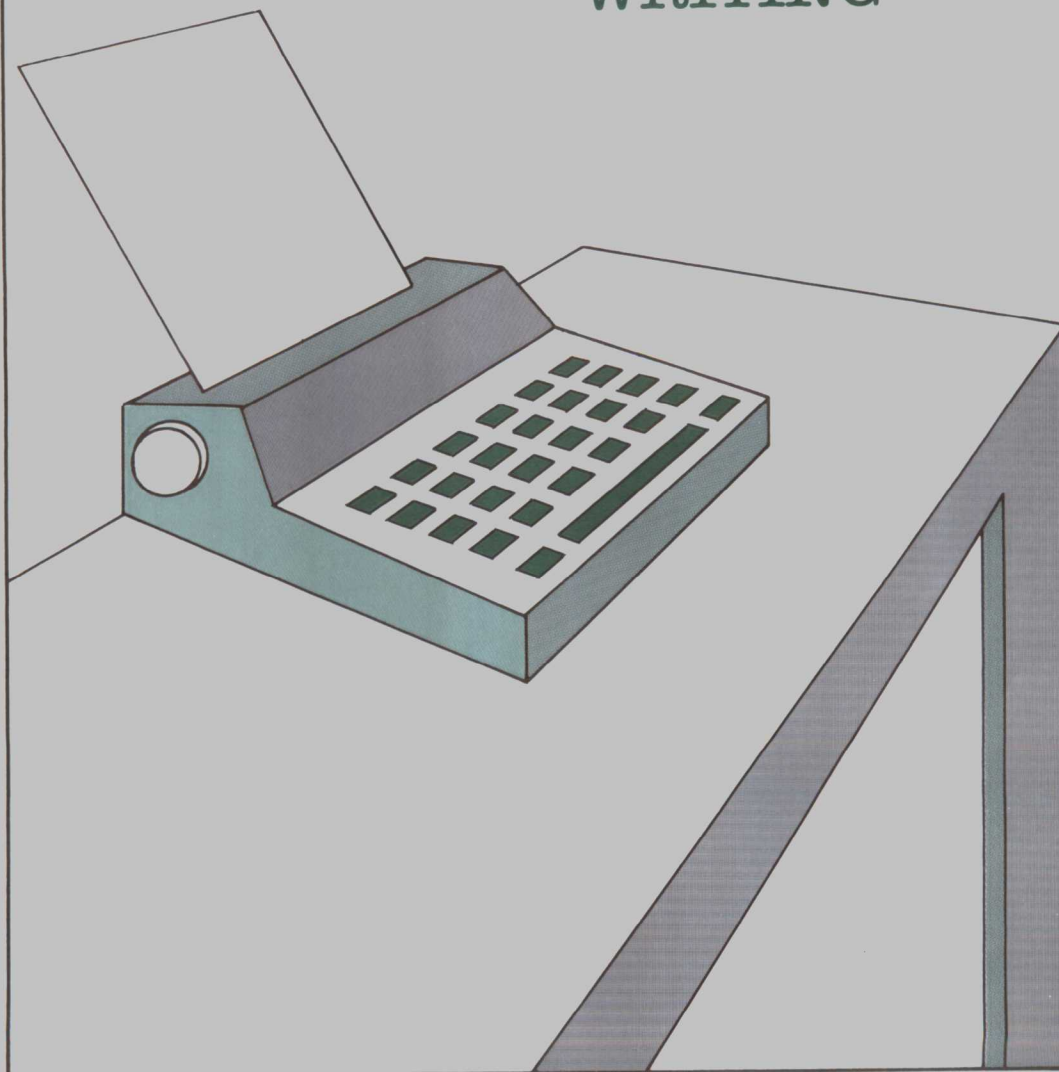
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# PART ONE

## BASIC PRINCIPLES OF ESSAY WRITING







# INTRODUCTION TO THE ESSAY FORM

**This chapter will explain:**

- **The importance of supporting a point in writing**
- **The difference between a paragraph and an essay**
- **The general structure of an essay**

## **AN IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WRITING AND TALKING**

In your everyday conversation, you make all kinds of points or assertions. You say, for example, "It's not safe to walk in our neighborhood after dark"; "My boss is a hard person to work for"; or "Poor study habits keep getting me into trouble." The points that you make concern personal matters as well as, at times, outside issues: "That trade will be a disaster for the team"; "Lots of TV commercials are degrading to women"; "Students should have to work for a year before attending college."

The people you are talking with do not always challenge you to give reasons for your statements. They may know why you feel as you do, or they may already agree with you, or they simply may not want to put you on the spot; and so they do not always ask, "Why?" The people who read what you write, however, may not know you, agree with you, or feel in any way obliged to you. So if you want to communicate effectively with them, you must provide solid evidence for any point you make. An important difference, then, between writing and talking is this: *In writing, any idea that you advance must be supported with specific reasons or details.*

Think of your readers as reasonable persons. They will not take your views on faith, but they are willing to accept what you say as long as you support it. So remember to support with specific evidence any statement that you make.