

Third Edition

Working

It

Out

A Troubleshooting Guide
for Writers

Barbara Fine Clouse



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for Writers
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McGraw-Hill Higher Education

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WORKING IT OUT: A TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE FOR WRITERS, THIRD EDITION

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 FGR/FGR 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

ISBN 0-07-236748-2

Editorial director: *Phillip A. Butcher*

Publisher: *Michael D. Lange*

Senior sponsoring editor: *Sarah Touborg*

Developmental editor: *Alexis Walker*

Marketing manager: *Thayne Conrad*

Project manager: *Kelly L. Delso*

Production supervisor: *Gina Hangos*

Coordinator freelance design: *Mary Christianson*

New media: *Todd Vaccaro*

Freelance Cover designer: *Kay Fulton*

Compositor: *Shepherd, Inc.*

Typeface: 10/12 Melior

Printer: *Quebecor Printing Book Group/ Fairfield*

Cover image: *The Observatory Group*

The credits section for this book begins on page 00 and is considered an extension of the copyright page.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Clouse, Barbara Fine.

Working it out: a troubleshooting guide for writers / Barbara Fine Clouse.-- 3rd ed.
p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 07-236748-2 (acid free paper)

1. English language-- Rhetoric. 2. English language-- Grammar. 3. Report writing. I.
Title.

PE1408.C5378 2001

808'.042--dc21

00-027368

When ordering this title, use ISBN 0-07-236748-2

<http://www.mhhe.com>

P R E F A C E

Working It Out: A Troubleshooting Guide for Writers is a compendium of strategies for handling all aspects of writing: idea generation, outlining, drafting, revising, and editing. It is based on the simple belief that people write better when they discover procedures that work well for them. Thus, one goal of the book is to provide a range of strategies for writers to sample as they work to develop successful writing processes.

A second goal of the book is to help writers when they get stuck. While seasoned writers understand that false starts, wrong turns, and writer's block are all part of the process, less-experienced writers may become frustrated when their work does not proceed smoothly, especially if they do not know what to do when they hit a snag. As a troubleshooting guide, *Working It Out* provides specific strategies for dealing with writing problems. A writer who gets stuck can consult the text and get help.

FEATURES

The features of *Working It Out* aim to make the book an efficient reference for those who want to improve their writing by discovering effective procedures and problem-solving strategies.

Over 240 Helpful Strategies

There are enough specific suggestions here that all users should find many ways to solve problems and improve their writing processes.

Clear, Jargon-Free Prose Written in a Conversational Style

So the book can be a ready reference both in and out of the classroom, explanations are as brief as possible and are written in a supportive, nonintimidating style.

Organization across the Sequence of the Writing Process

Writers can use the text in the same sequence as their writing. Part I treats prewriting; Part II treats drafting; Part III treats revising; and Part IV treats editing. (Part V provides topics for writing practice.)

Chapters Structured as Responses to Questions and Comments Voiced by Student Writers

Students and other novice writers can find what they need faster because chapter titles echo their own language and concerns.

Computer Strategies

A range of strategies is offered for writing at the computer.

An Overview of the Writing Process and Essay Structure

The Introduction contains information on the stages of the writing process; the writer's audience, purpose, and role; essay structure; and strategies for becoming a better writer.

Ideas for Writing

Chapter 26 contains 15 ideas for writing, in full rhetorical context.

Readings Available from the Primis Database

You can design your own book of readings to accompany *Working It Out*. Just visit the Primis website at <http://www.mhhe.com/primis/cornerstones> and create your own Primis book online! Or, if you prefer, contact your McGraw-Hill sales representative. (If you are not sure who that is, check out McGraw-Hill's sales representative locator at <http://www.mhhe.com>.)

Helpful Tips for Students and Instructors

Visit the Barbara Clouse website at <http://www.mhhe.com/clouse> for teaching tips and writing ideas. This website is updated frequently, so stop by often, and feel free to make suggestions for other features you might like to see there.

A Toll-Free Interactive Reader Line

You can make comments or ask questions about *Working It Out* by calling 1-800-435-2672, extension 29315.

NEW TO THE THIRD EDITION

The changes made in the third edition of *Working It Out* are in response to suggestions made by student and instructor reviewers and frequent users of the book. These changes include

- The addition of over 50 new strategies, including many new computer strategies.
- New material on essay structure, including a new, argumentation essay to illustrate structure.
- The addition of new chapters, including chapters on writing the thesis, essay organization, and punctuating direct quotations.
- The addition of material on avoiding wordiness, achieving parallelism, and distinguishing homophones.
- New examples to freshen and update the text.
- For better organization, the reconfiguration of some chapters.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Sarah Touborg and Alexis Walker of McGraw-Hill, for their support and guidance. In addition, I owe much to the sound counsel of the following reviewers, whose insights inform this book:

Barbara E. Beale
California State University, Fullerton

Bradford Crain
College of the Ozarks

John Green
Salem State College

Howard Hopkins
Lansing Community College

Brian Kennedy
Pasadena City College

Charles Kerlin
Saint Joseph's College

Patrick Mathias
Itasca Community College

Andrea Shanklin
Howard Community College

Jill Widner
Yakima Valley Community College

Finally, to my understanding husband, Denny, and to my delightful children, Greg and Jeff, I offer thanks for the support and for the room of my own.

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FIRST THINGS FIRST: AN INTRODUCTION

“DO I HAVE TO BUY THE BOOK?”

College instructors expect certain questions on the first day of class, questions like “Is the final comprehensive?” “Do you count attendance?” “Do you test on the book or on the lectures?” “Is there a curve?” And sometimes even, “Do we have to buy the book?” By explaining how this book can help you become a better writer and by providing important preliminary information, this chapter aims to make you glad that you took out your wallet.

HOW TO USE *WORKING IT OUT: A TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE FOR WRITERS*

Pretend for a moment that you play tennis and that you are having trouble with your baseline shots. A coach, noticing your problem, might suggest that you drop your hip a little. Now pretend that you are a serious runner and you are having trouble improving your time in the 1,600-meter run. In this case, your coach might suggest that you swing your arms more and pretend a giant hand is on your back pushing you along. That’s what coaches do: They make suggestions to help you solve problems that arise as a natural part of learning to do something better.

Right now, you are working to become a better writer, and as you do, problems will arise from time to time. Do not let these problems worry you, for they are a natural part of the learning process. Whenever we try to learn something, we hit snags now and then. The point is that we need to discover how to *solve* problems—and that is a learning experience of its own.

As you work to become a better writer, think of this book as one of your coaches. If you encounter a problem, look to this book for one or more suggestions for solving that problem. Of course, this book is not your only coach. Your classroom teacher is the best coach of all, and your classmates and the tutors in the writing center are also good sources of information. So if you have a problem, you can also talk to one of these people to get

suggestions for overcoming the obstacle. Ask them what specific procedures they follow, and try some of them to see if they work well for you too.

To use this book efficiently, do the following:

- Read over the table of contents so you have a sense of what the book covers. Notice that most of the chapters are titled with a remark often spoken by struggling writers.
- If you get stuck when you are writing, go back to the table of contents and find the remark that best expresses the problem you are having. Turn to the chapter titled with that remark.
- Quickly read the chapter (it will be short), and notice that a number of procedures are described for helping you overcome the obstacle. Pick the procedure that appeals to you the most and try it. If your problem is solved, great. If not, try another procedure. Some procedures will work for you and some will not because different strategies will be effective for different personal styles. If after trying three procedures you have not solved the problem, talk things over with your classroom teacher or a writing center tutor. *You are not expected to try every procedure each time you work through a chapter.*
- If you are not having any problems but want to discover more effective or efficient procedures, read through the book with an eye toward procedures to try the next time you write.

As you work to become a better writer, remember that following the procedures in this book will not guarantee complete success. These procedures are problem-solving strategies meant to ease the way. No set of procedures can guarantee success, but the ones in this book can help you to your goal.

HOW TO BECOME A BETTER WRITER

Becoming a better writer has much in common with becoming a better swimmer, becoming a better piano player, or becoming a better dancer. In all these cases, a person is working to improve a skill. As you work to improve your writing skills, remember the following.

1. **Be patient.** Improving a skill takes time. Just as perfecting a foul shot takes a basketball player time and practice, so too will improving your writing. If you expect too much too soon, you will become frustrated. So set reasonable goals by looking for slow, steady progress rather than dramatic, overnight improvement.
2. **Expect to get stuck.** Everyone does, even experienced, professional writers. Writer's block and dead ends are all part of writing, so do not

think there is something wrong with you if you have some trouble. Consult this text, your instructor, other experienced writers, and/or a writing center tutor when you get stuck. When you solve the problem, tuck the solution away for future reference, so the same problem does not plague you over and over again.

3. **Remember that writing is really rewriting.** Experienced writers work and rework drafts a number of times before they are satisfied. With each revision, you will learn a little more about writing, so welcome rewrites as learning opportunities, and know that you are acting like an experienced writer each time you revise.
4. **Be aware of what you do when you write.** Decide which procedures work well for you and which do not. Then consult this text and your instructor for procedures to replace ones that did not work. For example, maybe idea generation goes well for you, but revision does not. That means you need to discover new revision procedures. When your procedures work better, your writing will improve.
5. **Talk to other writers.** Find out what they do when they write, and try some of their procedures. When you need ideas, talk to others and kick around possibilities. Share your frustrations and successes. Form a network with your classmates and other writers for support and suggestions. You can help each other improve.
6. **Study the responses to your writing.** What does your instructor say about your writing? What do your classmates say when they read your drafts? What do people in the writing center say? Reader response is valuable to a writer. By paying attention to this response and working to improve areas where readers see weaknesses, you can improve more quickly. If you do not understand a response made by your instructor or another reader, or if you do not know how to make a change, ask for help.
7. **Read, read, read.** Read every day—the newspaper, your textbooks, news-magazines, short stories, novels. Read anything that interests you. Pay attention to how other writers handle introductions, conclusions, supporting detail, and transitions. Look up unfamiliar words, notice sentence structure, and observe punctuation. Try to incorporate strategies that you observe in your reading into some of your writing. The more you read, the more you will internalize about the nature of language, and the faster your writing will improve. Furthermore, frequent reading makes you more knowledgeable, so you have more ideas for your writing.
8. **Do not fear mistakes.** They are a natural part of learning. Go ahead and give your writing your best shot. Take risks; try things out. If you make mistakes, embrace them as opportunities to learn. If you are