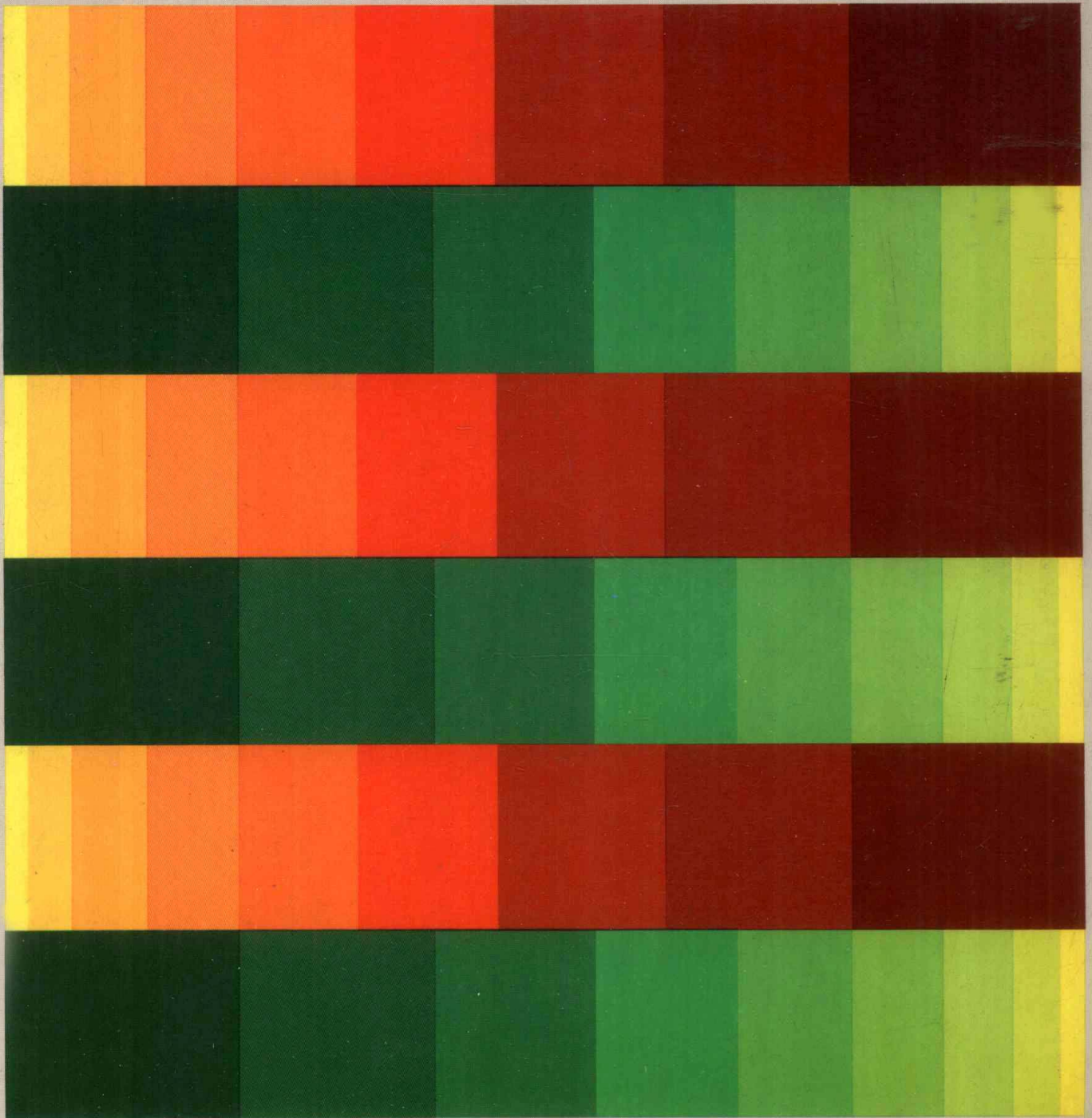


Discovery to Discourse

THE COMPOSING PROCESS



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DISCOVERY TO DISCOURSE

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For Paul and Don, with love.

PREFACE

Discovery to Discourse is a process-centered text designed to introduce you to the composing process experienced writers use. Unlike most writing texts, which focus on the needs of the reader and on the final product, this text makes you conscious of each stage of the composing process and of the needs of the writer as well as those of the reader. By using the process each time you write papers, you will learn to modify and adapt the approaches presented in this book to help you formulate your own approach to writing.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

As the discussion above suggests, this book will not be used in the usual manner. Instead of beginning on the first page and working through to the last, Chapter 1 and the first two selections of Chapter 2 will be used once to acquaint you with attitudes about writing and reading.

The assignments in the final part of Chapter 2 and Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 will be used each time you write a paper. Each assignment begins by asking you to read several essays from Chapter 9 to stimulate your thinking about the topic to be discussed in the paper. Then you will move to the getting-started approaches in Chapter 3 for discovering an appropriate subject for the writer and the reader. Chapter 4 provides approaches to use to discover a reader, purpose, and form for presenting the ideas, as well as suggestions for writing the first draft and for getting unstuck if you stop writing. Chapter 5 provides forms that a reader can use to react to your first draft. Chapter 6 includes methods for revising and rewriting your paper after obtaining a reader's reaction. Chapter 7 provides editing forms an editor can use to evaluate how well you have met the needs of a reader, and Chapter 8 offers approaches you can use to copyedit the final draft.

As we point out in the discussion of the composing process, you will not move through these stages in the step-by-step way we have just described. You will return to some, combine others, and learn to adapt them to your personal needs and to the writing assignment.

We have written the book in a conversational manner to make you feel at ease. Whenever we use *he* or *she* in discussing a writer or reader, we are referring to both men and women. Most of the student work has been left unedited to help you develop a sense of what writing looks like in the early stages of the process.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Discovery to Discourse has undergone a long gestation, and many people have helped to bring it to birth. We want to take this opportunity to acknowledge our debt and gratitude to all of them.

Over the years, we have worked with hundreds of students. By allowing us to share in their composing process, they have given us insights into the way writers get their ideas on paper. Their contributions are evident in the many approaches and examples found in the following pages. We are especially grateful to those students who gave us permission to use their writing to serve as examples for other beginning writers.

Several of our colleagues at Michigan State University have also played a part in preparing us to write this text. Jane Featherstone nurtured us as composition teachers with her supportive suggestions and enthusiastic interest in our discoveries. Early in our careers, she gave us an opportunity to work together to develop and teach an experimental writing course. In preparing the course, we read (among other works) Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors in Expectations*, which changed our perceptions about teaching writing. The research and experimentation we engaged in while teaching our course is at the heart of this text. Henry Silverman, our department chairman and a participant in the 1979 session of the Iowa Institute on Writing, furthered our academic growth by involving us in the development and implementation of a writing program based on the process model and by introducing us to the work of Richard Lloyd-Jones, Carl Klaus, James Kinneavy, and others. Clinton S. Burhans, Jr., and Michael Steinberg helped us clarify our theories and approaches to teaching writing in a seminar they conducted for ten members of the Department of American Thought and Language in 1978-79. Our discussions of the works of Frank Smith, Ulric Neisser, Jean Aitchison, Peter Farb, Peter Elbow, James Moffet, James Britton, Janet Emig, and many others helped us formulate theories to explain what was happening in our classrooms and inspired many of the approaches presented in this text. Our special debt to Peter Elbow's work can be seen in our chapter on the reader's reaction.

We are also grateful to the people who have helped us revise and prepare the text for publication. Our readers, Stephen Judy, Frank Hubbard, and James Switzer, were generous with their thoughtful criticism and support. At Macmillan, our editor, D. Anthony English, believed in our project from the beginning and has patiently and gently guided us through our writing process. His editorial assistant, Judith Newman, has managed all of the pieces with an expert hand and has freed us from many tedious tasks. Eileen Schlesinger, our production editor, has guided the transformation from manuscript to text with an eye to making the material accessible to students.

We also want to thank our families, who shared in our excitement: our parents, Martha and Russell Wendling, and Greta and Bill Mueller; our children, Charles and Josh, Brian, Juliet, Laurie, Matthew, Robin, and John. Most of all, we are grateful to our good friends and husbands, Paul and Don, who encouraged us, gave us time to write, and knew all along that we could do it.

Finally, we are forever indebted to each other and to the collaborative spirit that imbued our work. Together, we have made discoveries about the teaching of writing that we could never have made alone. In every sense, *Discovery to Discourse* is a product of the interaction of our minds.

B. W. Kirschner

J. M. Yates

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CHAPTER 1

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Attitudes play an important role in everything we do, and writing is no exception. After sharing her writing with classmates for a few weeks, one of our students discovered how her attitude toward her subject affected the reader's reaction to it. "My attitude has a lot to do with the results of my paper. If I think the topic is dull, my finished paper is dull. If I find my topic interesting, most likely the reader will be interested." Other students have found that their definition of a writer, their past writing experiences, and their ideas about the role writing will play in their lives all contribute to their general attitude toward learning to be a better writer.

WRITING INVENTORY

To give you an opportunity to uncover and explore your attitudes about writing, we have developed the writing inventory below. Answer the questions as completely and honestly as possible.

1. What is your definition of a writer? Discuss why you do or do not consider yourself a writer.
2. What kinds of writing experiences have you had? Describe the kinds of things you have written. Describe the one successful or unsuccessful writing experience you remember most vividly.
3. Do you think writing will play an important or useful part in your life? Describe what role you think writing will play in your personal and professional lives.
4. Reread your responses to the previous questions. What do your responses show you about your attitudes toward writing? Describe how you feel about learning to become a better writer.

EXPLORING COMMON ATTITUDES ABOUT WRITING

Assuming that you responded to the Writing Inventory as our students have in the past, you have probably discovered that your attitude about learning to write well is either positive, neutral, or negative. As you read through the responses our students made to Question 4, compare them to your responses and decide if *positive*, *neutral*, or *negative* describes your overall attitude.

Positive: "I am excited about learning to write better." "I enjoy writing and want to learn more about making a reader understand what I am trying to express." "I really do want to learn to write clear, persuasive papers."

Neutral: “Even though I think writing is something I can do without, I know I need it. So, I feel that the more I learn about it, the better I will do it in the future.” “Since I am an engineering major, I am not as interested in writing as I am in calculus or science, but I guess it will be important.” “Although I really would like to learn to be a good writer, I have been writing for quite a while and never seem to improve.”

Negative: “I am apprehensive about taking another writing class because of my lack of success in this area.” “To be honest, I am tired of writing. After a while, topics and examples seem harder to think of.” “I am not particularly enthusiastic about taking a writing class.”

As these student responses (and no doubt your own as well) point out, general attitudes about becoming a better writer grow out of more specific attitudes. These include attitudes toward writers, past experiences with writing, and what role you think writing will play in your future. A closer look at each of these areas will help you determine how each has shaped your current attitude and, if necessary, will suggest ways to replace neutral or negative attitudes with more positive ones.

CONSIDERING ATTITUDES ABOUT WRITERS

In Question 1 of the “Writing Inventory,” you gave your definition of a writer and considered why you did or did not think of yourself a writer. Probably some of you, like our students, defined a writer as “a person who puts thoughts down on paper” or as “someone who is writing to communicate an idea to others.” Those of you who responded in this way may also consider yourselves writers every time you write a letter to a friend or prepare a paper for a class. Your definition of a writer is related to the act of communication, and you realize that when people communicate in writing, they become writers. Such an attitude helps you understand that writing is a craft everyone can learn and even master. No doubt, you have a positive attitude about learning to write.

On the other hand, many of you probably echo the responses of the majority of our students who think that writers are people who have a special talent that makes writing easy for them. If so, you may have defined a writer like this: “A writer is a person who can sit down and write a story or paper without much previous thought.” “A writer can produce a story that is interesting and contains no grammatical errors.” “I think a writer is someone with a lot of ideas and is talented enough to create an interesting subject for the enjoyment of others.” “A writer is a person who has a talent for saying things, not just someone who writes on an assigned topic.” “A writer

is a person who can arrange his ideas on paper, with a flow from one idea to the next. He is creative and well organized, and his skills are nearly perfect.”

Such definitions make it difficult, if not impossible, for you to see yourself as a writer. Therefore, the idea that you can become a better writer does not occur to you. “I never think of myself as a writer because I have trouble putting ideas into words.” “Although I have done some writing, I do not have the talent needed to consider myself a writer.” Clearly, these statements reflect an attitude that will lessen your ability to become a better writer. But what can you do to replace these attitudes with more positive ones?

Try any of the following approaches to redefine your definition of a writer and to make it clear to yourself that you have the ability to become one. After finishing an approach, look at Question 1 of the “Writing Inventory” again. Is your definition beginning to change?

Approach 1: Gain Strength from Other Writers

Babette Blaushild suggests that when you get frustrated with writing, you should “borrow strength from others who have been there, too.” She cites the advice of Eugene O’Neill, who said about the writer’s task, “I know what you are up against and how you feel. The only thing is, keep up your confidence that sooner or later you’ll come through . . . and keep on writing, no matter what.” Our students agree with Blaushild. They find that considering the advice of experienced writers helps them to develop a more realistic definition of a writer and to begin to see that they, too, can be considered writers.

One essay that has helped them is William Zinsser’s “The Transaction.” In this essay, writer/teacher Zinsser presents a dialogue between himself and a surgeon he calls Dr. Brock. The doctor represents the idea that writers are people with special talents for whom writing is easy and fun. When asked what it was like to be a writer, “He said it was tremendous fun. . . . The words just flowed. It was easy.” Zinsser, speaking as a professional writer, contradicts this notion by saying that for him, writing was neither easy nor fun. “It was hard and lonely, and the words seldom just flowed.”

THE TRANSACTION

Several years ago a school in Connecticut held “a day devoted to the arts,” and I was asked if I would come and talk about writing as a vocation. When I arrived I found that a second speaker had been invited – Dr. Brock (as I’ll call him), a

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