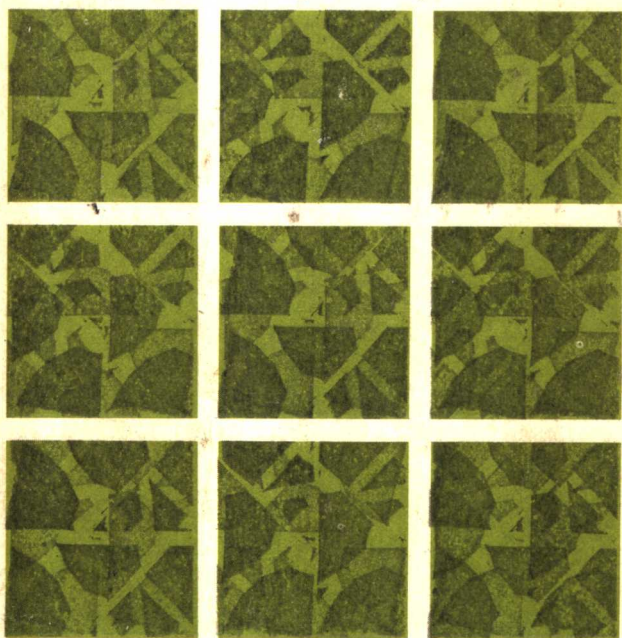


WORDS and IDEAS

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Hans P. Guth

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PREFACE

To the Teacher

Words and Ideas, Third Edition, derives from the following convictions about English composition as a subject:

- *Good writing can be taught*—not once and for all, but in the kind of course that offers frequent opportunities for writing and that enables the student to develop his skill and confidence through gradually more challenging assignments.
- *The emphasis in a writing course should be on positive procedures for generating good prose.* No writer can be effective whose overriding concern is the mere avoidance of error. The student will respect a writing course that confronts him with genuine writing problems, gives him realistic advice on how to proceed, and makes possible the sense of satisfaction that derives from meaningful work well done.
- *The best teacher of writing is not the subject-matter specialist but the teacher of English.* Ideally, every college teacher would teach effective communication. But in practice, the student acquires a respect for language, and a sense of its power and resources, from teachers whose first love is language and literature.
- *In the ideal English program, composition and literature are organically related.* A good composition course recognizes the creative and imaginative elements in expository prose. A good literature course provides ample opportunity for written expression, and develops the student's command of the written word.
- *Freshman English is not a mere service course but an essential part of a college education.* Students today are everywhere

dissatisfied with courses that serve only a remote ulterior purpose, that are merely an introduction to an increasingly more narrow and irresponsible specialism. They ask for courses that have meaning and relevance in their own right.

A Rationale for a Composition Course

There are many kinds of materials that can prove useful in a composition course; and there are many ways of organizing a program of instruction in writing. But to be effective, such a program must in some way reflect the teacher's understanding of the *process* of composition. It must reflect his sense of how a writer works. Rhetoric is the study of how good prose is produced. To be meaningful, rhetoric cannot be a "rhetoric of parts," offering finger exercises in limited aspects of composition. It must be a "rhetoric of the whole," which never loses sight of the central question: "What does it take to produce a piece of writing that is worth writing and worth reading?"

The rhetoric of *Words and Ideas* starts with a definition of the finished product that the writing process aims at: "The Whole Theme" (Chapter One). It then builds a writing program that explores four essential relationships: (1) the writer and his experience; (2) writing and thinking; (3) the writer and his audience; (4) the writer and his reading.

- *Writing from Observation and Experience.* As in its previous edition, *Words and Ideas* stresses the need for developing the student's powers of observation. It stresses the preliminary stage of gathering the material and mobilizing the resources without which writing remains an empty exercise. Chapters Two through Four ("Observation and Description," "Personal Experience," and "Opinion") all encourage the student to draw on his own observation and experience for the material that will give his writing authentic substance, for the evidence on which to base (and with which to support) responsible opinions. Increasingly, textbooks and programs in composition are beginning to share this emphasis on the "prewriting" stage.
- *Writing and Thinking.* The next two chapters of the rhetoric focus on the kind of thinking that must go on in the student's mind if he is going to give shape and structure to his materials. Chapter Five ("Definition") stresses the relationship between thinking and language; Chapter Six ("Logic") stresses the relationship between thinking and organization. In a meaningful rhetoric, logic cannot be in a final chapter, added as an after-

thought. The student's ability to think his material through is central to his performance as a writer. If he cannot think clearly, he cannot write well. The art of writing well is the art of making up one's mind. In *Words and Ideas*, the core of the rhetoric is devoted to the kinds of thinking that go into formulating responsible opinions and presenting them in clearly organized writing.

- *The Writer and His Audience.* The next two chapters relate the student's writing to the demands and expectations of the reader. Chapter Seven ("Persuasion") explores the tension between the writer's loyalty to his subject and his need for the reader's attention and assent. Chapter Eight ("Tone and Style") concentrates on effectiveness of style. It develops the student's sense of what makes reading apt, striking, and a pleasure to read.
- *The Writer and His Reading.* The remaining two chapters of the rhetoric focus on writing that draws on the work of other writers. Chapter Nine ("The Research Paper") focuses on the student's basic task: to sift, and to integrate into his own writing, material from different printed sources. Chapter Ten ("Writing About Literature") stresses the student's close reading of imaginative literature, and aims at helping him develop and structure his active response.

How to Use This Book

The Third Edition of *Words and Ideas* has been reorganized to bring it into closer harmony with prevailing course patterns, while at the same time keeping it flexible enough to make it adaptable to varying needs of students and preferences of instructors:

(1) The book now starts with a new chapter on the whole theme, surveying the whole writing process and stressing basic patterns of organization.

(2) After the initial survey, Chapters Two through Ten provide the basic framework for a course that explores major rhetorical principles by showing them at work in different kinds of writing. In order, these chapters provide a *cumulative program* in which each theme that the student is asked to write is treated as a purposeful whole.

(3) In many programs, Chapter Eight (“Tone and Style”), Chapter Nine (“The Research Paper”), and Chapter Ten (“Writing About Literature”) will prove most appropriate to the second half of a two-quarter or two-semester course.

(4) Several of the handbook chapters serve the double purpose of reference and classroom instruction. Many instructors will early in the course assign all or part of the chapter on diction, which as a whole provides a more than usually comprehensive introduction to the resources of the dictionary. Some instructors find it useful to teach the chapter on the paragraph before they go on to the whole theme, but most teachers probably will find this chapter, with its emphasis on form, more useful after the student has first studied materials like Chapters One through Four, with their emphasis on substance and purpose. For similar reasons, the chapter on sentence style may prove most useful late in the first-semester course – perhaps in conjunction with the chapter on persuasion, where emphasis is on the effect writing has on the reader.

(5) The sections of the handbook dealing with punctuation, grammatical usage, and the like, are designed primarily for convenient reference. Even these, however, are written so as to provide at the same time coherent instruction and exercise materials for the student needing help with mechanics.

Changes in the Third Edition

In writing the Third Edition of *Words and Ideas*, I have aimed at relating the freshman course organically to the world of today’s teachers and students; making the book as *useful* as possible to the teacher; making the book reflect the changes in the composition course that have taken place during the last ten years; bringing in new models and exercises from the best current professional and student writing.

Specific changes are as follows:

Three new chapters: The new Chapter One, “The Whole Theme,” takes the student step by step through the whole process of composition. The emphasis is on four basic kinds of themes: process, thesis and support, classification, comparison and contrast. This chapter incorporates the material on outlining, and on introductions and conclusions, formerly contained in the handbook chapter on organization.

The new Chapter Ten, “Writing About Literature,” places the emphasis on *kinds of critical papers* most frequently assigned in a composition or introduction to literature class: explication, studying

a character, the central symbol, tracing the theme, defining a critical term, comparison and contrast. The chapter provides many sample outlines and models for student papers.

The new Chapter Nineteen, "Practical Prose Forms," covers the summary, the business letter, and the essay exam.

Stronger positive emphasis: While continuing to alert students to familiar pitfalls, the new *Words and Ideas* gives stronger emphasis to the means by which *good writing is produced*. Throughout the rhetoric, the emphasis is on direct application to student writing. In each of the chapters devoted to description, personal experience, definition, logic, and persuasion, a new or expanded section describes typical kinds of papers, gives advice on how to structure a typical student theme, and provides sample outlines and models.

A leaner style: Most of the rhetoric has been *completely rewritten*, and much of the handbook trimmed down, for a leaner, more vigorous style. There is less exhortation, more demonstration. Major principles stand out more clearly for emphasis. Logical sequence of materials is easier to grasp at a glance for purposeful study and efficient reference.

New material: New *exercise material* illustrates a greater diversity of concerns and is drawn from a wider range of both professional and student writing. *Writing samples* include new selections from Mary McCarthy, John Updike, James Baldwin, Edward Albee, Marshall McLuhan. New sources range from the *National Review* to underground student newspapers. The new student research paper, "The Furor over Ibsen," is a lively inquiry into a controversy with intriguing contemporary parallels.

In working on this new edition, I have learned from teachers, students, and former students now turned teacher. I have profited from many detailed reviews and personal conferences with teachers from different parts of the country. Among those who have furnished me with new materials and new ideas, I want to thank especially Palmer Czamanske, Valparaiso University; Wallace Graves, San Fernando Valley State College; John Nichol, University of Southern California; Naomi Clark, Gwendolyn Large, and Mary Sapsis of San Jose State College. I am indebted to the following for invigorating criticism and pointed advice: John A. Barsness, Boise College; Jack D. Campbell, Oklahoma State University; Earl J. Dias, Southeastern

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H. Guth

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