

# COLLEGE WRITING SKILLS

WITH READINGS *John Langan*



O U R T H E D I T I O N

# COLLEGE WRITING SKILLS WITH READINGS

Fourth Edition

JOHN LANGAN  
*Atlantic Community College*

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**COLLEGE WRITING SKILLS WITH READINGS**

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

6 7 8 9 0    DOC    DOC    9 0 9

ISBN 0-07-036458-3

This book was set in Times Roman by Monotype Composition Company. The editors were Tim Julet and Peggy Rehberger; the design manager was Joan E. O'Connor and the text designer was Rafael Hernandez. The production supervisor was Richard A. Ausburn. The cover illustrator was Tina Hill and the cover was designed by John Hite; R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company was printer and binder.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Langan, John. (date)

College writing skills with readings / John Langan.—5th ed.

p.            cm.

Student ed.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-07-036458-3

1. English language—Rhetoric.    2. English language—Grammar.

3. Academic writing.    4. College readers.    5. Essay.    I. Title.

PE1471.L34            1997

808'.0427—dc20

96-28159

<http://www.mhcollege.com>

# 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 now lives with his wife, Judith Nadell, near Philadelphia. Among his everyday pleasures are running, working on his Macintosh computer, and watching Philadelphia sports teams 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

**Note:** This Instructor's Edition of *College Writing Skills with Readings* is identical to the student textbook except that it also includes, at the end, a special section: "Instructor's Guide." (A separate *Instructor's Manual and Test Bank* is also available; it includes this guide along with supplementary activities and tests.)

*College Writing Skills with Readings* is a rhetoric with readings that will help students master the writing of 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 page 127 and 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. In Part Two, students learn how to apply the four principles within the different patterns of essay development; then, in Part Three, they apply the principles to such specialized types of writing as the exam essay and the research paper. Finally, the reading selections in Part Five generate assignments which encourage students to apply the four principles in a variety of well-developed essays.
- *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 xxi. Then, in an early chapter (see page 41), 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 page 9. 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 way (though by no means the only way) that students learn is by imitation. *College Writing Skills with Readings* 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 four 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.
- *A number of prose readings are included in Part Five.* These readings deal with many contemporary concerns and will stimulate lively class discussions as well as individual thought. They will serve as a rich source of material for a wide range of writing assignments.

There are two special features in Part Five. First is the emphasis placed on helping students become stronger readers. A brief introductory section offers tips on good reading, and ten questions after each selection help students practice key skills in effective comprehension. A second special feature is the detailed guidelines provided with many of the writing assignments. Students are shown how to start thinking about an assignment, and they are often given specific ideas on how to proceed.

- *Helpful learning aids accompany the book.* Instructors will find useful the checklist of the four steps in essay writing on page 127 and the inside front cover. Also helpful will be the form for planning an essay on page 9 and the list of correction symbols on the inside back cover. The *Instructor's Edition* is made up of the student text followed by an Instructor's Guide featuring hints to the instructor, a model syllabus, and answers for all the activities and tests in the text. An *Instructor's Manual and Test Bank* includes the material in the Instructor's Guide along with thirty supplementary activities and tests. These activities and 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 Edition and the Instructor's Manual and Test Bank are available from the local McGraw-Hill representative or by writing to the College English Editor, The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10020.

## **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THIS BOOK AND *COLLEGE WRITING SKILLS***

*College Writing Skills with Readings* includes a Part Five, made up of twenty-five professional reading selections. It also contains, at the end of each chapter in Part Two, an additional writing assignment titled “Writing about a Reading Selection”; this assignment asks students to respond to one of the professional essays in Part Five by writing a paper using the mode of development in question.

## **CHANGES IN THE FOURTH EDITION OF *COLLEGE WRITING SKILLS WITH READINGS***

Here are the major changes and additions in the new edition of *College Writing Skills with Readings*:

- The treatment of prewriting in Part One has been enlarged by adding a section titled “Practice in Seeing the Entire Writing Process.” The section illustrates and comments on the sequence of stages that a student writer goes through in preparing a paragraph.
- “Introduction to Essay Development” at the start of Part Two has been revised, and the patterns of development have been rearranged into a more traditional sequence, beginning with description.
- The chapter on argumentation in Part Two has been expanded to provide more background information on the nature of argument. Students now learn five strategies that they can use to win over readers with differing viewpoints.
- Some chapters in the handbook in Part Four have been resequenced; a chapter on numbers and abbreviations has been added; and two more tests have been added to the popular editing activities that close the handbook.
- Five of the readings are new: “Only Daughter,” by Sandra Cisneros; “I Became Her Target,” by Roger Wilkins; “Propaganda Techniques in Today’s Advertising,” by Ann McClintock; “How to Deal with a Difficult Boss,” by Donna Brown Hogarty; and “Is Sex All That Matters?” by Joyce Garity.
- Finally, the book is now available in this Instructor’s Edition that features a convenient Instructor’s Guide at the end of the student text. The guide includes hints to the instructor, a model syllabus, and answers for all the activities and tests in the book.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Reviewers who have contributed to this edition through their helpful comments include Gale Aston, Roxbury Community College; Ellen H. Bell, Manatee Community College; Edna Boykin, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University; Roseann Cacciola, Rancho Santiago College; Alice Cleveland, College of Marin; John Covolo, Lakeland Community College; Susan Day, Illinois State University; Jeannie Dobson, Greenville Technical College; Linda Wheeler Donahue, Mattatuck Community College; Evelyn Etheridge, Paine College; Elaine Fitzpatrick, Massasoit Community College; R. Douglas Fossek, Santa Barbara City College; Cara Fuchs, Fairleigh Dickinson University; Daniel B. Gallagher, Laredo Junior College; Jan Gerzema, Indiana University Northwest; Dabney Gray, Mississippi University for Women; Linda Eanes Jefferson, Richard Bland College of the College of William and Mary; Leslie K. King, SUNY College at Oswego; Cyril M. Leder, Mott Community College; Patricia Maida, University of the District of Columbia; Mary Mears, Macon College; Michelle Peterson, Santa Barbara City College; Kathleen L. Pickard, Cuyahoga Community College; Carolyn Russell, Rio Hondo College; Rachel Schaffer, Eastern Montana College; Betty Slifer, College of Southern Idaho; Linda Suddeth Smith, Midlands Technical College; and Edna Troiano, Charles County Community College.

I also thank my McGraw-Hill editors, Tim Julet and Peggy Rehberger, for their talented support, and my copyeditor, Sue Gamer, for her superb editing work. Finally, I am grateful to my wife and writing colleague, Judy Nadell, for the major role she played in expanding the chapter on argumentation.

# 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 instructor 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 with Readings* 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.

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.

Finally, Part Five consists of a series of high-interest reading selections that will give you many ideas for writing. A special feature of Part Five is an introductory guide to effective reading. Each selection is then accompanied by comprehension questions that will give you practice in key reading skills. In addition, there are discussion questions and writing assignments that will help direct your thinking about each selection.

For your convenience, the book contains the following:

- On page 127 and the inside front cover, there is a checklist of the four basic steps in effective writing.
- On page 9, there is a diagram to use when planning an essay.
- On the inside back cover, 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 with Readings* 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**

# CONTENTS

READINGS LISTED BY RHETORICAL MODE TO THE INSTRUCTOR	xiii
TO THE STUDENT	xv
	xxi

## **PART ONE**

### **BASIC PRINCIPLES OF ESSAY WRITING**

	1
INTRODUCTION TO THE ESSAY FORM	3
IMPORTANT FACTORS IN WRITING	11
Your Attitude about Writing	12
Developing a Subject	13
Keeping a Journal	15
Prewriting	17
Outlining	26
Revising, Editing, and Proofreading	31
Practice in Seeing the Entire Writing Process	32
THE FIRST AND SECOND STEPS IN ESSAY WRITING	41
Step 1: Begin with a Point or Thesis	42
Step 2: Support the Thesis with Specific Evidence	46
Practice in Advancing and Supporting a Thesis	51
THE THIRD AND FOURTH STEPS IN ESSAY WRITING	69
Step 3: Organize and Connect the Specific Evidence	70
Step 4: Write Clear, Error-Free Sentences	86
Practice in Organizing and Connecting Specific Evidence	87

FOUR BASES FOR EVALUATING ESSAYS	95
Base 1: Unity	96
Base 2: Support	99
Base 3: Coherence	102
Base 4: Sentence Skills	105
Practice in Using the Four Bases	108

**PART TWO**  
**TYPES OF ESSAY DEVELOPMENT** 119

INTRODUCTION TO ESSAY DEVELOPMENT	121
DESCRIPTION	128
NARRATION	137
EXAMPLES	146
PROCESS	158
CAUSE AND EFFECT	167
COMPARISON AND CONTRAST	178
DEFINITION	195
DIVISION AND CLASSIFICATION	205
ARGUMENTATION	217

**PART THREE**  
**SPECIAL SKILLS** 237

TAKING ESSAY EXAMS	239
WRITING A SUMMARY	247
WRITING A REPORT	257
WRITING A RÉSUMÉ AND JOB APPLICATION LETTER	262
USING THE LIBRARY	268
WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER	286

<b>PART FOUR</b>	
<b>HANDBOOK OF SENTENCE SKILLS</b>	<b>307</b>
<b>Grammar</b>	
SUBJECTS AND VERBS	309
FRAGMENTS	314
RUN-ONS	328
REGULAR AND IRREGULAR VERBS	341
SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT	350
CONSISTENT VERB TENSE	356
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT VERBS	359
PRONOUN AGREEMENT, REFERENCE, AND POINT OF VIEW	364
PRONOUN TYPES	372
ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS	378
MISPLACED MODIFIERS	384
DANGLING MODIFIERS	387
FAULTY PARALLELISM	392
<b>Mechanics</b>	
MANUSCRIPT FORM	396
CAPITAL LETTERS	398
NUMBERS AND ABBREVIATIONS	406
<b>Punctuation</b>	
APOSTROPHE	410
QUOTATION MARKS	417
COMMA	424
OTHER PUNCTUATION MARKS	434
<b>Word Use</b>	
USING THE DICTIONARY	439
IMPROVING SPELLING	447
VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT	452
COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS	456
EFFECTIVE WORD CHOICE	467
SENTENCE VARIETY	477

<b>Practice</b>	
EDITING TESTS	487
<b>PART FIVE</b>	
<b>READINGS FOR WRITING</b>	501
INTRODUCTION TO THE READINGS	503
LOOKING INWARD	508
Thank You <i>Alex Haley</i>	508
Shame <i>Dick Gregory</i>	515
On Being a Mess <i>Elizabeth Ames</i>	522
Only Daughter <i>Sandra Cisneros</i>	528
I Became Her Target <i>Roger Wilkins</i>	534
The Ambivalence of Abortion <i>Linda Bird Francke</i>	540
Smash Thy Neighbor <i>John McMurtry</i>	547
A Hanging <i>George Orwell</i>	555
In My Day <i>Russell Baker</i>	562
OBSERVING OTHERS	571
On the Meaning of Plumbing and Poverty <i>Melanie Scheller</i>	571
A Kite <i>James Herndon</i>	577
Brett Hauser: Supermarket Box Boy <i>Studs Terkel</i>	584
Defense Mechanisms <i>Ronald B. Adler and Neil Towne</i>	590
Why Are Students Turned Off? <i>Casey Banas</i>	597
Five Parenting Styles <i>Mary Ann Lamanna and Agnes Reidmann</i>	603
Propaganda Techniques in Today's Advertising <i>Ann McClintock</i>	609
CONFRONTING PROBLEMS	617
Date Rape <i>Ellen Sweet</i>	617
Here's to Your Health <i>Joan Dunayer</i>	627
How to Make It in College, Now That You're Here <i>Brian O'Keeney</i>	632
College Lectures: Is Anybody Listening? <i>David Daniels</i>	641
Seven Ways to Keep the Peace at Home <i>Daniel A. Sugarman</i>	647
In Praise of the F Word <i>Mary Sherry</i>	657
The Plug-In Drug <i>Marie Winn</i>	662
How to Deal with a Difficult Boss <i>Donna Brown Hogarty</i>	671
Is Sex All That Matters? <i>Joyce Garity</i>	679

READING COMPREHENSION CHART	<b>686</b>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	<b>688</b>
INDEX	<b>689</b>



# READINGS LISTED BY RHETORICAL MODE

**Note:** Some selections are cross-listed because they illustrate more than one rhetorical method of development.

## EXAMPLES

Thank You <i>Alex Haley</i>	508
Defense Mechanisms <i>Ronald B. Adler and Neil Towne</i>	590
Propaganda Techniques in Today's Advertising <i>Ann McClintock</i>	609
Date Rape <i>Ellen Sweet</i>	617
Here's to Your Health <i>Joan Dunayer</i>	627
Seven Ways to Keep the Peace at Home <i>Daniel A. Sugarman</i>	647
How to Deal with a Difficult Boss <i>Donna Brown Hogarty</i>	671
Is Sex All That Matters? <i>Joyce Garity</i>	679

## PROCESS

How to Make It in College, Now That You're Here <i>Brian O'Keeney</i>	632
Seven Ways to Keep the Peace at Home <i>Daniel A. Sugarman</i>	647
How to Deal with a Difficult Boss <i>Donna Brown Hogarty</i>	671

## CAUSE AND EFFECT

Only Daughter <i>Sandra Cisneros</i>	528
Smash Thy Neighbor <i>John McMurtry</i>	547
On the Meaning of Plumbing and Poverty <i>Melanie Scheller</i>	571
Why Are Students Turned Off? <i>Casey Banas</i>	597
Propaganda Techniques in Today's Advertising <i>Ann McClintock</i>	609
Date Rape <i>Ellen Sweet</i>	617
The Plug-In Drug <i>Marie Winn</i>	662
How to Deal with a Difficult Boss <i>Donna Brown Hogarty</i>	671
Is Sex All That Matters? <i>Joyce Garity</i>	679

## COMPARISON-CONTRAST

Only Daughter <i>Sandra Cisneros</i>	528
The Ambivalence of Abortion <i>Linda Bird Francke</i>	540