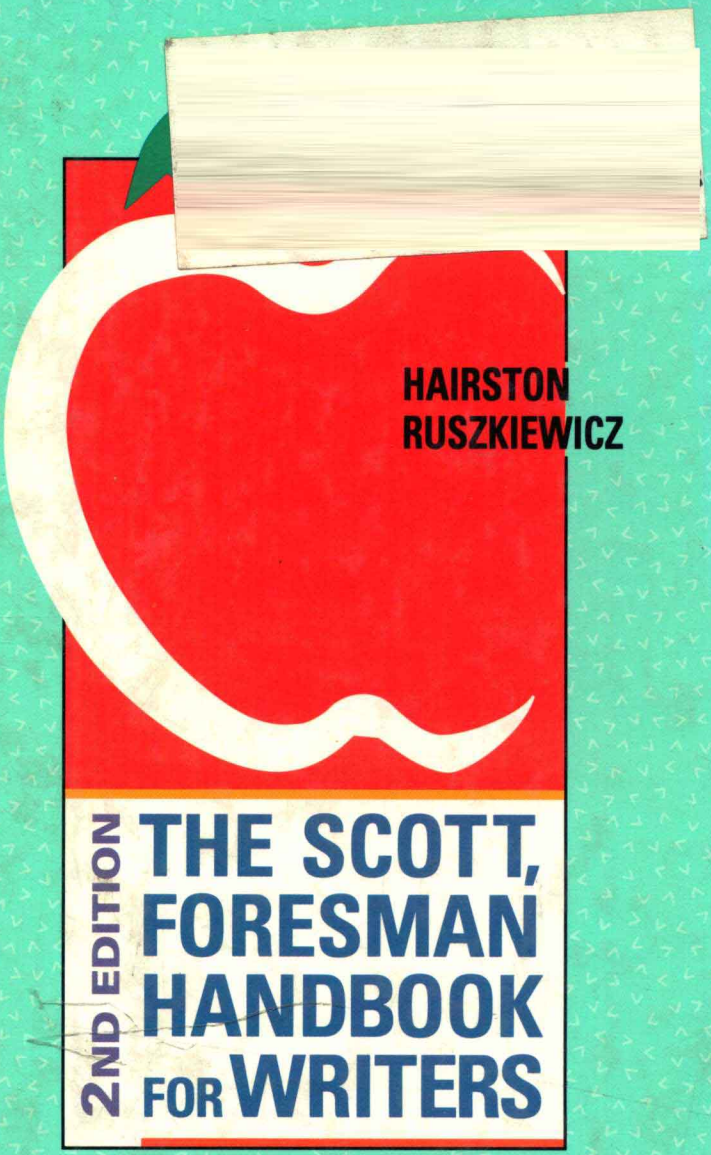

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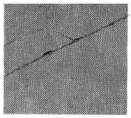

Preface

Success-conscious Americans are grammar-conscious Americans and for good reasons. They know that if they want to get ahead in almost any business or profession, they must speak and write reasonably correct English. The first edition of *The Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers* introduced a fresh and pragmatic approach to helping writers achieve that goal and in doing so became an immediate best seller. We were delighted and encouraged by that success, pleased to find that students and instructors responded so enthusiastically to our informal, practical, and user-friendly methods for improving writing.

In this second edition, we keep this easy-to-use, trouble-shooting format for helping writers to master the conventions of standard English, and we continue to stress taking a damage-control approach to correcting errors. We also maintain the holistic focus by urging writers to generate content and ideas first, then turn their attention to revising and editing.

In this edition we continue to avoid specialized terminology as much as possible; when it is necessary we define key terms at the beginning of each section. Since research shows that students learn most when they can identify and correct errors on their own, our goal has been to write a book that students can use independently to revise and edit their writing.

The second edition of *The Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers* continues the use of marginal symbols to mark items of composition, punctuation, and usage on a research-based scale of priorities. To establish that scale, we surveyed hundreds of English instructors and professional writers and editors to find out which features of standard English they valued most in writing. From their responses we developed a method of rankings that we use to alert writers to those features of usage and style that cause special problems and also to those fine points that could add polish to their work. We believe these symbols will alert writers to errors and lapses that could be damaging.

What the second edition covers

Part I, **The Writing Process,** not only gives a succinct overview of the writing process, but features an expanded discussion of different kinds of writing. We have introduced the terms **explanatory writing** and **exploratory writing** to reinforce these distinctions. Part I also contains new material on invention and a detailed discussion of the writing process with an expanded section on incubation. It gives stronger advice on outlines and thesis sentences, along with additional illustrations. The sections on drafting, revising, and editing are illustrated with a carefully analyzed new student paper.

Part II, **Style,** expands the first edition's discussion of paragraphs, and suggestions for writing good opening and closing paragraphs have been highlighted in a separate chapter. The chapter on transitions has been shifted to this section of the book, and the chapter on language, dialect, and sexist language now includes a chart to illustrate connotation and denotation. This style section features three new chapters on writing good sentences, arranged in sequential order and giving detailed instruction on ways to structure and polish sentences.

In Part III, **Grammar and Usage,** the pronoun and verb chapters have been divided into smaller and more manageable units, and the exercise sets are shorter and occur more frequently. Sections on mechanics and usage have been restructured to be more accessible to students, and more charts now highlight the discussion of usage. For easier reference, we have moved the chapters on sentence problems and modifiers to this section of the second edition. The chapter on writing with a word processor is now more comprehensive and current.

Part IV, **Research and Writing in the Disciplines,** is now a section that meets the needs of colleges and universities that emphasize writing across the curriculum. It features separate chapters on Writing in the Humanities, Writing in the Social Sciences, and Writing in the Professions. Each chapter includes its own sample paper.

Part V of the second edition, **Tools for Writers,** contains useful material on the dictionary, spelling, and writing with a word processor, as well as a **Glossary of Usage** and a new section titled **Parts of Speech.**

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Finally, because we believe learning about writing should be fun as well as useful, we have added a little zest to our book by creating two casts of characters from two fictional college campuses. One group works and studies at Clear Lake College in the peaceful, green world of Ruralia, Illinois; the other operates out of the more hectic Chicago campus of the same college. These characters and their stories appear in the exercises and examples throughout the book—we hope they will enliven the learning process a little for both instructors and students.

Acknowledgments

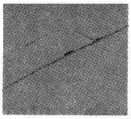
We wish to thank all those English professors and other professionals whose responses to our survey about error enabled us to set our priorities for usage and mechanics. Their pragmatic responses and concern for language have helped us establish the research base for our book and make informed judgments about placing the marginal symbols.

We are grateful also to the management of the College Division of Scott, Foresman and Company, now HarperCollins Publishers, for continuing to publish this handbook that attempts to chart new directions. We especially want to thank Anne Smith, who initiated the project, and Constance Rajala and Marisa L'Heureux, who gave us the benefit of creative and watchful editing for this second edition.

Finally, we wish to thank Ruth Blumenthal and James Balarbar, students at the University of Texas, for allowing us to reprint their drafts and essays as models of the writing process. We are continually aware of our debt to all our students, past and present, for providing us with the insight and motivation to write this book.

Maxine C. Hairston

John J. Ruszkiewicz



Foreword

What is a handbook for?

A handbook is a reference book for writers to use when they want advice about composing or guidance about a point of grammar or usage. It is one of a writer's basic tools, just as a word processor or a dictionary is a tool. In three important ways, we have tried to make this handbook a practical manual, easy to understand and easy to use.

First, we have tried to use as little specialized terminology as possible; when we do use specialized words, as we must in many sections, we define them for you.

Second, we have applied a problem-solving approach to most parts of the book. **Troubleshooting** sections identify the difficulties or questions writers are most likely to have. Then we enumerate and discuss solutions to these problems, beginning with the basic solutions and narrowing down to matters of **Fine Tuning.**

Third, we have devised a system of **symbols** for marking rhetorical and grammatical problems in the handbook according to their difficulty so you can tell quickly how damaging a certain error may be or how troublesome some element of the writing process is likely to prove. More on this system of **symbols** shortly.

What is damage control?

Most handbooks contain hundreds of conventions, injunctions, and rules; only professional grammarians and rhetoricians are likely to appreciate all of them. The problem for the average person who needs to consult a handbook is how to decide which issues are minor, even trivial, and which are really serious.

What writers need, then, are guidelines for damage control that will tell them which errors are the grammatical or rhetorical equivalent of a **serious blunder,** such as poking a fork in the toaster or turning left from the right-turn lane. And they need to know which issues are significant enough to **warrant special attention** because they play an important role in making writing clear, consistent, and effective. Ignoring such items could cause embarrassment. Writers also need to know which issues of grammar, rhetoric, or usage are just plain **tricky**—those irritating (usually minor) problems that consistently trouble many writers. And finally, it helps to know which conventions of language deal with distinctions so subtle that they might be called **refinements**—the linguistic equivalent of social customs like knowing how to address an ambassador or use a fruit knife. While appreciating such fine points could help you to add a touch of class to your writing, most writers need to think about getting their forks out of their toasters first.

In short, we are suggesting priorities. If you have the time and skill to get everything right every time, fine. But if you don't, we want you to know which problems to concentrate on first.

To do that, *The Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers* features a system of symbols in its margins to help you appreciate the seriousness of certain problems and practices. These symbols should help you set priorities in writing and revising. We have not attempted to assign symbols to every item in the book; rather, we have put them by only those items we think warrant your particular attention. We had the advice of a panel of experts in deciding which problems deserved what symbols, although of course we made the final judgments. Here is what the symbols mean.

Stop!—serious blunder. This error could be very damaging.

Caution. This is a significant item or issue.

Tricky. This point is confusing to many writers.

Fine point. The point is nice to know.

We hope these symbols and the problem-solving arrangement of the text will encourage you to use *The Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers* as a fix-it manual. In that respect, it is primarily a reference tool. But remember, too, that writing involves much more than just avoiding problems and correcting mistakes. For that reason, the first sections of the book focus on the writing process—getting started, producing a draft, finding your audience and purpose, and revising and editing.

When should you use a handbook?

We advise you not to use the grammar and usage sections of your handbook in the early stages of the writing process. People who write a lot find they work best if they don't worry about grammar, spelling, or rules of usage while composing a first draft. If they do, their best ideas often float away while they are tinkering with details. This "write first and fix it later" attitude makes sense for all writers—novices and professionals. Writing should be fun, not an ordeal, but we know from research that student writers who begin to worry too early about whether they are getting everything correct will bog down quickly. Then writing that could have been exciting and satisfying too often becomes a tedious and discouraging chore.

For this reason, in Part I of the handbook we strongly suggest that you make it your first priority to produce a rough draft of any paper you are writing. If you are preparing one of the assignments discussed in **Research and Writing in the Disciplines,** you may want to consult this section before writing. But, using whatever means work best for you, write down your ideas in some form early—even if they are not fully expressed or well organized. The important thing is to produce a first draft

you can then develop into a finished product by revising and editing.

We also suggest you wait to look up specific problems of grammar or usage until after you have finished large-scale revising and are working at small-scale or stylistic revising. (More on these terms in Chapter 4, Revising and Editing.) We think *The Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers* will help you most if you use it at this stage, after you have made your major decisions about the content of your paper. Then use it again when editing the final version of your paper so that the finished product is as polished as you can make it. Used in this way, the handbook can serve you as a coach, not a dictator.

Finally, a word about the cast of characters in our examples and exercises. You'll find that the lives and activities of people from two campuses of a mythical school called Clear Lake College and the people from the communities that surround them have been woven into narratives that develop throughout the handbook. We have created these characters and stories partly to enliven what is often the dullest part of a handbook and partly to remind you that writing usually involves people doing things with or for other people. Writing is a social activity; it doesn't take place in a vacuum. We hope meeting the cast of characters and reading about their triumphs and dilemmas will help to make *The Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers* interesting and engaging.

Contents

FOREWORD xxix

PART I THE WRITING PROCESS 1

1 WHAT IS WRITING? 3

1A What are common myths about writing? 3

1B How does the writing process work? 5
Writing as a process 5
Cycling through stages 6

EXERCISES 4, 7

2 HOW DO YOU PREPARE TO WRITE? 8

2A What kinds of writing do you do? 9
Explanatory writing projects 10
Exploratory writing projects 12
Combined writing strategies 13

2B How do you analyze your writing situation? 16
Evaluating your topic 16
Evaluating your audience 18
Evaluating your purpose 23

EXERCISES 9, 11, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, 26

3 WHAT GOES INTO PLANNING? 27

3A How do you find a topic? 27
Brainstorming 29
Freewriting 29
Word clusters 29
Computer programs 30

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3B **How do you narrow and focus a topic?** 31
Focusing 32
Treeing 33

3C **How do you explore and develop a subject?** 35
Zero drafts 35
Journalist's questions 36
Patterning 38

3D **How do you plan and outline a paper?** 39
Sample sentence outline 41
Sample scratch outline 43
Working lists 44
Sample working list 44

3E **How do you devise a thesis sentence?** 46

3F **How do you arrange a paper for emphasis?** 49

3G **How do you choose a title?** 52

EXERCISES 30, 35, 36, 37, 38, 44, 45, 48, 49, 51, 53

4 **HOW DO YOU WRITE A DRAFT?** 54

4A **How do you get started on a paper?** 54
Pacing 55
Collaboration 55

4B **When should you give yourself a break?** 58
Incubation 59

4C **How do you find a pattern of development?** 60
Introduction/body/conclusion 60
Problem and solution/question and answer 61
Comparison/contrast 61
Cause and effect 63
Assertion and support/claim and evidence 64
Commitment and response 65
Classification, narration, and process 66

4D **How do you produce a first draft?** 68

4E **When do you have a draft?** 69

4F **What does a draft look like? (An essay in progress)** 71

4G **How do you work on a draft collaboratively?** 77

Response sheet for drafts 78

EXERCISES 57, 58, 60, 67, 70

5 HOW DO YOU REVISE, EDIT, AND PROOFREAD? 80

5A **What does large-scale revision involve?** 81

Checklist for large-scale revision 85

5B **What does small-scale revision involve?** 86

Checklist for small-scale revision 88

5C **What do editing and proofreading involve?** 88

Checklist for editing and proofreading 90

5D **When is an essay finished? (An essay in progress, part 2)** 93

EXERCISES 85, 88, 91, 93

PART II STYLE 102

6 WHAT MAKES PARAGRAPHS WORK? 103

6A **How do you achieve unified paragraphs?** 104

Topic sentences 106

Commitment and response 108

Downshifting 111

6B **What other patterns can you use for paragraphs?** 114

Cause and effect 115

Comparison/contrast 115

Definition 116
Illustration 117
Classification 117
Narration/process 118
Analogy 118

6C How can you use transitions and parallelism to reduce paragraph sprawl? 120
Pointer words 121
Relationship words 121
Repetition 121
Parallel structure 122

6D Can you improve paragraph appearance? 123
Breaking up long paragraphs 124
Reconsidering short paragraphs 129

EXERCISES 108, 110, 112, 113, 119, 122, 127

7 HOW SHOULD YOU MANAGE OPENING AND CLOSING PARAGRAPHS? 131

7A What makes an opening paragraph effective? 131
Making a commitment 132
Making a direct announcement 134
Asking a question 135
Focusing on key facts 136
"Circling the field" 137

7B What makes a concluding paragraph effective? 139
Making a recommendation 140
Summarizing main points 140
Linking end to beginning 141

EXERCISES 133, 135, 136, 137, 140, 142, 143

8 HOW DO YOU MANAGE TRANSITIONS? 144

8A Where do problems with transitions occur? 145

Types of sentences 145
Subordinate clauses 146
Expletive constructions 147
Markers for time and sequence 148
Connecting words 148
Gaps between paragraphs 149
Sample transitions 150

8B How can you strengthen transitions? 153

Transition words 153
Checklist for transition words and function 154
Repetition of key ideas 154
Demonstrative pronouns 155
Relative pronouns 155
Parallel structure and downshifting 155
Semicolons 156

EXERCISES 151, 152, 156, 157

9 WHAT KINDS OF LANGUAGE CAN YOU USE? 158

9A How do you choose the appropriate language level? 158

Formal 161
Moderately informal 162
Casual 164

9B Denotation and connotation: What's appropriate? 167

Denotative language 169
Connotative language 172
"Whoopee" words 173

9C When is dialect appropriate? 174
Uses and importance 175
Limitations 176

9D How do you avoid sexist language? 178
Identifying sexist language 179
Avoiding sexist language 180

EXERCISES 165, 166, 174, 181

10 CAN YOU MAKE YOUR WRITING CLEARER? 183

10A Can you be more specific? 183
Abstract and concrete language 184
Details and examples 188
Downshifting 188

10B Can you help your readers see your point? 189
Description 190
Adding people 190
Metaphors and analogies 191

10C Can you make your writing more direct and easier to read? 194
Actor/action sentences 195
Active verbs 196

10D Can you lighten bureaucratic prose? 200
Heavy-duty nouns 201
Prepositional phrases 201

10E Can you make your writing more readable? 203
Chunking 203
Lists 205

EXERCISES 186, 187, 189, 192, 193, 196, 198, 199, 202, 205, 207

11 CAN YOU REVISE FOR SENTENCES THAT WORK BETTER? 208

11A Can you revise to clarify tangled sentences? 209

Clarifying the subject 210

Adding an independent clause after a dependent clause 211

Adding an independent clause after a lengthy subject 211

11B Can you redirect derailed sentences? 212

11C Can you reorganize overloaded sentences? 214

Dividing sentences 214

Reducing introductory clauses and phrases 215

Deflating lengthy subjects 216

11D Can you revise to make sentences parallel?

EXERCISES 212, 213, 216, 218, 219

12 CAN YOU REVISE FOR BETTER CONSTRUCTED SENTENCES? 220

12A Can you revise for better coordinated sentences? 220

Joining related independent clauses 221

12B Can you revise for better sentence subordination? 223

Using signals for subordination 224

Choosing signals for meaning 224

Emphasizing the most important idea 225

Arranging for smooth sentence flow 225

Stringing clauses together 226

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