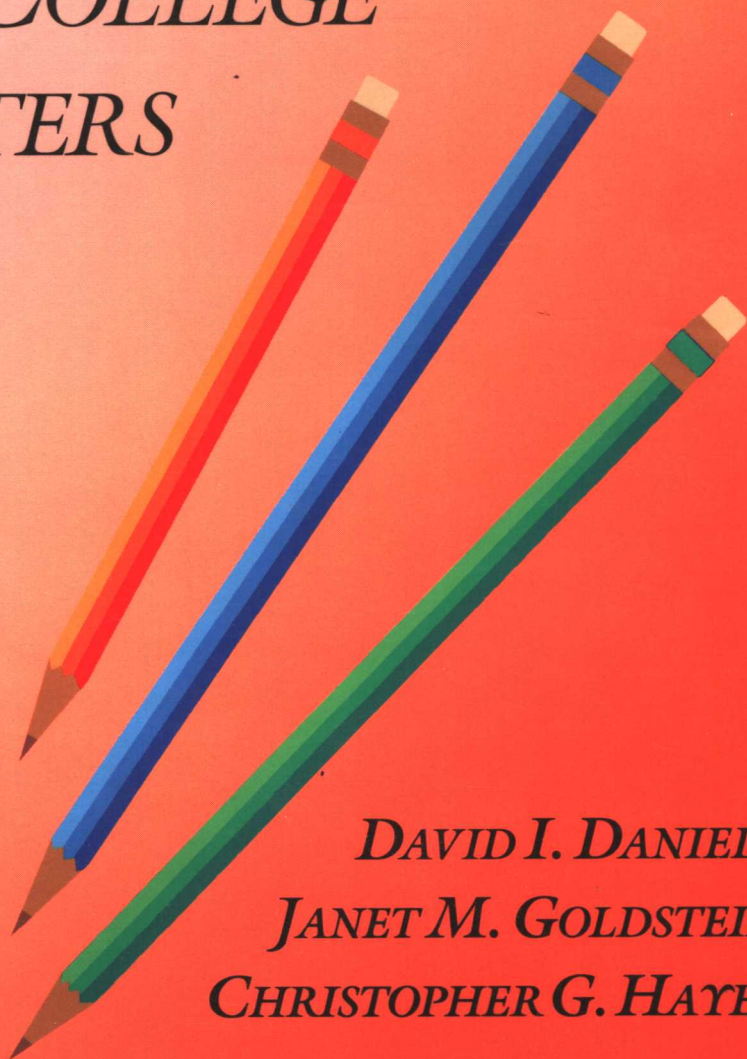

*A BASIC READER
FOR COLLEGE
WRITERS*



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A Basic Reader for College Writers

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Townsend Press
Marlton, NJ 08053

Preface to the Instructor

The number of college students who need work in basic skills is now very large—and growing rapidly. These students present a special challenge to those of us who teach them. On the one hand, they enter college expecting to think about and discuss issues at a serious intellectual level. On the other, they need to improve their basic writing and reading skills. Addressing these two equally important requirements demands of us a balancing act worthy of a tightrope walker.

A Basic Reader for College Writers is designed to help meet both the skill needs and intellectual needs of today's students. The book provides a series of thirty-two lively and thought-provoking essays, each accompanied by an extensive set of activities to help students read, understand, and write about the essays. In particular, by providing instruction and practice in the skills necessary for close and thoughtful reading, the text will help all those teachers whose students say, "I read it, but I didn't understand it."

The most important and distinguishing feature of the book is our emphasis on an *essential principle* that students must learn and practice. The principle is that any thoughtful communication of ideas has two basic parts: (1) a **point** is made and (2) that point is **supported**. Students learn to apply this principle to become better readers, writers, and thinkers. They are encouraged when *reading* an essay to look for a central idea as well as for the reasons, facts, examples, and details that support that idea. They are reminded when *writing* to follow the same basic principle: that is, to make a point and then provide support for that point. And they discover that *thinking* (which they also do when actively reading or writing) involves testing the worth of ideas by deciding whether there is solid support for those ideas.

Here are other important features of the book:

High Interest Level

At the heart of the book are the thirty-two selections, grouped into six thematic units. We believe that it is crucial for such reading selections to be of high

appeal. Students will not begin to enjoy reading if the material is dull. Also, a teacher's enthusiasm for a compelling essay can be infectious. We have thus spent a great deal of time locating and class-testing selections that will truly capture the interest of students and teachers. All of the readings are clearly and logically written; all present intriguing ideas, helpful practical information, or revealing insights into human nature.

Frequent Skills Practice

Complementing the high-interest selections is a series of high-quality activities that truly help students improve their reading and writing. The book assumes that reading and writing are interrelated skills. Work on reading can improve writing; work on writing can improve reading. Practice in reading and writing follows each of the thirty-two selections. Here is the sequence of activities:

First Impressions Following each reading is a freewriting activity titled "First Impressions" that encourages students to come to terms with what they have read. The activity consists of three questions that permit students to respond on different levels of feeling and opinion. For example, the first question is always "Did you enjoy reading this selection? Why or why not?" The two other questions focus on particular issues raised by the essay—issues about which every student should have something to say.

The "First Impressions" activity provides at least two additional benefits. First, it lays the groundwork for oral participation; many more students can contribute intelligently to classroom discussion after they have collected their thoughts on paper in advance. Second, as an integral step in the writing process, freewriting can supply students with raw material for one or more of the paragraph and essay assignments that follow the selections.

Words to Watch and Vocabulary Check Basic students need to strengthen their vocabularies in order to succeed in college—and they know it. *A Basic Reader for College Writers* builds vocabulary in the most research-proven and interesting way, by providing hundreds of useful words in context. Up to fifteen of a selection's words and phrases are defined in the "Words to Watch" section that comes before each reading. Other words that may be unfamiliar to students appear as part of the "Vocabulary Check" activity that follows each reading. Students thus have frequent opportunities to sharpen their skill at deriving meaning from context. A convenient glossary of words at the back of the book supplies the definitions and pronunciations for all of the "Words to Watch."

Reading Check Practice in reading skills is provided through an activity titled "Reading Check," a series of comprehension questions that follow the

“Vocabulary Check.” The questions involve four key skills: finding the central point and main ideas, recognizing key supporting details, drawing inferences, and understanding the writer’s craft. The craft questions include such elements as transitions, types of support, introduction and conclusion strategies, tone, purpose, and patterns of organization.

Outlining Activity or Summarizing Activity The treatment of outlining and summarizing is a unique feature of this book. While teachers agree that these skills are an important part of thoughtful reading and writing, they are all too seldom taught. From a practical standpoint, it is hardly possible for a teacher to respond individually to entire collections of class outlines or summaries. We have tried, then, to create activities of increasing difficulty that truly involve students in outlining and summarizing—in other words, that truly make students *think*—yet also make it possible for a teacher to give realistic feedback. It is through continued practice *and* feedback on challenging material that a student becomes a more effective reader and thinker. The first outlining activity can be seen on page 30; the first summarizing activity appears on page 11.

Paragraph Assignments and Essay Assignments Four writing assignments—two paragraphs and two essays—conclude the activities for each selection. The assignments emphasize the basic principle of clear communication: that a student make a point and support it. Numerous sample topic sentences and thesis statements as well as specific suggestions for supporting these points help students to succeed on these assignments. At the same time that it provides these guided opportunities for writing, the book remains, as its title indicates, a basic reader. Rather than attempting to teach the art of writing, *A Basic Reader for College Writers* focuses on teaching students to do the careful reading and sound thinking that effective writing requires.

Ease of Use

The book is designed to be simple for both teachers and students to use. The activities already listed are easy to present in class and convenient to correct. Answers to the activities appear in three places:

- **A glossed selection** Comments and answers accompany the first selection, “Bird Girl.” Students thus learn right at the start how to complete the activities and questions that follow each reading selection.
- **A partial answer key** Answers and explanations are given at the back of the book for the first selection in each of the remaining five units. The five glossed selections are: “Batter Up”; “Fun. Oh Boy, Fun. You Could Die from It”; “What Is Intelligence, Anyway?”; “A Crime of Compassion”; and “The

Smart Way to Buy a New Car." The answer key helps those students who benefit from self-checking. It also helps ensure that students understand the issues that they will then be asked to write about. Students are likely to use the partial answer key in an honest and positive way to improve their reading skills if they know that they may be checked on the many selections for which answers are not provided.

- ***A complete answer key in the Instructor's Manual*** Complete answers for all the activities are provided on letter-sized sheets in a separate Instructor's Manual. At the teacher's option, these sheets can easily be duplicated and distributed to students so they can check their own answers. The manual also contains additional writing assignments for each of the six units, as well as a model syllabus that can be used as a guide in planning a course.

Other features or supplements of the book allow for ease of use as well. A *preview* that accompanies each selection provides helpful background information and stimulates student interest. The activities are designed for *quick checking and grading*, either by the student or by the teacher. The *perforated pages* in the book add to the ease of grading. And many of the writing assignments are *interchangeable*: paragraph topics may be used for essays and vice versa.

Finally, a *computer disk* is available to help students work through the vocabulary and reading questions that accompany ten of the selections. The disk is a helpful motivational tool that will enable students to work at their own pace towards a basic understanding of any of the ten selections. Teachers will then have more time available to deepen that understanding while preparing students for writing activities.

In short, *A Basic Reader for College Writers* contains an appealing collection of readings and an exceptional series of activities that will give students extensive guided practice in reading and writing. We believe the book's value lies in the quality of the selections, the activities that follow, and the integrated approach to reading and writing that is maintained throughout.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the advice and suggestions provided by the following reviewers:

France Conroy, Burlington County College
Ann Dobie, University of Southwestern Louisiana
Toni Empringham, El Camino College
Yvonne Frye, Community College of Denver
Helen Gordon, Bakersfield College
Roslyn J. Harper, Trident Technical College

Paul Hauser, Kirkwood Community College
Brian Huot, Syracuse University
Peggy Jolly, University of Alabama at Birmingham
Nancy Martinez, University of New Mexico
Joseph G. R. Martinez, University of New Mexico
Jerry Olsen, Middlesex Community College
Kathleen Schatzberg-Smith, Rockland Community College
Jill L. Sessoms, USC-Coastal Carolina College.

In addition, we owe thanks to a number of people who helped make this book possible. Dot Carroll, Virginia H. Kerrick, and Elaine J. Lessig each made significant contributions to the initial stages of the manuscript. Our gratitude also goes to Carole Mohr, Executive Editor at Townsend Press. Her insightful editing work, especially in the early and middle stages of the project, made the book much better than it would have been otherwise. Most importantly, we acknowledge the advice and support of John Langan, who first suggested to Townsend Press the need for a textbook such as this one and who brought the three of us together for the project. Without his help, this book would not exist.

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How to Become a Better Reader and Writer

"Essay?" asked the red-headed student in the front row. "What do you mean—essay?"

The rest of the class laughed. The instructor had spent all week explaining what an essay is. But some of the other students laughed a little nervously. They had been asking themselves the same question the student in the front row dared to ask out loud. What *is* an essay, really?

An essay is a short piece of writing that expresses an author's idea or feeling about a particular topic. Many articles in books, magazines, and newspapers, as well as the papers you will be writing, follow the same basic pattern. An author makes a point of some kind and provides information that supports that point.

A Basic Reader for College Writers consists of this introductory chapter and 32 high-interest essays. This introduction will explain how understanding the concept of *point and support* can make you a better reader and writer. It will offer specific tips or strategies for reading more effectively. And while the book is not a composition text, some brief strategies will be suggested for more effective writing as well.

The rest of the book contains the 32 essays and a carefully-designed series of activities that accompanies each essay. As you read the essays and work closely with them, you will develop your own ideas for writing. At the end of each essay, you will be given specific paragraph and essay topics to write about.

Format of the 32 Reading Selections

This book assumes that we learn best through doing. You are asked, then, to answer brief questions as you read through the rest of this introduction.

Each of the 32 essays begins with a *Preview* that gives helpful background information and arouses your interest in the piece.

- What helpful information, for example, do you learn about the author of the first essay, "Bird Girl," by reading the preview?
-
-

Following the preview is a list of *Words to Watch*, which gives the definitions of difficult words taken from the reading.

- How many "Words to Watch" are provided for "Bird Girl" (page 2)?
-

In parentheses next to each word is the number of the paragraph in which it appears. Also, each word is underlined in the reading itself.

Every essay is followed by a series of activities. The initial activity, *First Impressions*, asks you to write for ten minutes about the piece you have just finished reading.

- Turn to "First Impressions" on page 6 and note how many writing choices you are given: _____

Next there is a series of questions titled *Vocabulary Check*. Half of these questions will help you learn words in a research-proven way: by seeing how they are actually used in the selection. The other questions will help reinforce the meanings of selected words learned in "Words to Watch."

- Turn to the "Vocabulary Check" on page 6 and record how many vocabulary questions appear: _____

The vocabulary material is followed by a *Reading Check*. The questions here will help you to practice and develop several important reading skills.

- Turn to "Reading Check" (page 8) to note the number of comprehension questions that are asked: _____
 - Complete the list below of the kinds of comprehension question provided: Central Point and Main Ideas
-
-

The Writer's Craft

You will next find an activity (page 11) in either *Outlining* or *Summarizing*: two processes that develop your ability to get to the heart of each piece and to think logically and clearly about what you have read.

- What kind of activity is given for "Bird Girl" (page 11)? _____

Next, there are *Discussion Questions* about the essay. These questions provide a final chance for you to deepen your understanding of a reading.

- Turn to page 12 and note how many discussion questions are provided for "Bird Girl" (and for every essay in the book): _____

Finally, two *Paragraph Assignments* and two *Essay Assignments* follow each essay. To get you started, the first paragraph assignment and the first essay assignment include sample main ideas and thesis statements. The second assignment in each pair offers specific hints for supporting your ideas. The selections are grouped into six units. Turn to the table of contents (page v) to complete the list below of the six units:

Personal Memories

Understanding Ourselves

Sports and Leisure

Additional information you should know about includes a glossary of the "Words to Watch" that appear before each selection (pages 307-315) and also a reading performance chart on the last page of the book.

Point and Support

The most important principle in this book is that effective writing has two basic parts: (1) a *central point* and (2) *support* for that point. The central point states what the author thinks, and the support helps you, the reader, understand why the author holds this opinion. By keeping this principle in mind, you can become a better reader and writer. As you read, remember that an author's purpose is to make a point and support it with reasons, examples, and other details. When you write, remember that to communicate effectively, you should follow the same basic plan: make a point and support it.

Suppose you read an article in *Newsweek* about flexible working hours. By answering the question, "What is the point of this article?" you discover that the author thinks making working hours more flexible is a good idea. Next, you ask, "How does the author support the central point?" In fact, the article gives three supporting reasons. Flexible working hours would lead to fewer traffic jams, better use of building space, and more opportunities for parents to work. By asking and answering these two questions, you have found the meaning of the article. *This strategy can be applied to almost anything you read.*

You should follow the same principle when you write. Let us say you are writing a paper on the parking problem at your school. First, you need to

decide what point to make about your topic. Suppose you decide to argue that the college should end its policy of reserving parking spaces for the faculty. Since your instructor, who will read (and grade) your paper, probably parks in a reserved space, you need some convincing reasons to support your central point. You might explain that the present policy makes poor use of space on an overcrowded campus since faculty parking spaces are often empty when the student section of the lot is full. You could also argue that students resent faculty parking privileges, making good relations between students and faculty more difficult. When you have thought of both your central point and enough support for that point, you are on your way to writing a solid, well-reasoned paper.

- What is an essay? _____
- The two basic parts of effective writing are to _____ a point and to _____ that point.

Reading Strategies

Most of your college reading is designed to help you learn about new subjects and new ideas. All too often, however, students have trouble understanding what they read. A familiar complaint is, "I read it, but I didn't understand it."

This section explains seven strategies that can make you a better reader. You will have many opportunities to apply them in this book. In fact, try to use them for *all* your reading. You'll then find yourself getting more from your other courses as well as from this one.

Strategy 1: Learn to Read Actively

One key to improved reading is getting actively involved in each stage of the reading process. Here are some ways to do so.

1. **Preview the selection.** In other words, look over what you will read—quickly but alertly—before you start to read it. Follow these steps:
 - a. ***Make the title into a question.*** For example, before reading a short selection titled "TV Commercials and Children," you might ask the question "How do TV commercials affect children?" or "Why are TV commercials directed at children?" Searching for the answer to your question will give you a reason for reading.

On the lines below, try out this tip by writing two questions based on "Learning to Give Up," the title of one of the selections in this book.

Are the questions you wrote on the lines above something like "Who learns to give up?" "Why do they learn to give up?" "What are the values or drawbacks of learning to give up?" If so, you've got the idea. Asking basic questions can make you a more active reader.

- b. *Read through the first several paragraphs and the last several.* They may give you a quick sense of the main idea of the article.
 - c. *Look at the first sentence in each paragraph.* You won't get a complete picture of the selection by reading only these sentences, but you will get some idea of the selection's overall organization.
2. Read the selection straight through for pleasure. Don't get bogged down; instead, try to understand as much as you can this first time through.
 3. Use any special features the book provides. In this book, a *Preview* introduces you to each selection. Also, *Words to Watch* defines the hard words in the selection in the order in which they appear. All these words are then underlined in the selection. Finally, the three *First Impressions* questions that follow each selection allow you to jot down some quick reactions to the selection and its relationship to your own life. Knowing that you'll be writing down your first impressions each time should focus your attention when you read the selections in this book. And once you get in the habit of writing about your first impressions, you'll be surprised by how many ideas you have.
 4. Reread the selection, marking key information with a pen or pencil. Marking material will keep your mind alert and show you what to come back to later. Here are some suggestions on how and what to mark:
 - a. Underline the ideas that seem important.
 - b. Write *Ex* in the margin to set off important examples.
 - c. Put question marks beside any material you don't understand.
 - d. Number any important series of ideas.

This marking will help you answer the questions that follow each selection.

Following each selection in this book is a set of questions that help you practice basic reading skills. As you strengthen these skills enough to make them habits, your reading ability is sure to improve. Here are the skills:

Strategy 2: Understand Vocabulary in Context

Building your vocabulary is essential to becoming a better reader and writer. In fact, people who build strong vocabularies are more likely to be successful in school and in their careers. Yet few of us have the time or desire to open the dictionary every time we meet an unfamiliar word. Luckily, there is another way to learn new words: we can guess their meanings with the help of surrounding

words (called *context*). For example, see if you can figure out the meaning of the word *prudent* from its context in this sentence:

The appearance of AIDS has caused many people to be more prudent about romance.

Because you understand the rest of of this sentence, you can guess that *prudent* means "cautious" or "careful."

Following each selection in this book are eight vocabulary items. The first four have been chosen to help you learn how to guess what words mean from their contexts. The last four cover important words from "Words to Watch." Here's an example for you to try, taken from the paragraph on "TV Commercials and Children" that appears below. See if you can figure out the meaning of the word in italics just by reading the sentence in which it appears. Then circle the letter of the answer that best completes the item.

The word *crave* in "such commercials often promote junk food. They encourage little children to *crave* sugary snacks and breakfast cereals" means

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| a. be afraid of. | c. strongly desire. |
| b. sell. | d. ignore. |

What would TV ads for junk food make children do with "sugary snacks and breakfast cereals"? If you chose c, "strongly desire," you are correct.

Strategy 3: Look for a Basic Structure in What You Read

You should assume that a well-written selection, long or short, has two basic parts: (1) a central point and (2) support for the central point. As you read the selections in this book, you'll be answering two kinds of questions about the structure of each reading:

1. **Find the Central Point and Main Ideas.** If a selection is only one paragraph long, the central point is often (though not always) expressed in its first sentence. In fact, your instructor may ask you to start the paragraphs you write with *topic sentences*—that is, sentences that state the main idea in each paragraph. In an essay, which is made up of several paragraphs, the sentence that states the central point is known as the *thesis statement*.

The sentence stating the central point of a selection is a one-sentence summary of the entire essay. It's the answer to the question "What is the point?" which you should ask about whatever you read. In addition to a central point, longer selections have main ideas that support the central point. Often these main ideas are stated in topic sentences that begin paragraphs, but sometimes they are found within or at the ends of paragraphs. And some of the time,

both central points and main ideas are not stated directly. When this situation happens, you must draw your own conclusions about what they are.

2. Locate Key Supporting Details. The support for central points and main ideas may be in the form of reasons, examples, details, facts, statistics, quotations, or anecdotes (stories). Finding these details will help you recognize an author's point-and-support structure for an essay.

Look, for example, at the following paragraph:

TV Commercials and Children

Television commercials aimed at young children—the kind shown during Saturday morning cartoon shows, for example—should be banned. For one thing, such commercials often promote junk food. They encourage little children to crave sugary snacks and breakfast cereals made of tiny chocolate doughnuts or cookie nuggets. In addition, these commercials urge children to be greedy. At the same time parents are teaching their children to share what they have with others, TV commercials make them want more expensive toys and other products for themselves. The worst thing about these ads, however, is that they take advantage of children who have not yet learned what advertising is or how it works. If a beloved cartoon character tells a child a cereal or a toy is great, the child believes it. Children can't see how advertisers trick them into wanting a product or how ads make toys or games look better than they really are. Aiming ads at little children is unfair.

Can you find the central point and the three key supporting details in this paragraph? Answer the questions below, and then read the explanations that follow them.

1. Which sentence best expresses the central point of "TV Commercials and Children"?
 - a. All television commercials should be banned.
 - b. TV commercials aimed at young children should be banned.
 - c. Commercials make young children want to eat junk food.
 - d. Advertisers do not care what children eat.

In this selection, the central point is *b*, "TV commercials aimed at young children should be banned." Answer *a* is *too broad*—it refers to *all* television commercials, not just those aimed at youngsters. Answer *c* is *too narrow*—it is actually one of the supporting details for the central point. Answer *d* may or may not be true, but it is not what the whole paragraph is about. Only answer *b* states the central point of the paragraph.

2. On the lines below, write the three key supporting details for the central point. (Ask yourself, "What specific reasons does the author give for why TV ads are harmful to children?")

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

If you wrote answers similar to "They promote junk food," "They encourage greed," and "They take advantage of children," you are correct.

Strategy 4: Draw Inferences

Inferences are the reasonable guesses we make based on the facts presented. For example, if a crowd of people is smiling and talking after leaving a movie, we would probably assume that the movie is an enjoyable one. And if rolled-up newspapers accumulate on a neighbor's porch over a holiday weekend, we could conclude that the family is away on a brief vacation. Or if trucks that usually race along the highway are suddenly observing the speed limit, we could infer that a police radar trap is nearby. We make the same kinds of judgments when we draw conclusions about what we read. In this book, you'll be answering several inference questions each time you read a selection. Look again at the paragraph on "TV Commercials and Children" (page xxvi) and answer the following question. Then read the explanation that follows it.

_____ TRUE OR FALSE? We can infer from the paragraph that young children think that ads tell the truth.

You can find the answer to this question near the end of the paragraph, when the writer explains that young children haven't learned what advertising is. The paragraph goes on to state that if a cartoon character praises a cereal or toy, the child believes that character. Therefore, the author is suggesting that young children believe everything they see on TV—including ads. The inference is true.

Strategy 5: Appreciate the Writer's Craft

"Writer's craft" refers to techniques an author uses to communicate ideas. Being aware of these strategies will increase your understanding of what you read as well as improve your own writing. In this book questions on the writer's craft cover:

1. Introductions and Conclusions. What does an author do to interest you in reading what he or she has written? Sometimes a selection begins with an entertaining story (sometimes called an anecdote), a quotation,

a provocative question, or a definition. To provide an ending, authors may use one of these techniques or instead do something like summarize key points, plead for a change, or make a prediction.

2. Type of Support. How has the author supported his or her central point? Common methods of support in paragraphs and essays include facts, examples, statistics, quotations, material from surveys and studies, questions, one or more incidents, and the author's own reasons and personal experiences.
3. Patterns of Organization. How have the supporting details been arranged? Authors often choose time order (telling the parts of a story in the order that they happened) or order of importance (from least to most important). Or they may prefer space order (showing where something is located), comparison-contrast (showing how two things are alike or different), or cause and effect (showing why something happened).
4. Tone. Just as a speaker's tone of voice reveals how he or she feels, a writer's tone also communicates feelings. You should be able to tell whether a selection's tone is humorous or serious, angry or friendly, formal or informal, self-pitying or sarcastic, encouraging or discouraging, or simply objective (factual).
5. Purpose. Decide what type of writing you are reading. Is it intended to inform (give people information), to entertain (give people pleasure), or to persuade (change people's minds about an issue)?
6. Audience. Decide for what kind of reader the selection was probably written. Was it meant for the general reader (anyone)? Or was the author writing for a smaller audience, such as major league baseball players, a group of fellow researchers, or parents of high school students?
7. Signal Words. Just as traffic signals tell drivers what's coming next, signal words provide needed guidance for readers. Some of these signal words and phrases (also called transitions) are listed below:
 - a. *Addition* words add a similar idea: and, also, in addition, finally.
 - b. *Time* words show when something happened: first, next, then, last.
 - c. *Location* words show where something is: above, between, in front of, next to.
 - d. *Illustration* words show an example: for example, for instance.
 - e. *Contrast* words show the next idea will be different: however, but, on the other hand.
 - f. *Conclusion* words indicate that a conclusion or result will follow: thus, therefore, as a result.
8. Intentional Repetition. Some words and phrases appear again and again throughout a selection not because the author is careless, but because he or she wants to call attention to ideas he or she considers important.

9. Titles. Looking closely at titles gives you clues to authors' ideas and attitudes towards their subjects.

Here are some "Writer's Craft" questions for you to try. To answer them, you may have to look once again at "TV Commercials and Children" on page xxvi. After you have answered the questions, check your answers below.

1. The purpose of "TV Commercials and Children" is to
 - a. entertain us with examples of clever ads.
 - b. inform us that children's programs contain commercials.
 - c. persuade us that children should watch less TV.
 - d. persuade us that commercials can be harmful to children.
2. The words *for example* in "Television commercials aimed at young children—the kind shown during Saturday morning cartoon shows, for example" signal
 - a. illustration.
 - b. contrast.
 - c. addition.
 - d. time.

Did you choose *d* for question 1 and *a* for question 2? Then you are correct.

Strategy 6: Learn to Outline and Summarize

Outlining and summarizing are two time-honored ways of highlighting the point and support in a piece of writing. An *outline* is a diagram that shows the central point and major supporting details. (In this book, capital letters, rather than Roman numerals, will be used to indicate the largest support.) A *summary* is a much shorter version of the selection, written in paragraph form. Usually the first sentence in a summary expresses the point, and the sentences that follow express the support.

Everyone agrees that outlining and summarizing are central to thoughtful reading and writing at the college level. The outlining or summarizing activity that follows each selection in the book will help you become more comfortable with these essential skills.

Strategy 7: Discuss Your Ideas

In class, your instructor will probably ask you to respond to one or more of the four discussion questions that follow each essay. After reading the selection, writing about your first impressions, and completing the activities, you'll find that you have a lot to say about the topic of the selection. When you discuss your ideas in class, you'll then be more ready and able to express *informed* opinions, based on all the reading and writing you've already done.