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Work u! Progress

A Guide to Writing and Revising

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■ With a new chapter on writing online ■



FOURTH EDITION

Work in Progress

A Guide to Writing and Revising

LISA EDE

Oregon State University



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To Instructors

With the first edition of *Work in Progress*, I wanted to write a theoretically sophisticated but commonsensical and relatively brief textbook, one that would enrich but not dominate the life of the classroom, one that would support but not impose a collaborative approach to the teaching of writing. Traditional textbooks have too often placed students and teachers in opposition: The teacher acts as the provider of knowledge, the students as passive absorbers of this wisdom. *Work in Progress* would, I hoped, foster the development of a genuine collaborative community, grounded in mutual respect and a shared commitment to inquiry. Learning and teaching are, after all, both works in progress.

Fortunately, *Work in Progress* has been successful enough to warrant subsequent editions, and thus it continues as my own work in progress. In this fourth edition, I have attempted to respond to important changes in the situations of teachers and students that have taken place in recent years. In particular, the development of electronic technologies such as the Internet and the World Wide Web are speedily changing what it means to be a writer and reader today, and so I've added a new chapter, "Understanding Online Writing Situations," with rhetorically grounded suggestions for writers of online texts. A second new chapter, "Strategies for Successful Collaboration: Writing with Others," responds to the increasing prevalence of collaborative learning and writing throughout the curriculum as well as in business, industry, and the professions.

These two new chapters will, I hope, increase the usefulness and timeliness of *Work in Progress*—as well as reinforce the text's central goals. These goals continue to be reflected in a number of key features:

- a focus on the concept of the rhetorical situation
- explicit support for and reinforcement of collaborative learning and writing activities
- extensive attention to the process of reading and to reading and writing as dynamic, interdependent activities
- full discussion of the demands of academic writing
- a strong emphasis on the importance of social context and of textual conventions of writing

NEW TO THIS EDITION

Chapter 5, “Understanding Online Writing Situations,” brings a rhetorical approach to such online writing tasks as posting to email and listservs and composing Web pages. Rather than focusing on “how to” issues—how to use Netscape, for instance—this chapter provides guidelines to help students analyze the rhetorical situations in this new medium of communication.

Chapter 10, “Strategies for Successful Collaboration: Writing with Others,” draws together and expands upon the third edition’s coverage of this topic, providing a richer and more coherent discussion of the challenges and benefits that collaborative writing can bring. This chapter draws upon Andrea Lunsford’s and my extensive research on this subject.

This edition incorporates further additions and changes. There are a number of new professional and student essays, including a second essay by noted prose stylist Ian Frazier in the chapter on style. Since this chapter also includes the long and dramatic first paragraph of Frazier’s *Great Plains*, students now have a powerful example of the way in which a single author varies his style according to purpose and situation. Finally, the fourth edition includes a new mini-anthology of reading selections focused on online writing technologies and situations. The mini-anthology in Chapter 11, “Understanding the Reading Process,” provides opportunities for teaching the reading strategies discussed in the chapter as well as for source-based writing assignments.

Work in Progress is divided into three major parts. Part One is an introduction to writing, helping students understand the processes of writing, rhetorical situations, communities and conventions, and online writing situations. The five chapters in Part One establish the conceptual and pedagogical framework for the text. Together, they enable students to develop a sophisticated yet commonsensical understanding of writing as a means of communication, the writing process, and the rhetorical situation. The discussion and activities in these chapters also encourage students to begin to think of themselves as writers participating in a community of writers and to recognize that a rhetorical approach to communication can help them respond effectively in a variety of writing situations, including online writing.

Part Two offers practical strategies for writing: invention, planning and drafting, revision, and collaboration. As the title of Part Two suggests, the chapters in this section introduce students to a variety of practical strategies they can use as they plan, draft, and revise. Rather than emphasizing a single, prescribed series of steps or strategies that students must follow, *Work in Progress* encourages students to develop a repertoire of strategies they

can use (working alone and with others), depending on their purpose and situation.

Part Three makes connections among writing, reading, and reasoning, covering the reading process and academic audiences, assignments, analysis, and argument. This final part of *Work in Progress* initiates students into the reading and writing they will do as members of the academic community. Students learn approaches to analyzing texts that will help them read more critically and write more effectively. The text offers suggestions for analyzing disciplinary conventions and for understanding what is expected for assignments. In these and other ways, *Work in Progress* shows students ways to approach the writing of academic analysis and argument.

I have attempted to make *Work in Progress* an innovative textbook—but also to be sure it remains a practical textbook. It provides a conceptual framework and activities that stimulate effective classroom instruction, yet it also offers teachers considerable autonomy and flexibility. Some teachers will particularly appreciate the book's emphasis on reading and on academic writing, for instance, while others may draw more heavily on its numerous interactive, collaborative, workshop-oriented activities. Still other instructors will appreciate the ways in which *Work in Progress's* rhetorical approach supports an emphasis on cultural and/or literacy studies. The *Instructor's Notes to Work in Progress* provide further elaboration of ways in which the text can be used.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Before I wrote *Work in Progress*, acknowledgments sometimes struck me as formulaic or conventional. Now I recognize that they are neither; rather, acknowledgments are simply inadequate to the task at hand. Coming at the end of the preface—and hence twice marginalized—acknowledgments can never adequately convey the complex web of interrelationships that make a book like this possible. I hope that the people whose support and assistance I acknowledge here not only note my debt of gratitude but also recognize the sustaining role that they have played, and continue to play, in my life.

I would like to begin by thanking my colleagues at the Center for Writing and Learning at Oregon State University. I could accomplish little in my teaching, research, and administration without the support and friendship of Mara Dempsey, Saundra Mills, Matt Jurdana, and Judy Maxey. They, along with our writing assistants, have taught me what it means to collaborate in a sustaining, productive fashion. Others in the OSU English department, my second academic home, supported me while I wrote and revised this text. I am indebted to my colleagues Chris Anderson, Vicki Collins, Anita Helle, and Simon Johnson for their friendship and their

commitment to writing over the years. I wish also to acknowledge the support and friendship of Cheryl Glenn and Jan Olson, former colleagues who recently moved to Pennsylvania State University.

I have dedicated this book to my students, and I hope that it in some way reflects what *they* have taught me over the years. I also owe a great debt of gratitude to another friend and teacher, Suzanne Clark, who allowed me to persuade her to interrupt her own important works in progress to collaborate with me on the *Instructor's Notes*. Colleagues and students play an important role in nurturing any project, but so do those who form the intangible but indispensable community of scholars that is one's most intimate disciplinary home. Here, it is harder to determine who to acknowledge; my debt to the composition theorists who have led the way or "grown up" with me is so great that I hesitate to list the names of specific individuals here for fear of omitting someone deserving of credit. I must, however, acknowledge my friend and frequent coauthor Andrea Lunsford, who writes with me even when I write alone. And I would also like to thank the many dedicated teachers of composition I have worked and talked with over the years. By their example, comments, suggestions, and questions, they have taught me a great deal about the teaching of writing.

A number of writing instructors took time from their teaching to read and comment on drafts of this edition. Their observations and suggestions have enriched and improved this book. These reviewers include: Nick Carbone, Marlboro College; Andrew Crockett, University of Arizona; Jim Crosswhite, University of Oregon; Bobby Cummings, Central Washington University; Donna Dunbar-Odom, East Texas State University; Lester Faigley, University of Texas at Austin; Allison Fernley, Salt Lake Community College; Bill Keith, Oregon State University; Tim Krause, Purdue University; Jennifer Phegley, Ohio State University; Nancy Prosenjak, Metropolitan State College at Denver; Penelope Smith, Gannon University; Susan Taylor, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Heidimarie Weidner, Tennessee Technological University; and Betty Youngkin, University of Dayton.

This edition has also benefited from the astute comments of student reviewers: Amy Bierley, Gannon University; Kristin D. Brooks, University of Dayton; Michael Ceccoli, University of Dayton; Kenny Claywell, Tennessee Technological University; Gordon Coonfield, Central Washington University; Bunnie S. Cummings, East Texas State University; Samantha K. Hoffman, Tennessee Technological University; John La Haye, Metropolitan State College; Christine L. Pasqua, Gannon University; and Michelle Stinson, Metropolitan State College.

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LISA EDE



Prologue: Entering the Conversation

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.

—KENNETH BURKE, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*



In the years since Kenneth Burke wrote the preceding statement, many have found his parlor metaphor to be an apt description of language in action. Whether we are considering the situation of an infant learning its first words or a student learning the language of the academy, we realize that before either one can “put in [their] oar,” they must “listen for a while.” We learn language best when we can interact with—and learn from—others. In this prologue, you will have an opportunity to learn about writing from a group of experienced students—students who have been conversing in the academic parlor for several years now. I asked these students to meet with me because I wanted to understand writing from *their* perspective—and I wanted to share their thoughts with you.

We met on a cold, rainy Thursday. The students entered my office, shaking their coats and umbrellas and chattering about the rain. Robin Cross is an agricultural economics major returning to school after running a sheepshearing and lambing business. Monica Molina, a sociology major who has just finished an internship in Oregon State University's Affirmative Action office, is a disk jockey on the student radio station and an active

member of OSU's Hispanic Students' Organization. Tina Fowlks is majoring in psychology, while Michael Lundin and Audrey Meier are English majors: All are students in their early twenties who are involved in a variety of campus activities. Chris Jones has a double major in science and technical writing; we can't guess his age (and, he laughingly says, he won't tell). James Fowell is a sociology major, computer geek, and veteran of the Internet. Jim Hogan, Kelly Rayle, Terrell Ratchford, Karen Zielinski, and Donna Anderson are all education majors, each having returned to college after working at various real-world jobs.

Twenty years teaching writing have taught me many things, and one of the most important is that students can learn an enormous amount about writing by talking, working, reading, and writing with other students. I begin by asking about the kinds of writing these students currently do. At first they laugh: "What kind of writing do you think we do?" Essays, summaries, tests, lab reports, letters of application: the familiar forms are named and discussed.

But as we talk, the list grows.

"I have quite a few friends whom I write to save on phone bills—and also because I enjoy getting mail," says Michael. "I dabble in creative writing and poems . . . just to have fun with words. Keeping a journal helps me to think about what I'm doing and to pay attention to life."

Others describe similar writing efforts—the poems written to express strong feelings, the pro-con lists sketched out to help make decisions. Some have published their writing: Robin writes occasional columns for his industry journal, and Chris writes ads for the student newspaper. James and Kelly describe themselves as "addicted to email."

Kelly keeps in touch with her parents through email letters: "They usually take the form of stream-of-consciousness writing, unpunctuated, uncorrected. We make puns and coin new words. It keeps us in touch—and it makes us laugh."

James also corresponds with family and friends through email, and he contributes to several bulletin boards: "I regularly post to several newsgroups on the Internet," James tells us, "alt.discordia, orst.soc.418, orst.soc.324, and alt.my.head.hurts."

Like most in college, these students juggle many demands, and writing sometimes adds to them. As we talk, they acknowledge the pressures that writing can bring. "Writing can make me really uptight," Donna observes—and the conversation evolves into an alternately humorous and heated discussion of the best way to respond to the pressure of deadlines. That pressure is quite real, everyone agrees. "Even when my writing's going well," Robin notes, "there's always some element of worry and stress."

Given such inevitable stress, I ask, what keeps you going? What does writing do for *you*? Audrey is quick to respond: “Writing gets me organized.” She laughs. “I’d be nowhere without my ‘to do’ list, my short-term and long-term goals. Writing keeps me in line with life!”

“And it keeps me in line with my studies,” Tina adds. “When I need to work through my ideas, really need to understand them, I write. I may just scribble ideas or freewrite about questions I have—I do whatever feels right at the time. The more difficult the reading is for me, the more I need writing to help me figure it out.”

“Writing’s important to my schoolwork too,” Kelly agrees; “it allows me to process information, to get it to sink in. Sometimes before a test I write just to find out what I know—and to find where the gaps are. But I also try to keep some fun in my writing—that’s why I like my email letters—they’re pure enjoyment.”

“Email is a real tension breaker for me too,” James agrees. “When I’m feeling uptight, I like to just sit at the computer and vent.”

“I’ll tell you what keeps me going as a writer,” Jim says. “I get a lot of satisfaction from winning the mental struggle to get my ideas on paper. Of course, there are times when I hate writing. But when I read a paper that I’m really proud of, when someone tells me they can really see what I mean, then I love having written.”

Jim’s comment seems somehow definitive, so our talk shifts to other matters. Audrey wonders whether others are as much an “organization freak” as she is. “I plan and plan and outline and then plan some more,” she says. Some agree—but others protest in mock horror. Tina doesn’t ever do outlines, she says, but spends several days thinking through her ideas and then freewriting and clustering. Jim describes his process differently: “Everything seems to happen all at once while I draft, including revising. I hate freewriting—can’t seem to let it flow. And though I spend some time jotting down ideas, I don’t really spend much time planning. I just start writing and then I kind of revise my writing as I go.”

“Boy, it’s a wonder anyone ever gets anything written, isn’t it!” Chris exclaims. We laugh and wonder whether despite many differences, we don’t all share some common experiences as writers. “One thing I’ve learned,” Michael says, “is that the more I write, the easier it gets. Not that I can count on that every time,” he quickly adds. “But overall I can see that it gets easier.”

“It’s kind of like an inchworm, isn’t it?” Monica asks. “You inch along and inch along. First a two-page paper seems impossible to write; a year later that’s not so hard but a five-page paper is a challenge.”

“I’ll tell you one thing that I’ve learned always works for me,” Karen comments. “I’ve learned that my writing’s always better if I get other

people to read it. Sometimes it's a friend, sometimes a writing assistant at the writing center, sometimes my mom—in fact, given deadlines, it's often my mom!"

"I need feedback too," Donna observes. "But I also need people I can talk about my ideas with separate from my paper."

"Talking about my ideas is important for me too," Tina adds. "If I can see that my topic interests somebody else, that gives me the push I need to keep going."

Anything else, I ask? "Well, I've learned to trust the process," Donna responds. "I've learned not to expect a perfect product immediately. When I'm feeling tense, I just keep repeating my mantra: 'I can always revise; I can always revise; I can always revise. . . .'"

"That's my mantra too!" Robin exclaims, and everyone laughs in agreement. "Poor spelling used to discourage me from getting started. But now I know that I don't have to worry about that, that I can accept imperfections, be patient, and let the process develop."

"Absolutely," Donna responds. "Knowing I can revise is a pressure valve for my ego. So much of my own self-image can be tied up in what I write that I can get all balled up and expect too much too fast. It's been a relief to learn that if I ease up a bit and let my writing develop naturally, it'll be better in the long run."

The hour is growing late, and the cookies and coffee are almost gone. I raise one final question: *What advice would you give to other students, especially those who are just beginning a college writing class?*

"You mean we get to be the experts for once?" Monica jokes.

"Absolutely," I reply. "So what do you think?"

"Write about topics that you really care about," Terrell quickly replies. "If you don't care, you can't write well—it'll just be a game to see if you can get a good grade."

"I agree," Michael adds. "Life's too short to just get by."

"Get to know your teacher and other students in your class," Tina observes. "They'll be reading your writing, and the better you know them, the more comfortable you'll be."



"But get other readers too," Donna suggests. "I meet regularly with a writing assistant, and I wouldn't give that up for anything. I like it that she's not in my class; it takes the pressure off and gives me a new perspective on my writing. And then there's my roommate—boy, do I owe her!"

"How's this for some simple but important advice?" Jim interjects: "Get started as early as you can. The more you put off writing, the harder it is. As that Nike commercial says: 'Just do it!' And do it often—the more practice you get the easier it'll come, and the better you'll get."

“Yes, and speaking of ‘doing it,’” Tina interjects, “I’ve got a four-pager due for my psych class tomorrow.”

Everyone has chapters to read, tests to study for, essays to write. It is time to end our conversation. We stand, stretch, pack up our belongings, all the while commenting on how quickly our time together has passed.

As I listen to these thoughtful students chat about what they need to do that night, about how quickly deadlines and the end of the term are approaching, I think back to my own student experiences, wishing that I’d known then what they know now. When I was an undergraduate, I was simply told *to write*; no one, not even my English teachers, talked to me about *how* to write—and that made writing a scary, lonely business. And my teachers certainly didn’t encourage me to learn from other students; that, they warned me, would be cheating. Fortunately, the teaching of writing has changed considerably since my undergraduate years. I have tried in *Work in Progress* to incorporate the best of these changes. And I’ve also tried to include many comments by students and examples of student writing. All, I hope, will help you grow in confidence and skill as a writer and thus help you find your own place in the conversation of the academy.



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