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confidence -

A Modern College Rhetoric

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Writing with Confidence

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Preface

Writing with Confidence: A Modern College Rhetoric is a text for college students working to develop their writing abilities. As the title implies, this book is concerned with attitudes as well as skills—with the ways in which writers perceive themselves and the world as well as with the technical means they use to achieve their rhetorical goals. "Rhetoric" is used here to mean writing to affect an audience. The book's basic assumption is that rhetorical intentions succeed most often when writers understand reading and writing as creative processes. Modern scholarship in composition has demonstrated that growth in literate creativity depends on two mutually reinforcing processes: as people gain experience in fulfilling rhetorical aims, they gain confidence in the power of writing to foster personal growth and community health, and as their confidence grows so does their power to fulfill rhetorical aims.

People spend time reading and writing because, among all ways of making meaning, written texts are uniquely efficient and powerful. For example, consider the text of a note intercepted one Friday by the teacher of an eleventh grade English class:

All tonight I know my hands will be
rough handling other players and I hope football.
This will ~~~~ be important to our school.
All our friends will be pulling for me
and ~~~~ every player. but what ever
I touch all game I will realy be
trying to touch your heart.

We might dismiss this note as awkward adolescent emoting unless we examine the writing in its context. The writer, a defensive lineman, had a particular audience of one in mind: his girl friend. And he had a particular objective in mind: to communicate certain feelings. Under no conditions was the note meant to be read by anyone else, so the teacher later forwarded it without comment to the young woman. But clearly the young man wanted the message to be read, not heard. He had used writing to compose a special thought based on a figurative contrast particularly meaningful to him. The thought was that his efforts on the football field that night, while important to the entire school, would also be intended especially for his girl friend. The figurative contrast is between physi-

cally manhandling other football players and psychologically touching her affections. The writer took some care to revise his work by deleting, adding, and substituting words to make his message more accurate and less redundant.

Obviously his proofreading overlooked errors in capitalization, spelling, and punctuation. Nevertheless the note demonstrates the essential virtue of written composition: it joined the boy and the girl, the writer and the reader, as a community of meaning-makers through a medium that offers an unmatched blend of convenience and power.

The full benefits of reading and writing, however, occur only for those who adopt the spirit of literacy. This spirit directs people to be alert to life and its possibilities. It encourages them to seek opportunities to originate new ways of living and to share new experiences, new feelings, new knowledge, and new ways of thinking about problems. Without this spirit, reading and writing are useful only in maintaining records; with this spirit, these means insure the growth of consciousness for a lifetime.

Because instruction in composition cannot begin without writers, this text encourages students to see themselves as writers here and now growing more adept in their craft. The Introduction explores students' anxieties and hopes, demonstrating how to exploit these emotions so they promote rather than inhibit achievement. Chapters 1 through 8 proceed to help students acquire three basic perceptual roles: observer, reader, thinker. Underlying these chapters is the assumption that because observation, reading, and thinking provide the fuel for composition, the inobservant, unreading, unreflective writer is running on empty. These chapters also guide students through the basic processes of inventing, planning, drafting, revising, and editing.

The heart of the book, Chapters 9 through 13, gives students experience in four fundamental rhetorical environments: sharing personal experience, evaluating, explaining, and arguing. Each environment is shown to establish a relationship among four elements: a reader, a writer, a subject matter, and a piece of writing. As in the study of perceptual roles, students are asked to take active rhetorical roles, the assumption being that the more vividly the context for writing is portrayed, the more efficiently skills are developed. To reinforce understanding of the writer's rhetorical relationships, Chapters 10–13 trace the processes readers use within the rhetorical environments. The book treats literacy as integrated processes (reading-writing) rather than as discrete products (a state of comprehension, a written text). To exemplify the processes within the rhetorical environments, each chapter details a student writer's work from first thoughts through planning and drafting to a final manuscript. These student demonstrations not only reinforce prior lessons, they also offer reassuring evidence of the lessons' validity.

Parts Four and Five guide students in fulfilling certain specially focused tasks. Part Four demonstrates in detail how to use the library and how to compose a library research paper. Part Five demonstrates the processes of writing about literature, composing answers to questions on essay exams, writing business letters, and preparing résumés. Part Six is a complete writer's guide to language, style, and usage, explaining sentence grammar, punctuation, word choice, syntactic options, and common stylistic dysfunctions and errors. The traditional

topics of grammar and usage are treated for their relevance to the processes of drafting and revising. Part Six discourages the notion that studying its topics independently, outside the context of specific rhetorical tasks, will inevitably improve writing ability.

Throughout, this book is designed to serve as an enabling resource. All its chapters reinforce this basic premise: writing with confidence means writing from a position of strength—the strength that comes from self-knowledge, perceptual sensitivity, technical skill, and the practical experience of writing in different modes and voices for different purposes and audiences.

Many people helped us prepare this book. We express our special appreciation to the staff at D.C. Heath, particularly Paul Smith and Holt Johnson for their editorial guidance, Karen Silverio for her production work, and Cia Boynton for her format design.

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