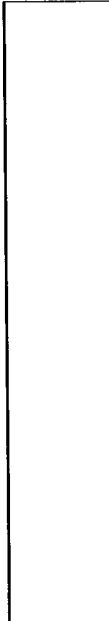


THINKING — AND — WRITING *Persuasively*

A B a s i c G u i d e



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Thinking and Writing Persuasively

A BASIC GUIDE

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Preface

Writing in a manner that convinces other people that your ideas have merit is an increasingly important skill in the workforce. The nurse who records patient information, the lawyer who writes a brief, and the secretary who suggests a change in office procedure all want their information to be accepted as reasonable. To this end, their writing must be clear and to the point. They cannot afford to be misunderstood. This text is called *Thinking and Writing Persuasively: A Basic Guide* because, to some extent, all writing is persuasive. All writers have the goal of convincing an audience to pay attention to their information, or there would be no purpose in the act of writing. Even a private journal or diary strives to communicate events and feelings as the writer experienced them, trying to persuade an audience, even if it is only the writer, that those perceptions have merit. As you proceed through the activities outlined in this text, you will learn to write for academic success and for continued success after you leave school, because much of the writing in those settings involves persuasion.

One of the most important parts of persuasion is discussing controversial topics with others without antagonism. When people discuss a controversial issue, they often begin with supporting extreme positions and then attempt to persuade those listening to agree with those positions. This book emphasizes the method to identify a place of agreement, or common ground, and then, using an element of that agreement, to persuade an audience to consider your position. Finding this area of common ground is where real change, or persuasion, can begin. As you learn

strategies of persuasive writing, you will also learn to think about writing in many different ways.

Writing is not a single activity. It is many activities occurring at once. Most textbooks have separate units on grammar, logic, audience, structure, and revision, as if each involves an isolated factor of writing and can be dealt with separately. In fact, before you write more than a word or two, you have to have some understanding of all these elements and more. This book is organized so that each chapter discusses topics in an order that responds to your needs as well as to the constraints of the classroom schedule, but you will find no chapters devoted to only one aspect of writing. Your instructor may wish to cover some of the material in a different order than we have arranged it; that is entirely a matter of personal preference. Given the understanding that virtually everything discussed in this book is related to the first paragraph you write, the order in which you cover the material is flexible.

As teachers, we acknowledge what you already know. You already reason, organize knowledge, and make decisions about what is important to you. You demonstrate these abilities when you vote, spend money, choose classes, and select your vocation. All of these thinking skills are used in persuasive writing as well. This text will help you put what you already know to work, and it will also help you to identify the components of good writing so that you can increase your control over the writing process.

By the time you finish this book, you will have been exposed to many methods for improving and focusing your writing. You will begin to write before you have read the entire book, probably within the first few chapters. The first drafts will serve as the foundation of more polished efforts that will follow as you gain confidence in reviewing and evaluating your writing. You will have many opportunities to revise. You might want to keep a file of all your work.

The Readings for Discussion in Chapter 11 will give you an opportunity to read material on a variety of topics and then to compare your responses to that material in discussions with your classmates. Those discussions will help you understand various viewpoints, contrast ideas, and respond to the topic under discussion. When you take a position in the discussion and develop an essay supporting that position, the comments of your classmates will give you an expanded understanding of the audience you are addressing.

This book does the work of a grammar handbook, a rhetoric, and a reader. It provides the grammar information you will need to write clear, error-free essays, and the appendix explains how to cite material you use

to support your position. There are chapters on the writing process and readings to help you gather ideas for topics. You will find information to address every step of the writing process as you proceed through the chapters.

Both of us have spent many years teaching composition. We have taught adults and teenagers who did not read or write. We have worked with at-risk teens. We have taught at a variety of universities and community colleges. Over the years our students have also taught us many things about how to help people grow as effective writers. Some of our students have had a difficult time overcoming the poverty and neglect in their previous schools. Some have had to walk days and nights to escape the killing fields of their native lands. Others have struggled to become proficient in English as their second language. They have brought a wealth of knowledge and experience into our classrooms with them, and each student has made contributions to this book by being willing to learn.

Writing classes have often been the gatekeeper of education: the one class that decided who stayed in school and who did not. Our interest in our students prompted us to invite all students into the world of higher education by making convincing, error-free writing ability a reachable goal. Instead of being gatekeepers, we want the courses based on this book to function as passageways to increased confidence in your knowledge of persuasive writing methods and your ability to produce such writing.

So, welcome to *Thinking and Writing Persuasively: A Basic Guide*. By the time you have finished this text, you will have learned how to think of ways to convince an audience that your ideas have merit and how to develop strategies in organizing those ideas on paper. This book will also serve as a reference every time you organize a written assignment in the future. Information such as the questions for reviewing an essay, a quick guide to comma rules, a list of frequently misused homophones, and a brief guide to Modern Language Association (MLA) referencing format will continue to be helpful. Most of all, we hope you find the process of improving your writing to be interesting and rewarding, because you will see applications every time you write.

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Chapter 1

Beginning a Discussion

How Ideas Are Formed

Why Write?

Using Information Sources

Writing and Revising

Revision Activities: Marie's Drafts

Chapter Review

It is the first day of school, and students take their seats. They look to the front expectantly to see what their teacher looks like and in the process, try to decide if this will be a good class or not.

All the students have opinions about the content of the class and expectations about how much they will enjoy it. In many ways those expectations will become reality, because people tend to look for examples that fit their previous experience.

In much the same way, you opened this textbook to begin reading. Most people want new things to be positive, and you may look for interesting and informative reading here. Composition textbooks do not have a reputation for being stimulating reading, however, and it is possible that you anticipate this one being much like all the others. To be perfectly honest, it is impossible to write a textbook that is as gripping as a novel or a short story. The purpose of textbooks is instruction, and the

purpose of fiction is entertainment and forms of insight. While instruction may be interesting, it will seldom grip one's attention in quite the same way that a fine work of fiction will.

There are ways to make textbooks easier and more interesting, however, and if you use some of these methods, your time with this one may prove even more useful:

1. As you read, watch for strategies you can apply to your writing.
2. Underline, highlight, or make a few notes about the parts that explain new ideas that seem particularly useful to you.
3. Read the chapter once quickly and then read carefully the areas that are discussing material that is new to you.
4. When something is not clear to you or you have questions, trust yourself and ask your instructor. If you do not understand, it is likely that others are not understanding either. You will help everyone if you ask in class and get things clear, but if that makes you uncomfortable, you may ask your instructor privately.

This text is organized to assist you in focusing your ideas, recognizing the needs of your audience, and writing an essay that is clear, interesting, and convincing to those who read it. All students have some experience with that process, but that experience varies widely. Even if you understand some element being covered in one of the chapters, review it so that you will be prepared to assist others as you read and respond to their essays during peer reviewing exercises.

With those preliminary comments, you are now ready to begin examining the process of composing clear, informative essays.

HOW IDEAS ARE FORMED

Writing begins with thinking. That seems obvious, but it is worth a few minutes of your time to consider how this process works for you and for others. Thinking is not something someone taught you how to do in the same way you were taught to read and write. From the time you were an infant, you have been taking in impressions of the world around you and sorting those impressions into some categories. That sorting process is called "thinking." As you learn new information, you compare it to what you already know and assign knowledge to what seems to be the most reasonable category. You do this so often that it is no longer a deliberate, conscious process but is almost completely automatic.

By the time you reach adulthood, you have an enormous volume of information, and you have established a variety of categories based on