SHORT

MES

MODEL ESSAYS FOR COMPOSITION









ELIZABETH PENFIELD

Short Takes

MODEL ESSAYS FOR COMPOSITION

Ninth Edition



University of New Orleans



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PREFACE

This book combines the old and the new. When the first edition was only an idea, I was teaching freshman English in a structured program that emphasized rhetorical modes and final product. My dilemma then was one that many teachers still face: how to incorporate the modes with the whole tangle of the writing process. But once I focused on the aims of discourse, the modes fell into place as means, not ends, and as patterns of organization used in combination, not just singly. There remained the problem of the textbooks, many of which contained essays of imposing length and complexity that intimidated and overwhelmed many a student. Often, any short essay was so because it was an excerpt. Short Takes was the result of my frustrations. This ninth edition still reflects the rhetorical framework of the first one, but it is flexible. You can even ignore it and use the thematic table of contents. But if you find the modes useful, you'll see them here.

This edition remains a collection of short, readable, interesting essays written by professionals and students, and the commentary continues to focus on reading and writing as interrelated activities. Much, however, is new:

- Revised chapter introductions that highlight the most important points and are therefore more accessible for students
- Fresh topics and eighteen new essays that engage students by analyzing subjects as varied as what makes a perfect ice cream sundae and the place of morality in the college curriculum
- Emphasis on subordinate modes so that students can more clearly understand how various modes are used singly and together
- Five sets of paired essays that present differing arguments on timely subjects so students can construct their own arguments in response
- Revised chapter on argument that pairs essays and includes a cartoon and comic strip so students can analyze differing views and different ways of presenting them
- Some writing assignments include the use of the Internet, a ready resource for most students

At the same time, features that teachers particularly liked are still here. The text

- Opens with "Freeze Frame: Reading and Writing," a brief section that introduces students to the principles of critical reading and writing.
- Provides chapter introductions directed to students that emphasize the writing process (as well as the kinds of choices and decisions all writers face).
- Presents short, engaging, accessible essays and helpful introductions to each rhetorical pattern.
- Contains complete essays, not excerpts.
- Describes each author, context for the essay, and its notable stylistic features.
- Includes questions on organization, ideas, technique, and style after each essay, engaging students to think critically about the readings.
- For each selection, suggests a number of topics for writing journal entries and essays.
- Concludes each chapter with more writing suggestions for each rhetorical mode and for essays that ask students to compare two or more of the selections.
- Additional writing prompts at the end of each chapter that call for an evaluation of two or more essays.
- Includes a variety of authors, styles, and subjects.
- Emphasizes how the rhetorical modes interact with invention and the entire writing process.
- Provides an alternate thematic table of contents.
- Comes with an Instructor's Manual that includes key words and phrases for each essay, suggestions for group work, and additional writing suggestions keyed to the thematic table of contents.

Each chapter builds on the previous one and leads to the one that follows, culminating in argument, but argument with a difference. The chapter on argument is a basic introduction, an extension of the kind of emphasis on thesis and evidence that exists throughout the text. Within each chapter, the essays are presented in order of difficulty. All the supplementary information—the chapter introductions, background information, notes on style, questions on the essays, and suggestions for writing—balance process and product, working on the premise that the two, like reading and writing, are so closely interrelated that one cannot be considered without the other.

As always, I welcome responses from students and teachers to this new edition, along with suggestions for the future. You can e-mail me direct <epenfiel@uno.edu> or in care of Longman's English Editor at Pearson Longman, 1185 Sixth Avenue, 25th Floor, New York, NY 10036.

The Essays

This edition contains 52 essays, 18 of which are new. Because most of the papers assigned in composition courses fall in the 400- to 1000-word range, most of the essays are short—about 1000 words at most—and as such easily lend themselves to scrutiny and emulation. A few are longer and rely on the kind of research that students may be asked to carry out. And a few illustrate the problem—solution organization often found in argumentative pieces. Two essays also serve as a basic introduction to the Modern Language Association's system of documentation. All of the essays are complete pieces, not excerpts, illustrating the arms of discourse and rhetorical modes.

To write is to choose among alternatives, to select the most appropriate organization, persona, diction, and techniques for a given audience and purpose. Each of the essays included in this edition was chosen because it exemplifies the author's choices, and the apparatus emphasizes those choices and alternatives. The essays, therefore, serve as illustrative models of organization and stylistic techniques available to the writer. The essays were also chosen because their authors represent different genders, ages, and cultures; as a result, the subjects of the essays are accessible and their perspectives are lively, qualities that also allow them to serve as sources of invention, as jumping-off places for students to develop their own ideas in their own styles.

Rhetorical Modes and the Aims of Discourse

Anyone who has used a reader with essays arranged by mode has probably run into two problems: first, few essays are pure examples of a single mode; second, most collections of essays treat argument—an aim of writing—as though it were the equivalent of description, comparison/contrast, and so on. *Short Takes* addresses these inconsistencies by emphasizing the difference between mode—how an essay is organized—and purpose—how an essay is intended to affect the

reader—and by pointing out how writing frequently blends two or more modes.

Because essays usually employ more than one mode, the essays here are grouped according to the *primary* rhetorical pattern that guides their organization; the questions that follow each essay point out the subordinate modes. As for the aims of discourse, the essays represent the various purposes for writing. The writers' self-expressive, informative, and persuasive purposes are underscored in the discussion questions. In addition, the apparatus connects academic writing and the kind of writing found outside the classroom.

Apparatus for Reading and Writing

The apparatus makes full use of the essays. Chapters 1 to 9 begin with a brief introduction to the student that depicts the mode or purpose under discussion, showing how it can be used in formal essays and in practical, everyday writing tasks. The introductions point out specifically how the modes can be shaped by considerations of audience, purpose, particular strategies, thesis, and organization, ending with advice on finding a subject, exploring a topic, and drafting a paper. This division of the writing process approximates the classic one of invention, arrangement, and style but is not intended to imply that these are separate stages.

To emphasize both what a text says and how it says it, each essay in Chapters 1 to 9 is preceded by background information on the author and the text and a brief discussion of a stylistic strategy. Two sets of questions—"Organization and Ideas" and "Technique and Style"—follow the essay, along with ideas for journal entries and essays. Throughout, process and product, as well as reading and writing, are interrelated, emphasizing the recursive nature of the act of writing. Writers constantly invent, organize, and revise; the lines that distinguish those activities are narrow, if not blurred.

"Suggestions for Writing" follow each essay and contain options for both journal entries and essays, all related by theme, organization, or ideas to the work that has just been read. The assignments allow a good deal of flexibility: some lend themselves to general information or personal experience, some to research papers, many to group work (outlined in the Instructor's Manual), some to the classic technique of imitation. In addition, at the end of Chapters 1 to 9 you'll find prompts for using the mode or aim under discussion and for comparing and evaluating the essays.

Whether working alone or in groups, once students select their subjects, they will find flipping back to the introduction helpful. There, "Exploring the Topic" shapes questions so that no matter what type of paper they are writing, students can generate information. "Drafting the Paper" then helps organize the material and points out some of the pitfalls and advantages inherent in a particular mode or aim.

The Instructor's Manual

An Instructor's Manual (ISBN 0-205-53944-0) includes key words and phrases, responses to the questions, and teaching suggestions for both the questions and the longer writing assignments. The manual also contains an additional argumentative essay by a student and writing prompts for the text's Thematic Guide.

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