

A decorative border in a dark green or black color, featuring stylized, symmetrical scrollwork and leaf-like motifs at the corners and midpoints, framing the central text.

COLLEGE WRITING

**A RHETORIC
AND HANDBOOK**

J. HAROLD JANIS

College Writing

A Rhetoric and Handbook

J. Harold Janis

New York University

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Preface

This is a rhetoric and handbook for a first course in composition. It is designed to meet the need for a textbook founded on literary principles yet pragmatic enough to aid all students, only a few of whom will ultimately find themselves in literary practice.

My experience in university teaching and in conducting writing classes in government and business has convinced me that, for talented and ambitious individuals, the need to write effectively is as compelling as the need to excel in the other facets of their work. In *College Writing* I have therefore treated composition not as an introduction to literature or to Composition as Art, although under certain conditions it surely deserves to be so treated, but as a necessary tool for getting things done.

This concept I have tried to carry through without doing violence to those features of the composition course that have, over time, proved their worth—the emphasis on expository writing, the adherence to established rhetorical principles, the reliance on the weekly theme as a vehicle for writing performance, and the inclusion of the library paper, through which the student is put to a major test of scholarship and rhetorical skill.

I have, on the other hand, made some additions and some shifts in emphasis. The opening chapters put writing in a broad communication context. The extensive chapter on argument and persuasion—a nod in the direction of the competition of ideas that characterizes our society—can serve the student in both the role of persuader and that of an aware citizen to whom, increasingly, persuasion is directed. The several chapters on business and technical writing, including a chapter on job applications, may be used independently by the student or included in the course work. In either case, they stand as illustrations of the writing demanded outside the academic world and show, more concretely than would be possible in a strictly literary approach, the applications of rhetoric to job performance.

The two parts of the book complement each other. Part I, the rhetoric, takes up not only the basic elements of structure and style, but also, in separate chapters, particular types of writing. The progression is from the fairly simple subjective forms, like the personal letter and the diary entry, to the more complex tasks of analysis and advocacy. Other theme types treated in the text include the familiar essay, description, and narration.

Part II, the handbook, is planned to ease the instructor's task of correcting papers and the student's task of revising them. Students can also look to it for guidance in drafting their themes when questions arise regarding grammar, punctuation and mechanics, word use, and sentence and paragraph structure. Current standards are observed throughout. With respect to grammar, the treatment is limited to those aspects most directly affecting composition, and the terms used are those most likely to be understood by the nonspecialist. Even so, a brief review of grammar and a glossary of grammatical terms have been included. Ease of reference has been a guiding principle in the organization of the handbook section, and the indexing of symbols and rule numbers in the endpapers provides additional convenience.

In both parts of the book, the users will find examples to go with every important statement of principle. These, in conjunction with the text, are intended to help students form ideas and find effective ways of expressing them on paper. Although I have relied mainly on current or established literary sources, I have also taken examples from business, government, law, science, and similar pursuits to show, at least by suggestion, that good writing is not entirely the property of "literature," as the term is commonly understood. Exercises to be discussed in class or done outside class will be found at the end of each chapter in the rhetoric and after each section in the "Handbook of English." The specific theme topics offered at the ends of most chapters supplement the comprehensive list of theme subjects in Chapter 2.

Like any author of a book such as this, I owe a great deal to those writers and publishers whose materials I have sampled; their contributions are formally acknowledged in the footnotes. Additional help came from the work of my students and the suggestions of colleagues both at New York University and elsewhere. Specifically, I want to thank Richard J. Conway for permission to use his library paper "Charles Macklin's Shylock," as well as students Mary Dwyer, Jo Ann

Friia, and Stewart York Greenberg, who have allowed me to use their writing for illustration and analysis. Finally, let me thank D. Anthony English, my editor at Macmillan, for his perceptive reading of the manuscript and his many valued suggestions.

J. H. J.

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THE LIBRARY PAPER

9. Researching and Organizing the Library Paper
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BUSINESS AND TECHNICAL WRITING

11. Business Letters
12. Job Applications
13. Memorandums and Reports

1

The Craft of Writing

Writing is drudgery.”

“Writing is fun.”

“Writing makes me nervous.”

“Writing is for creeps.”

Whatever you think of writing, you are destined to do a great deal of it. In college there are exams to take and papers to write, and—in your composition course—themes, themes, themes.

After college, there is more writing—writing *for* a job, and then writing *on* the job. For if you fulfill your ambitions at all, you *will* have something to say, or you will *have* to have something to say, and no medium is better for formulating thought than—writing.

Of course, you are no novice to writing. You have been studying and practicing it for most, if not all, of your academic life. So what can you learn about writing that you have not learned already? What can you do about your writing that you haven’t already done? Let’s begin with several assumptions.

First, you want to be able to write well. You may tell yourself that you already do; but hardly anyone does well enough. Even if you never thought about it seriously, the fact is that writing is not just a means of expression; it is also an important criterion of competence in any field, and an avenue to self-respect and self-realization. Few things in our society are done without preparatory writing, or without written documentation afterward. Not to be able to put one’s thoughts on paper—with facility—is to invite frustration and, at times, personal embarrassment and economic penalty.

Second, to write you must have something to say. Words do not rush in to fill a vacuum; they cannot even materialize until thoughts or feelings, however formless, begin to seek expression. Thus, if you suffer from “writer’s block,” if you have trouble getting started, if you gaze prolongedly and emptily at a blank sheet, your problem is probably not how to write, but what to say.

Third, society imposes certain standards of expression on those who wish to enjoy its favors. True, there is no universally accepted standard of English. On the other hand, some words and language patterns are more suitable than others for particular audiences and particular circumstances. Further, some institutions—the law, the church, business, government, education, the sciences—maintain standards that suit their own needs. The same person may use, on different occasions, language as dignified as a bishop's or as crude as a marine sergeant's after a bad day. But one must not, on penalty of ridicule or worse, confuse one's role.

In your composition course, you will probably be held to fairly strict standards of English. A close analogy is the emphasis on draftsmanship in the schooling of artists. The reasoning is that having a mastery of certain fundamentals, the writer and the artist can then, with greater confidence and assurance of success, make those departures in treatment that their creative purposes dictate. As a student of writing, you should have enough words at your command so that you can make the choices required for accuracy. You should be able to spell those words or obtain their correct spelling from the dictionary. Grammar? Sentence structure? Punctuation? Let's say that there are certain amenities that both literacy and sentence sense require. You no doubt have a knowledge of the basic grammatical phenomena—verbs agree with subjects, pronouns with antecedents, and so on—and are able to exercise some informed judgments in constructing sentences and punctuating them so that your meaning is clear. With care in writing and proofreading, you will further assure that the reader sees what you intend him to see.

So much for an elementary but necessary discipline that good writing will exact from you. Fortunately, that discipline is peripheral to the main task before you—the act of composition itself. As you will see, there are many ways in which you will be permitted to develop as a writer. Whatever ways you choose, it is important that you have an intimate acquaintance with the craft of writing. To treat writing as a craft is not to preclude its emergence as art. Attention to craft will, however, help you meet the compelling need—one shared by all serious writers—for a mastery of the principles, techniques, and skills through which you may express your thoughts and feelings. In prose composition, the elements of craft are well established. They include a generous background of knowledge and experience in the subject to be treated, a sense of order, a taste for language, and an endless