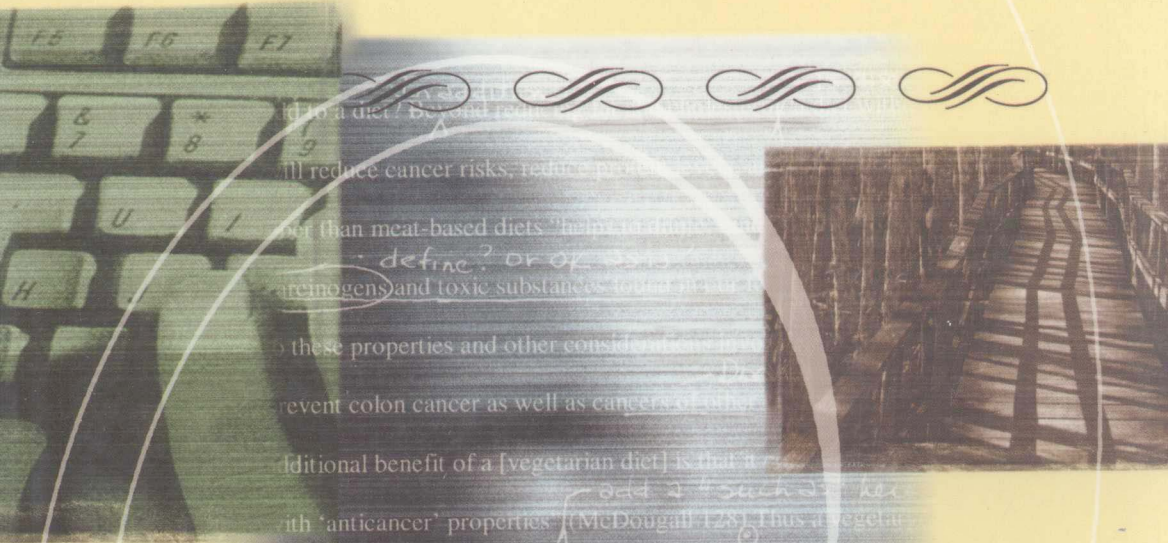


SEVENTH EDITION



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WRITE TO LEARN

DONALD M. MURRAY

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Write to Learn
Seventh Edition
Donald M. Murray

Publisher: *Earl McPeck*
Acquisitions Editor: *John Meyers*
Developmental Editor: *Laurie Runion*
Project Manager: *Elaine Hellmund*
Cover Credit: *Bill Brammer*

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Printed in Canada
3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 06 05 04 03

For more information contact Heinle, 25 Thomson Place, Boston, MA 02210 USA,
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ISBN: 0-1550-6512-2



PREFACE TO THE SEVENTH EDITION

It is an honor and a delight to be able to produce the seventh edition of a work. How few writers ever have so many opportunities to try and get it right. Of course, in my sixty-one years of publishing, I have learned you never get it right. That is a blessing. I have been able to practice my obsession with the writing process seven times and each edition has been different. So will the eighth if I am fortunate enough to have the chance to contradict myself and learn by writing.

Each day I practice my craft. Well, let's be honest. I have only written 1,287 days out of the last 1,481, but in those four years and 20 days I have written 1,029,198 words for an average of 799.7 words per writing day. And day after day I have not only surprised myself by what I have written, but how I have written it. I continue my apprenticeship.

This edition is changed by what I have learned and by the wise counsel of many readers who have tested my ideas in their own classrooms and on their own pages.

Here is what is new in the seventh edition:

- Chapter 1, “Make Writing Easy,” is new. It is designed to help the student enter the writing act immediately, using the skills they have at this beginning stage.
- Chapter 2, “Unlearning to Write,” is the former first chapter with the addition of what I think is important—that we have to unlearn to write if we are to write well.
- There are now three new, short “Shoptalk” chapters designed to help students develop the all-important attitudes that make it possible for them to learn and practice the writing process and to help prepare themselves for common writing tasks they will have to perform: Chapter 4, “Shoptalk:

The Research Plan”; Chapter 7, “Shoptalk: Preparing to Revise and Edit”; and Chapter 8, “Shoptalk: Helping Each Other.” This last chapter is especially important because it shows students how they can help their classmates—and be helped by their classmates—by responding to their drafts in pairs, small groups, or class size workshops.

- We have a new section on page 236 on writing e-mail at work that is meant to help students overcome some common mistakes when using this form of communication.
- The writing process itself is refined. In the sixth edition it was: FOCUS, EXPLORE, PLAN, DRAFT, and CLARIFY. In the seventh edition it is: FOCUS, RESEARCH, DRAFT, REVISE, and EDIT which we feel is more helpful to students and their teachers.
- One of the most important contributions to this edition are the essays “Lost and Found in Cyberspace” and “Assessing a World Wide Web Site” by Associate Professor Lisa Miller, an authority on Internet journalism and author of *Power Journalism: Computer-Assisted Reporting* (Harcourt College Publishers, 1998).
- I have taken the reader into my workroom with two new case histories. One weaves itself through the book, demonstrating how I work with voice. The other, in Chapter 12, shows how an essay can be written in small fragments of time.

———— PEDAGOGICAL FEATURES ————

Instructors and students will find the same useful pedagogical features as in the previous edition: writing using a daybook, writing with voice, writers’ quotations, end-of-chapter questions and answers, and end-of-chapter activities. We have also continued the index, “Help for Your Writing Problems,” on the inside front cover as well as a reference list of “Writing Techniques” placed on the inside back cover.

———— THE INSTRUCTOR’S MANUAL ————

I write the instructor’s manual to help teachers with the practical problems of the classroom. It is based on my own experience as a teacher and on the experiences of instructors who have used *Write to Learn* in many different types of institutions and courses, with students at varying levels of accomplishment. It is

specific, practical, and designed to help both beginning and experienced instructors in realistic teaching situations. This manual can be obtained by contacting your local Harcourt College sales representative.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I write each morning by myself but I am never alone. I am part of a writing community that inspires and supports me. Minnie Mae, who started mailing out the manuscripts that I was burning when we were first married, is my first reader and constant supporter.

Laurie Runion has again been involved in the conceptual development of this edition, as well as its chapter-by-chapter, page-by-page, paragraph-by-paragraph, sentence-by-sentence, word-by-word execution. She has suggested, commanded, demonstrated, supported, and corrected with perception, wisdom, and good humor. It is her book as much as it is mine and it is a joy for me to be allowed to collaborate with her.

I am still indebted to the questions and activities contributed by Mary Hallet, now assistant professor of English at Southeastern Massachusetts University.

Christopher Scanlan of the Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Florida; Donald Graves in Jackson, New Hampshire; Brock Dethier of Utah State University in Logan, Utah; Thomas Romano of the University of Miami in Oxford, Ohio; Elizabeth Cooke of the University of Maine at Farmington; Michael Steinberg of Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan; Lisa Miller of the University of New Hampshire and writer Ralph Fletcher of Durham, New Hampshire are as close as the telephone, e-mail, and fax. They always share, respond, listen, laugh, and understand.

The other members of my private writing community who appear behind my computer screen each writing morning, shaking their heads no and yes, smiling or frowning, include Driek Zirinsky of Boise State University, Bonnie Sunstein of the University of Iowa, Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Lad Tobin of Boston College.

I have been given wise counsel by those who reviewed the sixth edition and made valuable suggestions for the seventh, as well as those who have reviewed past editions: Ida Ferdman, Glendale Community College; Ray Moye, Coastal Carolina University; Lance Svehla, University of Akron; Larry Burton, University South Alabama; Sherie Coelho, Antelope Valley College; Bobbie R. Coleman, Moorpark College; Eileen Donovan-Kranz, Boston College; Marion Hogan Larson, Bethel College; Joan Spangler, California State University—Fullerton; Gil Tierney, William Rainey Harper College; and Karen Uehling, Boise State University.

I would also like to thank Carmen Sarkissian for her charming essay on becoming a writer and her instructor, Ida Ferdman at Glendale Community College, for sharing it with me.

I owe special thanks to the staff at Harcourt College Publishers: Michael Rosenberg, former Executive Editor for English; Julie McBurney, former Acquisitions Editor for English; Laurie Runion, Developmental Editor; Elaine Hellmund, Project Manager; John Meyers, former Market Strategist for English and now Acquisitions Editor; Nancy Marcus Land and the staff at Publications Development Company; and Steven Baker, copyeditor.

Other Books by Donald M. Murray

The Craft of Revision, Fourth Edition (Harcourt College Publishers, 2001)

My Twice-Lived Life: A Memoir (Ballentine, 2001)

Writing to Deadline—The Journalist at Work (Heinemann, 2000)

Crafting a Life in Essay, Story, Poem (Heinemann, 1996)

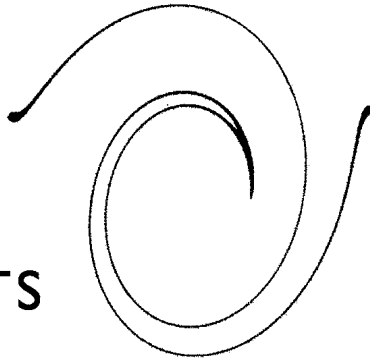
Read to Write, Third Edition (Harcourt College Publishers, 1993)

Shoptalk: Learning to Write with Writers (Heinemann, Boynton/Cook, 1990)

Expecting the Unexpected (Heinemann, Boynton/Cook, 1989)

Learning by Teaching, Second Edition (Heinemann, Boynton/Cook, 1989)

CONTENTS



PREFACE TO THE SEVENTH EDITION V

CHAPTER I MAKE WRITING EASY I

- The Writer's Memory 6
- The Writer's Voice 8
- The Writer's Daybook 8
- In the Writer's Workshop* 11
- Questions about Writing 12
- Writing Activities 15

CHAPTER 2 UNLEARNING TO WRITE 18

- What I Had to Unlearn 18
 - Know What You Want to Say before You Say It 18
 - Form Comes before Content 19
 - Correct Spelling, Grammar, Mechanics Are Essential in the First Draft 20
 - Long Is Better Than Short 20
 - Don't Write as You Speak 21
 - Always Outline First 21
 - The First Draft Should Be the Last Draft 22
 - There Is One Right Way 22
 - Revision and Editing Are the Same 23
 - Say What You Are Going to Say, Say It, Say What You've Said 23
 - Write in Generalities for a General Audience 23
 - Talent Is Rare 24

Easy Writing Is Bad Writing 24
 Study What Is Published and Imitate It 24
 Don't Make Mistakes 25
 You Can't Teach Writing 25
 The Writing Process 26
 Why Use the Process Approach to Writing? 27
 The Process Is Circular 28
 Why the Process Will Change 28
 Find Your Own Writing Territories 29
 Find Your Own Mystery 30
 Techniques for Discovering Subjects 31
 Looking for Surprise 33
 Looking for Connections 34
 Mapping 35
 Making a Tree 36
 Free Writing 36
 Interviewing Yourself 38
 Start the Writing Habit 39
 Time 40
 Place 41
 Conditions That Invite Writing 42
 Expectation 42
 Demand 42
 Rehearsal 43
 Forgiveness 43
 Velocity 43
 Ease 43
 Write in a Daybook 44
 Hear the Voice of the Draft 45
In the Writer's Workshop 49
 Questions about Learning to Write 50
 Activities for Learning to Write 53

CHAPTER 3
FOCUS 57

See and Write 58
 The Craft of Vision 58
 The Seeing I 60
 See with the Seven Senses 61
 Write to See 63
 The Focusing Line 66
 Ignition 66
 Conflict 68

Tension	68
Mystery	68
Surprise	68
Information	69
Worry	69
Joy	69
Connection	69
Personal Territories	69
Point of View	70
Voice	70
News	70
Significance	71
Find the Focusing Line	71
What the Focusing Line Gives the Writer	72
Possible Direction	72
Research	72
Reflection	72
Description	73
Limitation	73
Point of View	73
Voice	73
Form	73
Structure	74
Opening	74
Other Techniques to Find a Focus	74
The Steinbeck Statement	74
Begin by Ending	75
A Controlling Image	75
Anticipate the Reader's Need	75
Move the Angle of Vision	76
Adjust the Distance	76
Ask the Research Question	76
Make a Thesis Statement	77
Start a New Writing Task	77
Make an Assignment Your Own	78
Read the Assignment Carefully	78
Ask Questions	78
Stand Back	78
Be Self-Centered	79
Limit the Subject	79
Focus in the Daybook	80
Focus with Voice	80
<i>In the Writer's Workshop</i>	81
Questions about Focusing	83
Focusing Activities	87

CHAPTER 4
SHOPTALK: THE RESEARCH PLAN 91

The Researcher's Attitude 92
 Curiosity 92
 Respect for Specifics 92
 Respect for Connections 92
 Skepticism 93
Creating the Research Plan 93
 Overview 94
 Anticipation 94
 Strategy 94
 Tactics 95
 Tools 95
 Achievability 95
 Flexibility 96

CHAPTER 5
RESEARCH 97

The Writer's Eye 98
The Research Question 100
 The Internal Search 101
 The External Search 101
 Interview 103
 Use the Telephone and the Mail 104
 Use the Library 105
 Use the Internet 105
 "Lost and Found in Cyberspace" by Lisa C. Miller 106
 "Assessing a World Wide Web Site" by Lisa C. Miller 108
Research Using the Daybook 110
Hear the Voice While Researching 111
In the Writer's Workshop 112
Questions about Researching 113
Researching Activities 116

CHAPTER 6
DRAFT 120

Starting to Write 120
Keeping on Writing 121

Writing a Discovery Draft	122
Writing an Outline	124
Beginning the Draft	136
Title	136
First Lines	137
How to Write Those Important First Lines	138
Drafting First Lines	140
Checklist for First Lines	140
Categories of Effective First Lines	141
Continuing the Draft	146
Speed Writing	146
Building Blocks	147
Layering	148
Finishing the Draft	152
Unblocking Writer's Block	153
Drafting in the Daybook	159
Hear the Draft's Voice	159
<i>In the Writer's Workshop</i>	161
Questions about Drafting	163
Drafting Activities	166

.....

CHAPTER 7
SHOPTALK: PREPARING TO
REVISE AND EDIT 170

The Revision Attitude	171
The Revision and Editing Plan	172
The First Truth That Isn't True	173
The Second Truth That Isn't True	173
Revise Then Edit	174
A User's Warning	174

.....

CHAPTER 8
SHOPTALK: HELPING EACH OTHER 176

Going Public	177
Finding a Good Test Reader	177
Becoming a Good Test Reader	179
Helping a Writing Group to Help You	181
Becoming a Helpful Writing Group Member	182
Going Private	182

.....

CHAPTER 9
REVISE AND EDIT 184

- The Strategy of Revision 187
 - Look within for the Surprising 187
 - Look Forward for the Changing 189
 - Look Back for the Expected 191
- Two Key Questions 195
- The Revision Checklist 196
 - Checklist for Revising 197
- Edit to Clarify Meaning 199
- Proofreading and Editing 200
- Editing Priorities 201
- Editing Marks 202
- Editing Checklists 203
 - The Quick Edit Checklist 204
 - The Expanded Edit Checklist 204
- Revise and Edit in the Daybook 207
- Revise and Edit Your Voice 207
- In the Writer's Workshop* 209
- Questions about Revising and Editing 211
- Revising and Editing Activities 214

.....

CHAPTER 10
FIT YOUR PROCESS TO YOUR TASK 219

- How to Respond to a New Writing Task 220
 - Why Write? 220
 - What Is My Message? 221
 - Who Is My Reader? 222
 - What Evidence Will Persuade My Reader? 222
 - What Voice Will Keep the Reader Interested and Make the Reader Believe What I Have to Say? 222
 - What Form Will Carry My Message and Its Documentation to My Reader? 223
- Write to Describe 224
 - Tips on Writing Effective Description 224
 - The Narrative Essay 225
 - Tips on Writing Narrative 225
- Write to Analyze 226
 - Tips on Writing Analysis 227
 - Analysis in the Book Report 228
 - Tips on Writing a Book Report 228

The Reflective Essay	228
Tips on Writing the Reflective Essay	229
Write to Inform	230
Tips on Writing to Inform	230
The Research Paper	231
The Research Question	231
Research Note Taking	231
Plagiarism	232
The Form of the Research Paper	232
Tips on Writing the Research Paper	233
Write to Persuade	234
Tips on Writing Persuasion	234
Tips on Writing a Letter Applying for a Job	235
E-mail at Work	236
Questions about Fitting Your Process to Your Task	237
Activities to Fit Your Process to Your Task	239

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CHAPTER 11
LEARNING FROM WRITERS 242

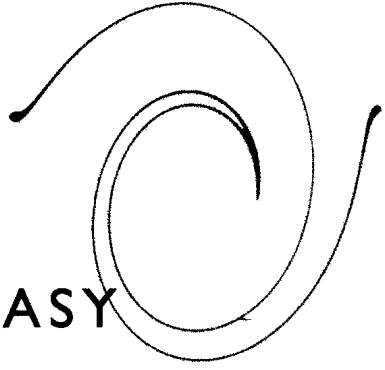
Student Case History: Writing to Describe—Sarah Hansen	242
Professional Case History: Writing to Analyze—Christopher Scanlan	249
Origins	249
The Process	250
Getting Naked	253
Feedback	254
Judgment Day	255
Tip Sheet	255
Role Models	257
Student Case History: Writing to Persuade—Emma Tobin	261
How I Helped Emma Tobin Write <i>Her</i> Essay—Don Murray	264
Student Case History: Writing to Inform—Tina Winslow	275
Student Case History: Writing to Analyze—Julie Schum	288
Case History of a Turning Point—Carmen Sarkissian	294
Case History of an Essay—Donald M. Murray	296
Questions on Writing a Case History	310
Case History Activities	311

.....

AFTERWORD 315

.....

INDEX 316



MAKE WRITING EASY

Let's write together.

Write what?

I don't know. I don't need to know what I am going to write and neither do you. Writing produces writing.

I have come to appreciate the terror and emptiness I used to fear when I faced the blank screen and the insistent demand of the blinking cursor. Not knowing what I will write, or even if I can write, means I will not write what I have written before. I have begun a voyage of *discovery*. The initial satisfaction from writing is *surprise*: we say what we do not expect to say in a way we do not expect to say it.

Surprise is also essential when I do come to my desk with a writing assignment. I know the topic but not how I will approach it or what I will learn from the assignment. After sixty years of publishing, I am still an apprentice to the writer's craft, taking instruction from each morning's draft, the experiments in meaning writers use to discover what to say and how to say it. As Eudora Welty wrote, "The writer himself studies intensely how to do it while he is in the thick of doing it; then when the particular novel or story is done, he is likely to forget how; he does well to. Each work is new. Mercifully, the question of how abides less in the abstract, and less in the past, than in the specific, in the work at hand. . . ."

All writers are self-taught. Your instructor can help, your classmates can help, this book can help, but you still have to write to learn to write. As you read this book, stop the moment you feel like writing and write. This book should be a collaborative experience as we write together. If you write as you read, you will better understand what I am saying—and you will have the satisfaction and fun of discovering what you did not know about your life.

This morning, for example, I came to my desk to finish this chapter and just started to read through what I thought was the final draft, but after reading the first three words, the next two surprised me and I was off, writing what I did not intend.

I sit back and let my mind drift. This is not the time for hard thinking, for concentration, for purpose, but the time for reflection, for patience, for accident. I remember what the poet William Stafford wrote:

“. . . one should lower his standards until there is no felt threshold to go over in writing. It's easy to write. You just shouldn't have standards that inhibit you from writing . . . I can imagine a person beginning to feel he's not able to write up to that standard he imagines the world has set for him. But to me that's surrealistic. The only standard I can rationally have is the standard I'm meeting right now. . . You should be more willing to forgive yourself. It doesn't make any difference if you are good or bad today. The assessment of the product is something that happens after you've done it.”

I have presumed to write books to tell others how to write, but I have to remember that I must be willing to write badly to write well, that what I accomplished yesterday may be of no help today.

You mean you haven't learn to write and you write books on how to write? Yes, and I flunked out of high school and became a professor, was a fearful kid and was in combat as a paratrooper, said I'd never get married and have been married twice, never imagined I'd be a parent and am now a grandfather. Life is always unexpected and writing should be as well.

School emphasizes straight-line thinking, but writers and artists, scientists and marketing managers also practice a circular, drifty kind of associative thinking that connects what the logical mind would never connect. In beginning to write, I have to remind myself not to think too hard but relax, listen to what drifts through my mind.

Sometimes a stimulus—a sound, a smell, something I see—stirs memories. I see moonlight open up into the woods behind my house and remember how much we hated moonlight in the Battle of the Bulge in World War II when what would be a lovely night in peacetime exposed us as we tried to hide from the enemy. I hear an oboe being played on the radio and imagine it is my long dead daughter practicing her oboe in the next room. I smell the pine Christmas tree and travel in memory to summer camp years before.

If those connections interest you, if they seem to hold a mystery, a problem, a question, then write—but the topic does not have to be that clear. I particularly delight in the connections without immediate explanation. I sit back, try to make my mind blank when I remember a newspaper story I read the night before about the possibility of restoring passenger rail service through our town. The phrase “train to college” drifts into mind.

Try it. It is impossible to have a blank mind. Something will drift out of your memory or experience, something you see or hear, smell or touch or taste will come into your head. The important thing is not to strain at it but remain in a drifty, dreamy state, making notes on what appears on the stage in the theater of your mind.