



# 30 WAYS TO HELP YOU WRITE

- MEMOS • REPORTS
- RESUMES
- ESSAYS • LETTERS
- STORIES
- POEMS
- PAPERS

NOW YOU, TOO,  
CAN LEARN  
THE SECRETS  
OF WRITING  
PERSUASIVELY,  
WITH EASE,  
CONFIDENCE  
AND SUCCESS.

---

**WEBER SHAW, PH.D.**

# **30 WAYS TO HELP YOU WRITE**

**by  
FRAN WEBER SHAW, Ph.D**



**BANTAM BOOKS**  
**TORONTO • NEW YORK • LONDON • SYDNEY**

### 30 WAYS TO HELP YOU WRITE

*A Bantam Book / November 1980*

*2nd printing . . . . October 1981*

*3rd printing . . September 1983*

Quotation from "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," by Conrad Aiken; copyright 1932, © 1960 by Conrad Aiken. By permission of Brandt & Brandt Literary Agents, Inc.

Translation of Basho's Haiku from *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics* by R. H. Blyth; copyright 1949 by R. H. Blyth. By permission from The Hokuseido Press, Tokyo.

Quotation from *nigger* by Dick Gregory with Robert Lipsyte; copyright © 1964 by Dick Gregory Enterprises, Inc. By permission of E. P. Dutton.

Ideas from *Mind Games* by Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston; copyright © 1972 by E. L. Masters and Jean Houston. By permission of Viking Penguin, Inc.

Quotation from *The Long Valley* by John Steinbeck; copyright 1938, © 1966 by John Steinbeck. By permission of Viking Penguin, Inc.

Quotation from "Confessions of a Female Chauvinist Sow," by Anne Roiphe, from *New York Magazine*, October 1972; copyright © 1972 by Anne Roiphe. By permission of Brandt & Brandt Literary Agents, Inc.

*All rights reserved.*

*Copyright © 1980 by Dr. Fran Shaw.*

*Cover art copyright © 1980 by Bantam Books, Inc.*

*This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission.*

*For information address: Bantam Books, Inc.*

ISBN 0-553-24073-0

*Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada*

---

*Bantam Books are published by Bantam Books, Inc. Its trademark, consisting of the words "Bantam Books" and the portrayal of a rooster, is Registered in U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and in other countries. Marca Registrada. Bantam Books, Inc., 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10103.*

---

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

H 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

## ESPECIALLY FOR WRITING CLASSES<sup>1</sup>

	<i>Try Experiments</i>
•a first class to get acquainted	7 (Steps 4, 5) 8 (Step 1)
•writing "free-flow" together	1, 2, 3, 4
•blackboard group writing	15, 16
•outdoor group poem	5
•finding a subject and getting going	28, 29
•getting into any area for discussion	15 (Version 2)
•library treasure hunt	19, 26
•writing about men and women	20
•writing dialogue	13
•writing description	6, 7, 8
narration	9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14
exposition	16, 17, 18, 19
argument	20, 21
•writing about literature	25
•writing term papers and reports	24, 26
•writing essay exams	27
•revising	30 (see Part IV)
•writing effective letters (getting someone to do something for you)	22, 23
•writing an essay on an application	28, 29
•get some feedback from others	18, 21, 22, 24
•interview people, then write	17, 20

---

<sup>1</sup> NOTE TO TEACHERS. For a change of pace, begin class with a writing experiment. Have students read aloud part or all of their own or each other's papers. Then ask what the students like about the piece read? What works well?

If you prefer, suggest doing an experiment at home to generate material for essays and stories.

## WHAT DO YOU WANT TO WRITE?

### *Try Experiments*

•the first draft of anything	28, 29
•a paragraph to get going	1, 2, 3, 4
•a letter that gets action	22, 23
•a story	1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14
•a poem, or a “group poem”	5, 11, 13, 15
•an autobiographical essay	9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 20
•a “how-to” article	18
•a letter to the editor	21, 22, 23
•a speech	16, 28, 29
•a promotional piece	28, 29
•an essay exam	27
•a research paper	19, 28, 29
•a paper for history, social sciences, or humanities	19, 26
•an essay about literature	25
•a scientific or technical report	24
•a memo in plain English	23
•a comparison/contrast	17, 26
•an essay for a college, job, or fellowship application	28, 29
•a description of a place or person	5, 6 7, 8
•a long report or dissertation	24, 28, 29
•an abstract or summary	24
•a clear version of a confusing sentence	30

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you so much Barnett Weber, Elizabeth Weber, David Shaw, Joe Cary, Tren Anderson, Lee Jacobus, Peter Elbow, James Jenkins, Joelle Delbourgo, John Owens, and especially Terry Winter Owens. Your encouragement, above all, helped me help myself write.

## Preface

When you put words on paper, is it like pulling teeth?

You're not alone. Ask people what happens to them, and you'll hear: "I panic," "I can't get going," "What comes out on the page just isn't as good as what's in my head."

But many of these same people are learning how to help themselves write, how to build confidence, save frustrating hours, and have a better time writing.

Would you like to

—discover a way to write what you want anytime?

—get from first notes to final draft, painlessly?

—experience your creativity now?

These experiments are designed to give you a new ease and skill in writing. Try a few and you'll see you already have a wealth of material which can just pour out. You'll learn how to become your own best friend when you write. Instead of struggling, you can create a new condition from which words freely flow. You'll find the experiments especially useful if you're

—a student with an essay due

—a teacher trying to generate lively writing

—a business person who needs to communicate more effectively

—a housewife with an important letter to send

—an aspiring writer who hopes to get going.

People who've tried these experiments at schools, corporations, and writers' conferences tell me they have a fresh taste of words coming easily—they're delighted with the results.

Dr. Bruce Sherman, for instance, never thought of himself as an author. Last summer, he played with writing

"free-flow" at the beach and he enjoyed it so much, he began writing this way in a weekly column. This year he landed a prestigious job which includes producing a newsletter for dentists across the country.

Solomon P., a teacher at the local community college, tried writing "three-liners" with a group from the Neighborhood Youth Corps. At first, it was just a pleasant break from routine. But students quickly joined the experiment, and were proud of the "group poem" they wrote together. They asked, "When can we do another one?"

Tom L., who'd "rather do anything than write," had the chance to publish an article. To inspire himself, he typed out a question he wanted to answer, let tensions "drain" from his body, then "talked" nonstop on paper. "I can't believe it. I wrote more in ten minutes than I had written in my whole life."

Talented undergrad Lynn P. complained she'd been feeling stuck for months. I received a card last Christmas: "You were so right about free-flow writing. It's wonderful. Especially when those gems come out."

Returning to college after 15 years, Helen A. felt lost when she had to do her first paper. She phoned to say, "I tried the experiment for writing a comparison. Instead of wondering, I knew just what to do. I got a 95—and a note from my teacher saying, 'If you haven't thought about writing, you should.'"

Another continuing education student Diane M. told me she never found enough time to do all her work. It took her weeks to gather material for even a short essay, and she usually got sidetracked in the overflow. I showed her how to divide a paper into sections and plan her pages. "It's working! I had a paper due last week. What would've taken me twenty hours, I did in two."

An overdue Ph.D. thesis was depressing Steven R. "You know how long I've been trying to get this done? Seven years." He told me he had "all the data," so I asked him to write nonstop "the section you feel you can do right now." Exhilarated after finishing the whole first draft, he told me, "I consider myself a difficult case—I just didn't want to write it. But once you got me going,



it was exciting. It felt good to watch it get done. Now I know I can turn out anything I have to."

Says Jane R., "I wish I'd had this book in college—all that wasted time!"

Bob Z., a buyer for a bookstore chain, wanted a better job. "I did the experiment and wrote a really effective letter. It got me the interview and, I think, the job." After a series of business writing workshop sessions, he told me, "I look at the writing I did six months ago. I edit and organize my thoughts better. The tone I'm putting across is much more effective. I think of who the reader is going to be, and step into his shoes for a moment. And when I read now, I can see where people with good points get lost in their writing. And I know how to help them."

Hank P., who trains people to use medical equipment, agreed. "My stuff is shorter now. It says what I want to say, and gets the job done more quickly."

Art designer Bill P. said he was grateful. "I really like writing more than when I started—and for me that's a great thing."

After a workshop at his company, systems analyst Darryl P., pleased with his brisk new writing style, summed it up with a smile: "This is great."

Whether you're a "non-writer" who must get a job done or an aspiring author who's feeling stuck, you'll find experiments here to suit your needs. Practice the ones that work best for you, and begin to build a new image of yourself: soon you'll know you too can write whatever you want.

Fran Shaw

# Contents

Preface	xv
PART 1	
NOTICING MORE AND HAVING PLENTY TO SAY	1
Experiment 1: Write free-flow for the pleasure of now	4
Experiment 2: Walk "blind" to discover more	7
Experiment 3: Continuously sense each step	8
Experiment 4: Look for one color	8
SHAPING WHAT COMES	9
PART 2	
FREEING MATERIAL FOR DIFFERENT KINDS OF WRITING	13
Chapter 1: Describing People, Places, and Things	15
Experiment 5: Write "three-liners" to notice what's here	16
Experiment 6: Where am I?	18
Experiment 7: Guess who's being described	18
Experiment 8: Sketch someone without explaining	19
SHAPING WHAT COMES	20
Describing a Place	20
Describing a Person	23
Chapter 2: Showing What Happened	27
Experiment 9: Invite intense moments	27
Experiment 10: Travel through time	30
Experiment 10A: Travel through time and pick an era that attracts you	32

Experiment 11: Take a bird's eye view	34
Experiment 12: Descend a dream stairway	36
Experiment 13: Listen in—How do people talk?	38
Experiment 14: Imagine a crisis moment—What happened?	40
SHAPING WHAT COMES	41
FOUR STEPS FOR STORY WRITERS	42
Writing an Autobiographical Essay	44
About Writing Dialogue	46
Chapter 3: Explaining Something	51
Experiment 15: Play the Graffiti Game	51
Experiment 16: Find sensory specifics to illustrate ideas	53
Experiment 17: Contrast then and now	54
Experiment 18: Do something, then tell "how-to"	57
Experiment 19: Research a burning question	59
SHAPING WHAT COMES	61
Six Ways to Explain	61
Chapter 4: Convincing Someone	65
Experiment 20: Give your views about men and women today	65
Experiment 21: Freely write your gripe	69
Especially for Business and for Letter Writers	70
Experiment 22: Send a letter that gets action	70
Some Model Letters	73
Experiment 23: Persuade with Plain English	75
SHAPING WHAT COMES	79
A CHECK LIST FOR LETTER WRITERS	80
A CHECK LIST FOR MEMO AND REPORT WRITERS	81
An Experiment in Writing Your Résumé	82
A Sample Résumé	84
A Sample Cover Letter to Accompany Your Résumé	86

<b>Chapter 5: Especially for Students: Writing Papers and Essay Exams</b>	<b>91</b>
Hints for Getting by What Stops You	91
How to Organize a Paper Quickly	92
Writing a Scientific or Technical Report or Dissertation	97
Experiment 24: Divide the report into sections; use "There is" instead of "I think"	97
Writing an Abstract or Summary	99
Writing about Literature	99
Experiment 25: Immerse yourself, discover your slant	99
<b>SHAPING WHAT COMES</b>	<b>101</b>
Beginnings	101
Middles	104
Endings	107
Titles	107
Writing about People, Eras, or Ideas	108
Experiment 26: Plan your pages—choose three bases of comparison/contrast	108
<b>SHAPING WHAT COMES</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>A CHECK LIST FOR PAPER WRITERS</b>	<b>112</b>
About Transitions	113
Writing Essay Exams	113
Experiment 27: Take five minutes to write this scratch sheet	113

### **PART 3**

<b>FINDING YOUR WAY FROM NOTES TO FIRST DRAFT</b>	<b>117</b>
How to Find What You Want to Write	119
"Suppose I Have a Subject—Now What?"	120
Experiment 28: Ask your question, answer freely	122
Experiment 29: Talk in paragraphs: What's the story	123

SEVEN STEPS TO HELP YOU WRITE	125
Give Yourself an Encouraging Word	125
Twelve Things to Try When You're Stuck	126
PART 4	
TOWARD BECOMING YOUR OWN BEST EDITOR	129
First: Listen for Tone, Locate Rough Spots	132
Second: Check out your Beginning, Middle, End, and Links Between Parts	135
CHECK YOUR ORDER OF PRESENTATION	135
Notice How You Get from Here to There	138
Third: Tighten and Sharpen	138
WHAT NEEDS TIGHTENING?	139
WHAT NEEDS SHARPENING?	142
Experiment 30: Sounds confusing? Say it over coffee	143
A QUICK CHECK LIST	144
When to Proofread, and Why it Pays	145
What about Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar? Some Common Mistakes to Watch for	145
Writing Samples Revised	150
Appreciate your Final Draft	161
Glossary	163
A Brief Selection of Books for the Writer	167
Index	169

**PART 1**

---

**NOTICING MORE AND  
HAVING PLENTY TO SAY**



Every time you sit down to write, you need to experience words coming easily. It feels good to sail across the page, something quickening inside as ideas pour out. And it's just this momentum that keeps you writing.

But how to begin? You've read, thought, made notes, you want to write. Yet you put it off all day. Finally, you sit down and eke out a few sentences . . . and scrap them.

### Familiar?

Look at it like this: you may be suffering from acute writing anxiety. That's when you say to yourself "I can't" even before you try. A teacher of mine calls it "teacheritis." "When you were younger," she explained, "someone said that you were good at one thing but not at another. Good in math, but not in English. And now you tell yourself, 'I can do this, I can't do that.' Maybe it's not so!" The main symptom: believing that voice that jumps in to comment even *before* you begin ("I can't") and especially while you write ("This is no good"). It stops you dead.

What a moment of possibility! Here's a sly way to avoid that, and get going. As an experiment, before writing, turn your attention away from the task for a moment, and *focus on your body and senses now*. Doing this, you'll clear a space, make room for a fresh impulse.

You may notice that those thoughts which have you stuck are mirrored in your physical self. Now as you read, for instance, are you holding your jaw tightly? Keep it like that a moment, then let it relax. Your new approach is as simple as that. You may not be able to talk yourself out of discouraging speculations, but what would happen if you took a few minutes—before writing—to "unlock" muscular tension? Would words flow more freely? While you give your body a few minutes of attention and re-



laxation, you're no longer fretting or criticizing. You're not stuck in that. Circulation, muscular tension become different: you create a new condition in yourself.

"Try an experiment? Relax my face? Sounds interesting, but I haven't got time. I better just dig in and do it my old way."

You've heard that voice before. It's the one that makes you tense up. Once again you're about to, ugh, make spinach out of a writing task.

Why not save all those unproductive hours straining? Try an experiment; you'll discover things you didn't know a moment ago.

"Experimenting" means you don't know what will come. You open, in a specific way, to your experience and don't have to figure out what you'll write. In fact, by treating yourself like an undiscovered genius, you may discover your best ideas come when you're "playing" rather than forcing.

For now, don't edit or criticize *while you're writing*: that'll happen later. At the moment, you want only to write abundantly without concerning yourself about impressing some future reader. Give yourself the chance to see how you can use the process of writing to feel more alive and express that intensity.

Whatever you want to write, take ten pleasant minutes now to try a first experiment.

---

### Experiment 1

#### Write free-flow for the pleasure of now

---

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <i>"Now I'm<br/>Sitting<br/>Here"</i> | 1. Sit comfortably, perhaps outdoors. Write across the top of your pad: "NOW I'M SITTING HERE AND." Put down your pad and pen. Read steps 2, 3, and 4, and try them.      |
| <i>Relax,<br/>Head to<br/>Toe</i>     | 2. Close your eyes, and allow the muscles of your face to relax. Move down your body, naming to yourself each part and suggesting it relax. It's as if tensions can drain |