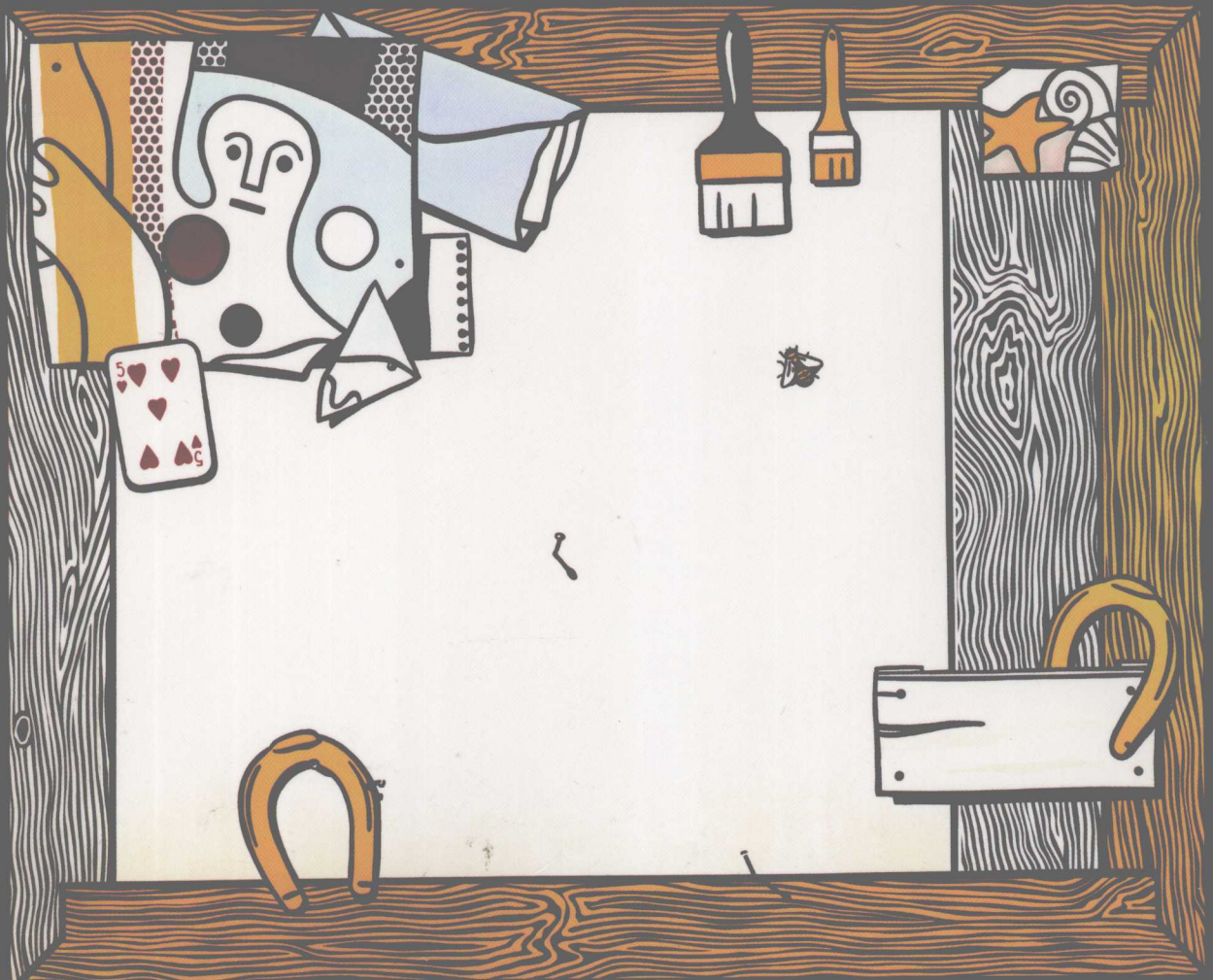


THE DECISIVE WRITER

KATHRYN ROSSER RAIGN



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The Decisive Writer

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Preface

The Decisive Writer is a book about making decisions—the kinds of decisions writers face every time they write. Experienced writers are decisive writers because they have had years of experience in which to learn, by trial and error, how to make effective writing choices. Regardless of the level of talent students bring to a composition class, most of them have very little conscious knowledge of how they can intentionally make effective choices when writing.

While most composition textbooks emphasize the importance of teaching the writing process, they often fail to look at that process as a series of choices. Learning that an essay or other written text is the result of a process empowers students by demystifying the act of writing, but it is even more empowering for students to understand that there is a rationale for every decision they will make as writers and that becoming better writers is a matter of learning to make effective choices during each stage of the writing process. For these reasons, *The Decisive Writer* uses the decision-making process as its controlling paradigm.

Because we live in a world of mixed media, *The Decisive Writer* is visually oriented. Each chapter has a theme to which the graphics, the student essays, the professional essays, and the writing options connect. These themes have been chosen for their relevance to the book's audience and for their ability to prompt effective written responses.

≡ Organization

The Decisive Writer has three parts:

- Part One: How Writing Works
- Part Two: Reasons for Writing
- Part Three: Conducting Research

Part One: How Writing Works

Chapter 1 introduces the rhetorical situation—with its three-part structure of audience, purpose, and occasion—as a tool for making informed writing choices. The text presents questions whose answers lead students to effective decisions in relation to each of these three parts. Students are also shown how to apply the rhetorical situation as an integral part of the writing process. Examples of a student's work at each stage of the writing process are presented, including free writing, a rough draft with peer comments, and a revised draft.

Chapter 2, "Strategies for Writing," explores some of the reasons why people write—to share a personal experience, observation, or information, to solve a problem, to evaluate, persuade, or respond—and includes examples of each type of writing. Linking reasons with methods, this chapter discusses rhetorical strategies for development and organizational methods for shaping a piece of writing. The chapter gives students a working familiarity with strategies and organizational patterns from which they can choose as they write.

Although design used to be considered appropriate course material only in technical communication classes, Chapter 3, "The Design of Writing," presents design as an integral part of effective written communication—whether in a paper or on a Web page. In order to use design to increase the effectiveness of their writing, students have to understand basic design principles.

Part Two: Reasons for Writing

Each of the seven chapters in this part of *The Decisive Writer* discusses how to make choices when writing for a specific reason. Rhetorical strategies appropriate to each reason for writing, as well as organizational methods from which the writer can choose, are considered. Additionally, each chapter has both student and professional writing samples that illustrate the various strategies and methods.

At the end of each chapter is a set of collaborative exercises that may be used for small groups to practice the skills presented in the chapter. Next, a feature called "Writing Picks" presents four writing options from which students can choose. A series of questions

based on the application of the rhetorical situation helps guide the student to develop the writing option he or she has chosen. Students are also provided with a series of activities that help them to engage in each phase of the writing process—prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing—in relation to the type of writing the chapter covers.

Part Three: Conducting Research

Chapter 11, “Collecting Information,” introduces students to methods of conducting research in both the library and on the Internet. The chapter concludes with three research-based writing options from which the students can choose.

Chapter 12 discusses how to evaluate sources and use them effectively in a research paper. Having chosen one of the writing options introduced in the previous chapter, students are asked to complete a series of exercises that prepare them to write the research paper: an abstract, an outline, and an annotated bibliography.

Chapter 13, “Documenting Sources,” provides guidelines and example entries for citing sources in both MLA and APA style. This chapter includes an MLA-style student research paper, complete with outline and Works Cited list.

≡ Features

The Decisive Writer contains a number of features that make it stand out from other rhetoric textbooks.

- *Thematic Content* Every reading relates to the theme of the chapter, and each writing option asks students to respond in some way related to that theme. These themes were chosen to prompt provocative and insightful student responses.
- *Visual Orientation* Each chapter of *The Decisive Writer* includes extensive graphics, as well as at least one visually oriented writing option. Students are also encouraged by the writing exercises to include graphics in their own work.
- *Writer's Breaks* These exercises are intended to help students generate material that will help them in selecting a topic from the writing options found at the end of each chapter and in

developing that topic. Students can do these exercises as class assignments or on their own.

- *Student Essays* Each of the chapters in Part Two includes two student essays that were written in response to one of the writing options in the chapter. To help readers understand the significance of these essays, each one has been annotated to identify the student's use of specific rhetorical strategies and/or organizational methods. Each essay is also followed by a set of thought-provoking questions titled "Consider This . . .".
- *Professional Essays* Each chapter in Parts One and Two contains one to five professional works that relate to the thematic element of the chapter. These readings are intended to give students examples of how an experienced writer addressed the issue being raised by the chapter.
- *Collaborative Exercises* These exercises provide students with the opportunity to practice the skills presented in the chapter in preparation for writing their own essays.
- *Writing Briefs or Picks* Each chapter concludes with three or four writing options. The options in Part One lead the student to produce a brief piece of writing. In Part Two, each option is intended to result in a complete essay. In Part Three, the options relate to the production of a research paper.
- *Applying the Rhetorical Situation* Although students are introduced to the rhetorical situation in Chapter One, *The Decisive Writer* reinforces consistent use of this tool by providing in each chapter a list of questions related to the rhetorical situation and to the chapter's writing options.
- *Focusing on Process* In this section of each chapter, students are given specific activities to help them complete the four stages of the writing process.
- *Grammar Choices* Each chapter concludes with brief grammar and style lessons, which focus on aspects that often give students trouble and include short activities for applying the material to actual drafts. Chapter One begins by describing

four types of sentences, and the next four chapters discuss those types in more detail. Other Grammar Choices sections focus on transitive and intransitive verbs, sentence errors, pronouns, verb tenses, dangling modifiers, faulty predication, pronoun cases, and restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses. Many of them build on skills and concepts previously presented.

- *Style Choices* Each chapter includes a brief style lesson that presents a technique students can immediately begin applying to their own writing.

≡ Ancillaries

The following ancillaries provide additional resources as you use this book.

- *The Instructor's Manual* This manual includes helpful information for new instructors, including advice on facilitating group work and responding to student writing, a collection of sample syllabi, and specific advice on teaching each chapter. A list of further readings and additional writing options are included in the *Instructor's Manual*. Exercises to accompany the grammar and style lessons that appear in the text are available in the *Instructor's Manual*.
- *The Decisive Writer Web Site* The companion Web site contains a wealth of information you will find useful in the classroom. The site features Diction Concept Library, Grammar Concept Library, Mechanics Concept Library, Punctuation Concept Library, Research Concept Library, Student Paper Libraries, Writing Concept Library, and more!

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Kathryn R. Raign
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