

WRITING

Process, Product, and Power

KEN DAVIS

KIM BRIAN LOVEJOY

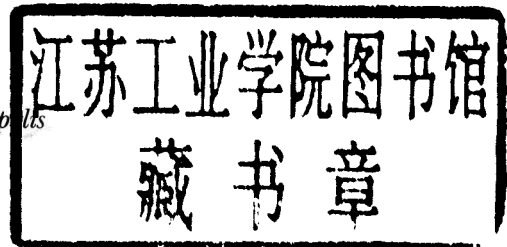
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Preface

Writing: Process, Product, and Power is an introductory college writing text that integrates writing as process and as product to empower students as writers.

We have organized the book by seven major features of written products. As we guide students through the writing process, we focus on writing activities and strategies as they relate to each of the major product features. Seven writing assignments, arranged in order of increasing complexity, enable students to develop their writing abilities and to write for real audiences and situations. Each assignment includes three or more samples of student papers for discussion and group work, all written by students of ours, specifically for the assignment. We have found the book especially adaptable to a portfolio approach to teaching writing.

We believe that *Writing: Process, Product, and Power* differs from most writing textbooks in several ways:

- It integrates the process and product of writing by focusing on what writers do as they reflect on the major features of any piece of writing.
- It emphasizes writing as power, enabling students to learn about themselves as writers and thinkers, to engage in problem solving, and to produce effective writing in real situations.
- It defines and illustrates the uses of journal writing throughout the writing process, as a means of reflecting on the student's behavior as a writer, of discovering and shaping ideas for writing, of writing about writing, and of collecting and responding to peer commentary.
- It introduces theoretical concepts in practical ways so that students can easily understand and use them.

- It features a section on writing from research, with a discussion of both print and non-print sources of information.
- It features seven major writing assignments, culminating in a self-reflective essay about the writing course.
- It includes twenty-five student papers for analysis and discussion, reflecting richly rhetorical situations that students can easily grasp. These papers represent a range of abilities, so that students will see papers close to their own level of ability and be able to reason ways to improve them.

In addition to the important people to whom this book is dedicated, we thank our students and colleagues at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis for their help and encouragement.

Ken also thanks his wife, Bette, and his children, Casey and Evan, for their patience, humor, and love; he also thanks his former students and colleagues at the University of Kentucky, especially Chris Cetrulo. Kim thanks his wife, Mary, and his children Rebecca and Joseph, for giving his life meaning and balance; he also thanks Professor Frank Clary of St. Michael's College, who has long been a source of inspiration.

Finally, thanks go to Phil Miller, Tracey Augustine, and Mariann Murphy at Prentice Hall, and to William Smith of Virginia Commonwealth University, Lucien Agosta of California State University-Sacramento, Molly Wescott of Florence-Darlington Technical College, Patricia Connors of Memphis State University, Ed Davis of Sinclair Community College, Dale C. Brannoa of Oklahoma State University-Okmulgee, and Betty Hart of Fairmount State College for their helpful reviews.

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OVERVIEW

Writing as Process, Product, and Power

A poet visits a writing classroom and invites ten minutes of “freewriting” about an abstract, black-and-white photograph (a conch shell? a sand dune? a nude?); suddenly the room is full of eyes and writing hands, swirling their way down into the curls and turns of the picture. Connie’s alert eyes and mind take up the shape, play with it, turn it inside out, then get it down in words on her paper. Cathy looks puzzled, then calm, and sets to work, her Flair pen and her tidy legal pad becoming one—with each other, with the photograph, with the room. David, with relaxed intensity, smiles as he dabs at the page like a painter. (What colors do you paint, David, as you see and resee the picture?)

Susan is cool and professional, her long slim arm holding the page at maximum distance, lest the words get too close. Karen’s eyes dance across the turning shapes, dance the shape onto the page, as her dancer’s foot shapes tiny circles in the air.

Words come faster now, from poet Liz’s scraping of chalk on slate, as her wooden heels walk her *own* words across the floor, across slowly, back quickly, like a typewriter. Barbara, meanwhile, works at the page like a loving artisan, like a farrier shoeing a favorite horse. Hugh’s felt-tip pen draws circles and spirals to black out words, replicating the circles and spirals of the photograph. Greg’s pencil, yellow and blunt, moves mouselike, gnawing at the words as they come. Bob is writing with his eyes and his bent head, burning the words onto the page like a lens focusing a tiny furnace of sunlight onto a pine board.

Sue leans into her work, letting the words support her through the fulcrum of her plastic pen. Robert, rooted to chair and floor, is a silversmith, shaping his words with pliers and files, crafting glistening wonder from the silver oxide of the photographic paper.

The photograph is multicopied now, transformed into words expressing each writer's unique perspective on the story beneath the photograph. Because each writer is different—in attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions—each views the photograph in slightly different shades of light, illuminating nuances of meaning quite different from others' perceptions. And in the process of communicating their perceptions, they write differently from each other and differently, perhaps, each time they write. So how can we begin to talk about writing—much less learn to write better?

Yet writers *can* learn to write better. And teachers and other writers and even textbooks can help. One way to start that help is by defining *writing*.

In everyday talk the word *writing* is used in at least three different ways. First, it is used as a noun, the name of a *thing*: we can speak of a “piece of writing” as we would speak of a piece of cheese. Second, writing is used as a verb, an activity; we say, “Mike is writing instructions for buying a compact disc player” or “Constance is writing an autobiographical essay.” *Writing* thus means both a process and the product that results from it.

A third use of the word *writing*, although perhaps not quite so everyday, is a common one in education, business, and government. In those fields, and others, we talk about writing as a skill, an ability: we talk about the need for improving writing, we offer courses and workshops on writing, and we publish textbooks on writing, like this one. Writing is clearly a *power* that can be learned and strengthened. Moreover, it *gives* power to those who use it well—as students, workers, citizens, and human beings—because it offers a means of expression, a way to use language to achieve our purposes and to communicate our ideas.

This book is about writing in all three senses: as process, as product, and as power. Further, this book has three major goals, each concerned with one of these three ways of talking about writing. This Overview discusses those three goals.

The Writing Process

The first goal of this book is to help you develop your confidence and skill in the writing *process* as a way of communicating—and as a way of learning. So far, you may have thought of writing only as a medium of communication, and certainly that is its major purpose. But writing is also an important tool for learning, and if you are just beginning a college education, that is a useful fact for you to remember. In fact, one of the most valuable activities you can do as a college student—for the sake of both improving your writing and learning your other subjects—is to keep a daily journal of your learning and other experiences.

Using a daily journal to write about your experiences will, for example, reinforce your learning and help you to discover your own questions and points of interests. You've probably been told before that one of the best ways

to prepare for an essay examination is to ask yourself possible essay questions and then to practice writing essays in response to them. One of us, in fact, used this strategy when preparing for his Ph.D. written examinations. Though it requires an investment in time, this strategy is particularly effective because it helps you to identify the parts of your subject that you know well and those that you need to review more thoroughly. If you can write about something, you have comprehended it.

Thus, getting into the habit of writing about your learning experiences in the various courses you take in college is one way to become a better learner. You don't *really* know what you know about a subject until you *can* write about it. When you write it down, synthesizing and ordering pieces of information, making connections among disparate ideas, using your eyes, hand, and brain to compose your thoughts in the act of writing, you will have succeeded in learning new information and in discovering new questions to guide your future learning.

Because one of our goals in this book is to help you better understand writing as a process, we are going to suggest that you use a journal to begin thinking and writing about your own behavior as a beginning college writer—that is, to reflect on your own process of writing. Although you have learned most of what you know about written *products* through reading, you cannot learn much about the writing *process* that way. For example, you could read any of the sample papers in this book a thousand times without knowing the number of drafts that the writers produced before writing the final copies that you see in this book.

In fact, one of the main purposes of formal instruction in writing—like this textbook—is to teach you useful things about the writing process that are not apparent from reading the final product.

STAGES OF THE PROCESS

The left-hand column of the chart in Figure 1 is a reminder that writing *is* a process: it is not something that happens all at once. This writing process, as we suggested earlier, is not a rigid, step-by-step activity; it usually involves many twists and turns, much doubling back and leaping forward. Nevertheless, for purposes of learning to write better, it may be useful to think of the writing process as having three stages—stages defined not by what activities are done in them but merely by *when* they occur.

The easiest of the three stages to define is the second stage, which this book calls *drafting*: it consists of everything you do during the time you are actually putting the piece of writing down on paper, or on a computer screen. Drafting is writing the work through once; when it ends, a draft has been completed.

That may sound like the whole writing process, and for some writers, some of the time, it is. When you take a telephone message for a family member or roommate, for example, you very likely just write it down as you

Figure 1 - Writing: Process, Product, and Power

Stages in the writing Process	Features of the written Product	Range of the writer's Power
Predrafting	Situation	Matters of CHOICE
	Content	(writer needs TOOLS)
	Organization	
Drafting	Paragraphs	
	Sentences	
	Words	Matters of CONVENTION
Postdrafting	Mechanics	(writer needs RULES)

hear it, and you may not look at it again. Most writing tasks, however, are not that simple and straightforward. In most writing situations, writers do something before they begin that first draft: they think, read, take notes, talk with a friend or colleague, perhaps even outline. For example, one of us likes to list ideas on a page and order them in some way before beginning to write. Some writers talk into a tape recorder and then take notes as they play it back; one of us began his doctoral dissertation that way. Whatever writers do before they draft, that is the first stage of the writing process: we call it *predrafting*. It includes what some textbooks and teachers may call “discovery,” “invention,” “planning,” or “prewriting.” *Predrafting* is the preparation for *drafting*.

Similarly, most writers do something after they finish their first draft:

they reread, reconsider, revise. As mentioned earlier, the student-writers who produced the sample papers used in this book reread, reconsidered, and revised several drafts before they reached the final product. That is the third stage of the writing process, the stage we call *postdrafting*. It includes such activities as “rewriting,” “revising,” and “editing.”

Each of this book’s seven main chapters is divided into sections on predrafting, drafting, and postdrafting. In this way, the book suggests not just *what* to do to improve the various features of your writing—but also *when* during the process to do it. More will be said about that point shortly.

Of course, it is important to remember that our way of talking about the writing process can only be an approximation of what writers actually do when they write, because all writers compose differently. We have organized the writing process in a way that we think will be helpful to beginning college writers; it should help you to focus attention on particular features of a piece of writing without feeling overwhelmed by all of the variables in a writing situation. As you progress in the course you will, we hope, develop a clearer and more defined sense of your own writing process, first by writing about it in your journal, and second by practicing writing papers for different purposes and in different situations.

YOUR WRITING TIME

Inexperienced writers often begin the writing process by deciding what their first sentence will be, then writing it. At this point, they have completed the predrafting stage and have already begun drafting. They then work their way slowly and laboriously through the draft—planning each sentence, writing it, then reading it back and making revisions or corrections. When they finish the last sentence, they perhaps give the work a quick overall look and then send it on its way. Such writers can be called “one-stage” writers. With little or no time given to predrafting or postdrafting, their writing process consists essentially of a slow, difficult drafting stage.

More experienced writers tend to divide their time more equally among the three stages in the “process” column, perhaps even spending more time at predrafting and postdrafting than at drafting. That is, they tend to do more planning before they actually begin their drafts than inexperienced writers do, and they tend to do more revising and correcting after they finish their drafts. In between, they may do less planning and revising sentence by sentence during the drafting stage: their drafts may be “quick and dirty.”

This book will encourage you to divide your writing time that way, and it will provide specific advice on how to do so. By keeping your predrafting, drafting, and postdrafting in proportion, you will have a more efficient writing process and will produce better written products.

One way to understand why this is true is by comparing writing with

house building. Imagine a person who decides to build a vacation house on the shore of a lake. On his first visit to the site, he is struck by the view across the water and decides that what he wants most of all in the house is a large picture window. So he drives into town, buys a preframed picture window, and brings it out to the lot. Then realizing that he needs a section of wall to hold the window up, he buys a few boards and a handful of nails, and builds a little wall. But the wall needs a foundation, so he lays a short length of concrete blocks and fastens the wall and window to them. He then paints the wall and window, and hangs curtains. Now he is ready to decide what he wants next in the house—perhaps a bathroom.

No one, of course, builds houses that way: such a process would be an enormous waste of time and money, and it would result in houses that don't hold together very well. But that is precisely the way many inexperienced writers write. Each of their sentences is like the picture window—planned, constructed, and finished before moving on to the next component of the product. The result for the writer, as for the house builder, is an inefficient use of time and an inferior result.

Better house builders, like better writers, divide their time more sensibly. Given a year to build a vacation house, they spend several months before ever putting hammer to nail. They use that time well, defining the needs to be met by the house (How many people must it sleep? Does it need to be heated?), drawing increasingly detailed plans, and buying materials. Then, when actual construction begins, it can go fairly quickly, without frequent stops for further planning, and certainly without interruptions to paint walls or hang curtains. Such finishing activities can come later, in the last several months of the year, as the house is readied for its users.

A second way to understand the need for proportion of the stages in the writing process is to consider the psychology of writing. Within the brain, writing involves two very different activities. One activity is the “mechanical” process of translating ideas into hand motions—the process of thinking, for example, of a small furry animal that purrs, and translating that thought into the hand and finger movements that result in the word *cat* appearing on a piece of paper or a computer screen. That process is an extraordinarily complex one, involving a relatively large section of the brain. We might call that part of the mind the “internal writer.”

The other mental activity involved in writing is a more “supervisory” one: looking out at the world and deciding what to say to it, and looking at the emerging piece of writing and deciding how well it fulfills its task. That supervisory function is very much like the role played by newspaper editors: they assign stories, then read and evaluate them. So we might call this part of the writing mind the “internal editor.”

Imagine yourself as a newspaper writer, the first day on the job. Your boss assigns you a story, and you sit down at your keyboard. As you hesitatingly type the first words of the piece, you hear a voice behind you:

“What a lousy way to begin a story!” You look up and find that your boss, the editor, is looking over your shoulder, watching you work. You delete the words you just typed and start again. “A little better,” the editor says; “let’s see where it goes next.” You continue, nervously. “What?!” your boss exclaims. “Don’t they teach you people to spell anymore?!” And so on. Word by word, page by page, through the story, your editor reads and criticizes as you write.

Few writers could work under those conditions. Yet those are the very conditions that many inexperienced writers impose on themselves. As one-stage writers, they force their internal writer and their internal editor to work simultaneously, with the latter criticizing the former every word of the way. The resulting internal conflict only adds to the difficulty of the writing process and subtracts from the quality of the written product. (Actually, we have internal editors that interfere with all kinds of activities; the poet e. e. cummings was surely speaking of one kind of internal editor when he wrote “since feeling is first / who pays any attention / to the syntax of things / will never wholly kiss you.”)

Good newspaper editors, of course, do not read over their reporters’ shoulders: they make careful, thorough assignments, then get out of the way. Only after the reporter has produced a draft do they get back on the scene, to make corrections and suggest revisions. Many good writers make their internal editors behave that way too. They learn to make their internal editor do careful, thorough planning in the predrafting stage, then get out of the way during drafting, to let the internal writer do its job without interference. Then at the postdrafting stage, they let their internal editor come back to oversee the revising and correcting.

So to have a more efficient, effective writing process, you do not necessarily need to learn many new techniques. Instead, you may simply need to take much of the planning you are already doing sentence by sentence during the drafting stage and move it into the predrafting stage. Similarly, you may need to take much of the revising and correcting you are already doing sentence by sentence during the drafting stage and move it into the postdrafting stage. As a result of these moves, your written products will almost surely become more successful.

We will suggest several strategies that may be new to you and helpful in the writing process. Use your journal to experiment with these strategies when you begin a writing assignment, and use the strategies that work best for you as a writer. There are many ways to keep in good physical condition, for example, but we do not all practice the same techniques: some of us prefer rigorous walking, others racquetball, others basketball, and so on. The same is true with writing: we do not all use the same strategies when we write. As a beginning college writer, you should experiment with all of the strategies—and more than once—before you make decisions about what works for you and what does not.

Exercises

A. Consider the writing process *you* use. Use the questions below to reflect on your writing behavior. Read each question carefully, and take as many notes as you can. Then, in your journal, write a description of your writing process.

1. How do you prepare for writing a paper? What do you do to get started writing? Do you talk with others about your ideas? Do you read related material? What environment do you write best in? Do you write best at home, at work, in the library? Do you use a certain kind of paper? Write with a certain kind of pen or pencil? Use a word processor?
2. We have described the writing process as consisting of three stages: predrafting, drafting, and postdrafting. Are you usually a one-stage writer, or do you go through various stages? At which stage do you spend most of your time when you work on a writing assignment? Explain.
3. Once you begin writing a paper, how would you describe your composing process? Do you write a paragraph or two, and then rewrite? Do you frequently pause to read what you have written? Do you write a complete first draft and then reread? Do you start with the introduction? In the middle? Do you write for long periods? How often do you take breaks?
4. What do you do when you revise? Do you proofread? Do you change words and correct punctuation? Do you revise often or at different times? Do you make major changes to adjust for focus or audience? Do you have others read and comment on what you have written? Must you see your paper in typed form before you can revise?
5. How does your writing process vary with different writing tasks?

B. The composing process—the act of communicating thoughts and feeling to others—is not unique to writers. Writers, like other “composers,” experience the creative process in surprisingly similar ways, whether it be through the medium of words, color, sound, or motion. Visit with someone who is not a writer by trade but who does participate, in some way, in communicating thoughts, ideas, feelings, etc. (e.g., a musician, a dancer, an artist, an actor or actress, a choreographer, etc.). In your journal, describe some of the similarities between your own writing process and the composing process of the person you visited. Focus on the similarities that were perhaps not obvious to you at the beginning.

The Written Product

FEATURES OF WRITING

The second goal of this book is to help you develop your ability to produce successful written *products*, pieces of writing. To be successful as a whole, a piece of writing must succeed in several different ways: it must be well organized, for example, have “good grammar,” and be correctly spelled. Most of your past formal instruction in writing has probably focused on these and other features of written products.

However, research about writing suggests that most of what you have learned about written products did not come from formal instruction. Instead, you learned it informally from reading. Every comic book, every newspaper, every novel, every letter you have ever read has contributed to your knowledge of how writing looks, sounds, and “feels.” So an important way for you to become a better writer is to keep *reading*.

What formal instruction—like this textbook—can add to your knowledge of written products are new ways of thinking about them. To think of pieces of writing in new ways, you should look separately at the various features every piece of writing has. One way to classify these features is shown in the middle column of the chart in Figure 1. This column lists seven features of any written work, from a one-paragraph memo to a multivolume encyclopedia. These seven features will be the subjects of this book’s seven chapters.

The first feature of a piece of writing is its overall sense of the writing *situation*. No written product exists in isolation, created out of nothing. Instead, every piece of writing is written by somebody, for somebody (even if that somebody is the writer), about something, and for some reason. That is, every piece of writing has a writer, a reader, a subject, and a purpose. For example, if you were writing a complaint letter to your apartment landlord about unsafe living conditions in your apartment, you might think of yourself as an “apartment building tenant,” your reader as an “apartment building landlord,” your subject as “the unsafe living conditions in your apartment,” and your purpose as “to convince your landlord that immediate action is needed.”

To be successful, a piece of writing must take its writer, reader, subject, and purpose into account; it must meet all the needs of its situation. In your complaint letter, for example, you might succeed in informing your landlord of the unsafe conditions in your apartment, but you may also end up with your name at the *bottom* of a list of tenants whose apartments need repairs. In other words, by not attending to your purpose—one of the components of the writing situation—you might achieve only a portion of what you set out to achieve. Chapter One is designed to help you analyze and clarify the writing situations you encounter as a writer.