

THE
SHORT
HANDBOOK
FOR

Writers

Gerald J. Schiffhorst
Donald Pharr

SECOND EDITION

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THE SHORT HANDBOOK FOR WRITERS

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A B O U T T H E A U T H O R S

GERALD J. SCHIFFHORST is Professor of English at the University of Central Florida, where he has taught since 1970. He received his Ph.D. from Washington University in St. Louis and has taught at the University of Missouri–St. Louis. He is the author of several works on John Milton and has edited two volumes of Renaissance studies, the most recent being *The Witness of Times* (Duquesne University Press, 1993).

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*To Lynn Butler Schiffhorst
and Mary Ferguson Pharr
for their patience and support.*

Our purpose in this book is to provide students with a handy source of reference as they write as well as essential information on the composing process. As such, *The Short Handbook for Writers* can function both as a classroom text and as an independent tool for students responding to questions posed by their instructors.

The second edition of *The Short Handbook for Writers* is a substantial revision of the first edition. Our goal is to concentrate on the *practical* needs of the composition student, and to this end we have written a text with a sharpened focus. Changes to the first edition involve the following areas:

- **The Writing Process:** Part I now includes six chapters on planning and writing an essay, beginning with topic selection and continuing through rhetorical context, drafting, revising, and writing effective paragraphs and sentences. Our emphasis in this section is on careful planning of the essay and careful revision of the preliminary draft. Chapter 6, “Writing Effective Sentences,” includes many numbered exercise sections to test the areas covered in each section of the chapter.
- **Editing Your Writing:** Part II emphasizes mechanical problems and how to fix them. The three chapters concentrate on editing for grammar, mechanics, and diction. We have included an abundance of example sentences, usually set up as “not acceptable” and then followed by “acceptable” or “preferred” versions in the same context. Part II also has an extensive series of numbered exercises to challenge the student.
- **A Practical Guide to Writing:** Part III has been completely revised. Chapter 10, “Writing a Research Paper,” begins with a discussion of the various issues that affect the planning, writing, and documenting of the research paper, and then the chapter offers separate sections on MLA and APA documentation, with annotated student research papers included. We also emphasize, in both the MLA and APA sections, documentation of electronic sources. Chapter 11,

"Other Types of Writing," examines the types of applied writing most likely to be valuable to composition students: the literary analysis, the business letter, the memo, and the résumé. Chapter 12, "Grammatical Definitions and ESL Concerns," provides a useful guide to grammatical terms and to issues that concern the student whose first language is not English.

- **Glossaries:** The first glossary defines the terms used in the text. The second glossary draws distinctions between accepted usage and usage not appropriate for modern college-level writing.
- **Ancillaries:** Four ancillaries are available with this text: *The McGraw-Hill Guide to Electronic Research and Documentation*, *A Brief Guide to Persuasion and Critical Thinking*, *A Brief Guide to Avoiding Bias*, and *ESL Workbook*. These titles address areas of immediate concern to today's composition student.

Our book thus provides a useful source of clear, brief answers to the major questions that arise for composition students. We rely as little as possible on formal terminology, explaining essential terms both in the text and in Chapter 12 or the Glossary of Terms.

We are pleased to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of many students and colleagues. At the University of Central Florida, Catherine Schutz and John F. Schell have been generous with their advice. The following reviewers provided helpful suggestions during the revision: Joy W. Bashore, Central Virginia Community College; Christopher Belcher, Community College of Allegheny County; Elizabeth Jo Dallas, Community College of Allegheny County; Woodrow L. Holbein, The Citadel; Jill Karle, Piedmont Virginia Community College; Tom Kmetzo, Naugatuck Valley Community Technical College; Judith L. Merrell, Community College of Allegheny County; and Michael Robertson, Trenton State College. We are especially grateful to Donna French for word processing and a keen eye, to Kerime Toksu for skillful and conscientious copy editing, to Wanda Lubelska for creating an attractive and user-friendly text design, and to our editors, Phillip A. Butcher, Tim Julet, and Larry Goldberg, for making the book possible.

Gerald J. Schiffhorst
Donald Pharr

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The Writing Process

Finding Something to Say

Overview

Instead of reading this book straight through, you will probably refer to various chapters and parts of chapters as you need them. Even so, to put things in perspective and to help you get the most from your time, we will begin with an overview of the whole subject of writing.

We are not going to present a simple, foolproof formula guaranteed to make you a competent writer. Unfortunately, there is no such formula. Writing is like playing tennis: you learn and improve by doing—by practicing, by listening to criticism, and by practicing some more. Good writing does more than just avoid blunders. It holds the reader's interest. When you write well, you begin by thinking through what you want to say. Then you say it, in clear, logical sentences and carefully chosen words, expressing your thoughts and feelings so that your audience will understand them just as you want them to be understood.

Most writing—certainly all the writing we will be concerned with here—has a purpose and a method suited to it. Writers tell stories: they say what happens (narration). Or they argue: they speak for or against something (argument). Or they describe: they tell how something looks, sounds, or moves (description). Or they explain: they tell how something works (ex-

position) or why something happens (analysis). As you plan what you want to say in a paper, you will also be deciding which of these five approaches you will use. This does not mean that you will choose one approach and ignore the rest. You may be called on to explain, argue, describe, analyze, or narrate, or explain and argue, or describe and narrate, or do all of these in one paper. Nevertheless, the assignment, your own purpose, or a combination of your assignment and your purpose will usually make one approach predominant. For example, you may start out by describing ways in which consumers are deceived by television commercials and then end up arguing that there should be stricter regulation of such advertising. Since the emphasis in this case should fall on the argument, your purpose in describing commercials is to prepare your reader to believe as you do about regulation.

In an essay on Al-A-Teen, your main purpose might be to explain what this support group does and how it functions. You might compare it with Alcoholics Anonymous, or you might classify various programs for substance abusers and their families in relation to in-patient or out-patient treatment centers. You might also analyze different theories of teenage alcoholism and drug abuse, using quotations from magazine and newspaper articles dealing with the causes of these problems. Perhaps you could attend an Al-A-Teen meeting and then describe the range of people you met or provide a narrative account of your visit. Finally, you might conclude an essay with your opinion of the issues involved: Is Al-A-Teen helping to solve the problems of adolescents faced with substance abuse? Still, your essay would remain mostly expository: to explain the role of Al-A-Teen, based on your experience and reading.

To a certain degree, all writing must be persuasive. It must persuade readers that it is worth their time and attention. What you have to say will get a fair hearing only if you make sure it deserves one. Writing that deserves to be read is the kind we will be concerned with throughout this book.

Writing is a process of generating ideas, and the first four chapters divide this ongoing process, for convenience, into