

Second Edition

The Process of Composition

Joy M. Reid

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COMPOSING PROCESSES

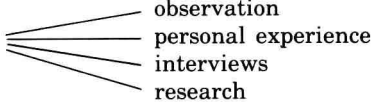
Choose a **SUBJECT**.
Identify your **AUDIENCE**.
Decide on the **PURPOSE**
of your paper.

Or be sure that you understand the
assignment given and the expecta-
tions of the professor.

Generating Material

Narrow the subject to a topic that:
will interest your audience
you know about
you can successfully develop

Collect ideas about your topic



- observation
- personal experience
- interviews
- research

Generate details about your topic

brainstorming	listing
clustering	treeing
outlining	flow-charting

Select the most important, most interesting ideas

Organizing Material

State the main idea of the essay in a thesis statement:
statement of opinion and/or
statement of intent

Develop paragraphs of support for your thesis statement:
topic sentence
supporting sentences

- facts
- examples
- physical description
- personal experience

Decide on methods of development to present your ideas:

- process
- extended definition
- comparison/contrast
- classification
- cause-effect

Drafting

Begin writing wherever	}	in the middle?
you feel comfortable		at the beginning?
you have adequate information		with the thesis?
		topic sentences?

Do not worry about errors; just write

Reread what you have written
reflect on what you have said
reconsider your ideas
evaluate your support

See inside back cover of this book for **REVISING PROCESSES**

Preface: Second Edition

When Prentice Hall invited me to do a second edition of *The Process of Composition*, I was delighted. Like many textbook writers, I had begun to collect advice, suggestions, and additional materials even while the book was in press. Moreover, since the first edition was published, ESL composition has flowered; much research and many textbooks have expanded teachers' options and students' opportunities.

The major revisions in *The Process of Composition* reflect both native and non-native speaker composition research, as well as years of feedback from teachers and students. The changes involve function rather than form; the fundamentals of the book remain the same. Briefly, the revisions involved the following:

1. The first chapters have been shortened, principally because *The Process of Paragraph Writing* (Reid and Lindstrom, Prentice Hall, 1985) covers the paragraph in great detail.
2. The middle section has been expanded, primarily with student-generated exercises and samples that will assist teachers and students; thus, the essay becomes the major focus of the textbook. The chapter on Argumentation and the one on Response to Written Material have been reversed; students suggested that change.
3. The research paper section has been completely rewritten and refocused, the better to emphasize more specific research strategies for academic students; student samples of the various parts of a research paper have been annotated for easier teaching and learning.

4. The grammar/sentence structure section and the appendix remain essentially unchanged; the inside front and back covers contain important composing strategies and revision processes that will now be more easily accessible.

Otherwise, *The Process of Composition* remains the advanced level ESL writing text of the first edition, which was based on the following assumptions:

1. No composition book is perfect for every class and every teacher. Therefore, this book covers the fundamental techniques and methods of composition, yet the format allows the teacher to insert additional exercises and assignments that are both class-specific and provide for individual teacher emphasis. This flexibility should give the experienced teacher a focus for materials and the newer teacher a foundation on which to build.
2. Academic writing has specific formats that are *expected* by academic readers. Many ESL students (like many native speaker/writers) have little or no concept of these formats. These students need to learn acceptable forms of academic prose.
3. Composition students in general, and ESL students in particular, need to spend more time practicing writing than reading about theories of writing. To that end, this book presents material in a concise form, more outline than text, more workbook than textbook.
4. Advanced ESL students are pre-university adults who will be subject to the academic and cultural expectations of an American university. In order to function with professors and with U.S. students, ESL students in advanced writing must understand the importance of written English and the necessity of individual commitment to learning the skills. To reach this goal, this book requires students to select their own topics, that is, to write about what they know, and the assignments require the students to make the course personally relevant.

Overall Structure of the Course

The first weeks of the course review basic paragraph writing: writing for an audience, the qualities of a paragraph, selection of a topic, generation of ideas through a variety of prewriting strategies, supporting techniques, and methods of development.

In following weeks, the students apply what they have learned to the writing of essays; the paragraphs they have learned to write during the first weeks have the same structure as body paragraphs in essays. In addition, they incorporate and expand the process of paragraph writing: prewriting, rough-draft construction, revision, and the final draft. In this section, students concentrate on expository, argumentative, and analytic prose.

Finally, in a continuing spiral, the students finish the last weeks of the course by writing a research paper, either on a topic from their major fields or on a topic that interests them. During these weeks, they learn about library research: the *Readers' Guide*, indexing and abstracting journals, and other research and reference materials. They also apply their knowledge of writing essays in selecting, organizing, and writing the research paper, using citation techniques from their major fields.

In order to prepare the students for university writing, *The Process of Composition* is organized so that the most basic processes in writing—selection, the topic sentence, supporting techniques, and methods of development—are presented three times in the major sections of the book: the paragraph, the essay, and the research paper. This spiraling technique enables the students to practice the basic processes again and again in increasingly complex contexts and thereby avoids the motivation problems involved in simple repetition. For additional reinforcement in these processes, the students are required to *revise* each assignment. In some cases, the students are asked not only to revise but also to lengthen and to rewrite assignments. In each assignment, the basic processes are stressed, so the students have sufficient opportunity to produce and polish the format.

Some sections of *The Process of Composition* are optional; short modules on such skills as writing resumes and business letters, doing sentence combining, and even learning to use basic reference materials can be used or not, depending on the needs of the students and the priorities of the teacher. These options offer the teacher flexibility in planning the course and structuring individual projects or assignments.

Concentration in the course is on academic writing skills. While the techniques used in description and narration (physical detail, illustration, personal experience) are fundamental to all good writing, they are presented in *The Process of Composition* as supporting techniques for exposition and argumentation, the rhetorical modes most often used in university writing. Students are assigned expository paragraphs and essays (explaining topics of their choice to a specific audience), argumentative essays (persuading an audience that an opinion about a controversy is valid), and summary/response essays (evaluating written material for an audience).

Because the course is based on academic writing, it is based on principles of composition rather than on grammatical structures. Naturally, ESL students, even at the advanced level, continue to have grammatical weaknesses. *The Process of Composition* deals with grammar problems that are specifically related to writing: punctuation, sentence structure, verb-tense agreement, prepositions, and so forth. But because the book concentrates on the process of writing, grammatical explanations and exercises focus only on those problems that are directly related to the *production* of written English. These explanations are in a separate section so that they can be used individually as class needs become evident. The grammar section, then, can often be presented as part of the *revising* process.

In order to produce students who can function in a university class, controlled writing as such is not used in *The Process of Composition*; however, the students are taught to write according to a nearly mathematical set of rules, to write in a very specific format, according to a formula. Each paragraph begins with a topic sentence; the four to eight sentences that follow are supporting sentences that explain, define, clarify, or illustrate the topic sentence. Both the introduction and the conclusion have specific forms and several techniques from which the students must choose. While this prescriptive, even arbitrary, formula may seem artificial and unnatural to the ESL students at first, the overall structure of the paragraph or essay teaches the students a method of writing that is acceptable to the majority of university professors. If, later in their university careers, the ESL students submit a paper that is not mechanically perfect, which has second language errors not familiar to the professor, at least the format will be understandable, and the student will have a better chance of communicating.

The ultimate goal of such an approach is that the students will finish the advanced ESL class in writing with knowledge of the format of most university assignments and with the confidence that they can *construct* an essay (a critique, a report of research, a term paper) if they know the necessary material. The analogy is with word roots and affixes in vocabulary building: If the students can see some logic in the formation of the language, their confidence in being able to produce the language increases.

Finally, in keeping with the philosophy of having students read as little as possible, the writing samples in *The Process of Composition* are short, limited in number, and consist of student writing by both native and ESL speakers. The samples are about topics that students consider relevant and are written in language that students can understand. Moreover, they are viable: The students have models they are *able* to imitate.

Finally, I write textbooks for students and teacher's manuals for teachers. The teacher's manual for *The Process of Composition* includes a suggested syllabus, techniques for teaching, additional exercises, explanations and answers to exercises, and suggestions for approaching the material. For a *free* copy of the Teacher's Manual, write Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632.

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J.M.R.

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The Fundamentals of Writing

Objectives of the Course

This is a course in essay writing. That implies that you must master certain skills that will enable you to write competent university essays. You must understand and be able to produce the techniques by which academic writers communicate to academic audiences. At the end of the course, you will be able to demonstrate a command of the following skills:

1. Prewriting: think before writing
 - A. Understand the assignment
 - B. Choose a subject that you are interested in
 - C. Narrow the subject so that it can be adequately covered within the limits of the assignment
 - D. Collect ideas
 - E. Consider the audience
2. Organization: write straightforward prose
 - A. Begin and end the paper clearly
 - B. Write a thesis statement of opinion and/or intent
 - C. Move smoothly from one paragraph to another
3. Development: support ideas
 - A. Use specific details to explain general ideas
 - B. Use facts, examples, physical description, and personal experience to develop ideas

4. Revision: look again, change and strengthen
 - A. Reconsider the needs of the audience
 - B. Reconsider the purpose(s) of the paper
5. Grammar and mechanics
 - A. Use language with precision
 - B. Avoid common errors of grammar and sentence structure
 - C. Strengthen writing through editing

The Audience

Two essential rules for this course are

1. Write about what you know.
2. Always write for an audience.

The audience is an essential concept for all writers. Writers choose their subjects and their methods of presenting material (diction, sentence structure, organization) according to who will read the finished product.

In order to communicate successfully, to write essays that have interest and value, you must decide

- A. Who you are: a student? a son or daughter? an expert?
- B. Who your audience is: classmates? parents? the admissions officer?

Your decisions about who you are and who your audience is will determine

- A. What you write: what does your audience know? what are the interests, the needs, and the expectations of your audience? what does your audience *not* know? what might your audience want to know? what do you know that you can communicate to your audience?
- B. How you write: will you use short sentences and simple language? will you use sophisticated concepts and terms? will you use charts or photographs?

Audience Expectations

Suppose you went to a movie titled *First Love*. You sat in the theater expecting . . . two young people, beautiful scenery, romantic music. Instead, during the first three minutes of the film, you saw five brutal murders, unspeakable violence, and terror. How would you feel? Confused? Angry? Would you leave the theater? Or ask for your money back?

Suppose you took a trip to Hawaii; you expected . . . sunny weather, warm temperatures, a peaceful ocean. Instead, a hurricane occurred; the weather was rainy, windy, and cold for your entire trip. How would you feel? Disappointed? Frustrated? Would you leave Hawaii before your vacation was finished?

Suppose you bought a book for a beginning biology course at your university. You began to read the first chapter, expecting . . . basic concepts, clear explanations, and simple language. Instead, the pages contain terms and diagrams that a graduate student in biology would have difficulty understanding. How would you feel? Puzzled? Resentful? Would you drop the course?

All audiences have expectations. U.S. professors also have expectations; when they make writing assignments (essays, laboratory reports, research papers), they *expect* their students to write in very specific ways. If a student does not fulfill the expectations of the professor, the results could be confusion, frustration (and a lower grade on the paper!).

Many native speakers of English are familiar with the expectations of U.S. professors. One of your major objectives in this class will be to discover those expectations and to learn how to fulfill them.

EXERCISE 1A

1. Write a paragraph about "How I Spent Last Saturday." Think about your audience. Your selection of ideas will be different if you write:
 - A. a letter to your grandmother
 - B. a memo to your advisor
 - C. a note to your best friend
 2. Write a paragraph describing a tree for the following three audiences:
 - A. an elementary school child
 - B. your class
 - C. a professor of botany
 3. You have been gambling in Las Vegas and have lost all the money you were going to use to go to the university this semester. Write a letter to two of the people listed below. The goal of this letter is to obtain the money necessary for school. NOTE: Truth need not be a part of this letter.
 - A. the political leader of your country
 - B. the university financial aid officer
 - C. your rich grandfather
 - D. the head of the CIA
-

Showing and Telling

In the paragraphs below, students wrote about their mothers. The information in these paragraphs demonstrates the differences between

SHOWING
(Demonstrating)

TELLING
(Asserting)

no support

Simply telling your reader what you want to communicate may be easy, but it is rarely very interesting or even very believable. In order to *support* your statements, you will need to use specific details and examples. In other words, showing your reader that what you have presented is valid will make your essay more interesting and more believable.

Read the sample paragraphs. Which sentences in each paragraph simply *tell* about the mother? Which sentences *show*—that is, which sentences contain specific details and examples about the mother? In addition, which sentences discuss the mother? Do some sentences tell about the writer instead?

It started nineteen years ago when she brought me into the world. Maw gave me the best care any child could have gotten. She has taught me more than any teacher in school and is overflowing with love. Always understanding and easy to communicate with and there when needed. She's the best: my "Maw."

Mom is a gray-haired lady of about 72 years. She is very sweet when she wants to be and very difficult when she puts her mind to it. I had to teach her how to drive at the age of 50, and the only safe place to teach her was in a wheat field. She is a determined lady; for example, when I was teaching her to drive she backed up the car until it boiled, but she did learn how to back. She has more trouble now keeping her stories in correct order and true. I love my mother more as I grow older. I realize some of the things she had to go through to raise me.

An essay on my mother you said, and I began thinking what to write. I just realized that it's possible that I don't truly know my mother, or at least not as well as I'd thought. She's about an inch shorter than I am and we look very much alike. Both of us have a spreading hip problem. My mom's always there. She's easy to talk to and I like hearing her opinions. I really admire her because she went back to school a few years ago and now is teaching in an elementary school. She really loves her job and the children. She also has plenty of time to keep up just about everything else that she did before working. Now that my brothers and sisters and I are older and more on our own I'm very glad that my mother's the way she is. She has accepted the fact that we have lives of our own, and she is going on living hers. My father has also benefited from this. They really make a good team.

My mom can handle just about anything that life can throw at her. Usually she's the most excitable person in our house. I just can't imagine what it would

be like without her. Except that I would feel as though some great knowledge had been torn from my own self.

My mother was born in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1918. She grew up in the Bavarian Alps and lived there until her family moved to the city of Marlsruhe which lies near the Black Forest, along the Rhine River. Just prior to World War II, my mother married my father and I came along in 1939. In 1945, after the war and after my father had been killed in action, my mother met and married my stepfather and travelled with him to the United States to live with him and me in California where she still resides.

The following paragraphs were written by students in response to an assignment to write a paragraph about their names. The students tried to *show*, by using factual information, details, and examples, what their names meant. Are there specific details in the paragraphs? What makes each paragraph interesting? What details are *memorable*?

My complete name is Lili Margarite Chan Gonzalez. My first name, Lili, was the name of a ballet dancer. She was my grandfather's fiancée. They never got married because one night after her show she was killed with a knife in the street where she used to live. In my country most of my friends call me Lilian because they say that Lili is a diminutive of Lilian. My second name is the name of a flower and also the name of a saint. In the Catholic religion, our second name must have a Catholic meaning. Chan, my third name, is a Chinese name. I really don't know anything about it. My real last name is Gonzalez, and it is a very common Spanish name.

Lili Gonzalez
(Brazil)

My full name is Adel Addeb Ali Hassan Ali Ebram O'hide Salamah Faraq Al-Hadad. These ten names are my name plus my father's and my grandfather's from my father's side. It is a custom in Arabia that every child has to be called by his father's side. My family name is supposed to be Al-Hadad, but for some reason my sixth grandfather was famous, so his sons and grandsons took his name to be a family name. All of these names are Arabian. As it is everywhere, one name has been repeated, maybe because it was common during that time.