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**COLLEGE
WRITING**

A Workbook

Example sentences
can be found
in the workbook

COLLEGE WRITING

A Workbook

Michael J. Hogan
Peter C. Page

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COLLEGE WRITING: A Workbook

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College Writing

Preface to the Teacher

College Writing is a book for beginning college students who need to learn the basic grammatical, mechanical, and phrasing conventions of written English. While there are many reasons why these students find themselves in need of a course in the basics of written English, it is clear that they share several major problems. Most have only been confused by the grammatical terms and handbook rules they have previously studied. More importantly, when they write, most fail to apply whatever rulebook knowledge about written English they have learned. Many, too, view the work they do in an English composition class as isolated from any writing they do outside the English classroom. And, paradoxically, when they enter college, most face the need to learn the conventions of standard written English quickly, because at the same time they are enrolled in a developmental writing class, they are taking other courses in which they are asked to write properly and well. *College Writing* has been designed to overcome these problems by offering students a streamlined, practical course in which *learning and applying the basic conventions of written English are presented as a single, integrated activity*. This objective is accomplished through the following features:

Basic grammatical and mechanical conventions are explained in terms that appeal to the student's common sense. The book shows the student how readers are distracted or confused when rules and conventions are ignored.

All rules and conventions are grouped around the need for either completeness, consistency, or coherence in writing. This organization has proven in class testings to help the student understand and remember the rules and guidelines for written English: instead of facing dozens of seemingly unrelated rules, the student can see the underlying system of written English.

Assignments focus on asking the student to apply rules and conventions. Explanation and identification exercises covering a particular rule or guideline are always followed by either revising, sentence-combining, or composing tasks in which the student puts into practice the rule or guideline under study.

Sample materials, exercises, and writing suggestions are all based either on actual student writing submitted in freshman courses or on passages or writing assignments typical of those freshmen encounter in beginning natural science, social science, business, and humanities courses. Composition is presented as an interesting, practical skill that is essential to college work.

Problem areas for basic writers that other workbooks often ignore are covered. For example, the book gives attention to revising and proofreading skills, to the most common forms of academic writing (summaries, short-essay answers, brief reports, etc.), and to truly practical guidelines for punctuating.

Several useful teaching and learning aids are provided. Each section of explanatory material concludes with a checklist that summarizes the major points from the section. An answer key at the back of the book lets students check their own work. A full Teacher's Manual offers many teaching hints, gives suggestions for in-class activities, supplies possibilities for extra work, and anticipates problems students may encounter through the book.

Michael J. Hogan
Peter C. Page

Introduction to the Student

College Writing: A Workbook is a book designed to help you succeed in college and in the real life situations that follow college. The book is based on the assumption that as a student you will need to know and remember to apply the basic rules of grammar, usage, and punctuation in all the typical situations you will encounter when you must write in your college courses. English is not simply a subject that stops after every English class; English is a group of important skills that are vital in all your college courses and in the world beyond college. And writing well is probably the most important of the skills you can master, for it allows you to express yourself with ease and precision in the many situations you will face in college—not merely in the typical English courses you may take but in biology, history, economics, nursing, and engineering courses.

You may already be asking yourself why you need to be able to apply basic rules of grammar, conventions of punctuation, and standards of usage in your writing. After all, isn't it good enough to be able to write just as you speak? Does it matter how you write as long as the point gets made? These are perplexing questions. You *do* know a great deal about English and its rules and conventions already. You know these things without having to think about them; otherwise, you would not be able to speak, read, or write at all. But many of you will find that the English you speak is very different from the standard English you read in newsmagazines and textbooks. In standard written English writers not only make their point, but they do so by completing their train of thought fully, by ordering their words carefully and consistently, and by appealing to an audience of educated readers. Learning to write standard English, especially standard English for academic situations, means that you cannot assume anything on the part of your readers except their intelligence and fairly broad background of knowledge. You cannot expect your readers to understand your dialect or your slang, but you can assume that they will be able to read grammatical, well-punctuated, well-argued prose.

Some things that are perfectly acceptable in everyday speech are often not acceptable in college writing. A sociology paper cannot be written in the same language that is used to tell a joke in the locker room, nor can a biology report be as informal as a casual conversation with a next-door neighbor. We often forget this fact, however, by allowing our casual spoken patterns of English to creep into our written work. Look, for instance, at this student theme on the subject of billboards:

While your on vacation to Arizona, or California, or even Washington, wouldn't you rather see beautiful mountains, deserts, trees and skies—or would you rather see, “smoke Winston cigarettes” or “Drink light Beer”? The thing is billboards interfere with Nature, they also creat a driving hazard. For instance your driving down the road at, seventy miles an hours, your already exceeding the speed limit, but while your driving you just can't seem to keep your eyes off of the billboards. At the end of the road there is a sharp curve. Well due to the fact that you were reading the signs instead of paying attention to the road, “CRASH”! off the road you go. So its a very simple problem to solve. Remove every single billboard. From the side of every road in the U.S. Then at least people will be killed from drunken drivers. NOT from drivers grooving on BILLBOARDS.

No one would deny that this writer has some very good points to make: perhaps billboards should be removed from the roadsides because they ruin the natural scenery and distract drivers. But the writer's way of expressing himself may be annoying to many readers because it is very informal and conversational. The writer speaks to his reader as if he were talking to an old friend. He runs his thoughts together as if he can barely wait to make his point. He does not seem to care that some of his sentences are actually the sort of fragmentary comments many of us use when we are speaking. He is inattentive to spelling and mechanical conventions. Although he has conveyed his strong feelings on the topic, he has not really tried to use logic to persuade the many readers who do not have exactly the same views of billboards that he has. In short, this writer is writing as if he were speaking. He needs to learn (or get into the habit of using) the rules for standard written English.

Learning these rules for college writing takes hard work. But you can help yourself if you remember that the rules and conventions for college writing have a logic and a purpose. Of course, when you are faced with learning what may seem like hundreds of different rules of grammar, punctuation, word usage, and sentence formation, it is easy to overlook the commonsensical principles that underlie these rules. If you can think of no logical reason why writing

Good baseball players can run, hit, throw, catch, and spit through their teeth.

is better than writing

Good baseball players can run and hit, they also can throw can catch, and know how to spit through their teeth.

then the odds that you will write the first, smoother, clearer version are not good. This book will help you learn the real, understandable reasons for the rules. Almost every basic guideline of standard written English can be explained, we believe, by the need for writers to communicate their thoughts completely, consistently, and coherently. Thus this book groups the various basic guidelines for writing successfully in college into sections on completeness (complete sentences, detailed statements, etc.), on consistency (agreement of subject and verb, parallel phrases and clauses, etc.), and on coherence (clear word choices, smoothly arranged sentences, etc.). By the time you have finished the work in this book, you should have no difficulty remembering that these three general principles are important if you are to succeed as a college writer. And keeping the three general principles in mind should help you remember and apply the various individual rules.

You will be able to use this book best if you understand several points about how any book (or course) that aims to help students improve their writing must be organized. First, consider the many things people do when they write standard English: they spell and punctuate properly; they construct complete sentences in which subjects and verbs agree; they put clauses and phrases in parallel forms when necessary; they make clear and appropriate pronoun references; they select precise, clear words; they select details and organize their points well. Good writing, in other words, involves doing many things well—and doing them at the same time. If you are a typical beginning college student, you probably need to improve your ability to write full sentences, punctuate in ways that help readers follow your statements, select words that make your ideas clear, avoid grammatical errors that distract readers, and develop and organize your thoughts. A problem arises because a book (or a course) cannot offer advice and practice on every ingredient of good college writing at once; a book must begin with one ingredient and move on to others later. You will find several features in this book aimed at overcoming this problem: (1) whenever possible, individual rules or conventions that fit together are treated together; (2) the order of units on completeness, then consistency, and then coherence allows in a general way a movement from the basic rules to the finer points of good college writing; (3) at several places in the book rules covered earlier are reviewed, or rules to be covered later are previewed; (4) while the material in the book is arranged in an order, it is possible to complete exercises in the middle or latter parts before completing all early parts; (5) the book includes many suggestions for writing assignments in which you will be asked to put into

practice its rules and suggestions. The important point to understand, though, is that you should not expect to solve all your writing problems overnight. Students develop writing skills through steady practice over a period of time.

Certainly the best way to come as close to perfection as possible is to reread and revise your writing. Good writers are rarely satisfied with a first version of a paper; they usually write several versions, correcting errors in the original, adding details to the original, rearranging the original to make the paper smoother, substituting precise for vague words in the original. Examining and revising what you write is very important. Thus revising plays a large role in writing classes—and in this book. Make it a point to get into the habit of rereading your writing closely and revising it.

You may also be interested in the answer to another question that students in writing courses often ask. The notion of perfection in writing standard English sometimes causes some worry. Your teachers (and your other readers) probably will seem to you to expect perfect writing: writing that is free of spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors, writing that uses apt word choices, writing that is succinct and yet detailed, writing that is at once tightly organized and interesting. Now perfection is, of course, a practical impossibility. What you as a college writer must do is seek to come as close to perfection as you can each time you write. Perhaps the most important of all conventions in college writing is, in fact, that writers will help their readers by doing their utmost to make their writing as sharp, understandable, and error-free as possible.

A final feature of this book is that its explanations, exercise materials, and writing assignments are based on the types of reading and writing tasks that beginning college students face in their courses. You will be studying the rules of standard English by examining (and revising) passages from history, biology, chemistry, psychology, geography, economics, geology, and other fields of study in college. You will be asked to practice applying the rules for standard written English in writing tasks typical of those college students must perform. You will, for instance, practice writing definition and identification answers of a sentence or two, paragraphs that explain an idea or summarize a set of facts, and essays that argue an opinion or describe an event. This practice in context will, we hope, make *College Writing* both practical and interesting for you. It will also help you remember that using the basic rules of standard written English is not something important only in your English class but is important for all college courses.

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UNIT A

COMPLETENESS

Perhaps the best way to show the importance of completeness in college writing is to compare a passage that is complete with one that is not. Examine this description of the reception at the White House the day of Andrew Jackson's inauguration as president in 1829:

At the White House, preparations had been made for the President to meet the people informally. But what took place was never anticipated. Jackson shook hands with the well-wishers, but the press of the crowd threatened to injure him, and several gentlemen were obliged to surround him and shield him from the pushing and shoving. The pressure got so bad that the President finally ducked out a side entrance and fled to his lodgings at Gadsby's Hotel. The crowd did not pursue him but turned their attention instead to the food and drink, scrambling to grab the refreshments from the hands of waiters, breaking china and glassware in the process, spilling pails of liquor on the carpets, and smearing mud all over the damask covered chairs as they climbed over them to get a better look. The destruction reached such a pitch that tubs of wine and ice cream were carried outside to the garden to draw the crowd out of the house, whereupon the guests dove through the windows to reach the prize.

Adapted from Robert V. Rimini's
Andrew Jackson (New York: Harper
& Row, 1969), pp. 107–108.

Here is a version of the same event, as it might be written by a writer who ignores the rules for completeness in college writing: