



A  
CASE  
for  
WRITING

A Casebook Approach  
to Writing Paragraphs  
and Essays

JOHN H. THISSEN

# A CASE FOR WRITING

**A CASEBOOK APPROACH TO  
WRITING PARAGRAPHS AND ESSAYS**

**John H. Thissen**

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# PREFACE

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This book was written to fill a need—mine. In the three decades that I taught entry-level college composition courses, I used many different textbooks, but I couldn't find the one I really wanted. I was on the hunt for a book that would let students discover that their job in my classroom had some connection with the world outside Room 604. Teaching in a large urban college brought me into contact with busy adults from 18 to 75 whose time, patience, and gullibility were limited. They were willing to concede to their math, computer science, and social science teachers that some classroom efforts had grounding in future tasks. But their notion of what English teachers dispensed was often based on a suspension of disbelief: "You're a nice guy, so I'll go along with this stuff. Besides, the course is required."

I wanted a book that was not merely "relevant"—to use that wonderful horse we all began riding in the sixties—but one that would enable students to see for themselves that writing is something people do because the world runs on it, not because English teachers say so. A **casebook approach** seemed to be a good possibility, so I tried a few case-oriented textbooks and labored to make them useful. I admired the ingenuity of their authors and found myself totally absorbed in the microcosms of communication that individual cases could create. But I also found my developmental students overly challenged by the level of diction and complexity of sentence structure that the available casebooks contained. I liked the idea of using role playing and immersion in a realistic situation, but I found it necessary to do a counterproductive amount of explaining and explicating. No books of this type were suitable for my students. English 100 is not English 101.

Finally, with the encouragement of many, many people, I decided to write one of my own. This text is a compendium of all the useful tricks, stratagems, insights, nuggets, ploys, and methodologies I could assemble for one simple purpose: I want beginning composition students to understand that *all writing is writing for an audience*, and I want them to see this truth manifested in real ways as accomplished by real people. When they see this, they can do it for themselves and continue to get better at it. The casebook approach, if used patiently and creatively, is a valid and effective way for students and teachers to collaborate on writing as it actually takes place in concrete situations.

What will you find in this book and this approach to writing?

Most importantly, **students** will find an attempt to readjust some of the steps they have followed in the past. Instead of concentrating on watching others write, then analyzing what they've done, and, finally, imitating it, students who use *A Case for Writing* will jump right into the "real world" and *become* writers as their world's exigencies force them to write. Each situation becomes the student's situation. The student is the theater owner, the library board member, the animal rights activist, the thoughtful writer of a letter to the editor.

As a **teacher**, your role will be to encourage and facilitate your students' attempts at analyzing situations, role playing, and constructing worlds in which communication takes place. You will oversee the process of writing as it fits these constructs, and you will point out to students that if they can write in such and such a "case," they can write within the cases that their own life will inevitably supply. From your own experience, you will help them find the verbal sets, makeup, props, and syntactic stagecraft necessary to make "artificial" writing believable.

To help you accomplish these tasks, *A Case for Writing* supplies many resources:

- Two **introductory chapters** that set the stage for the productive use of the casebook approach. The first, "How Writing Works," analyzes the writing process and illustrates the major thrust of the course. The second chapter is titled appropriately, "**Getting Started.**" Both of these chapters introduce students to the use of cases and what will be expected of them during the course.
- Seventeen fully realized, detailed **cases** to be used as jumping-off points for writing. They vary in difficulty, milieu, and emotional intensity. They range from big-city bus crashes to small-town colleges, from suburban factories to neighborhood theaters. They are peopled by a mixture of characters, multiracial, multiethnic, multifaceted.
- Each case is accompanied by **Key Terms** to be explored and used as appropriate in discussing and writing about the case.
- A section on **Analyzing the Case** follows each case, setting out some of the issues and problems involved in the situation. Further questions for class analysis are also included.
- **Roleplaying.** A section on roleplaying accompanies each of the cases. Students are introduced to this important technique and shown how to move

from roleplaying into writing. By inhabiting the minds of others, they discover how people write in realistic situations.

- Writing assignments and various kinds of **exercises** accompany each case. Writing assignments range from a sentence or two to fully developed essays.
- Separate parts on “**Writing Paragraphs**” and “**Writing Essays.**” The instruction in these parts is then incorporated into the cases that follow.
- Separate discussions of important **Writing Conventions** in eight chapters, including spelling, punctuation, sentence completeness, pronoun agreement, and consistency in person and tense. Numerous exercises accompany the writing conventions. These treatments are not exhaustive, and it is expected that this book will be supplemented by a standard handbook, either print or electronic.
- Separate treatment of various **methods of development**, including description, example, comparison/contrast, cause and effect, definition, process, and classification. Each method is accompanied by exercises.
- A chapter on “**Types of College Writing.**” This chapter includes such areas of academic writing as essay examinations, research, writing about literature, and writing across the curriculum.
- An **appendix** that contains the following:
  1. Additional cases for further exploration. This collection enables an instructor to tailor and adapt the course by substituting different cases for those contained in the individual chapters.
  2. A discussion of the most difficult challenges facing English as a second language (ESL) students, including use of articles, verb forms, and an overview of the general syntactic basis of English.
  3. Two professionally written articles, “Claim Your Domain Name Before the Internet Winter Hits,” and “Wood Ghost.” These articles are annotated to illustrate how professional writers go about their business. In addition, “Wood Ghost” has a section on vocabulary study.
- A **glossary** of the terms appearing in boldface throughout the book.
- An **instructor’s manual** that includes tips on teaching methods and answers to the exercises. A list of additional supplementary materials follows.

## THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PACKAGE

In addition to the instructor's manual described previously (ISBN 0-321-04454-1), many other innovative supplements are available for both instructors and students. All of these supplements are available either free or at greatly reduced prices.

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***Teaching Online: Internet Research, Conversation, and Composition, Second Edition.*** Ideal for instructors who have never surfed the Internet, this easy-to-follow guide offers basic definitions, numerous examples, and step-by-step information about finding and using Internet sources. Free to adopters. (ISBN 0-321-01957-1)

## For Instructors

**Electronic Text Bank for Writing.** This electronic test bank features more than 5,000 questions in all areas of writing, from grammar to paragraphing, through essay writing, research, and documentation. With this easy-to-use CD-ROM, instructors simply choose questions from the electronic test bank, then print out the completed test for distribution. (ISBN 0-321-08117-X) Printed version also available (0-321-08596-5)

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John H. Thissen  
Glenview, IL

## AN OVERVIEW OF A CASE FOR WRITING

Chapter	Case	Writing Conventions	Methods of Development
<b>Part One: Introduction</b>			
1	Animal Rights		
2	Animal Rights, cont'd.	Spelling	
<b>Part Two: Writing Paragraphs</b>			
3	Writing Paragraphs		
4	Adult Film Theater	Sentence Completeness	Description
5	The Lottery Winner	Pronoun Clarity	Examples
6	The Cheating Scandal	Letter Writing	Comparison/Contrast
7	The Bus Crash	Commas	Cause and Effect
<b>Part Three: Writing Essays</b>			
8	Writing Essays		
9	The Company's Child Care Center	Colons, Semicolons	Definition
10	Transfer to Another College	Quotations	Process
11	Censorship in the Library	Consistent Tense/ Consistent Person	Classification
12	Types of College Writing		
<b>Appendix A Additional Cases for Study</b> <b>Appendix B English as a Second Language</b> <b>Appendix C Professional Readings for Study</b>			

# BRIEF CONTENTS

---

Detailed Contents   vii

Preface   xv

## **Part 1           Introduction to Writing   1**

Chapter 1   How Writing Works   3

Chapter 2   Getting Started/The Writing Process   19

## **Part 2           Writing Paragraphs   43**

Chapter 3   Writing Effective Paragraphs   45

Chapter 4   Case: Adult Film Theater  
Sentence Completeness/Description   55

Chapter 5   Case: The Lottery Winner  
Pronoun Clarity/Using Examples   67

Chapter 6   Case: The Cheating Scandal  
Writing Letters/Comparison and Contrast   79

Chapter 7   Case: The Bus Crash  
Commas/Cause and Effect   91

## **Part 3           Writing Essays   103**

Chapter 8   Writing Effective Essays   105

Chapter 9   Case: The Company's Child Care Center  
Semicolons and Colons/Definitions   111

Chapter 10   Case: Transfer to Another College  
Quotations/Explaining a Process   121

Chapter 11   Case: Censorship in the Library  
Consistent Tense and Person/Classification   133

Chapter 12   Types of College Writing   143

## **Additional Resources for Writers 153**

**Appendix A Additional Cases for Study 155**

**Appendix B English as a Second Language 205**

**Appendix C Professional Readings for Study 213**

**Glossary 227**

**Credits 235**

**Index 237**

# DETAILED CONTENTS

---

Preface xv

## **Part 1 Introduction to Writing 1**

### **Chapter 1 How Writing Works 3**

Getting Started 3

What Do People Write? 4

How This Book Works 5

**Case: Animal Rights 7**

Audience 10

Appropriate Language 11

Sample Documents 12

Types of Writing 14

Letters 14

Memos 14

Reports 14

Flyers 15

Articles 15

E-Mail 16

### **Chapter 2 Getting Started/The Writing Process 19**

Taking It Step By Step 19

Analyzing the Audience 20

Role Playing 20

Learning from Models 24