

THE NORTON  
READER

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# The Norton Reader

An Anthology of Expository Prose

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## SEVENTH EDITION

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# Preface

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Editors of texts that undergo repeated revision inevitably regard their latest effort as especially fine. Certainly the editors of this seventh edition of *The Norton Reader* consider it the equal of its progenitors and possibly the best since the first edition of 1965. Its generous contents are varied in many ways—in length, style, tone, immediacy, difficulty, and subject; and period, nationality, age, and sex of the author. Eight essays, for example, are by Canadian authors, forty-one by women. New and familiar essays by Native American, black, Asian American, and Chicano writers reflect the range of the Reader. All entries have been approved by at least three of the editors: quality has continued to be essential for inclusion.

Having satisfied the demands of most readers, two-thirds of the selections remain from earlier editions. It is a pleasure—simply to name selections from “Personal Report”—to print again old favorites by Dylan Thomas, Maya Angelou, Loren Eiseley, and E. B. White. It is no less a pleasure to introduce new selections that account for one-third of this edition. They come from such authors as June Callwood, Jane Howard, Neil Postman, Richard Rodriguez, Nancy Sommers, Gloria Steinem, and Michael J. Katz. Further, inclusion of these new essayists points up a sharpened focus on modern and contemporary writing. Thirty essays were published between 1900 and 1950, eighty-five between 1950 and 1980, and fifty-one since 1980.

As heretofore, the essays are gathered into sections according to major fields of human concern, some of them familiar ground to students—“Personal Report,” “Mind,” “Education,” “Language and Communication”—and others inviting ventures toward more specialized kinds of knowledge, such as “History,” “Science,” “Philosophy and Religion.” Teachers familiar with earlier editions will, however, note important changes in the manner of presenting essays. The editors have sought a middle ground between anthologies that offer essays with little or no editorial help and others in which editorial advice overwhelms the readings. The editors, realizing that writing and reading can engage in dialogues to the benefit of both, have sought to stimulate such dialogues

in several ways:

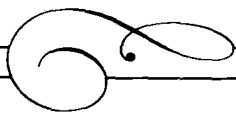
1. By increasing the number of essays for which study questions are provided.
2. By dividing these study questions into two complementary categories: "The Reader" and "The Writer." The first focuses on content and interpretation—in short, on meaning. The second focuses on means and ends, on the strategies of style, tone, and arrangement by which an author seeks to effect changes in the readers' mind.
3. By multiplying to four the offerings of certain gifted essayists—E. B. White, Virginia Woolf, Lewis Thomas, and Joan Didion—so that students may discover how authors, like baseball pitchers, vary their delivery to suit the occasion. There are, too, other less frequent manifestations of the same voice employing in different essays different means for different ends: Henry David Thoreau, for example, or Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Eudora Welty, Wayne C. Booth, George Orwell, Samuel Johnson, and Stephen Jay Gould.
4. By providing more cross-referencing questions that invite discrimination among the ways different authors treat related subjects—Loren Eiseley, E. B. White, Lewis Thomas, and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross on mortality, for example, or the paired essays, one by Virginia Woolf and one by Doris Lessing, entitled "My Father."
5. By providing a totally new introductory (rather than final) essay on reading and writing. The work of Robert E. Hosmer, Jr. of Mount Holyoke, it explicitly yet informally coaches young readers in analyzing the processes of writing and reasoned response.
6. By expanding the authors' biographies to help students determine the contexts from which writings emerge.
7. And by securing from Professor Hosmer a new teachers' *Guide*, one that treats the rhetoric and content of *all* essays in the *Reader*, focusing especially on the aforementioned quartets of essays by E. B. White, Virginia Woolf, Lewis Thomas, and Joan Didion.

Many of these improvements derive from suggestions from the field, and much of what remains does so because of support from teachers across the country. Among those whose aid it is a pleasure to acknowledge are the following: Christine Barkley, San Diego Mesa College; Ruth M. Bradley, Diablo Valley College; Roger D. Carlstrom, Yakima Valley Community College; Joseph J. Comprone, University of Louisville; Virginia Cooke, Simon Fraser University; Richard Hauer Costa, Texas A&M University; Carrol Daniels, Stephen F. Austin State University; Charles H. Daughaday, Murray State University; Wilfred O. Dietrich, Blinn College; J. L. Dillard, Northwestern State University of Louisiana; M. Elaine Dolan, Tulane University of Louisiana; Anita Gandolfo, West Virginia University; Marshall Gilliland, University of Saskatchewan; Frederick Goldberg, Clayton Junior College; Katherine K. Gottschalk,

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—Arthur M. Eastman

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# Notes on Reading and Writing

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Despair is no good—for the writer, for anyone. Only hope can carry us aloft, can keep us afloat. Only hope, and a certain faith that the incredible structure that has been fashioned by this most strange and ingenious of all mammals cannot end in ruin and disaster. This faith is a writer's faith, for writing itself is an act of faith, nothing else.

—E. B. White, "The Faith of a Writer"

E. B. White's eloquent remarks, delivered on his receiving the National Medal for Literature in 1971, encourage all of us engaged in writing. His words provide a point of departure as we consider the whole project of reading and writing, and the role that *The Norton Reader* can play in enabling you to become a better writer. A better writer, for you can already write. That is not just to say that you know the language and some of the "mechanics," like exclamation points, periods, and paragraph indentions, needed to put your thoughts on paper. It also means that you know how to communicate your thoughts in writing, at least some of the time. Sometimes you know what you want to say, other times you do not; sometimes you can find the words to say exactly what you want to, other times you cannot; sometimes you are satisfied with what you have written, other times you are not. If you feel that these last remarks apply to you, do not despair—you are in the company of almost every writer, amateur and professional.

One of the first things to remember about writing derives from an awareness of what human beings are: limited, capable of mistakes, and constantly seeking to understand and express themselves. To recognize this is not to give way to despair; rather, it is to recognize two positive implications for you as a writer. First, your writing cannot be "perfect," and no one is asking you to write the perfect essay. Work toward

producing the best piece of writing you can deliver today, but do not be crippled by unrealistic expectations, your own or your instructor's. Second, because you are unique and your experiences and objectives are solely your own, you always have something to add to a text you have read, whether in thought, discussion, or writing.

Recognizing this should give you confidence. Writing, like many other human activities, goes hand in hand with self-confidence: if you think you can do it, you are halfway there. "Writing itself is an act of faith," primarily in yourself and your abilities, secondarily in language. If you remember how you learned to do certain things—prepare a meal, play a sport, pass an exam—you recall just how important self-confidence is. Of course, preparation and practice are equally important elements in any process. In the process of learning to write better, your preparation—reading, thinking, discussing—and your practice—writing, revising, editing—are essential. In addition, the work of your instructor and your classmates will be invaluable for you. They, too, are writers confronting the same problems that you confront.

*The Norton Reader* has been designed to play a significant part in that process. It offers a selection of well-written, thought-provoking essays for you to read, reflect on, discuss, and write about. These essays are here for you. The meaning of each essay does not reside "there" on the page, in the essay; nor does it reside solely in you. Furthermore, the essay does not mean whatever you want it to mean. Rather, meaning will emerge from the text and your response to it in that intervening distance between you and the printed page. The meaning that you derive will be tested, modified, rejected, or enhanced when you discuss your ideas in class and when you write. The remarks that follow may offer some helpful strategies as you work with the essays in this reader.

### *The Essay*

It is far easier to say what the essay is *not* than to say what it is; it is not a poem or drama or catalogue or lab report or any one of a long list of other forms of writing we might cite. But definition by negation does not help much, nor does a definition such as Aldous Huxley's flippant "The essay is a literary device for saying almost everything about anything." One way to define the essay is to describe it as a "brief prose composition that attempts to make and develop an assertion in an engaging manner." It is worth pausing to consider the different elements of this definition. First, the essay is brief, perhaps only a few typed pages. Second, the essay is prose. Alexander Pope referred to his verse compositions, the "Essay on Criticism" and the "Essay on Man," as essays, but few writers since the eighteenth century have followed his example. Essays today are works of

nonfiction in prose. Third, the essay writer attempts to develop an assertion, to make one point clearly and effectively. Finally, the word “essay,” from the French noun *essai*, a “trial,” reflects the view of Michel de Montaigne, a sixteenth-century French philosopher and creator of the “*essai*.” Montaigne considered his essays attempts to respond to a wide variety of issues and events in a thoughtful, personal way.

One way to classify essays in general is to distinguish the formal essay from the informal essay. The formal essay most often presents a serious subject for a specialized audience; its author writes as an acknowledged authority whose purpose is to inform the reader; the tone of the formal essay tends to be impersonal. Nancy Sommers’s “Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers,” Niccolò Machiavelli’s “The Morals of the Prince,” and Jean-Paul Sartre’s “Existentialism” illustrate the formal essay. The informal essay, on the other hand, deals with events from everyday life and presents its subject matter for a general reader; its author is often a keen observer or participant who writes in a personal way. Examples of informal essays in *The Norton Reader* include Dylan Thomas’s “Memories of Christmas,” Daniel Mark Epstein’s “The Case of Harry Houdini,” and Phyllis Rose’s “Shopping and Other Spiritual Adventures.”

Every essay, whether formal or informal, focuses attention on a particular subject and seeks to make a definite point for a specific audience. It is a combination of objective elements and subjective responses. In writing essays in college, keep in mind the importance of balancing personal response with objective material. You limit the effectiveness of your writing when the reader is left with the impression that all you have written is opinion.

### *Rhetoric and the Modes of Essay Writing*

When you hear someone’s remarks dismissed as “mere rhetoric,” you know that the term is less than glowing: the speaker or writer may have mastered the means of expression—style and delivery—but is found lacking in substance. Politicians often face this charge. Yet *rhetoric* also has positive meaning, for it refers to both knowledge and skill of strategies for effective communication. Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* is the central document in the study of rhetoric. For Aristotle, rhetoric has mostly to do with persuasion, with inventing arguments, arranging evidence, and expressing ideas in aptly chosen language. For our purpose, rhetoric is the knowledge of the skills and strategies needed to communicate ideas, with grace and fluency, to a designated audience.

Rhetorical tradition provides a convenient way of distinguishing one type of essay from another. We can speak of four basic “modes” or types of essay writing: narrative, descriptive, expository, and argumentative.

Narrative essays, which relate an event or a series of events, demonstrate a particular dimension of the storyteller's art: creating a story from factual material. Unlike a short story or novel or fable, narrative essays deal exclusively with "real world" events. Descriptive essays create impressions that appeal to our senses. Expository essays offer explanations, most often by supplying substantial information presented in a logical manner. Among the most common forms of exposition, which can also be called analysis, are essays of comparison/contrast, classification, definition, process analysis, and causal analysis. Finally, argumentative essays seek to convince the reader of the correctness of a particular point of view. Strictly speaking, argument and persuasion are two different activities (argument appeals to reason and seeks assent; persuasion appeals to emotion and seeks action), but they are often combined in effective writing. Likewise, while it is possible to write an essay that is pure narrative or pure description or pure exposition, it is much more likely that you will mix modes in your own writing.

### *Writing as Process*

The composing process involves all stages of your work, from the first ideas you have or notes you jot down through the presentation of the final copy. It extends well beyond the physical acts of putting pen to paper or hands to keyboard, for, in the process of composing—in reading, reflecting, discussing, and writing—you are actively involved in creating a text.

Consider the kinds of writing activities you might use in working on an essay: preliminary writing (notes, journal entries, freewriting); inventing a thesis and designing an essay (trial thesis statements and outlines); working up a draft; revising; editing the best draft for final copy. Seen in this way, writing is a process by and through which you can progress from tentative responses and jottings to a final draft worthy of submission.

Writing is also a cognitive process, a means by which you learn more about a particular subject, about other people, and about yourself. At no point will you or any writer know everything about a specific topic, but in most cases you will know more by the time you submit the final copy than you did when you invented your thesis or wrote your first draft. The status of writing as a cognitive process means two things for you. First, you can expect to learn from your writing. And second, you can be confident that your writing will improve with effort, for you and the essay are proceeding toward a goal.

### *Reading and Writing*

Reading and writing might seem to be opposing activities. Careful reading calls for analysis, splitting a text apart in order to understand how

it is constructed. Effective writing, on the other hand, demands synthesis, binding elements together so that they function as a whole. Yet reading and writing are complementary activities, for the better you understand how a given essay “works,” the more you learn about how to make your own writing “work.”

In considering anything you have read, you need to ask yourself two important questions, both of them posed by a distinguished teacher, Robert Scholes: What does this text mean? How does it mean? When you have finished reading, you will have some tentative responses; when you have discussed the reading in class, you will have clearer answers; and when you have written your essay, you will have significantly deepened your understanding of the text. Put another way, writing will complete the experience of reading.

### *How to Read: Some Practical Suggestions*

A good understanding of any serious essay requires more than just one reading. You might adopt a three-part method for reading your assigned essays: first, an uninterrupted narrative reading to acquire a basic sense of the text (What does it mean?); then, a close, analytical, annotated reading to appreciate the structure and logic of the text (How does it mean?); finally, a “review reading” to synthesize your earlier readings. Because careful reading is analysis, you will want to be precise as you examine all the elements—even the title—of the essays you read.

As you read, annotate your text with a free but directed hand. Underline important ideas and essential terms; underline passages you do not understand; put question marks and comments in the margins. Imagine that you are in conversation with the writer and respond accordingly. If a particular idea strikes you as insightful, make a note. If the writer’s thought seems unclear, note that you want to focus on it in your next reading or in discussion. Refer to your annotated text in class to remind you what ideas provoked you and where you had questions. Use your annotation to bring your personal perspective and experience to bear on what you read. This is an essential part of the composing process.

### *What to Look for When You Read*

To get at the structure and substance of an essay, spend some time considering the following elements:

#### 1. TITLE, AND OPENING AND CLOSING PARAGRAPHS

Notice the title—it can be an important aspect of the essay, serving to catch the reader’s interest and sometimes giving a clear indication of what the essay is about. Study the opening paragraph, a vital part of an



essay, one which establishes some common ground with the reader. The opening paragraph often articulates the thesis of the essay. Take a look at how Brent Staples in "Black Men and Public Space" and Betty Rollin in "Motherhood: Who Needs It?" startle the reader in their opening paragraphs. Consider the closing paragraph. It should reinforce the thesis and offer an assessment, an observation, or a prediction; it should leave the reader with something to think about. Look at the provocative closing paragraphs of "Decolonizing the Mind" by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and "Shopping and Other Spiritual Adventures" by Phyllis Rose.

## 2. THESIS, DEVELOPMENT, AND SUPPORT

Examine the essay for a thesis statement, a sentence in which the writer takes a stand and indicates his or her central purpose. Sometimes, as in Judith Viorst's "Good as Guilt," the writer's thesis is explicitly stated. Other times, as in E. B. White's "Once More to the Lake," where there is probably no single sentence that will satisfactorily represent the entire essay, the writer implies it. In such cases the careful reader should be able to construct a thesis statement.

How does the writer develop the main idea of the essay? Sometimes a thesis will rest on assumptions, related ideas that the writer does not mention directly but expects the reader to understand or to agree to or, if the real purpose is deception, to overlook. Machiavelli, in "The Morals of the Prince," appears to assume that it is more important for a prince to stay in power than to be a "good" man. In considering what you read, always ask yourself: What assumptions has the writer made? Apply that question to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's "On the Fear of Death" or Stephen Jay Gould's "The Terrifying Normalcy of AIDS."

How does the writer support the main idea of the essay? Determine what kinds of support have been enlisted. Factual evidence (material easily verifiable or attested to by reliable witnesses) or opinion? If opinion, whose? That of a recognized authority? Furthermore, consider whether or not the support is sufficient for the subject, purpose, and audience. Is the evidence appropriate and convincing? Evaluate the evidence Anthony Burgess draws on in his essay "Is America Falling Apart?"

## 3. ORGANIZATION

A well-written essay is clearly, logically, and carefully organized. Its skeletal structure can be discerned, removed, and examined. Think of this process as something like boning a fish: if the essay has been organized well, you should be able to delineate its structure as easily as you can separate the skeletal system from a freshly caught trout. As an exercise in discerning structure, see if you can "bone" George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" or Desmond Morris's "Territorial Behavior."