

Second Edition

Working It Out

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A Troubleshooting
.....
Guide for Writers
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Barbara Fine Clouse

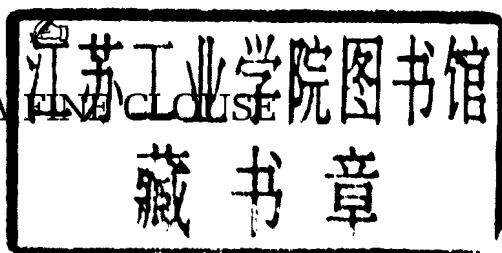
WORKING IT OUT



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BARBARA FINE CLOUSE



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WORKING IT OUT

A Troubleshooting Guide for Writers

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In loving memory of Bob Krantz

Preface

Working It Out: A Troubleshooting Guide for Writers is a compendium of strategies for handling the various phases of writing: idea generation, outlining, drafting, revising, and editing. It is based on the simple belief that people write better when they discover procedures that work well for them. Thus, one goal of the book is to provide a range of strategies for writers to sample as they work to develop successful writing processes.

A second goal of the book is to provide writers with aid and comfort when they get stuck. While seasoned writers understand that false starts, wrong turns, and writer's block are all part of the process, the less-experienced may become frustrated and discouraged when their work does not proceed smoothly, especially if they do not know what to do when they hit a snag. As a troubleshooting guide, *Working It Out* provides specific strategies for dealing with writing problems. Thus, a writer who gets stuck along the way can consult the text and get the help needed to reduce frustration and move forward.

FEATURES

The features of *Working It Out* are aimed at making the book as useful as possible to those who want to improve their writing by discovering effective, efficient procedures and problem-solving strategies. These features include:

Clear, Jargon-free Prose Written in a Conversational Style

So the book can be a ready reference both in and out of the classroom, explanations are as brief as possible and are written in a supportive, nonintimidating, noncondescending style.

Organization across the Sequence of the Writing Process

So writers can use the text in the same sequence as the progression of their writing. Part 1 treats prewriting; Part 2 treats drafting; Part 3 treats revising; and Part 4 treats editing. (Part 5 provides topics for writing practice.)

Most Chapters Are Titled with a Question or Remark Frequently Voiced by Student Writers

This way, students and other novice writers can find what they need faster because chapter titles echo their own language and concerns.

Over 190 Helpful Strategies

There are enough specific suggestions here that all users should find many ways to solve problems and improve their writing processes.

Computer Strategies

A range of strategies is offered for those who favor writing at the computer.

An Overview of the Writing Process and Essay Structure

Chapter 1 contains information on the stages of the writing process; the writer's audience, purpose, and role; essay structure; and how to become a better writer.

A Process Log and Reader Response Questionnaire

Appendix 1 shows writers how to use a process log to monitor the development and facilitate the improvement of their writing processes. Appendix 2 shows writers how to use a questionnaire to learn how readers react to their drafts and what revisions are needed.

Ideas for Writing

Chapter 24 contains fifteen ideas for writing in full rhetorical context.

NEW TO THE SECOND EDITION

In response to suggestions made by reviewers and frequent users of *Working It Out*, the following changes were made for the second edition:

- Twenty-eight new strategies are included.
- The essay structure illustration was replaced with a more analytical essay model.
- The preface and Chapter 1 were reorganized for easier use. Some of this material is now in a special section entitled “How to Use This Book: A Preface to the Student.”
- A number of experiential examples were replaced with nonexperiential ones.
- A chapter to help writers who discover their drafts are too long is included.
- A chapter on commas is included.
- A chapter on apostrophes is included.
- An appendix on taking essay examinations is included.
- A distinction is made between comma splices and run-on sentences.
- A strategy for choosing between *who* and *whom* is included.
- Common myths about writing are included.

Acknowledgments

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Finally, to Denny, Greg, and Jeff, my indulgent, understanding husband and children, I offer my heartfelt thanks for the support and for the room of my own.

Barbara Fine Clouse

A Preface to the Student: How to Use This Book

Pretend for a moment that you are on the tennis team and that you are having trouble with your baseline shots. The coach, noticing your problem, might suggest that you drop your hip a little. Now pretend that you are on the track team and you are having trouble improving your time in the 1,600-meter run. In this case, your coach might suggest that you swing your arms more and pretend a giant hand is on your back pushing you along. That's what coaches do: They make suggestions to help you solve problems that arise as a natural part of learning to do something better.

Right now, you are working to become a better writer, and as you do so, problems will arise from time to time. Do not let these problems worry you, for they are a natural part of the learning process. Whenever we try to learn something, we hit snags now and then. The point is that we need to discover how to *solve* problems—and that is a learning experience of its own.

As you work to become a better writer, think of this book as one of your coaches. If you encounter a problem, you can look to this book for one or more suggestions for solving that problem. Of course, this book is not your only coach. Your classroom teacher is the best coach of all, and your classmates and the tutors in the writing center are also good sources of information. So if you have a problem, you can also talk to one of these people to get suggestions for overcoming the obstacle. Ask them what specific procedures they follow, and try some of them to see if they work well for you too.

To use this book efficiently, do the following:

- Read over the table of contents so you have a sense of what the book covers. Notice that most of the chapters are titled with a remark often spoken by struggling writers.
- If you get stuck when you are writing, go back to the table of contents and find the remark that best expresses the problem you are having. Turn to the chapter titled with that remark.
- Quickly read the chapter (it will be short), and notice that a number of procedures are described for helping you overcome the obstacle in question. Pick the procedure that appeals to you the most and try it. If your problem is solved, great. If not, try another procedure. (Some procedures will work for you and some will not.) If after trying three procedures you have not solved the problem, talk things over with your classroom teacher or a writing center tutor. *You are not expected to try every procedure each time you work through a chapter.*
- If you are not having any problems but want to discover more effective or efficient procedures, read through the book with an eye toward procedures you can try the next time you write. If you try a procedure and like it, use it again. Otherwise, look for something else to try.

As you work to become a better writer with this book as one of your coaches, remember one thing: Following the procedures in this book will not guarantee complete success. These procedures are problem-solving strategies meant to ease the way. No set of procedures can guarantee success, but the ones in this book can help you down the road to your goal.

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A Troubleshooting Guide
for Writers

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