

Writing

A College Handbook

James A.W. Heffernan
John E. Lincoln

WRITING

A COLLEGE
HANDBOOK

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PREFACE

This book is just what its title says—a composition handbook meant for college students. In response to the current and widespread view of what a handbook should be, we wrote this one to be used not only as a reference guide for individual students but also as a classroom text for composition courses. Besides helping students to correct errors on their own, it will provide ample opportunity for classroom discussion of those errors and of what makes writing effective.

Since many teachers like to start by getting students into the rhythm of the writing process as a whole, Part I of this book treats the writing of essays from beginning to end. The first two chapters deal in detail with the vexing problem of getting an essay started. We explain not only how to choose a topic or get a personal grip on an assigned one but also how to use a variety of “prewriting” techniques. Chapter 3 then treats the shaping of an essay as a process of discovering rather than of predetermining its direction. Besides discussing various ways of introducing, developing, and concluding an essay, this chapter explains how to make outlining go hand in hand with thinking. As an alternative to the vertical-list outline, which can be drawn up first only if the student knows in advance what the essay is going to say, we show how to use the tree outline, which can be made to grow and develop as the student thinks about the topic and gradually discovers a thesis.

After thus introducing the writing process as a whole, we closely consider certain aspects of the process. Our discussion includes not only topics that you normally find in a handbook but some that you often don't. As you would expect, we treat descrip-

tion, narration, and various methods of exposition; we explain in a nontechnical way how to write an effective argument; we show how to organize a paragraph by using either one or both of two basic structures; we show how to choose and use individual words effectively; and we give a ten-step guide to revising an essay. But we also offer a section of specific advice on how to invigorate style, and a chapter on how to turn reading into writing: how to use reading matter as a source of stimulation or information, an object of analysis, or a stylistic model to imitate.

Part II, "Writing Sentences," takes a fundamentally positive approach to sentence construction. We give ample space to sentence errors, and our reference system makes it easy to find specific advice on how to correct them. But since this book was written to be read as well as consulted, most of the chapters in Part II begin by explaining and illustrating the rhetorical impact of a particular construction when it is correctly and effectively used. Before we attack the misplaced modifier, we show what a well-placed modifier can do; before we identify the wrong ways of joining independent clauses (for instance, the fused sentence and the comma splice), we show what coordination can do. Using lively examples from student essays as well as from the work of leading writers, we aim to show repeatedly that good writing is not simply the absence of grammatical error, but the presence of rhetorical power.

Our emphasis on rhetorical effect is reinforced by the exercises. Instead of merely calling for the correction of errors, many of them ask students to expand or combine short sentences, to finish sentences that we start for them, or to imitate complete sentences. *The exercises will therefore help students to increase the variety of constructions they actually use and the variety of rhetorical effects they can achieve.*

This combination of grammatical explanation, error correction, and emphasis on rhetorical effect is something of an innovation in a handbook. In the fall of 1978, therefore, we put an earlier version of "Writing Sentences" into the hands of some six hundred freshman-composition students at sixteen colleges. The results were both instructive and positive. Students' comments and teachers' detailed reports have helped us revise and refine our approach, and have also assured us that it works in classrooms other than our own.

Part III, "The Research Paper and Other Writing Tasks," provides first of all a detailed guide to the preparation and writing of a research paper. We explain not only how to use a library, take notes, cite sources, and avoid plagiarism, but also how to plan and organize the paper, how to keep quotations under control, and how to make them serve an argument or explanation rather than

take it over completely. Then, to illustrate the actual process of writing a research paper, we demonstrate how various notes on the subject of dreams grow into the sample paper, "Dreams and Waking Life."

The final chapter of the book moves "beyond Freshman English" into the various kinds of writing that students have to do for other courses and other purposes. With apt illustrations, the chapter shows how to write an examination essay, a résumé and a covering letter for a job application, a business letter, a letter of protest, and a personal statement for an application to a post-graduate program. The chapter tries to demonstrate, in fact, that the ability to write well can have a real and lasting effect upon a student's life.

Many teachers may find that this book by itself serves all the needs of a beginning composition course. But to help you identify the problems of individual students, Bruce Chadwick (Long Island University Brooklyn Center) has prepared diagnostic tests. In addition, we ourselves have prepared a number of supplements. For students who need intensive work on the sentence, we have written *Writing—A College Workbook*, which offers brief instruction and extensive exercises on every aspect of sentence structure treated in Part II of the *Handbook*. For students who wish to check their answers to the exercises in the *Handbook* or the *Workbook*, we have prepared two answer pamphlets, one for each book (you may order one or both of these for your students). Finally, for your own use, we have written an instructor's manual. This provides not only the answers to the exercises in the *Handbook* and the *Workbook* but also a number of suggestions on how to use the *Handbook* in a composition course.

JAMES A. W. HEFFERNAN
JOHN E. LINCOLN

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J.A.W.H.

J.E.L.

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