
THE WORLD OF WORK

READINGS
FOR WRITERS

JOHN W. PRESLEY
& NORMAN PRINSKY

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The World of work.

1. Readers—Work. 2. Work. 3. Work ethic.
4. Vocation. 5. College readers. 6. English language—
Rhetoric. I. Presley, John W. II. Prinsky, Norman
PE1127.W65W57 1987 808'.0427 86-12307
ISBN 0-13-966169-7

Editorial/production supervision and
interior design: Sylvia Moore
Cover design: Lundgren Graphics, Ltd.
Manufacturing buyer: Ray Keating

©1987 by Prentice-Hall, Inc.
A Division of Simon & Schuster
Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

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Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 0-13-966169-7 01

Prentice-Hall International (UK) Limited, *London*
Prentice-Hall of Australia Pty. Limited, *Sydney*
Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., *Toronto*
Prentice-Hall Hispanoamericana, S.A., *Mexico*
Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, *New Delhi*
Prentice-Hall of Japan, Inc., *Tokyo*
Prentice-Hall of Southeast Asia Pte. Ltd., *Singapore*
Editora Prentice-Hall do Brasil, Ltda., *Rio de Janeiro*

TO THE INSTRUCTOR

No teacher would argue that a student should not take a serious view of career, work, and finance; however, teachers often feel that students choose majors and occupational goals that will result in a job at the end of four years, with too little consideration given to how work, studies, and self-realization may be blended. In other words, not often enough do students heed how the full development of their abilities, minds, and sensitivities may be matched with fulfilling careers.

The essays collected here, the questions, and the writing assignments all encourage students to explore their choice of career, or their choice of major, both to see whether that choice reflects their sense of self and to arrive at a broader, humanistic notion of work.

Our anthology contains selections from many of the world's great authors and thinkers—Hesiod, Montaigne, Calvin, Samuel Johnson. These are only a few of many important writers for whom the questions of work and money—how to make a living—were subjects of intense concern. Such renowned essayists as Addison, Emerson, Carlyle, and Lamb (selections by all of whom could not be included because of space considerations) have treated them. The students in American colleges and universities today are by no means unique in their concern with choosing a career and their occupational goals. Though this focus on the working life is often decried as “mere vocationalism,” the great writers of the past found the idea of *vocation* certainly worthy of their pens, as exemplified by essays in this anthology.

Together with his practical advice about saving and working, Benjamin Franklin dispensed sound moral and psychological advice. In the preface to his *Poor Richard's Almanack*, we find Franklin arguing that true economy and success stem from one's ethics and personality. For Thoreau, the essential question was not "How to make a living?" so much as "Why make a living as people now do?" John Calvin was even more direct in seeing spiritual dimensions in one's choice of vocation. Likewise, important authors like Samuel Johnson and Thomas Fuller found larger, philosophical issues to consider when exploring the world of work and finance.

These beliefs, that work has an ethical dimension and is profoundly interrelated to one's sense of self and the world, continue in the writings of modern authors like Patrick Fenton, who find that the modern workplace alienates the worker from the larger dimensions of work. Those writers who, like Richard Selzer, do find satisfaction in the workplace, have discovered that an occupation may enhance one's sensitivity to self and the surrounding world.

Even in one of the most recent and most practical essays in this collection, Davidyne Mayleas says that finding a job can be "a valuable personal adventure" and that taking stock of abilities and prospects can help you "develop new ideas about yourself."

In sum, the student's need for practical advice need not conflict with the teacher's charge to explore vital areas of the liberal arts curriculum while presenting the student with rhetorical models for analysis and selections to improve reading comprehension.

The World of Work: Readings for Writers includes forty-two essays from thirty-eight writers, ranging from Hesiod and Francis Bacon to Adam Smith, Samuel Clemens, and several contemporary authors. These essays are divided into nine thematic categories:

Job Choice and Self-fulfillment

Work and Morality

Work and Education

Careers for the 1990s

Money

Job Opportunities and Other Practical Matters

Varieties of Work

Efficiency and Success on the Job

The Work Environment

Essays written by authors prominent in either the worlds of business or belles-lettres are preceded by introductions that are designed to inform students about the author's standing, as well as to provide various "pre-reading" and "post-reading" aids. All essays have some pre-reading apparatus, designed to alert the student to such things as an essay's

original place of publication, date, or intended audience, which will help explain the form, style, and level of difficulty of the selection.

We have followed all selections with full vocabulary lists, believing, after having taught a wide range of students at several post-secondary institutions of various kinds, that improvement in vocabulary recognition is one of the quickest (though all too often ignored) routes to improving reading comprehension. The teacher should apprise students that common words such as “want,” “embarrassed,” “peculiar,” and “rude”—all in our twentieth selection, by Adam Smith—are listed when used to convey a different sense or meaning from an average reader’s first expectation.

Four kinds of questions follow each essay. Questions on “Ideas and Aims” are intended to develop literal and inferential comprehension. “Organization and Form” questions stress rhetorical structures of both the overall essay and individual paragraphs, while also emphasizing the topics of coherence and transition. “Words and Style” questions point out rhetorical devices, figurative language, and the writer’s control of denotation and connotation. The questions listed under “Discussion and Writing” provide impetus for classroom discussion of larger or personal issues and application of the author’s ideas to contemporary student concerns. Topics for writing often involve comparing or contrasting the ideas in several selections, and the topics frequently suggest that the student use a particular selection as a rhetorical model.

At the end of each of the nine sections of this book are additional questions, which may be used for discussion or writing or both. As the heading for these questions suggests (“Taking Stock: Comparing and Contrasting the Selections”), they are aimed at providing further linkages between and among the various readings. Sometimes in these questions the student is invited to compare or contrast readings from different sections of the book; our hope is to give this anthology a more unified feeling than is usually derived from anthologies.

For some selections our apparatus is rather detailed. We have provided numerous specific questions, knowing from experience that generality in a question often becomes vagueness or obscurity to the freshman (or even the sophomore or junior) reader. Further, some questions will work better for a particular class or class section or teacher, while different questions will be more effective for another class, class section, or teacher. Also, an instructor for variety may well want to vary the questions asked from one term to the next. Of course, not all questions need by any means be assigned for class discussion or writing.

The World of Work, we believe, provides a sound apparatus for introducing students to a variety of prose models and to the long tradition of essay literature treating a subject of deep—and real—importance to college students.

We wish to thank the small conglomerate who have contributed to

the final incorporation of our enterprise: our editor, Phil Miller, stalwart steering committee of one; Sylvia Moore, our production editor and in all the best senses book-keeper, cheerful and meticulous; and finally, our several scrupulous auditors—our copy editor and reviewers—for helpful comments and suggestions: Ilene McGrath, copy editor; Douglas Butturff, formerly University of Central Arkansas; Lucas Carpenter, Oxford College of Emory University; Kenneth Davis, University of Kentucky; Stanley J. Kozikowski, Bryant College; Paul Lizotte, Rivier College; and Twila Yates Papay, Rollins College. Lastly, thanks to those models of productivity on several levels: Ruth and Arnold Prinsky.

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JOB CHOICE AND SELF- FULFILLMENT

DULL WORK

Eric Hoffer



Eric Hoffer was born in New York City in 1902 and died in 1983. He was, in his own words, “practically blind up to the age of fifteen. When my eyesight came back, I was seized with an enormous hunger for the printed word.” He read voraciously. During his early years as a migrant worker, a dishwasher, a gold miner, and a longshoreman, Hoffer took advantage of every opportunity to read and to write. During one long winter, snowed in, he read all of Montaigne’s Essays six times. (See Section 2, “Work and Morality,” for a short essay by Montaigne.)

Hoffer migrated to California early. He said, "I knew several things: one, that I didn't want to work in a factory; two, that I couldn't stand being dependent upon the good graces of a boss; three, that I was going to stay poor." While waiting for trains, or at noon, or during rest periods in the fields, he wrote his early works, among them The True Believer (1951), The Passionate State of Mind (1955), and The Ordeal of Change (1963). Among his later works, Reflections on the Human Condition (1972) is probably the most notable. Hoffer was famous for his clarity and logic. Self-educated philosopher, controversialist, and author of six books, he has been called "a born generalizer, with a mind that inclines to the wry epigram and the icy aphorism."

- 1 There seems to be a general assumption that brilliant people cannot stand routine; that they need a varied, exciting life in order to do their best. It is also assumed that dull people are particularly suited for dull work. We are told that the reason the present-day young protest so loudly against the dullness of factory jobs is that they are better educated and brighter than the young of the past.
- 2 Actually, there is no evidence that people who achieve much crave for, let alone live, eventful lives. The opposite is nearer the truth. One thinks of Amos the shepherd, Socrates the stonemason, Omar the tentmaker. Jesus probably had his first revelations while doing humdrum carpentry work. Einstein worked out his theory of relativity while serving as a clerk in a Swiss patent office. Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* and the *Discourses* while immersed in the dull life of a small country town where the only excitement he knew was playing cards with muleteers at the inn. Immanuel Kant's daily life was an unalterable routine. The housewives of Königsberg set their clocks when they saw him pass on his way to the university. He took the same walk each morning, rain or shine. The greatest distance Kant ever traveled was sixty miles from Königsberg.
- 3 The outstanding characteristic of man's creativeness is the ability to transmute trivial impulses into momentous consequences. The greatness of man is in what he can do with petty grievances and joys, and with common physiological pressures and hungers. "When I have a little vexation," wrote Keats, "it grows in five minutes into a theme for Sophocles." To a creative individual all experience is seminal—all events are equidistant from new ideas and insights—and his inordinate humanness shows itself in the ability to make the trivial and common reach an enormous way.
- 4 An eventful life exhausts rather than stimulates. Milton, who in 1640 was a poet of great promise, spent twenty sterile years in the eventful atmosphere of the Puritan revolution. He fulfilled his great promise when the revolution was dead, and he in solitary disgrace. Cellini's exciting life kept him from becoming the great artist he could have been. It is

legitimate to doubt whether Machiavelli would have written his great books had he been allowed to continue in the diplomatic service of Florence and had he gone on interesting missions. It is usually the mediocre poets, writers, etc., who go in search of stimulating events to release their creative flow.

- 5 It may be true that work on the assembly line dulls the faculties and empties the mind, the cure only being fewer hours of work at higher pay. But during fifty years as a workingman, I have found dull routine compatible with an active mind. I can still savor the joy I used to derive from the fact that while doing dull, repetitive work on the waterfront, I could talk with my partners and compose sentences in the back of my mind, all at the same time. Life seemed glorious. Chances are that had my work been of absorbing interest I could not have done any thinking and composing on the company's time or even on my own time after returning from work.
- 6 People who find dull jobs unendurable are often dull people who do not know what to do with themselves when at leisure. Children and mature people thrive on dull routine, while the adolescent, who has lost the child's capacity for concentration and is without the inner resources of the mature, needs excitement and novelty to stave off boredom.

Editors' note: We have included definitions and notes where they make a selection more easily understood. Other than these aids and some necessary elision, we have not altered the original texts, and this has left some language that may now be considered sexist, such as Hoffer's use, in paragraph 3, of "man" and "he." We trust that modern readers will consider such usage in its historic context.

VOCABULARY

crave (P2), *eventful* (P2), *Amos* (P2), *Socrates* (P2), *Omar* (P2), *humdrum* (P2), *Machiavelli* (P2), *immersed* (P2), *muleteers* (P2), *Kant* (P2), *unalterable* (P2), *transmute* (P3), *momentous* (P3), *petty* (P3), *physiological* (P3), *vexation* (P3), *Keats* (P3), *Sophocles* (P3), *seminal* (P3), *equidistant* (P3), *inordinate* (P3), *Milton* (P4), *Cellini* (P4), *mediocre* (P4), *faculties* (P5), *compatible* (P5), *savor* (P5), *thrive* (P6), *novelty* (P6), *stave off* (P6)

IDEAS AND AIMS

1. What does Hoffer mean by "dull" work?
2. What kinds of examples does Hoffer use to illustrate his idea that brilliant people do not require exciting lives? In what categories are these people famous?
3. What is the outstanding characteristic of human creativity, according to

Hoffer? How do human beings, in other words, make dull circumstances eventful?

4. What is the danger of an eventful life, for the creative person?
5. How does Hoffer illustrate this danger?
6. How did Hoffer busy his mind while performing routine work?
7. According to Hoffer, then, must “dull” work be dull? What kinds of people, according to Hoffer, find dull jobs unendurable?
8. Hoffer’s overall aim in this essay is to argue and persuade, rather than to explain. What from the essay makes this clear?
9. Hoffer’s essay depends on two key concepts and terms, “dull” and “creative.” What does he mean by each, judging from how he uses the terms in the essay?
10. What implicit distinction is there in the essay between “dull people” (P6) and the mind of a person being dulled by work (P5)?

ORGANIZATION AND FORM

1. Hoffer’s argument is primarily inductive rather than deductive. (Look up these as well as other such technical terms in your collegiate dictionary or composition handbook.) How is the inductive method used in P2, P3, P4, and P5?
2. What sentence in Hoffer’s essay comes closest to stating his overall thesis?
3. How does P1 function to state the con side that Hoffer will argue against?
4. How is Hoffer’s inductive example in P5 different from the preceding examples in PP2–4? Is it effectively used for an argumentative or persuasive essay? Why or why not?
5. How does Hoffer’s conclusion, P5, extend or develop his main idea rather than merely repeating or restating it?

WORDS AND STYLE

1. Hoffer very successfully uses clear abstract words to convey his ideas. How are the first sentence of P2, the first sentence of P3, and the first sentence of P4 effective in this respect? What other examples would you add?
2. How does Hoffer use parallelism effectively in P2?
3. Which is the shortest sentence of P5 (and, indeed, of the whole essay)? How does its length work rhetorically—that is, how does it help Hoffer convey his idea and mood (tone) at this point in the essay?

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. Weak spots in the argument based on induction are that the examples used as evidence may be too few or not representative. Are enough individuals from enough fields cited to convince you? Why or why not?