



# THE CALL To WRITE

*Brief Second Edition*

JOHN TRIMBUR



# THE CALL TO WRITE

Brief Edition

**SECOND EDITION**

John Trimbur  
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# Preface

**T**he *Call to Write*, Second Edition, offers students a broad introduction to writing so that they can learn to write with flexibility and influence in a variety of settings. Many of the assignments in the following chapters are typical of the writing college students are called on to do. A central aim of this book, after all, is to help students become effective writers in their college coursework. At the same time, *The Call to Write* takes as its starting point the view that writing is much more than a school subject. Writing is an activity individuals and groups rely on to communicate with others, organize their social lives, get work done, entertain themselves, and voice their needs and aspirations. Accordingly, this book presents a wide range of situations that call on people to write—in everyday life, in school, in the workplace, and in the public sphere.

Just as the situations that give rise to writing differ, so do the tools available to writers. Technologies of writing range from the handwritten note to the typed or word-processed essay to the new means of composing e-mail and hypertext in cyberspace. Writing can no longer refer simply to the traditional forms of print literacy. It also involves the visual design of the page and screen and the electronic communication media that enable the integration of text, graphics, sound, and video. While *The Call to Write* cannot teach many of the skills needed to operate the new writing technologies, it takes into account how writers use these new means of communication and how many forms of writing combine words and graphics to present a message.

One of the main premises of this book is that writing should belong to everyone in the various roles people play—as private individuals, as students, as workers, and as participants in public life. *The Call to Write* offers students an education in writing, with the goal of enabling them to see how writing connects individuals to others and to the cultural practices and social institutions that shape their lives. In this regard, the call to write—the felt sense that something needs to be said—presents writing not just as a skill to master but as a means to participate meaningfully in the common life and to influence its direction.

## **DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF *THE CALL TO WRITE***

The goal of this book is to offer teachers and students a range of activities grounded in rhetorical traditions and the accumulated experience of successful writing instruction. It has been enormously gratifying that teachers and students who used the first edition of this book have confirmed the practical value of its approach. This second edition builds on—and seeks to refine—the basic features that give *The Call to Write* its distinctive character:

- **An emphasis on the rhetorical situation:** *The Call to Write* begins with the idea that writing doesn't just happen but instead takes place in particular social contexts. Throughout the book, students are provided with opportunities to analyze how rhetorical situations give rise to the call to write. A wide array of writing—from speeches, letters, Web sites, op-ed pieces, proposals, and reviews to comic strips, graffiti, listservs, ads, flyers, and newsletters, as well as academic articles, literary essays, and student work—illustrates the range and richness of situations that call on people to write.
- **Genre-based writing assignments:** To help students understand the choices available to them when they respond to the call to write, the “Writing Projects” in Part Two use the notion of genre as the basis for guided writing assignments. Each chapter in Part Two includes individual and collaborative writing assignments based on familiar genres; extensive treatment of invention, planning, peer commentary, and revision; samples of student writing; and an opportunity for students to reflect on the process of writing.
- **An emphasis on collaborative learning:** *The Call to Write* includes many opportunities for working together, as well as a collaborative project and guidelines for peer commentaries in each of the chapters in Part Two. Chapter 12, “Case Study of a Writing Assignment,” traces a student's use of peer response to write an academic paper, and Chapter 13, “Working Together: Collaborative Writing Projects,” offers information and advice about group writing projects.
- **Integration of reading and writing:** Chapter 2, “Reading Strategies: Analyzing the Rhetorical Situation,” has been revised to help students learn how to analyze the situations that call on people to write, the choices writers make, and the effects of those choices on readers. Throughout the book, questions entitled “For Critical Inquiry” ask students to read closely and carefully, to understand their response as readers and the decisions writers make when they take up the call to write.
- **A focus on visual design:** *The Call to Write* emphasizes not only how many types of writing integrate text and graphics but also that writing itself is a form of visible language. Each chapter in Part Two includes a “Visual Design” reading that asks students to evaluate critically how a particular

example of visual communication works. Chapter 19, “Visual Design,” has been extensively revised to explore how visual design is used for purposes of identification, information, and persuasion and to provide instruction in effective page design.

- **Online activities:** Throughout *The Call to Write* are many samples of online writing—e-mail messages, listservs, newsgroups, and Web sites. Each chapter in Part Two includes a “Going Online” activity that invites students to explore and evaluate the new electronic communication media; and the revised Chapter 15 “Communicating Online: Writing in the Age of Digital Literacy,” presents information on how writers use the new writing technologies, as well as readings about the emerging cyberculture.
- **An emphasis on ethics and the writer’s responsibilities:** *The Call to Write* presents boxes on the “Ethics of Writing” that raise issues concerning writers’ responsibilities toward their readers and their subjects. Chapter 3, “Persuasion and Responsibility: Analyzing Arguments,” includes extensive coverage of how writers can deal responsibly with disagreements and negotiate their differences with others.

## **NEW TO THE SECOND EDITION**

This second edition includes new and revised features to help students understand and respond to the call to write. These additions come in large part from discussions with writing teachers who used the first edition of *The Call to Write*.

- **New writing assignments in Part One:** Each chapter in Part One now culminates with a writing assignment—to analyze a literacy event, to analyze a rhetorical situation, and to analyze an argument. Accompanied by a sample analysis, these assignments are meant to help students deepen their understanding of how writing works in the world.
- **A new chapter, “Fact Sheets and FAQs, Brochures, and Web Sites,” in Part Two:** This new chapter provides students with the opportunity to work with print and online informative genres of writing. On the page or on the screen, these three genres call on students to present ideas and information in forms that are easy for their intended audiences to read and use.
- **New features in Part Two:** Each chapter in Part Two now includes “Exploring Your Experience,” to tap into students’ existing genre knowledge; “Rhetorical Analysis,” to build on the analytical strategies in Part One; and “Genre Choices,” to consider how writers decide which genre to use in a given situation.
- **A new chapter, “The Form of Nonfiction Prose,” in Part Three:** This new chapter (Chapter 14) emphasizes how the forms of writing embody writers’

purposes. It includes sections on organization, beginnings and endings, transitions, and paragraphing.

- **A new section “The Ethics of Fieldwork” in Part Four:** This new section extends the treatment of the writer’s responsibilities to consider relations between researchers and subjects.
- **Redesign of *The Call to Write*:** The new design makes the book more accessible and easier to use. Particularly in Part Two, we have streamlined the chapter structure to help students identify key points and stay focused on the various genres of writing.

## **USING THE CALL TO WRITE**

This book is meant to be used flexibly to fit the goals and local needs of teachers, courses, and writing programs.

While there is no single path to follow in teaching *The Call to Write*, for most teachers the core of the book will be the writing projects in Part Two—the guided writing assignments based on common genres. Teachers can choose from among these genres and assign them in the order that best suits their course design.

A rich array of material appears in the other sections of *The Call to Write*, and teachers may draw on the various chapters to introduce key concepts and deepen students’ understanding of reading and writing. It can be helpful to think of the organization of the book as a modular one that enables teachers to combine chapters in ways that emphasize their own interests and priorities.

The following overview of the organization of *The Call to Write* describes the six main parts of the book.

- **Part One, “Writing and Reading,”** introduces students to the notion of the call to write, offers strategies for critical reading and rhetorical analysis, and presents methods for identifying disputed issues, planning responsible arguments, and negotiating differences with others. These chapters can serve to introduce central themes at the beginning of a course, or they can be integrated throughout the course.
- **Part Two, “Writing Projects,”** presents familiar genres of writing, with examples, questions “For Critical Inquiry,” and individual and collaborative writing assignments. Assignments call on students to write for a number of different audiences and in a number of different settings, ranging from everyday life to the academic world to public forums. These chapters form the core of *The Call to Write*.
- **Part Three, “Writers at Work,”** presents a case study of a student using peer commentary to complete an academic writing assignment, looks at

how writers work together on collaborative writing projects, explores the meaning and purpose of form in writing, and considers the new electronic writing technologies. The chapters in Part Three can be integrated into a course at a number of points—to initiate discussion of how writers manage individual writing projects, to enhance student understanding of peer commentary, to prepare students for collaborative writing projects, to deepen students’ understanding of form, and to highlight issues in electronic communication.

- **Part Four, “Doing Research,”** explores what calls on people to do research, how they formulate meaningful questions, and what sources they typically use. Part Four provides an overview of the research process and introduces students to library, online, and field research. This section is particularly appropriate for writing courses that emphasize research-based writing.
- **Part Five, “Presenting Your Work,”** looks at how writers communicate the results of their work to readers. It includes information on research papers and documentation, visual design, essay exams, and portfolios. The chapters in this part can be integrated into a course at many points, depending on the teacher’s goals.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR *THE CALL TO WRITE***

*The Call to Write*, Second Edition, is accompanied by many helpful supplements, for both teachers and students.

### **For Instructors**

*The Instructor’s Resource Manual*, by Stephen Ruffus and Lisa Bickmore, both of Salt Lake Community College, provides background on the genre approach of *The Call to Write*, as well as practical teaching approaches to public writing, the ethics of writing, literacy narratives, portfolios, and collaboration. Sample syllabi and teaching tips for the Second Edition are also included.

*An Introduction to Teaching Composition in an Electronic Environment*, by Eric Hoffman and Carol Scheidenhelm of Northern Illinois University, offers a wealth of computer-related classroom activities. It also provides guidance for both experienced and inexperienced instructors who wish to make creative use of technology in a composition course.

*The Allyn & Bacon Sourcebook for College Writing Teachers*, Second Edition, edited by James McDonald of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, provides instructors with a varied selection of readings written by composition and rhetoric scholars on both theoretical and practical subjects.

“Longman Resources for Instructors” also includes these other helpful texts: *Using Portfolios*, by Kathleen McClelland of Auburn University; *Comp Tales*, a



collection of writing teachers' accounts of their teaching experiences, edited by Richard Haswell and Min-Zhan Lu; and the videos *Writing, Teaching, and Learning*, by David Jolliffe, and *Writing Across the Curriculum: Making It Work*, produced by Robert Morris College and the Public Broadcasting System.

## For Students

The Literacy Library Series (*Public Literacy*, by Elizabeth Ervin of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington; *Workplace Literacy*, by Rachel Spilka of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; and *Academic Literacy*, by Stacia Neeley of Texas Christian University offers additional models and instruction for writing for each of these three different contexts.

*Visual Communication: A Writer's Guide*, Second Edition, by Susan Hilligoss and Tharon Howard, both of Clemson University, examines the rhetoric and principles of visual design, with an emphasis throughout on audience and genre. Practical guidelines for incorporating graphics and visuals are featured along with sample planning worksheets and design samples and exercises.

*Analyzing Literature: A Guide for Students*, Second Edition, by Sharon James McGee of Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, provides advice and sample student papers to help students interpret and discuss works from a variety of literary genres.

*Researching Online*, Fifth Edition, by David Munger and Shireen Campbell of Davidson College, gives students detailed, step-by-step instructions for performing electronic searches; for using e-mail, listservs, Usenet newsgroups, IRC, and MUDs and MOOs to do research; and for assessing the validity of electronic sources.

*The Longman Writer's Journal*, by Mimi Markus of Broward Community College, provides students with their own personal space for writing. It contains journal writing strategies, sample journal entries by other students, and many writing prompts and topics to help get students writing.

*The Call to Write* may also be packaged with other books at a discount. Two dictionaries are available: *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition, a hardcover desk dictionary, and *The New American Webster Handy College Dictionary*, Third Edition, a briefer paperback dictionary. Also, in conjunction with Penguin Putnam, Longman is proud to offer a variety of Penguin titles, such as Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* and Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*.

*The Mercury Reader* offers a database of nearly 500 classic and contemporary reading selections, with accompanying pedagogical elements, from which an instructor can create a customized book tailored to their course. An optional genre-based Table of Contents is available for *The Mercury Reader*, thus allowing instructors to create a custom reader that complements the approach of *The Call to Write*. For more information, please visit <<http://www.pearsoncustom.com/database/merc.html>>

*Take Note!* is a complete research information-management tool for students working on projects that require the use of outside sources. This cross-platform CD-ROM integrates note taking, outlining, and bibliography management into one easy-to-use package.

## For Instructors and Students

A Companion Web site, *The Call to Write Online* (at <<http://www.ablongman.com/trimbur>>), also developed by Stephen Ruffus and Lisa Bickmore, includes interactive material for both the student and the instructor. For students, the site features two kinds of exercises: 1) writing and critical thinking activities, and 2) exercises to accompany online readings, that demonstrate the different genres highlighted in the text. The Web site also features “Going Online” sections that offer links to numerous other Web sites of interest, and “In the News” sections that highlight particular headline events in the news and provide a writing activity and annotated links for further inquiry. Finally, a collection of sample student documents is included on the site, annotated with marginal notes that discuss the strengths of each sample.

For instructors, this companion website also features the following materials:

- sample course syllabi
- a practical guide to “Communicating Online” that includes information on electronic portfolios, links to samples online, and sample assignments
- a discussion of multimedia and visual rhetoric, with sample assignments
- annotated links of interest to instructors
- a brief discussion of the approach of *The Call to Write* and how it fits with the objectives described in the WPA Outcomes Statement.

CourseCompass is a nationally hosted, interactive online course management system powered by BlackBoard. This easy-to-use and customizable program enables professors to tailor content and functionality to meet individual course needs. Every CourseCompass course includes a range of preloaded content such as testing and assessment questions, chapter-level objectives, chapter summaries, illustrations, web activities and the complete text in electronic form—all designed to help students master core course objectives. For more information, or to see a demo, visit <[www.coursecompass.com](http://www.coursecompass.com)>.

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# Acknowledgments

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Preparing *The Call to Write*, Second Edition, has made me acutely aware of the intellectual, professional, and personal debts I have accumulated over the years teaching writing, training writing teachers and peer tutors, and administering writing programs and writing centers. I want to acknowledge the contributions so many rhetoricians and composition specialists have made to my thinking about the study and teaching of writing, and I hope they will recognize—and perhaps approve of—the way their work has influenced the design of this book.

The unifying theme of the “call to write,” as many will note immediately, comes from Lloyd Bitzer’s notion of “exigence” and the “rhetorical situation.” My treatment of argument and persuasion is informed by Aristotle’s appeals (by way of Wayne Booth’s sense of “rhetorical stance”) and stasis theory (as articulated recently in Dick Fulkerson’s *Teaching Argument in Writing*), and my understanding of reasoning in argument is altogether indebted to Stephen Toulmin (though the terminology I use differs somewhat). The influence of Carolyn Miller’s seminal work on genre as “social action” should be apparent at every turn.

I learned to teach writing from two great mentors, Ken Bruffee and Peter Elbow, and their mark is everywhere in the book. My interest in visual design grows in part out of an ongoing collaboration with Diana George. Lester Faigley got me to pay attention to electronic communication and cyberspace. Bob Schwegler listened and offered key advice at many points.

I am happy to feature so much writing from students I have taught at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, where I developed and taught the bulk of the material that now appears in *The Call to Write*. Some of the student writing, I should note, has been edited for this book.

Leslie Taggart was the development editor for *The Call to Write*, and Lynn Hudson provided the in-house editorial support at Longman. I want to acknowledge their hard work, careful attention, good sense of humor, and loyalty to this project.

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John Trimbur  
 Cranston, RI  
 August 2001



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