



REVISED PRINTING

**READINGS ACROSS
AMERICAN CULTURES**

HELEN GILLOTTE • JAN GREGORY

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Preface

The book you are about to read came into being for one reason: to give college and university students taking reading improvement classes an opportunity to work on both reading and writing in the ways they will have to do in “regular” classes. In working on the assignments for this revised printing, students will find ways of preparing for the work they are asked to do in those classes; for that reason, we have included both fiction and non-fiction, as courses in a wide range of disciplines expect students to be familiar with ways of reading and responding to both kinds of writing. We have also selected readings reflecting a wide range of approaches, from those based on personal experiences to more scholarly or academic ways of presenting information. The payoff for students, we hope, will be greater ease in mastering the work of the other courses they take.

We also wanted to give the reader of this book a chance to think about material whose writers—and their perspectives—mirror the diversity of contemporary American culture. We hope that in reflecting about this diversity of experience and outlook, the reader will develop a deeper understanding of what it means to live in a pluralistic society, one in which differences of belief or outlook reflect a basic fact of life. We hope as well that the reader will find commonalities in experience that may seem different on the surface from his/her own. With these insights, we believe, the reader will come to appreciate the many ways in which human beings respond to each other and the world.

As a practical matter, we limited the scope of the readings to four themes or topic-areas: work, language, personal relationships, and the experience of being “caught” between cultures. The alternative—a broader range of topics—would have made it difficult to provide variety and depth on any one theme or topic, more pages than any class could possibly read in a semester or even two. But we know that in making this decision we have had to exclude topics equally intriguing to potential readers, to whom we offer our apologies.

But why these four topics? For one thing, they identify aspects of life that affect us all, that affect us every day, and that have a lot of meaning in our lives. For another, they are related to each other, in both obvious and subtle ways. In this sense, they invite the reader to make connections between and among the readings, whether in reading activities or in writing. Making connections, understanding ideas, broadening one’s outlook—all these add up to a major part of the work that goes into a college or university education, the hard work that helps each of us to clarify our own ideas and understand the ways in which other people go through their lives.

It would not have emerged from idea to reality, however, without the help and suggestions of many friends, colleagues, and students. Among them are Lynn Bonfield and Susan Sherwood of the San Francisco State University Labor Archives, whose insightful and gracious help took us down paths we did not know existed; Anne Hallett and Colleen Press, who read, field-tested, and responded to portions of our very first draft; Elise Earthman, Amy Hittner, Michelle du Barry, who proposed some of the readings; Lita Kurth and Linda Legaspi, who helped us along the way; and Carole Stecher, who did some essential research on the lives of the writers whose work is represented here. We give thanks as well to the English 115 instructors who have used this book in their classes at SFSU, developed assignments based on the readings, and shared some very constructive suggestions with us.

It was their comments that led to the changes in this revised printing of the book, and for those comments, which resulted from using the book for several semesters, we are grateful. In particular, we wish to thank June Lee and Karen Wong (now teaching at Skyline College) for loving attention to details that escaped us, and for help in making the book more presentable and more accessible to its audience.

For the flaws, alas, we must take full responsibility.

Introduction: An Overview

Although we know that as mammals we need air and water, few of us think about them very often: most of us, most of the time, simply take them for granted. But deprived of either, we feel suffocated or parched, becoming keenly aware of how much we depend on them for our continued existence. Without them, we realize, we could not survive.

Our cultures play a similar role in our lives, filling survival needs of other kinds: cultures are, as an English philosopher and mathematician once said, “like the very air we breathe.” They provide us with ways of understanding both the physical world and the relationships between and among human beings. They shape our values—our beliefs about what is beautiful and what is not, our sense of what is (or is not) ethical or useful or appropriate, our way of understanding time, our ideas about how life should be lived and about man’s place in the universe: they tell us who we are. They give us a model for family and other relationships, for using language, for fitting work into our lives, for responding to people from other groups. In other words, some students of culture believe, every culture provides a way of seeing, experiencing, and understanding “reality.”

If that is true, culture is indeed like the air we breathe—one ingredient necessary to our survival. Interestingly, people from every culture seem to assume that their beliefs about the world actually correspond with “reality.” This may be one reason why so many of us (no matter who we are, or what culture we were born into or grew up in) believe our way of thinking is “better” than that of other groups: after all, we may assume, we have a special line on what is “real” or “true” or “beautiful.” We know how things are “supposed to be.”

In a geographical area whose people are as diverse as those of North America, assumptions like these can create problems. They may get in the way of our learning to respect and appreciate the very real differences between or among groups, especially if we don’t know we are making the assumptions in the first place. They may also interfere with our ability to see some of the similarities in the ways different groups go through life—some of the ways of dealing with life that all human beings have in common, shared attitudes or assumptions.

As one small example: regardless of cultural origin, most of us have strong family values, even people who may choose to live alone. In general, wherever we or our ancestors came from, we prefer to share our lives with people whom we care for and who care for us. But although we believe in the idea of family, we may well have different ideas about who the members of a family should be, who should hold the reins of power, who should do what kind or amount of the work in a household, how to handle the tasks and difficulties of daily life, or what we should do if the problems of family life outweigh its satisfactions.

As another example, each of us, and each of our cultures, has ideas or beliefs about the importance of work in human life. Some of us find great meaning in our work, while others see it as a mere necessity, a means to an end—a way to earn enough money to live as we would like to. For some, work plays a central role, helping create or shape our sense of who we are, our identity; carried to an extreme, work may play so important a role that we become “workaholics.”

It is similarities and differences such as these that this book explores in readings of different kinds and differing levels of difficulty. Each section presents a wide spectrum of perspectives—ways of looking at or thinking about the same broad topic-area. Each opens a window into the ways in which other people think about some familiar issues, and increases your understanding of how others see the world. In writing about them, you will explore and expand your own thoughts about these themes. With any luck at all, you will increase the breadth and depth of your knowledge as well as the reading and writing skills you will need in college or university classes and in the workplace as well.

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Additional Readings

S E C T I O N

1



Readin' And Writin' . . .

Assume the following situation: having graduated from high school, you are about to start your college or university career. You have already put in twelve years of study during which, like other students, you did some reading and writing as part of your coursework. You have taken innumerable tests. Now you are told you need to enroll in a reading class. “But I already know how to read,” you say to yourself. “This isn’t what I expected in college, and it’s going to drag out the amount of time it will take me to graduate. What’s wrong with the way I read? What are they going to teach me in this class that I don’t already know?”

These are good challenging questions—and they don’t have easy answers. In fact, though, you may already have clues to some of the answers that apply to you personally. Maybe you feel as if it takes forever to read a page or chapter, or as if your vocabulary isn’t big enough, or as if you can’t remember what you’ve read once you finish it. Maybe you don’t do as well on tests as you think you should, or feel that you don’t really understand what you’ve read once you complete an assignment. And maybe you have other ideas about what’s “wrong” with your reading.

Take a few minutes now and write down some of the problems you’ve experienced in reading or remembering what you read—or that teachers have pointed out to you.

Now turn the page and keep on reading.

Key Concepts In Reading

Learning to read well—like learning to write well—is an ongoing process, something that takes place in stages. This process asks us not only to absorb the information presented in an article, story, or book, but to master certain tasks. Knowing what the act of reading involves can streamline the process and even make reading itself much more enjoyable.

First of all, what we are doing when we read is something like detective work: we are “decoding” a “text.” That is, we are trying to make sense of (decode) someone else’s written message (text), to understand that piece of writing and make it part of our knowledge-base or incorporate it into our own perspective—to make it part of ourselves. In simpler words, we are trying to “get it.” Experienced readers are good at this: they have a high degree of accuracy in decoding what they read, and they read “fluently,” or quickly and smoothly, even when the writing itself may be complex or difficult.

Second, even people who are good at decoding a message may not fully understand it (the word often used to describe this kind of understanding is “comprehension,” from the verb “to comprehend”). That’s why learning more about the reading process is helpful. It can help us “get into,” get through, and then get beyond the reading material. It helps us connect with the text, and then make the material we’ve read part of our own fund of knowledge and attitudes. How do we accomplish all this? What do we need to know in order to do so?

One important concept in reading is found in the word schema (“skeema,” or “ski-muh”), whose plural is **schemata**. What this refers to, basically, is the knowledge and experience you have stored in your brain throughout your life: **already-absorbed knowledge** that helps prepare you to understand new material and gives you a model for coping with new tasks or experiences. Most of us don’t realize how much we have already stored in our memories, or how we draw upon it when we deal with new situations or challenges; some of it may not even be conscious knowledge. But it’s there. And as we learn more, we add to that knowledge, or develop our schema.

Let’s look at a non-academic example: grills. What comes to mind when we think about a grill? What’s the first thought *you* have? Write it down.

Some of us immediately get a picture of a barbecue, others of an elongated hot surface used for frying hot dogs, hamburgers, and sometimes hotcakes. Others think of hamburger joints, “greasy spoons,” or diners like the ’50’s-style places that were trendy in the late 1980’s and early ’90’s. So if we see a restaurant calling itself a grill, we expect a quick, informal, fairly inexpensive meal, with the main dish probably fried or cooked on a grill—that’s what our experience has prepared us for, our “schema” for a grill. (Of course, those who watch TV may think instantly of “grill” in another way altogether: crime-suspects and politicians are “grilled” in the sense that they are questioned intensively, rapidly, and often heatedly.)

But if you went to the Savoy Grill in London looking for a quick cheeseburger and fries, you’d be in for a major shock. What you’d find is an elegant atmosphere with a maitre d’hôtel or headwaiter, white tablecloths, fresh flowers on each table, silver table-settings, crystal glasses, a wine-steward ready with suggestions about the choices on the wine-list, waiters hovering to fill the water-glasses, a sophisticated menu and equally sophisticated prices. Once you recovered from your surprise and perhaps embarrassment, you’d realize you had just increased your knowledge-base—your *mental model*, or *schema*—about what “grill” means. (This actually happened to one of us. Now she’s a lot wiser.)

Activating Prior Knowledge

In reading, just as in life itself, we need to find ways of using our schemata. It's easier to understand a passage if we can draw on what we know about the subject or topic of that passage, and it's much easier to draw on our knowledge if we activate it first. The problem or question is how we activate the knowledge we aren't sure we have when we are about to read something new that we aren't sure how to approach. There are several strategies we can use at different stages when we read:

Prediction = making hypotheses or guesses about what will happen or be said in a text. When we predict, we are using what we do know and forming expectations about what will follow. The trick here is to be very clear about identifying to yourself what you think a text will say, and knowing why you think so. One good starting-point is the title of a book, chapter, story, or whatever: What might it mean or imply? What images or ideas does it bring up for you? What does it lead you to expect? Other parts of a text you can use are chapter or section headings; the titles of graphs or charts; parts of the text you have already read.

Visualization = creating mental pictures or images based upon the words you are reading. You can do this in different ways. One is to get an overview of the whole text by "pre-reading" it; another is to build an image or images based on specific passages or parts of the text, allowing yourself to add to or change the images as you continue reading; another is to form pictures based on your earlier reading or prior knowledge.

Comprehension-monitoring = an abstract way of talking about what we do when we check or notice *how we are doing what we are doing*. When we "monitor" something, we're simply keeping track of it. Obvious examples of people who monitor their own professional activities are athletes, musicians, and actors. All of them have to be aware of how they perform in order to satisfy their audiences and themselves, or to do their work well—and *they change the way they do things when they are dissatisfied with their performance on the field, in a recording studio, or on stage*. Likewise, teachers change the way they present lessons, or doctors the way they treat their patients, if their performance monitoring says they need to.

"Comprehension monitoring" is about becoming more conscious of our own reading activity or process. If we increase our awareness of what we are doing when we read, we may learn to notice when we've somehow missed the boat in reading something—*when* it stopped making sense, *how* we're missing the point, *what* we aren't following, or *where* we don't understand words, sentences, or longer parts of a text. Another way of looking at this monitoring process is that it trains us to become aware not only of the text itself but also when and how to use certain strategies for understanding it.

Some specific ways of thinking about reading that will make it easier to do the tasks assigned in this anthology involve

Self-knowledge: finding out and recognizing our strengths and weaknesses in understanding or comprehending written material.

Task-knowledge: knowing how to decide which reading strategies are appropriate for the kind of thing we're reading.

Self-monitoring: being aware of when we have—or haven't—understood a text and also knowing the importance or value of what to do about it when we haven't.

Self-knowledge involves, among many other things, the way we see or perceive ourselves in general—our self-concept. And the way we see ourselves may affect our performance. If we have been praised for skill in doing something, we see or experience ourselves as "good at it"—we perceive ourselves as competent, and tend to feel good about ourselves. We have a positive image when we think of ourselves performing the activity, and are confident about moving ahead to new and more complex tasks associated with that activity.

But if we have been told repeatedly that we "can't write well" or are "poor readers," we may come to believe that we don't have what it takes to truly master the activity. We're not likely to figure out new problem-solving

techniques or ways to improve our performance in the activity: we tell ourselves that we are incompetent, just “can’t” read or write well. We may also take it for granted that we’re stuck with this level of performance, whatever it may be: we’ve incorporated the belief that we’re unable to do a task, whatever it may be.

This state of mind is sometimes called “learned helplessness.” It has been given this name for the obvious reason: at some point in our lives, we have learned how to feel this way. After all, none of us was born with either reading or writing skills; we had to learn both. If we did not enjoy or master the tasks when we first learned them, or if we got negative feedback, we may also have learned to see ourselves as unable to do the tasks themselves, unable to find new ways of approaching them, and unable to change the things we do that don’t work for us.

But the way we see ourselves is not part of our genetic inheritance; it can be changed. And there are a number of specific things we can do to change our skills that also bear on the way we perceive ourselves. By learning new strategies and refining our skills, we can discover that we are more competent than we had thought.

One thing we can do is define our own reasons for reading what we read—with each new assignment. There’s a difference between an instructor’s goal or rationale for asking us to do something, and our own purposes. Once an assignment has been given, try to verbalize your personal reason for reading the material assigned. For instance, you might ask any of the following questions, or others: “What prediction am I going to check out in this essay?” “Which reading-skill do I want to work on?” “What do I hope to gain from reading this material?”

Another thing we can do is to ask questions: Why am I confused about this reading? Where did I lose track of what I’m reading? What word(s) am I stumbling over? What is the point of this chapter or story? What do I want to know that this material hasn’t answered? How are my attitudes or assumptions like or different from the writer’s? How is my interpretation different from what the writer says?

A third involves trying different approaches to deal with a difficult text, and knowing when to make the switch from one method to another. You may want to keep a “reading log” or reading journal so you can record your questions or reactions to the reading material. Sometimes you’ll want to make a point of checking to see whether your predictions have been accurate. At other times you’ll want to pause and reread a passage to figure out from the context what an unfamiliar word may mean, or to look it up in your dictionary. At other times you might want to think of a personal experience that you could relate to a new or complex concept. At still other times, after completing an assignment, you might want to write out some of the questions *you* have about the material and then try to answer them; you might want to go back and state in your own words the writer’s overall main idea and some of the ideas in the body of the text that explain or support that core idea—to write an informal outline of the material and then check it against the whole text. The class you are now taking will train you in a range of strategies you can use to become a more active reader.

The Reading/Writing Connection

Your class will also help you see a very important relationship: the reading-writing connection. Strong or experienced readers learn quite a bit about writing from the texts they have read; experienced writers seem to be more at ease when they read than inexperienced ones. One strand of this connection has to do with the thinking you do—whether activating prior knowledge, reflecting about an assignment, or responding to a writing assignment. Even if you did not read a lot as a child, or do not yet read for pleasure, you will discover the benefits of this relationship between improved reading skills and the writing you do.

So what do we learn, when we read, about writing? We see different ways in which writers have shaped their ideas—ways of organizing or structuring a text, of presenting information. That is, we form impressions of the many ways in which writers “encode” their own thoughts for the reader. We learn about different ways of shaping or structuring body paragraphs. We can see where writers use details, examples, illustrations, facts, reasoning, or anecdotes, and get ideas about how and when to “show” the reader what we as writers mean. In short, we absorb a variety of models or methods for transmitting and explaining ideas, and for prompting us to think on paper, to create new knowledge, to express perspectives of our own. As important as anything else, we see how skilled writers use language: we see how they analyze their ideas; we notice some of the word-choices they make and the kinds of sentences they write; we get ideas about how they create their “voice,” or personality-on-paper.

When we write, on the other hand, we are clarifying our own thoughts or experience and our responses to what we have read. In other words, we are finding a way to *focus* these ideas for ourselves and our readers. In order to find a focus and to explain our ideas, of course, we must draw upon—or activate—our knowledge both of the subject and of how to write about it. By doing so, we are likely to learn something new from the act of writing as we work with the topic itself, think about what we want to say and how we want to say it, and find a way to transfer our ideas to paper: when we write, we are deepening our understanding of what we have read and experienced. Finally, as we actually use language and expand our ways of expressing ourselves, we are apt to increase our understanding and appreciation of how professional writers use language, and why they use words and different structures the way they do. In doing all this, we are making connections between new and old ideas or thoughts, or seeing things in new ways. We will then store all this in memory (probably without even realizing we are doing so) and it will become part of the prior knowledge and schema we draw on in the reading we do later on. Building the reading-writing connection can be a major asset to each of us, enhancing each activity separately and helping us prepare for the lives we will lead in the “information age” of computers, faxes, and electronic communication of other kinds. It will most definitely enable us to approach the rest of our university or college courses more confident in our ability to do what they ask of us.

As *you* become more skilled in pre-reading, pre-writing, reading and writing strategies, you will come to understand and appreciate this connection more fully. At that point, you will have found an answer to the question raised at the beginning of this section.

Some Words About Writing

As you read and work with this book, you will need to know how to respond when the words below are used: they signal different ways to think and write about topics or questions. As you will see, some of the definitions overlap, and some are fairly broad, but that is often true of definitions. If you need clarification, ask your instructor.

Refer to the definitions when working on the tasks that come before and after each reading so you understand what you are being asked to do. College and university teachers in all disciplines use these terms when they want you to do specific tasks in reading and writing for their classes. Some of the terms are also used in corporate or commercial, industrial, and professional settings, so you will also need to know what they mean when you write in work settings.

Writing Instruction-Words

Analyze: take something apart—divide a broad or general idea into smaller components, subsets, or elements, looking at each component or element in some detail and being as objective as you can.

Classify: group things—put information, facts or data into a category with similar information.

Compare: show similarities or likenesses among things, ideas, events, people; explain how they are alike.

Contrast: show differences among things, ideas, events, people; explain how they are different.

Criticize (“critique”): indicate your point of view or perspective on, and analyze objectively the strengths or weaknesses of, an idea, point of view, article, story, and so on—a “critique” may be either positive or negative.

Define: say what something “means”—state and briefly explain the meaning of some word or concept.

Describe: say what something is like, looks like, or appears to be or mean—find words that show the external or surface qualities or characteristics of something (e.g., its appearance, sound or size, or a sequence of events) in order to illustrate or support a more general or important point about it, or to explain an idea; show what something is like on the outside in order to say something about its “inner” or “deeper” meaning.

Detail: give the reader a picture of what you mean by providing facts, data, specifics, examples that show what a broad or inclusive statement means; be concrete about a more general idea you’re writing about.

Discuss: look at an issue from more than one perspective; present more than one point of view, or perspective, on the issue.

Elaborate: present a lot of detail, or write in very specific detail, about an idea.

Evaluate: show how you feel about something; appraise an idea or point of view by indicating your opinion or judgment about it, your perspective on or view of an idea, article, story, event, or thing—whether it is strong or weak, beautiful or ugly, good or bad; support your perspective with evidence.

Explain: show what an idea or statement is about, or means; clarify the meaning or point of something by using detail or reasoning; clarify a broad point by breaking it down into smaller components.

Identify: tell what something is; name, define, or briefly explain the most important characteristics of something.

Illustrate: show what you mean by providing details, examples, facts, data, evidence, word-pictures, or graphics (such as charts, diagrams, or figures) that show the meaning of a point you have made, or create a word-picture for the reader.

Interpret: state your understanding of what something means, usually a story, idea or theory, event, behavior, activity, work of art.

Justify: give reasons or facts to show the merits of an idea or perspective.

Prove: provide logical reasons, facts, evidence to show how something is either valid or true.

Speculate: write your ideas or thoughts about a topic even if you do not have “hard facts” to prove what you say; think freely but “on task” about a question you have been asked or a topic you have been given.

Summarize: provide the key ideas, points, or highlights of an essay, article, or story; outline the main or most important ideas of a text.

Key Concepts in Writing

Good writers (whether students or professional writers) work in stages: they do only a little at a time. In other words, they have learned from experience that they need to look at any writing project as a set of smaller—and more manageable—components or tasks. Knowing that they won’t “get it right” the first time, and that they will make changes as they work, they allow many days for even short projects so they can do their work a little at a time.

In general, there are four stages in the writing process: pre-writing, drafting, revision, and proofreading.

Pre-writing includes any activity a writer does to *prepare for* writing something, whether it is classwork, job-related, or personal. Experienced writers often use some pre-writing technique to get started on projects—to activate their ideas by “thinking on paper.” Some also use pre-writing techniques to help find ways of developing ideas when they think they have run out of words or feel blocked when they are working on a draft or even when they are revising. All of the pre-writing techniques are informal and can be used at any time to help produce detail or clarify ideas. You may want to use different techniques at different times, or adapt them to suit the way you work. Some of the widely-used methods are:

- **Brainstorming**—a technique used in business and industry to generate a lot of ideas or suggestions in a short period of time, no matter how incomplete or contradictory they may be; one can brainstorm by exchanging ideas with others about a topic or task during a pre-set period of time; by writing; or even by talking one’s ideas into a tape-recorder.

- *Freewriting*—an approach that allows us to write quite a bit in a very short time, without worrying about grammar, spelling, organization and so on. The goals of freewriting are to start putting ideas into words and to get the brain in gear so it will focus on and generate more ideas.
- *Listing*—what we do in planning any complex activity about which we want to remember important parts—whether we are going to the market, planning our days, or giving a party, we often break down what we need to do in list-form; we also add to or subtract from lists as we are actually going through the process of whatever it is we are trying to accomplish.
- *Mapping and clustering*—more visual methods of grouping ideas or information related to a given question or idea; some writers use a “map” or “cluster diagram” to help organize and focus ideas that they will be working with when they write. People who are image-oriented or who tend to think in visual terms find these methods particularly helpful.

Freewriting is “free” in the sense that it allows a writer to put words on paper quickly and freely—without concern for rules, spelling, mechanics, or the usual conventions of writing. Its purpose is to help a writer find words for his or her ideas: to transfer thoughts and words to paper, and in that way to generate more ideas. The theory behind this is that once any of us begins to write about a topic—once we put our ideas into words—the brain continues to work: it generates more thoughts, questions, words about the topic or project even when the writer is doing something else or is asleep. Freewriting, which some people refer to as “thinking on paper,” helps us make maximum use of our own resources in writing.

There are only a few rules for freewriting:

1. Write **non-stop** (that is, continuously) for a pre-set period of time, usually 5 to 10 minutes. Use a kitchen-timer, alarm clock, or a watch with a timer so you don’t have to watch the clock.
2. If you run out of words or ideas, or “block” in any way, keep on writing even if you have to copy the last sentence you wrote. Another option is to write words like “Help, help, help,” “I don’t know what to say,” nonsense words, or any random words or phrases that come to mind while you’re freewriting. Write everything that comes to mind about the topic: don’t prejudge the quality of your ideas or censor any questions, ideas, words that come to mind. The trick is to write down everything you can in response to the topic or question so your thoughts begin to surface.
3. Pay no attention to spelling, punctuation, grammar (you can correct them later), or to any other rules—just keep on writing, without censoring ideas. Nobody else is going to read or evaluate your freewriting.
4. At the end of the pre-set time, put the freewriting away for awhile, at least for a few hours. Then reread it and select the parts that you think you’d like to work on some more—the parts that seem important or interesting to you, and that move you in the right direction with your topic.

Drafting refers to what any writer does when s/he actually begins to write a paper, report, or text of your own. A draft is a “paper in progress,” a first attempt to find a form for what one wants to say. The purpose of the draft is to try out an approach to a topic, not to produce a completed essay: drafts are changeable.

What are you aiming at in a first draft? The “big three” goals of the drafting stage are:

1. Finding a strong focus for your essay, the core idea you want to build on in later paragraphs;
2. Figuring out the best way to organize or sequence the points you want to make in the body (or “middle”) paragraphs of what you’re writing;
3. Generating or choosing some of the detail you’ll use in explaining ideas.

Smart and experienced writers usually do at least two or three drafts. They know that the first draft, like freewriting, is one way to “think on paper,” and that they will need to make many changes in the content once they have a rough plan or draft of a paper. They see a first draft as a way to discover or decide what they really want to say—to clarify their purpose. And they know they will later add, subtract, or reshape ideas; add “showing” detail; move or change sentences; find clearer words to strengthen their meaning.

Experienced writers may make some changes while they are working on their first or second draft but they often let a few days go by until they are ready to re-work sentences because they may need or want to wait until they are comfortable with the “big three” aspects of composing an essay or report before they work on improving sentences. That is, they may re-work larger chunks or segments of a text before they re-work individual sentences. While some writers revise or rewrite at the same time they are building a draft, many wait to revise until they feel that they have control of the overall idea and shape of their essay.

Revision refers to the changes writers make when they are working on a writing project. They may rewrite topic sentences of body paragraphs to make them clearer (or add topic sentences if necessary), relocate sentences or paragraphs, take out words or sentences that don’t really belong in the essay, add examples, information or facts to support ideas, reword or combine other sentences they’ve written, and so on.

For experienced writers, *it is normal to do several revisions of a draft*. Revision is craftsmanship: any carpenter, athlete, sales representative, doctor, musician, jeweler, sculptor does his own form of revision when he works on perfecting his skill, art-form, or craft. As only one example, the well-known novelist Ernest Hemingway rewrote the final page of his novel *A Farewell to Arms* thirty-nine times before he was satisfied with it.

The tasks of revision may be easier if you write the draft of each paragraph on a separate sheet of paper so you can work on it without worrying about running out of space. They will also be easier when you learn to look at the words on the page as “trial runs” of what you want to accomplish or say: any trial run can be changed. They will be even easier once you have a clear idea of what a finished essay or paragraph should include or “be,” how to control focus, use detail, avoid repetitiousness, and so on—what you will learn in a well-planned composition class. If you write your first draft on a word-processor or computer, you should print out hard copy of the draft in order to revise it: very few people can revise while they’re looking at a computer screen that shows only a part of what they’ve written.

Proofreading is the last stage of the writing process—a “quality check” of the final product. Experienced writers proofread after they’re finished with the major tasks of drafting and revising their content; their goal is a product that the reader can follow without getting confused or distracted by mistakes. Many build in proofreading time at the end of the writing process so they can look only at “surface” issues: grammar; punctuation; mechanics (including apostrophe use, pluralization of nouns, verb tense endings or forms, and so on); spelling; missing or omitted words that should be added in; repeated words (for instance, “The theme of this story might be especially interesting to some readers some readers but not others”).

Many writers find it difficult to proofread if they’re tired or if they try to find mistakes while they are working on content. For one thing, it’s hard to see gaps or mistakes when they have just struggled to write down what they wanted to say and are still involved with the ideas. This is why some writers let their revised draft sit overnight before they proofread: they can see the words and sentences more clearly, be more objective in looking at their work, and figure out ways to improve word-choices, sentences, punctuation, spelling. Some proofread “backward,” starting with the conclusion and working toward the introduction so they can focus on surface issues rather than content. Many look for “silly mistakes” on the final revision and correct them before typing the final product. The time you set aside for proofreading provides a good opportunity for quality control of the final product.