

S E C O N D E D I T I O N

*The Concise  
Guide  
to Writing*

RISE B. AXELROD  
CHARLES R. COOPER

**SECOND  
EDITION**

# *The Concise Guide to Writing*

**Rise B. Axelrod**

*California State University, San Bernardino*

**Charles R. Cooper**

*University of California, San Diego*



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Editor: Jimmy Fleming  
Development editor: Carla Kay Samodulski  
Managing editor: Patricia Mansfield Phelan  
Project editor: Nicholas Webb  
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# To the Instructor

*The Concise Guide to Writing*, second edition, aims to show students how writing works and how written texts are shaped by the writing situations from which they arise. Through five essay assignment chapters, students experience three fundamentally different kinds of inquiry and composing: remembering events, explaining information, and convincing readers to take seriously one's judgments, positions, or proposals. Students see how these kinds of thinking and writing are important for them as college students, workers, and citizens. We also aim to show students that reading like a writer, planning essays systematically, getting critical comments on rough drafts, revising thoughtfully, and reflecting on their learning can improve their writing and confidence as writers. *The Concise Guide* challenges students, setting high standards for them with each essay they attempt and providing the support they need to achieve more than they imagined they could.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

*The Concise Guide to Writing* has three sections:

Chapter 1 explains how writing works and what it contributes to thinking and learning. It also introduces students to the writing activities in the assignment chapters of Part One.

*Part One* Chapters 2 through 6 present five different writing assignments: Remembering an Event, Explaining a Concept, Justifying an Evaluation, Arguing a Position, and Proposing a Solution. Instructors may choose among these chapters or teach them in any sequence that meets the needs of the course. The assignment chapters are arranged here to move students from writing about personal experience and observation to writing that calls for synthesis of information and for reasoned argument.

Each assignment chapter in Part One follows the same organizational plan.

- Several academic writing situations show students where they may encounter this kind of writing in their other courses.
- A For Group Inquiry activity gives students practice in the kind of writing under study in the chapter.
- A set of readings, including published writings as well as a student essay, each one accompanied by a critical apparatus, helps students explore the kind of writing.
- A summary details the purpose and audience and the basic features of the type of writing.

- A flexible Guide to Writing gives the chapter's writing assignment and escorts students through the composing process.
- A Writer at Work section shows how the student writer represented in the chapter's readings worked through some aspect of the writing process.
- A Reflecting on Your Writing activity encourages students to consider what they have learned while writing the essay.

*Part Two* Chapters 7 through 11 look at various strategies for writing and research. Students learn how to use strategies for cueing readers, such as orienting statements, paragraphing, cohesive devices, and transitions. They also learn about strategies for writing to discover and develop ideas, for reading critically and evaluating arguments, for doing research both in the library and on the Internet, and for using and acknowledging sources.

## NOTEWORTHY FEATURES

*The Concise Guide to Writing* contains several special features that contribute to the book's widespread acceptance. Chief among these are the practical Guides to Writing, the integration of reading and writing, the real-world kinds of writing assignments, and the promotion of collaborative work and group inquiry.

*Practical Guides to Writing* In this book, we do not merely talk about the composing process; we also offer practical, flexible Guides to Writing that escort students through the entire composing process, from invention through revision and self-evaluation. Thus, this text is more than just a rhetoric for students to refer to occasionally. It is a guidebook that will help them to write. Commonsensical and easy to follow, the writing guides teach students to assess rhetorical situations, identify the kinds of information they need, ask probing questions and find answers, and organize their writing to achieve their purposes most effectively. The Guides to Writing also enable students to give and receive constructive advice for revising their drafts.

*Systematic Integration of Reading and Writing* Because we see a close relationship between reading critically and writing well, *The Concise Guide to Writing* combines reading instruction with writing instruction. Each assignment chapter in Part One introduces one kind of writing, which students are led to consider both as readers and writers. The readings are each followed by a set of questions and commentary designed to make students aware of how they, as readers, understand and think critically about what others have written. At the same time, students become aware of the types of decisions all writers make. They are also challenged to apply these insights to their own writing as they imagine their prospective readers, set goals, and write and revise their drafts.

*Real-World Kinds of Writing and Writing Situations* The writing assignments in Part One reflect the great diversity in the nonfiction being published in the United States today. Students gain a substantive introduction to the reading and writing of autobiography, explanation, and argument. Though we specify the type

of writing for each assignment, students are encouraged to choose their own subjects and designate their readers; they thereby establish a commitment to the subjects they choose as well as learn the consequences of their choice for particular readers. Students practice the various modes of writing—definition, classification, illustration, narration, description, comparison and contrast—within the context of purposeful real-world discourse.

*Promotion of Collaboration and Group Inquiry* Each Part One assignment chapter begins with a collaborative activity that invites students to rehearse the kind of writing under study in the chapter. In addition, the readings in these chapters are accompanied by questions for discussion designed to provoke thoughtful group inquiry into the social and political dimensions of the reading. Finally, the Guides to Writing include two specific collaborative activities that are fundamental to good writing everywhere. The first, occurring near the end of the invention stage, asks students to work in small groups to try out their writing plans, to get advice from student readers on improving those plans and on how best to approach their audiences, and to assess their interests in and commitments to their chosen subjects. The second collaborative activity, Getting Critical Comments, gives students comprehensive and specific advice on how to revise their classmates' drafts. Occurring at a crucial point in the writing process—just as students are preparing to revise their own drafts—the activity also brings together all that students have learned about the type of writing covered in the chapter.

## NEW TO THIS EDITION

In this new edition of *The Concise Guide to Writing*, we have increased the emphasis on academic writing assignments involving some form of argumentation, provided students with more strategies for completing the assignments, and generally made the book easier for students to use. Consequently, we have added new chapters on justifying an evaluation, reading critically, conducting research in the library and on the Internet, and using and acknowledging sources. A new critical thinking activity—Reflecting on Your Writing—appears in each chapter in Part One. We have also changed to a new spiral binding and included tips on using computers on the inside front and back covers.

*A New Chapter on Justifying an Evaluation* Chapter 4, "Justifying an Evaluation," teaches students how to evaluate a reading, movie, television program, or some other subject. This kind of writing is not only enjoyable for students, but it also teaches them how to think critically about their likes and dislikes and to recognize that others may have different judgments. The chapter emphasizes that in making an evaluation, writers use careful analysis to support their judgments.

*A New Chapter on Reading Critically* Chapter 9, "Strategies for Reading Critically," presents several useful strategies for reading with a critical eye, including outlining and summarizing, evaluating an argument, and reflecting on challenges to one's beliefs and values. These critical reading strategies, which students can

use in their other courses as well, complement the attention given to critical reading in the writing assignment chapters and elsewhere in the book.

*Two New Chapters on Research and Documentation* Chapter 10, "Strategies for Doing Research in the Library and on the Internet," provides comprehensive support for library and electronic research, while Chapter 11, "Strategies for Using and Acknowledging Sources," presents guidelines for integrating the results of that research into an essay. Chapter 11 also includes information on integrating quotations, paraphrasing and summarizing, and avoiding plagiarism, as well as on the MLA and APA styles of documentation.

*A New Critical Thinking Activity* Each Part One assignment chapter concludes with a new activity, Reflecting on Your Writing. It encourages students to think critically about and reflect on what they learned from the writing assignment by focusing on how they identified and dealt with one specific problem encountered during the writing process.

*A New Spiral Binding* The book's new spiral binding allows it to lie flat, making it easier for students to work with the Guides to Writing and other resources, whether they are on their own, in groups, or at the computer.

*Tips on Using the Computer* The inside front and back covers offer useful tips for students working either in a writing lab, in a computerized classroom, or at their own computers at home.

## USING THIS TEXT WITH OTHER RESOURCES

*The Concise Guide to Writing*, with its five major essay assignments, provides all that might be required in a first-year composition course. It could usefully be supplemented, however, by a handbook of usage and style, a composition reader, or a variety of trade books.

Instructors considering a rhetorically arranged reader would want to ensure that its readings and assignments align with those in *The Concise Guide*. One such reader is our own *Reading Critically, Writing Well*, fourth edition (St. Martin's Press). While both books are based on the same systematic approach to reading and writing, *The Concise Guide* offers more comprehensive support for composing than *Reading Critically*. Also available is *The Great American Bologna Festival*, second edition (St. Martin's Press), a collection of student essays written using our Guides to Writing. Instructors accustomed to assigning a thematic reader may find among its suggested writing assignments ones that match those in *The Concise Guide*'s five assignment chapters. An instructor considering trade books might choose an autobiography for students to read while working their way through the "Remembering an Event" chapter, and books on current social problems to read with the "Arguing a Position" and "Proposing a Solution" chapters. The *Instructor's Resource Manual* that accompanies this text contains teaching strategies, discussions of the readings, a chapter on general classroom techniques, and a selected bibliography in composition studies.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our debt grows year by year to those teachers and students who have used *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing*, on which *The Concise Guide* is based, and who have so generously encouraged and advised us.

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Rise Axelrod  
Charles Cooper

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## Introduction

Why is writing important? Is there a connection between writing and thinking? Can writing be learned? What does reading have to do with learning to write? How can I learn to write more effectively and efficiently? These are some of the questions you may be asking as you begin this writing course. Read on—for *The Concise Guide to Writing* offers some answers for these and other questions you may have.

## WHY WRITING IS IMPORTANT

Writing has wide-ranging implications for the way we think and learn, as well as for our chances of success, our personal development, and our relations with other people.

## Writing Influences the Way People Think

First, writing encourages us to be organized, logical, even creative in our thinking. Moreover, it urges us to ask questions, to look critically at what others have to say as well as what we ourselves think.

The grammatical and textual conventions of writing impose a certain kind of order on our thinking. To write comprehensible sentences and paragraphs, we need to put words in a certain order: follow subjects with verbs, coordinate parallel ideas, subordinate the particular to the general. And from different kinds of writing, we learn different ways of developing our thoughts: reflecting critically on our own behavior in autobiography; distinguishing fact from opinion in concept explanations; making judgments based on evidence and the dialectic between opposing points of view in position papers. Further, we learn to analyze and evaluate ideas and to synthesize what we learn from others and experience first-hand. In all these ways, writing fosters habits of critical inquiry.

Writing keeps me from believing everything I read. —Gloria Steinem

Those who are learning to compose and arrange their sentences with accuracy and order are learning, at the same time, to think with accuracy and order.

—Hugh Blair

## Writing Contributes to the Way We Learn

When we take notes in class or as we read, writing helps us sort information and highlight what is important. Taking notes helps us remember what we are learning