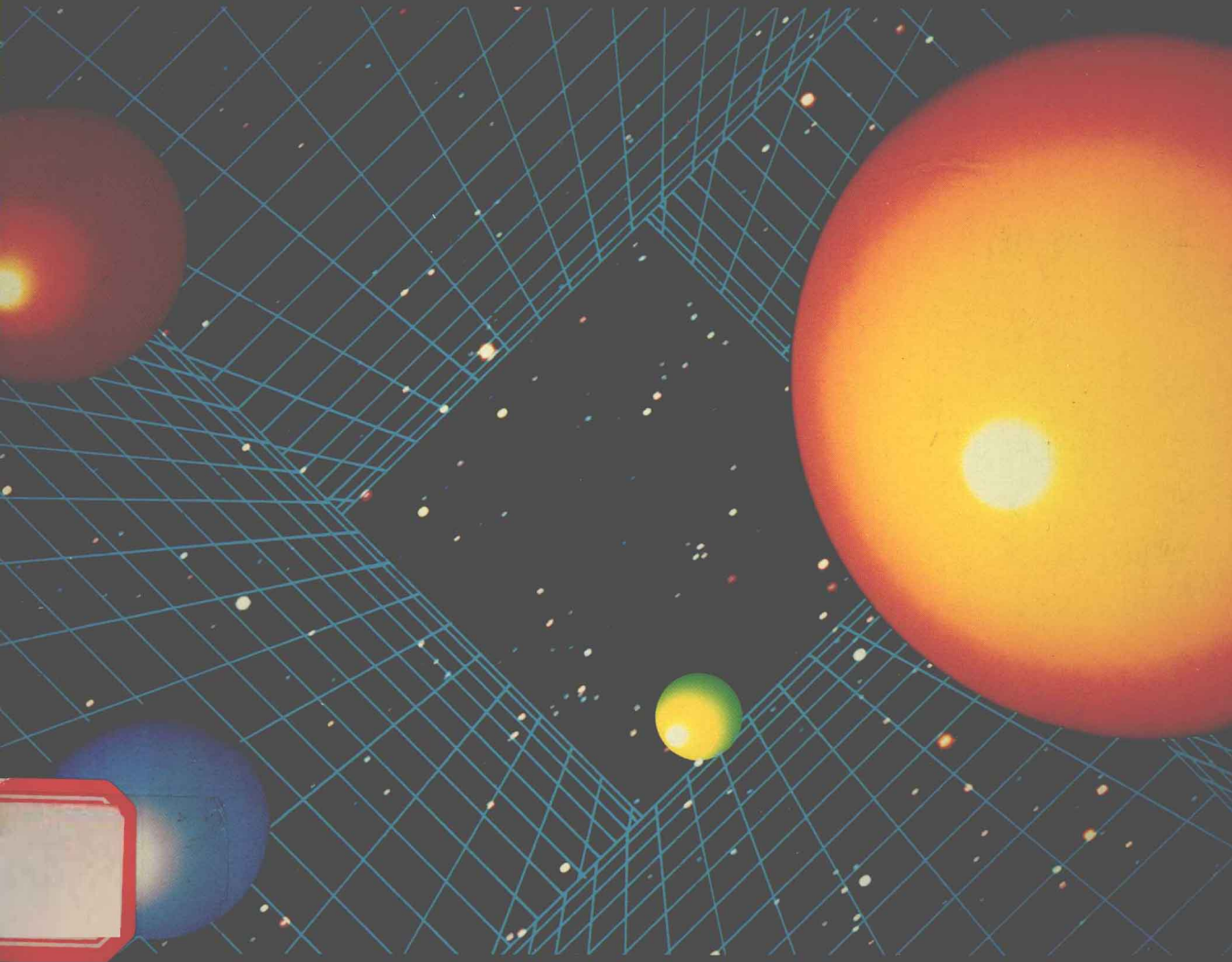


Putting **Process**
Into **Practice**

A Guide for Basic Writers



Deborah Hawkins Pickering

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_____ Into **Practice**

A Guide for Basic Writers

Deborah Hawkins Pickering
Rosary College

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Putting **Process**

Into **Practice**

For Jeff, Ben, and Sam

Preface

This is a composition text for developmental writers and any other undergraduate writers who need practice in composing and reading essays. It is based on the following concepts of modern rhetoric, among others:

- Writing is a process, but individual writers' processes may differ.
- Students learn best by beginning with the global aspects of composing—writing from whole to parts.
- Grammar, usage, and sentence structure are best learned within that global context, as the writer attempts to say something significant to a particular audience.
- Students should become comfortable writing about familiar and significant topics before moving on to unfamiliar or academic subject matter.
- Students learn to write by writing rather than reading about or being lectured to about how to write.
- Students should practice writing to a variety of audiences, not just their teachers. In fact, other students often make the best audience.
- Students should be given opportunities to write expressively, according to Edward Sapir's definition as applied by James Britton.

Organization of the Text

The text is in three parts—a rhetoric, six assignment sequences, and a reader—which are meant to be used *concurrently*. For example, instructors may wish to begin by assigning the journal

and an essay or two from *The Reader* before assigning the first section of *The Rhetoric*.

The Rhetoric introduces students to the various writing processes, stressing that they should concentrate on developing fluency, then clarity (of purpose, audience, organization, expression), and finally, correctness. Sections of the rhetoric, including the exercises, should be read piecemeal, as needed.

The six thematically based **Assignment Sequences** include thirty assignments—more than enough for a semester or even a year. The first fifteen guide the students through prewriting and revising activities; the second fifteen invite students to “get started” and “think it over” on their own. The assignments have spiraling, nonlinear rhythm: the students work through the writing process over and over until they have internalized it, developing their own thought processes as they move from the concrete to the abstract, from the present to the past and future, from familiar, known audiences to public, perhaps unknown, audiences.

The Reader includes essays by twenty-six students as well as seven published writers, arranged alphabetically. The essays may stimulate class discussion or journal entries and thematically complement the assignments. They represent a range of abilities, interests, background, and ages. The discussion following each essay usually focuses on one particular aspect of the writing process. I have included both drafts and revisions of several student essays as well as some of the students’ own comments about their writing processes.

Salient Features of the Text

The assumption behind the creation of this text is that writing, like learning, is a human activity. All writers need to write often and to get responses from peers and teachers. Writers learn most when they write about topics they care about to genuine audiences.

The single most important feature of the book is the degree to which it takes the students through writing processes: their gradual development from fluency to clarity and then to correctness (based on the model offered by Mayher et al. in *Learning to Write/Writing to Learn*) and the recursive process they go through each time they take up a writing task (prewriting, drafting, revising).

A second feature is that the book is based on theories of modern rhetoric, most fundamentally those of James Britton and James Moffett. In addition, readers will note the influence of Peter Elbow and Donald Murray.

Third, because of the journal's potential as a way of learning and as a source of ideas for more public forms of writing, students are asked to start writing in their journals immediately and to continue throughout the semester and year.

Acknowledgments

From 1982-87, as Coordinator of English Communication Skills at Northern Illinois University, I worked with an exceptional group of instructors to develop the core of the assignment sequences in this text. The assignments evolved, under my direction, through the summers and semesters when the staff and I met to share ideas and writing. I wish to acknowledge the contributions of Loretta Rielly, Joe Gastiger, Ellen Franklin, Ann Litow, Margaret Gage, Carole Barrowman, Margaret Sides, and all the other instructors of 103P-English Communications Skills.

I am also indebted to the following people:

- The students from Northern Illinois University and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point who were the inspiration for the book and whose essays appear in *The Reader*.
- My former teachers, James Britton, Paul Diehl, Carl Klaus, and Richard Lloyd-Jones, from whom I learned many things, among them the relationship between learning and writing, the importance of sentence play, and the idea of writing sequences.
- The reviewers who responded with such great care to the budding versions of the text: Lil Brannon of New York University, whose early comments encouraged me; Donald Barshis of Harold Washington College; Michael Blitz of John Jay College of City University of New York; Christine Briggs of Henry Ford Community College; C. Jeriel Howard of Northeastern University.
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Deborah Hawkins Pickering

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*Professional essays.

1 The Rhetoric

The word *rhetoric* comes from the Greek word meaning “to say or speak.” Although it originally referred to speech, the term has come to include written as well as spoken language. Part One is called a rhetoric because it describes the writing process. It explains what writing is and how most people learn to write. You should probably consider this part of the text as the reference section: to be read piecemeal, as needed, and not all at once. For example, if you want to begin by reviewing punctuation, you may do so by turning to Section Four, Correctness. Or, if your instructor begins the semester by assigning the journal from Part Two and some essays from the Reader, he or she may then ask you to read Section One from the Rhetoric. Just remember that you don’t need to read all of Part One before beginning the assignments or the essays.

Section One—Writing Is...explains what knowing how to write can do for you. Writing here doesn’t mean handwriting or copying; it means composing—using written symbols to communicate meaning.

Sections Two, Three, and Four describe the way people develop as writers if given the opportunity: from fluency to clarity and then correctness.

The first challenge is to develop fluency, to learn to pick up pen and paper and sit down at a word processor and put your thoughts on paper easily. Section Two offers some suggestions for getting started.

Once you are comfortably fluent, Section Three will help you learn to write clearly: to have a clear purpose, to write to a particular audience, to arrange your sentences and paragraphs in a readable manner, and to think about sentence structure.

Section Four will probably be the most familiar because it’s about correctness. If you have trouble with spelling, punctuation, agreement, word choice, and editing your papers, consult the appropriate explanations and exercises.

Writing Is...

A Human Activity

Some people think that only gifted people can write, that writers are born, not made, and that there's a secret to learning how to write well. Actually, writing comes naturally to human beings—as naturally as talking, singing, playing musical instruments, and swimming. Now it is true that some people have more ability than others and that some need more coaching than others, but all have the potential to improve at these activities if they have the intention to do so.

If you really want to improve your writing, you can—if you practice and get response from your classmates and your instructor. The assignments in this text are designed to provide you with plenty of practice. As you read, write, and talk about your ideas, you'll discover many things about writing as a human activity.

A Way of Communicating with Other People

The main reason you write is to communicate with others: you leave telephone messages for family members; you write letters to good friends and prospective employers; for a variety of audiences, you record what you observe on a trip, on the job, or in a lab experiment; you detail the memorable events in our lives for future generations; you leave instructions on pet, plant, or child care for those left in charge. You also do a lot of writing in school.

Even if you have never consciously thought about it, the teacher is the audience for most of the writing you do in school. Peter Elbow says that, for many students, teachers constitute a dangerous (as opposed to a safe) audience.

We can better understand, then, the effects of other people on our writing if we distinguish between a **dangerous**

audience and a **safe audience**. Whether an audience is one or the other is partly an objective matter: are your readers a bunch of hostile critics just itching for you to make a mistake, or are they a crowd of friends or fans who look forward to enjoying what you have to say and won't hold anything against you even if you have difficulties?

But safety and danger are partly subjective matters, too. Some people are terrified no matter how friendly the audience is, while others are not intimidated even by sharks. Either way, however, you can almost always tell whether an audience is functioning as a safe one or a dangerous one for you at a given moment. You can tell whether the audience is helping or hindering you in your efforts to put out words. [*Writing with Power*, pp. 184–85]

Because people usually write more to safe audiences, the first assignments in Part Two ask you to consider friends, relatives, or members of the class as your audience. These people care about you as well as your writing. They want to know how you are, what's been happening to you, and what you've been thinking about.

Your instructors in college are concerned about you as writers and want to know how well you understand class discussion and the assigned readings. On some occasions, they may use your writing as a means of testing your knowledge of the subject matter. You may be required to write essay tests in history, chemistry, or psychology class. Some instructors may ask you to keep a learning log or journal in which you write your responses to what you are learning. You could consider such a journal a conversation on paper—with you doing most of the talking. As the audience for your journal, your teacher is no longer just an examiner but an interested adult who wants to know what you think of what you're learning.

Eventually, you'll write to larger, more distant audiences with whom you have something in common or who are interested in the topic you're writing about. Members of a general audience probably will never get to know you as a person. They focus on your words on the page and their meaning.

Exercise

Make a list of the audiences you've written to within the last month. Which ones would you label safe or dangerous? Why?
