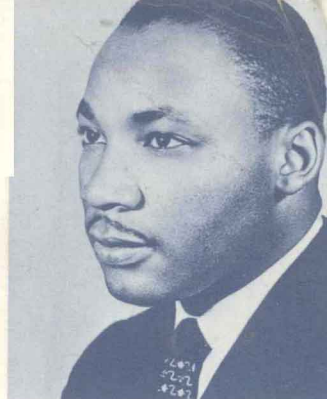


GREAT WRITING



A Reader for Writers

SECOND EDITION

Harvey S. Wiener • Nora Eisenberg

Great Writing:

A Reader for Writers



Second Edition

Harvey S. Wiener

Adelphi University

Nora Eisenberg

CUNY—LaGuardia Community College



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Preface

We believe in a number of important principles about learning to write, and these principles inform this book and establish its content, approach, and format.

We believe first in the primacy of text and in the enduring authority, intelligence, and joy in great writing. When aspiring writers read great writing carefully and attentively, they come closer to producing exceptional writing themselves. Aiming for contemporaneity, too many anthologies for writers avoid great writing; they may offer readable, serviceable samples, but they rarely show our language at its very best or address the great intellectual issues of our civilization. To use readings as guides for writing—as exercises in form, as explorations of style, as laboratories for the growth of ideas in words and sentences—students must read the very best our culture has to offer. Shakespeare, Swift, Virginia Woolf, Cather, Plato, Conrad, Orwell, John Stuart Mill, Poe, Emerson, Emily Brontë, E. B. White, Langston Hughes, Didion, Keats, James Joyce, Thoreau, great writers of our civilization, help provide the models that teach the writer's craft.

With a title like *Great Writing* we know that we are going out on a limb, and we want to admit at the outset that our selections unabashedly proclaim our own subjective judgments, tastes, and prejudices. An experienced reader could grumble about our exclusions or could question some of the pieces or authors we chose to include. Still, we strove to make selections that many educated readers would identify as important writing by great figures. You will recognize most of the authors and many of the selections. Our goal was always to choose the most clearly written, the most elegantly and intelligently reasoned, the most sensitive and thought-provoking pieces that suited the rhetorical strategies we believe best organize a course of study. We aimed for ethnic, geographical, and sexual diversity among our authors, and we tried to balance long pieces with short ones, humorous pieces with serious ones, and intense pieces with relaxed ones. We chose excerpts as rarely as possible, yet could not always avoid them when we drew from novels, or long essays. Where excerpts appear, we have explained the context so that what precedes or follows the selection is always clear. Of course, our wish is that students will like so much of what they read here that they will choose to read or reread on their own the full-length works—all of *Huckleberry Finn*, *Native Son*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Walden*, to name a few.

We also believe that poets, dramatists, novelists, and short story writers have as much to teach about writing essays as do nonfiction writers. Certainly in regard to description, narration, imagery, style, tone, characterization, symbol, point of view, satire, irony, dialogue, diction, coherence, allusion, and analogy—basic terms that readers and writers use to talk about their efforts—our collection of poems, short stories, and scenes from novels and plays can speak to beginning

writers and can teach them. To exclude poetry, fiction, and dramatic literature from a reader is to risk a loss of exposure to great minds at a critical point in a student's growth.

More than offering great ideas and brilliant style, poets, fiction writers, and playwrights grapple with the same kinds of rhetorical principles that many people have too long insisted are the purview of essayists alone. Surely Marvell in "To His Coy Mistress" worked through the familiar conventions of argument and persuasion that face any writer who chooses to take a position and to win supporters. Certainly Carson McCullers in "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud." faced the same need for clarity and personalized meaning, the same confusions of denotation and connotation, the same impulse to establish new lexical validity that any writer faces in attempting an important definition. This is not to say, of course, that we are challenging the rightful place of the expository essay in a program for developing writers; rather, we aim to complement that place by establishing for it a larger context that includes great writing in any genre. In fact, you will find many outstanding essays in this book.

Exploring the writer's craft through a consideration of rhetorical patterns is a useful way to study writing. We have chosen to organize this book by means of traditional rhetorical categories: description, narration, exemplification, process analysis, comparison, classification, causation, definition, and argumentation. Our choice of selections demonstrates our conviction that elements of writing in all genres rely upon these categories. Every chapter contains poetry, fiction, essays, and occasionally drama—all within familiar rhetorical contexts. We're not offering these examples as pure or absolute models of their type, however. Sometimes the rhetorical strategy is a dominant mode in the selection and is easy to recognize. At other times the strategy may be more subtle. A single paragraph or two, even a couple of sentences, may demonstrate some particularly striking application of a rhetorical principle. Sometimes more than one strategy—say, description and narration, causality and process, or definition, illustration and argumentation—may work hand in hand.

The value in practicing rhetorical patterns is that they point the way to a range of available options for writers. We agree with many critics of rhetorically organized readers—it's the rare writer who chooses a rhetorical strategy and then sets out to fill it with ideas. No one says, "Today I'm going to write a classification essay." Ideas always come first for writers, and as these ideas develop, writers pay attention to audience, purpose, language, style, and all the varied, complex factors that help make an essay successful. Still, as ideas develop, writers cannot help but benefit from knowing rhetorical options and using them creatively and intelligently. Thus, if a writer wanted to develop an essay about the Civil War, a knowledge of cause-and-effect strategies would help him or her present clearly a sense of why the war began; a knowledge of descriptive strategies would help breathe life into a Union hospital scene; a knowledge of comparison and contrast strategies would help in a consideration of the relative strengths of the North and the South. The writer would not have to exclude one strategy for the other: Powerful writing often relies upon a number of different rhetorical

patterns within a single essay. Again, the key is choices. Learning to write within rhetorical contexts expands a writer's choices and, no matter what the assignment, improves dramatically the possible approaches to writing.

We have made significant revisions for this new edition, adding outstanding pieces of great writing to an already noteworthy collection. Drawing from a wide range of cultures and ethnic backgrounds, we continue to offer challenging essays, stories, poems, and plays. Louise Erdrich, Franz Kafka, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Gwendolyn Brooks, Joan Didion, Anton Chekhov, Albert Camus, Alice Walker, Ruth Praver Jhabvala—these and other renowned writers add fresh voices to the chorus of talent in *Great Writing*. Also new to this edition are “Summing Up” sections at the end of each chapter's introduction. Students will find the summary lists useful as reviews of the rhetorical strategy at hand. In crystalizing the main points, “Summing Up” will help guide students' thoughtful reading and writing throughout the book. We also have added a section at the end of each chapter called “Crossover,” which taps students' critical thinking skills by asking them to consider linkages among selections that raise similar issues, themes, and ideas.

We want to thank our friends and colleagues who encouraged us to develop this text and who read proposals and early drafts. Don McQuade and Bob Atwan listened to early versions of our thoughts. John Wright saw the goals of our project immediately and gave us the support and energy we needed to carry it through. Elizabeth McMahan (Illinois State University), Lee Jacobus (University of Connecticut), and Gratia Murphey (Youngstown State University) did a thorough, thoughtful job of critiquing an early manuscript. Tim Julet at McGraw-Hill guided *Great Writing* to, and through, production with affection, respect, and care. To all the people who helped us along, including our families, we are deeply in debt.

Harvey S. Wiener
Nora Eisenberg

Contents

Preface *xix*

Introduction: The Writing Process *1*

Chapter One

DESCRIPTION

- N. Scott Momaday, THE LAST OF THE KIWAS 17
- E. B. White, ONCE MORE TO THE LAKE 23
- Emily Brontë, WUTHERING HEIGHTS, CHAPTER 1 30
- Amy Lowell, WIND AND SILVER 36
- Percy Bysshe Shelley, OZYMANDIAS 38
- Edna O'Brien, MY MOTHER'S MOTHER 40
- Alfred Kazin, THE KITCHEN 52
- Alfred, Lord Tennyson, THE EAGLE 57
- John Keats, ODE TO AUTUMN 59
- Melville Crane, SNOW TOWARD EVENING 61

Chapter Two

NARRATION

- Willa Cather, A WAGNER MATINÉE 70
- Frederick Douglass, FROM NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS,
AN AMERICAN SLAVE 77
- Emily Dickinson, THERE'S BEEN A DEATH IN THE OPPOSITE HOUSE 86
- Richard Wright, NATIVE SON, CHAPTER 1 88
- Countee Cullen, INCIDENT 96
- Judith Ortiz Cofer, THE WITCH'S HUSBAND 98
- William Blake, THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER 105

- James Joyce, *ARABY* 107
Langston Hughes, *SALVATION* 113
Edgar Allan Poe, *THE TELL-TALE HEART* 116
Raymond Carver, *MY FATHER'S LIFE* 122
Louise Erdrich, *JACKLIGHT* 130

Chapter Three

EXEMPLIFICATION

- Maxine Hong Kingston, *FAMILY GHOSTS* 141
Barbara Tuchman, *THE BLACK DEATH* 145
James Thurber, *COURTSHIP THROUGH THE AGES* 155
Walt Whitman, *THERE WAS A CHILD WENT FORTH* 160
e. e. cummings, *NOBODY LOSES ALL THE TIME* 163
Mark Twain, *I DISCOVER MOSES AND THE BULRUSHERS* 166
Gwendolyn Brooks, *WE REAL COOL* 170
Robert Browning, *MY LAST DUCHESS* 172
Lucille Clifton, *GOOD TIMES* 175
William Zinsser, *CLUTTER* 177

Chapter Four

PROCESS

- Joan Didion, *ON KEEPING A NOTEBOOK* 192
Ernest Hemingway, *CAMPING OUT* 199
Anthony Trollope, *250 WORDS EVERY QUARTER OF AN HOUR* 203
Ovid, *THE CREATION* 205
Henry David Thoreau, *ON ECONOMY* 209
D. H. Lawrence, *THE ROCKING-HORSE WINNER* 225
Ved Mehta, *THE BABY MYNA* 238
Camara Laye, *THE GOLD WORKER* 243
Lorrie Moore, *HOW TO BECOME A BETTER WRITER* 250

Chapter Five

COMPARISON

- Virginia Woolf, SHAKESPEARE'S GIFTED SISTER 265
- Amy Tan, TWO KINDS 269
- Joseph Conrad, THE SECRET SHARER 278
- Thomas Hardy, THE RUINED MAID 309
- Seamus Heaney, DIGGING 311
- Susan Sontag, TWO DISEASES 314
- Plato, THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE 321
- William Shakespeare, MY MISTRESS' EYES ARE NOTHING LIKE THE SUN 326
- Robert Frost, FIRE AND ICE 328
- Sylvia Plath, A COMPARISON 330
- Toni Morrison, A SLOW WALK OF TREES 334
- Alice Walker, EVERYDAY USE 342

Chapter Six

CLASSIFICATION

- George Orwell, POLITICS AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE 358
- Stephen Jay Gould, THE GEOMETER OF RACE 370
- Irwin Shaw, THE GIRLS IN THEIR SUMMER DRESSES 379
- Dylan Thomas, DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT 385
- Henry Reed, NAMING OF PARTS 387
- ECCLESIASTES, Chapter 3 389
- Malcolm Cowley, THE NATIONAL HEARTBEAT: "WE-NESS" AND "ME-NESS" 391
- Phillip Lopate, MODERN FRIENDSHIPS 395

Chapter Seven

CAUSATION

- Albert Camus, THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS 411
- Kate Chopin, THE STORY OF AN HOUR 415

- George Orwell, WHY I WRITE 419
- Tobias Wolff, THE CHAIN 426
- Langston Hughes, DREAM DEFERRED 438
- Edwin Arlington Robinson, RICHARD CORY 440
- William Shakespeare, WHEN MY LOVE SWEARS THAT SHE IS MADE
OF TRUTH 442
- Jack London, TO BUILD A FIRE 444
- Lewis Thomas, ON WARTS 457

Chapter Eight

DEFINITION

- Ralph Waldo Emerson, GIFTS 472
- Carson McCullers, A TREE. A ROCK. A CLOUD. 476
- Susan Brownmiller, FEMININITY 484
- Carl Sandburg, PRIMER LESSON 489
- Robert Graves, THE NAKED AND THE NUDE 491
- e. e. cummings, A POLITICIAN 493
- Joseph Epstein, YOUR BASIC LANGUAGE SNOB 494
- Marianne Moore, POETRY 505
- William Blake, THE TIGER 508
- Richard Rodriguez, COMPLEXION 510

Chapter Nine

ARGUMENTATION AND PERSUASION

- Martin Luther King, Jr., I HAVE A DREAM 525
- Jonathan Swift, A MODEST PROPOSAL 530
- Virginia Woolf, PROFESSIONS FOR WOMEN 538
- Andrew Marvell, TO HIS COY MISTRESS 543
- Wilfred Owen, DULCE ET DECORUM EST 546
- Ruth Praver Jhabvala, MYSELF IN INDIA 549

Adrienne Rich, CLAIMING AN EDUCATION 558

Franz Kafka, THE JUDGMENT 563

John Stuart Mill, ON LIBERTY 572

Anton Chekhov, A MARRIAGE PROPOSAL 582

***Acknowledgments* 595**

Thematic Contents

Language and Writing

- CLUTTER, William Zinsser 117
250 WORDS EVERY QUARTER OF AN HOUR, Anthony Trollope 203
ON KEEPING A NOTEBOOK, Joan Didion 192
HOW TO BECOME A BETTER WRITER, Lorrie Moore 250
A COMPARISON, Sylvia Plath 330
POLITICS AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, George Orwell 358
WHY I WRITE, George Orwell 419
PRIMER LESSON, Carl Sandburg 489
POETRY, Marianne Moore 505
YOUR BASIC LANGUAGE SNOB, Joseph Epstein 494

Family

- THE LAST OF THE KIWAS, N. Scott Momaday 17
MY MOTHER'S MOTHER, Edna O'Brien 40
NATIVE SON, Richard Wright 88
MY FATHER'S LIFE, Raymond Carver 122
FAMILY GHOSTS, Maxine Hong Kingston 141
THERE WAS A CHILD WENT FORTH, Walt Whitman 160
NOBODY LOSES ALL THE TIME, e. e. cummings 163
GOOD TIMES, Lucille Clifton 175
THE ROCKING-HORSE WINNER, D. H. Lawrence 225
THE GOLD WORKER, Camara Laye 243
SHAKESPEARE'S GIFTED SISTER, Virginia Woolf 265
A SLOW WALK OF TREES, Toni Morrison 334

- EVERYDAY USE, Alice Walker 342
 DIGGING, Seamus Heaney 311
 TWO KINDS, Amy Tan 269
 A MARRIAGE PROPOSAL, Anton Chekhov 582
 THE CHAIN, Tobias Wolff 426
 THE STORY OF AN HOUR, Kate Chopin 415
 THE JUDGMENT, Franz Kafka 563
 A TREE. A ROCK. A CLOUD., Carson McCullers 476

Love and Loss

- OZYMANDIAS, Percy Bysshe Shelley 38
 ARABY, James Joyce 107
 MY MOTHER'S MOTHER, Edna O'Brien 40
 MY FATHER'S LIFE, Raymond Carver 122
 MY LAST DUCHESS, Robert Browning 172
 COURTSHIP THROUGH THE AGES, James Thurber 155
 THE ROCKING-HORSE WINNER, D. H. Lawrence 225
 MY MISTRESS' EYES ARE NOTHING LIKE THE SUN, William Shakespeare 326
 THE GIRLS IN THEIR SUMMER DRESSES, Irwin Shaw 379
 MODERN FRIENDSHIPS, Phillip Lopate 395
 A MARRIAGE PROPOSAL, Anton Chekhov 582
 THE STORY OF AN HOUR, Kate Chopin 415
 WHEN MY LOVE SWEARS THAT SHE IS MADE OF TRUTH, William Shakespeare 442
 TO HIS COY MISTRESS, Andrew Marvell 543

Education, Science, and Culture

- NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS, AN AMERICAN SLAVE, Frederick Douglass 77
 MY MOTHER'S MOTHER, Edna O'Brien 40

- FAMILY GHOSTS, Maxine Hong Kingston 141
- THE BLACK DEATH, Barbara Tuchman 145
- CAMPING OUT, Ernest Hemingway 199
- THE CREATION, Ovid 205
- ON ECONOMY, Henry David Thoreau 209
- THE BABY MYNA, Ved Mehta 238
- ON KEEPING A NOTEBOOK, Joan Didion 192
- TWO DISEASES, Susan Sontag 314
- THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE, Plato 321
- FIRE AND ICE, Robert Frost 328
- NAMING OF PARTS, Henry Reed 387
- ECCLESIASTES, CHAPTER 3 389
- THE NATIONAL HEARTBEAT: "WE-NESS" AND "ME-NESS," Malcolm Cowley 391
- THE GEOMETER OF RACE, Stephen Jay Gould 370
- THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS, Albert Camus 411
- DREAM DEFERRED, Langston Hughes 438
- ON WARTS, Lewis Thomas 457
- GIFTS, Ralph Waldo Emerson 472
- PROFESSIONS FOR WOMEN, Virginia Woolf 538
- COMPLEXION, Richard Rodriguez 510
- YOUR BASIC LANGUAGE SNOB, Joseph Epstein 494
- DULCE ET DECORUM EST, Wilfred Owen 546
- CLAIMING AN EDUCATION, Adrienne Rich 558
- ON LIBERTY, John Stuart Mill 572

Death, Illness, and Mortality

- OZYMANDIAS, Percy Bysshe Shelley 38
- MY MOTHER'S MOTHER, Edna O'Brien 40
- ODE TO AUTUMN, John Keats 59
- THERE'S BEEN A DEATH IN THE OPPOSITE HOUSE, Emily Dickinson 86

- THE TELL-TALE HEART, Edgar Allan Poe 116
- MY FATHER'S LIFE, Raymond Carver 122
- NOBODY LOSES ALL THE TIME, e. e. cummings 163
- THE BLACK DEATH, Barbara Tuchman 145
- TWO DISEASES, Susan Sontag 314
- DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT, Dylan Thomas 385
- ECCLESIASTES, CHAPTER 3 389
- NAMING OF PARTS, Henry Reed 387
- THE CHAIN, Tobias Wolff 426
- THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS, Albert Camus 411
- THE STORY OF AN HOUR, Kate Chopin 415
- RICHARD CORY, Edwin Arlington Robinson 440
- TO BUILD A FIRE, Jack London 444
- A MODEST PROPOSAL, Jonathan Swift 530
- DULCE ET DECORUM EST, Wilfred Owen 546

Race, Gender, and Ethnicity

- NATIVE SON, Richard Wright 88
- INCIDENT, Countee Cullen 96
- THE LAST OF THE KIWAS, N. Scott Momaday 17
- MY MOTHER'S MOTHER, Edna O'Brien 40
- FAMILY GHOSTS, Maxine Hong Kingston 141
- GOOD TIMES, Lucille Clifton 175
- WE REAL COOL, Gwendolyn Brooks 170
- SHAKESPEARE'S GIFTED SISTER, Virginia Woolf 265
- ON KEEPING A NOTEBOOK, Joan Didion 192
- A SLOW WALK OF TREES, Toni Morrison 334
- EVERYDAY USE, Alice Walker 342
- DIGGING, Seamus Heaney 311
- TWO KINDS, Amy Tan 269

- THE GIRLS IN THEIR SUMMER DRESSES, Irwin Shaw 379
 THE GEOMETER OF RACE, Stephen Jay Gould 370
 THE STORY OF AN HOUR, Kate Chopin 415
 DREAM DEFERRED, Langston Hughes 438
 COMPLEXION, Richard Rodriguez 510
 FEMININITY, Susan Brownmiller 484
 I HAVE A DREAM, Martin Luther King, Jr. 525
 PROFESSIONS FOR WOMEN, Virginia Woolf 538
 MYSELF IN INDIA, Ruth Praver Jhabvala 549

Work, Professions, and Money

- MY MOTHER'S MOTHER, Edna O'Brien 40
 CHIMNEY SWEEPER, William Blake 105
 A POLITICIAN, e. e. cummings 493
 THE TELL-TALE HEART, Edgar Allan Poe 116
 NOBODY LOSES ALL THE TIME, e. e. cummings 163
 I DISCOVER MOSES AND THE BULRUSHERS, Mark Twain 166
 ON ECONOMY, Henry David Thoreau 209
 THE GOLD WORKER, Camara Laye 243
 ON KEEPING A NOTEBOOK, Joan Didion 192
 THE SECRET SHARER, Joseph Conrad 278
 THE RUINED MAID, Thomas Hardy 309
 A COMPARISON, Sylvia Plath 330
 THE CHAIN, Tobias Wolff 426
 RICHARD CORY, Edwin Arlington Robinson 440
 YOUR BASIC LANGUAGE SNOB, Joseph Epstein 494
 CLAIMING AN EDUCATION, Adrienne Rich 558

Nature

- ONCE MORE TO THE LAKE, E. B. White 23
 THE EAGLE, Alfred, Lord Tennyson 57