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There have been a lot of writing textbooks published in the past decade. This is the only one that begins early enough in the writing process to make a real difference.

When I first taught people to write, I entered the students' writing process at the finish. I'd show students polished, professional essays, point out their features, and say, "Write something like that." Then I'd look at what they had written to see if their works had the features of a good essay. But this approach didn't work very well. I was too late.

Then the "process-revolution" taught me how to enter the writing process during the composing stage. I'd show students the mythical steps a writer goes through to produce an essay, beginning with brainstorming, and say, "Go through these steps." Then I'd have them write, observing and conferring as their essays evolved. This approach worked better, but something was still missing. The results were often wooden and perfunctory. I was still too late.

By the time I wrote the first edition of *The Writer's Way*, I realized that the big stuff goes on before the brainstorming, before the particular writing project is even imagined. An instructor should be there when the writer is figuring out why she writes, what writing is supposed to do, and what good writing is. Students can reproduce the features of good essays or walk through the steps of the writing process endlessly and gain nothing if they're working with a mistaken definition of writing and its purposes. If a student has the impression that writing is supposed to hide her ignorance, get her good grades, or demonstrate her mastery of technical features or skills (such as outlining or using lively verbs), then writing practice—process-based or otherwise—will simply reinforce her misunderstanding. Until students write for the reasons successful writers write, they won't write well.

So I based this book on what I had learned: 1) good writing begins with real, strong reasons to write; and 2) good reasons to write answer all questions about technique. A successful writer is doing something of importance to himself; that sense of purpose guides all of his writing decisions. He asks himself, not "What's the rule?" or "What do good essays do?", but "What works?" The main goal of *The Writer's Way* is to teach writers to ask themselves, "Does this work?", and to look for answers in their own purposes. This approach pays off, I know, because

I've used it in my own classes and I've had a lot of feedback about it from other instructors who report the same level of success.

This way of thinking is based on the linguistic principles known as the "whole-language" or "natural-language" approach. Its best-known spokespeople are Frank Smith and Kenneth and Yetta Goodman, and its premise is that people learn best by immersing themselves in the whole thing to be learned, often surrounding themselves with examples of what it looks like and how it's done. Moreover, they should do it in a context in which the thing to be learned offers immediate, demonstrable personal rewards. These might be aesthetic or emotional rewards ("That feels good.") or utilitarian ones ("I can get things done with this."). By extension, a writer must write from an attitude that says, "I do this as myself; I do this for me." This commitment to making writing a part of one's real life Frank Smith calls "joining the club of writers." All of us learn to speak in such a context, and with such an attitude. We can learn to write the same way.

What's New in the Fourth Edition

The Fourth Edition has continued in the tradition of the Third Edition, which was to leave a good thing largely alone.

Nearly half of the sample essays in the modes chapters are new. We've kept many of the old two-pagers, to remind students that you can do a lot of good work in a small space, but most of the new essays are longer—a thousand words or more—because instructors continue to want more models for longer compositions. Several of the new pieces address life after college and the issues of adulthood—child raising, marriages of daughters, and so forth—so that our ever-increasing population of older college students will feel represented.

Time has passed and the world of data gathering has gone more online, so the documentation section of the research chapter has a new section that focuses on the tricky problems involved in citing on-line sources.

The end-of-chapter exercises have been reworked to encourage drafting and revision. In addition to the prewriting exercises of the Third Edition, there are now more postwriting exercises that direct students to take up one of their own completed drafts, work with the draft in a concrete way, and often revise guided by the results.

The Fourth Edition, like each of its predecessors, has wrestled with the saber-toothed tiger of chapter sequencing. Users of the book frequently complain that the chapters aren't in the order in which classroom practice dictates one use them. This is true. But it turns out to be impossible to sequence chapters to match everyone's course structure and at the same time maintain some internal logic for the book. Courses and books have their own logic, and they're different. We have left the chapter sequence alone, and instead hope to solve the problem

from the other end, by giving you permission and encouragement to use the chapters in any order you wish. The usual practice seems to be to jump to Chapters 10 and 14 early, which is what I do.

Acknowledgments

Eight new students have added their names to the list of generous writers and classroom friends who let me use their essays for free. Their names are in the index of essays at the back of the book. Crump and Carbone's Writing Online: A Student's Guide to the Internet and World Wide Web, Second Edition, was a helpful friend as I was struggling with the issue of on-line citations.

I am grateful for the critiques of the previous edition done by the following teachers: Rebecca Flannagan, Francis Marion University, South Carolina; Emily Golson, University of Northern Colorado; John Hollowell, University of California, Irvine; William T. Hope, Jefferson Community College, Ohio; and Holli G. Levitsky, Loyola Marymount University, California.

Nancy Praizler supplied invaluable indexing assistance. And warmest thanks to Becky Bennett, who has steered the Fourth Edition through editorial rocks and shoals with passion, wisdom, and wit—nunc dimittis.

To the Student

This book is divided into five parts and two appendices. Part One is an introduction to the natural-language attitude toward learning to write. It will acquaint you with the way the book thinks before you undertake specific writing activities, so I encourage you to read it straight through before doing anything else.

Parts Two and Three are a step-by-step walk-through of the writing process: from first thoughts through brainstorming, drafting, rethinking, organizing, stylistic polishing, and cosmetic editing. There are too many pages to read at a sitting, and you'll want to start writing before you've read it all. So read through it chapter by chapter as you write, focusing on those chapters that address places where you tend to get stuck.

Part Two covers "prewriting," all the messy, creative things a writer does to find things to write about and generate reams of text around them. Part Three assumes the creative production is largely done and it's time to evaluate, rethink, reshape, and polish. In reality, though—as the book says over and over—the creating is never done. Rewriting is much like "prewriting" all over again.

Part Four gives you advice and practice for three essay modes: personal writing, writing to inform, and argument. These chapters assume a knowledge of Parts Two and Three, so in theory you should read all of Parts Two and Three first. But your course may assign these

chapters early, so you'll end up reading them at the same time you read Part Two. In fact, everything in all of the chapters relates to everything else. So you may find yourself reading Chapter 5 and discussing writer's block at the same time you are reading Chapter 14 and trying to write an essay on your Uncle Stanley, all the time wishing you had already read Chapter 11 on eliminating wordiness, but knowing that will have to wait.

Part Four is the most fun, because that's where most of the student essays are. Each chapter has several complete essays that illustrate specific writing lessons, and each ends with a Treasury, a short collection of student essays simply to be read, enjoyed, and inspired by.

Part Five discusses the term paper, that big four-to-six-week project some of your college instructors will eventually ask you to write. Even if you're not writing a term paper in your writing class, these two chapters will help you with basic academic writing skills: how to quote; how to avoid plagiarism; how to use the library; how to cite a source and make a bibliography; and so on.

The two appendices are on special topics that have no place in the sequential logic of the writing process: essay-test taking and collaborative writing. If your course is focusing on writing for college courses, Appendix A will be of interest to you. It's also a handy thing to refer to later on in other courses. If your course is asking you to write in a collaborative team, Appendix B will be useful. If you haven't thought about writing in teams before, I hope you will look into Appendix B and let it talk you into it. In the world outside school, writing is almost always a team effort. School can help people get ready for it.

The Writers' Workshop sections at the ends of most of the chapters are different from the main text. These practical sessions are similar to the lab section of a science course: first you watch a hands-on demonstration of one of the concepts presented in the chapter, then in the section headed "Your Turn" you try it yourself. They're designed to get your hands dirty with writers' work.

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