

# **Brief Workbook for Writers**

**Second Edition**

Lennet J. Daigle

with  
Allen D. Towery

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*Georgia Southwestern College*

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

This second edition of the Brief Workbook for Writers has an interesting production history. I began revisions at about thirty thousand feet somewhere over Kansas and completed them at Tunghai University, Taichung, Taiwan, where I am spending this year as a Fulbright Lecturer.

As did its predecessor, this second edition of a Brief Workbook for Writers combines a complete discussion of composition and grammar with a large number of exercises and activities. In fact, this edition features expanded exercises throughout, along with introductory material which I hope is as succinct as possible. The exercises require that a student demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the material. Both the composition and grammar exercises encourage the student to apply the principles set forth in the preliminary discussion.

The Brief Workbook for Writers is quite useful as a concise reference text and workbook. It is designed, however, to complement the second edition of the Brief Handbook for Writers, and thus follows the organization and principles of the handbook.

For their assistance in developing this second edition, I wish to thank Phil Miller, Editor, and Martha Masterson, Editor for Humanities Supplements of the College Editorial Division of Prentice Hall.

I must also thank three extremely supportive administrators at Georgia Southwestern College: William Capitan, President; Jerry Williams, Vice-President for Academic Affairs; and James Russell, Division Chairman of Arts and Sciences. The pleasant and productive

academic environment that I enjoy is due primarily to these three professionals.

For this second edition I must also acknowledge the cooperation and support of my associates in Taiwan. The revisions undertaken at Tunghai University were largely possible because of the gracious support of Kowang Mei, President, and Ivor Shepherd, Chairman of Foreign Languages and Western Literature.

In addition, I wish to thank the Fulbright Foundation and the Foundation for Scholarly Exchange, Taiwan, for providing me with an environment and the support that made this edition possible.

It goes without saying that the unsung heroine in all of my endeavors is Amy, my wife.

Lennet Daigle

Taichung, Taiwan

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## **1 PLANNING**

The writing process begins well before one puts pen to paper. A successful writer must first understand the assignment, whether it is self-imposed (i.e., a letter of apology, a job application), given by a teacher (i.e., an essay, term paper), or required by an employer (i.e., a business memorandum, report). A good writer must also consider the style and format most appropriate both for the material and for its readers. An effective writer must also have adequate information--facts, examples, citations--with which to develop his writing.

### **1A CLARIFY YOUR PURPOSE FOR WRITING.**

Most writing seeks to entertain, persuade, or inform. The choice often depends on the intended reader as well as on the approach the writer wishes to take in dealing with his subject. As a writer, ask yourself:

Am I writing to provide information to someone?

Am I writing to express my feelings?

Am I writing to persuade someone to accept a point of view?

### **1B GATHER INFORMATION.**

After arriving at an understanding of purpose, begin to gather information related to the assignment. Sources of information include reading material, a wealth of which can be found in a library, and class

discussions; however, these sources also include our observations, experiences, and imaginings.

Through research and review you obtain information from the library or from class materials. However, you can also call forward what you already know about the subject through a process called brainstorming.

## BRAINSTORMING

Contemplate your subject.

Jot down in no particular order things related to your subject.

List concepts, examples, facts--whatever comes to mind.

Continue to write until you have listed everything you know about your subject.

## 1C NARROW THE FOCUS AND DEVELOP A PRELIMINARY THESIS STATEMENT

After contemplating your subject and gathering information, begin to develop a thesis statement. A clear thesis statement limits the topic and thus narrows the focus of the writing.

Thesis statement:

Topic + limiting statement

(Student activity funds + should not be wasted on last year's films.)

A good thesis statement avoids overly general topics, which could never be adequately discussed in an essay or research paper.

Too general: Love, Violence, Politics

Better topics: College Romances, Violence on the College Football Field, Student Conservatives

A good thesis statement also avoids topics which offer no direction for development.

Directionless: College romances are wonderful.

Violence on the football field is terrible.

Student conservatives are interesting.

Better: College romances often bring together quite different people.

Violence on the football field can sometimes carry over into other aspects of campus life.

Student conservatives are usually vocal on three issues: the economy, social reform, and world affairs.

A good thesis avoids stating the obvious, the well-known, or the insignificant. In short, a good thesis statement passes the "so what" test. If, after reading a thesis statement, your response is "so what," the thesis statement is not an effective one. A good thesis provides an interesting and specific statement about a particular topic.

#### 1D BEGIN TO ORGANIZE INFORMATION IN TERMS OF YOUR THESIS STATEMENT.

Brainstorming provides a wealth of material--some valuable, some worthless. Sort through this material to determine if it relates to the preliminary thesis. Check those points of facts that seem to suit your purpose. Then, organize and supplement your brainstorming material. If there are facts or examples that seem to suggest an implicit point, then state that point. If, on the other hand, your brainstorming has uncovered good points which have little support, then provide facts or examples for support.

This sorting and supplementing process produces a preliminary outline. An outline is a kind of road map that guides a writer through a maze of material by indicating the relation of facts to ideas and organizing the material in a way which allows a writer to plan the progress of the paper from one major point through the supporting facts and examples to another major point.

#### Preliminary Outline Format

##### Major Topic

##### I. Major point supporting the topic

Supporting facts and examples

##### II. Major point supporting the topic

Supporting facts and examples

##### III. Major point supporting the topic

Supporting facts and examples

##### Conclusion

Besides outlining, another way of sorting through the material provided by brainstorming is freewriting. This technique involves simply writing questions and statements related to the subject. The only rule of freewriting is that you continue the process until everything that needs to be down on paper is there. Freewriting is not as consciously organized as outlining. Nevertheless, it often reveals a focus, a central point, or a pattern of writing which deserves development.

1E REVIEW THE PLANNING PROCESS.

1. Understand the nature of the writing assignment.
2. Clarify your purpose for writing.
3. Gather information.
  - Research material.
  - Brainstorm.
4. Narrow the focus of the material and develop a thesis.
5. Begin to organize and supplement information by means of a preliminary outline or freewriting activities.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_

### ACTIVITY 1-1, PLANNING

Listed below are a number of thesis statements. Some of these statements are satisfactory while others are not sufficiently limited or do not provide clear enough direction to be effective thesis statements. Place an X before those statements which would be ineffective. Be prepared to explain the reason for your choice.

1. Travel is enjoyable.
2. The poor deserve attention.
3. Gun control legislation could deprive citizens of certain constitutional rights.
4. The time normally wasted watching television could be more productively spent reading, exercising, or developing a hobby.
5. People are obsessed with time.
6. Young people are too apathetic and irresponsible.
7. The Hispanic culture holds certain values which could assist people from that culture in becoming good personnel managers.
8. Computer science is the best major.
9. Football has become a major source of funds and a major expense for colleges.
10. Most immigrants help the country.
11. The student alcoholic usually ends up failing in more ways than one.
12. Bad movies should be banned.
13. Fraternities and sororities can provide important social support for the new student.
14. High schools are too easy.
15. Faddish diets are often expensive and unhealthy.
16. Pornography is a disgrace.

17. What can a person learn from getting married too young?
18. There are two kinds of beauty: a superficial physical beauty and an intrinsic moral beauty.
19. Minority groups have advanced.
20. History is a difficult subject which requires a particular knowledge of facts as well as understanding of human character.
21. Living in New York provides cultural, educational, and professional opportunities which can be found in few other places.
22. A nuclear war would be devastating.
23. My best friend is truly humorous.
24. Most humor is based on incongruity.
25. Courage is a wonderful thing.



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_

### ACTIVITY 1-2, PLANNING

For each of the following general topics, provide a clear thesis statement.

Example: Beauty pageants: Although often criticized as sexist,  
beauty pageants can teach leadership and provide professional  
opportunities to contestants.

1. Women's rights \_\_\_\_\_

2. Cities \_\_\_\_\_

3. Career goals \_\_\_\_\_

4. Crime \_\_\_\_\_

5. Writing and speaking ability \_\_\_\_\_

6. Illegal drugs \_\_\_\_\_

7. Public education \_\_\_\_\_

8. Marriage \_\_\_\_\_

9. Pollution \_\_\_\_\_