

The background of the cover is an abstract, painterly composition. It features swirling, organic shapes in shades of dark green, blue, and black, with some lighter, almost white, areas that suggest light reflecting off a textured surface. The overall effect is one of depth and movement, reminiscent of a close-up of a natural form like a rock or a piece of fabric.

Eugene R. Hammond

**INFORMATIVE
WRITING**



INFORMATIVE WRITING



EUGENE R. HAMMOND

University of Maryland

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INFORMATIVE WRITING

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*To my partners
in crime:
Ann Allen, Lucy Schultz,
Carolyn Hill, Betsy Cohn,
Sally Glover, Rosalie Gancie,
and the writing staff
at College Park*



Preface

Informative Writing tries to approach the writing course from the students' point of view. It tries to recognize areas where students are willing to work hard and also areas that they are tired of repeating. Its most distinguishing feature is that it emphasizes writing activities rather than explanations. Recent research and my experience suggest that students learn and remember more from "workshop" classes, where they are busy writing and helping each other with writing, than they do in either "lecture" or "discussion" classes, in which they read and discuss model essays or chapters from a textbook. The most unusual chapter in the book is the chapter on grammar, "Sentence Sense," which teaches students grammar and punctuation through their construction of their own sentences.

The chapters are broken down as follows:

Chapter 1: "Where Do We Start?" This chapter consists of various exercises that help students determine what they value in "good" writing and then compare what they value with the standards of their teacher and their classmates. It also tries to get students to think about why they're taking this course.

Chapter 2: "Telling Details." This chapter will send students out searching for details which can tell the reader something. Such a search is essential early in the semester if we expect our students to write specifically. The chapter is based largely on Ken Macrorie's ideas about telling facts (in *Telling Writing*), but it applies the principle of telling facts to all forms of writing—not just narration and description.

Chapter 3: "Facts, Inferences, and Theses." This chapter includes several exercises in the most crucial skills for a writer distinguishing facts from inferences, and then drawing inferences from facts. Students will learn through this chapter how to use fact-inference pairs as a prewriting technique and how to use inferences as tools for organizing a paper.

Chapter 4: "Writing for a Reader." This chapter tries to get students to picture a reader as they write. It includes several examples of writing, mostly in some

inflated, vague, or “official” style. Students are asked to choose which writers they’d like to hear more from. Then they are shown several ways (including timed writing) that they can use to develop a confident voice.

Chapter 5: “Organization I: Writing Systematically.” This chapter focuses on a week-long exercise of practice in the so-called *rhetorical modes* (definition, cause-effect, problem-solution, comparison-contrast, etc.). It emphasizes the use of these strategies as tools for making your thinking clear to your reader. It concludes with a brief explanation of how useful these organizational strategies can be when writing essay exams.

Chapter 6: “Organization II: Paragraphing, Introductions, and Conclusions.” This chapter consists almost entirely of exercises designed to help students develop both a conscious and an intuitive sense of how best to handle these three important writers’ problems.

Chapter 7: “Thinking.” This chapter, which is not related to any specific assignment and could have been placed anywhere in the book, is meant to remind students of the crucial importance to a writer of curiosity, reflection, and creativity. Several exercises are included which encourage students to make connections, and distinctions, judgments, and to qualify assertions.

Chapter 8: “Sentence Sense.” This chapter tries to teach students practical punctuation and the use of different grammatical forms for varying emphasis. It includes sentence-imitation and sentence-building exercises which teachers can easily modify or supplement depending on their students’ individual needs. This chapter can be used as appropriate throughout the semester. It is placed in the middle of the book to make reference to it easier and to remind students that grammar, though not the end-all of writing, is more than merely matter for an appendix.

Chapter 9: “Persuasion.” This chapter tries to explain induction and deduction in practical ways so that students can make use of them. It also introduces the terms *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* as critical standards that students can apply to writing. All writing, I believe, is persuasive, but specifically persuasive techniques are more necessary when one’s readers are not inclined to agree. The chapter contains several questions and exercises that get students to think about what the best strategies are for persuading others. I remind students that many of the best arguments are not overtly arguments, and I explain Carl Rogers’ theory that care for one’s reader makes successful persuasion possible.

Chapter 10: “The Writing Process.” This chapter begins by asking students to describe their writing processes in different circumstances—when they are writing an assignment, when they are writing for fun, when they are proud of what they write, and when they hate writing. It then includes descriptions of the

writing process and portions of descriptions—from a filmmaker, a sculptor, and both student and professional writers.

Chapter 11: “Revision.” This chapter contains several flawed student essays for students to practice revision on. It also tries to teach rethinking, reorganization, and further research, as well as tightening and making word choice more precise, as typical revision strategies.

Chapter 12: “Reading.” This chapter includes practice in reading comprehension, but not simply comprehension of “the main points.” It encourages students to be alert to matters of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*, or what we might call voice, substance, and attitude toward the reader. It repeats some of the lessons of finding facts and drawing inferences that were practiced in Chapter 3. It will help students learn how to write papers about works of literature.

Chapter 13: “Research.” This chapter includes exercises to be undertaken in any library to show students the often odd and lively sources of information that they usually neglect when they head dutifully for the card catalog. It also includes advice about the use of the new MLA guidelines for parenthetical references and lists of “Works Cited.”

Chapter 14: “Interviewing.” The exercises in this chapter get the students used to collecting information from other people. Once they master this skill, they will have a much greater fund of information from which to draw when they write.

Chapter 15: “Suggested Assignments.” This chapter includes ten assignments, explained in a way that helps students proceed systematically, from which a teacher may choose or adapt as many as he or she finds use and time for. All assignments require research—of people, of places, or of books and artifacts. No assignment can be done in a student’s room the night before it’s due. The assignments can easily be adapted to the interests of various programs, personal interests, and student abilities.

Chapter 16: “What Next?” This chapter tries to get students to take stock of what they’ve learned and to think about how they will go about improving their own writing after they leave this course.

The advantages of this text over others are as follows:

1. The students practice everything, so they internalize more of what they learn.
2. The papers encourage observation, selection, and judgment: skills which will be necessary in any writing situation students later find themselves in.
3. Students finish the course knowing enough grammar to be literate representatives of our universities and community colleges, but they learn through practice and not through analysis.

4. Students read more flawed work than they do models, so they are encouraged to develop their critical abilities.
5. Students most often write about subjects that they know more about than their teachers; consequently, they produce work that they're proud of, and they come to like writing.
6. Teachers using this book, after first becoming acquainted with it, need to do far less preparation, since so many useful exercises are provided, and much emphasis is placed on students taking responsibility for their work into their own hands. This leaves teachers free to devote their energy to reading and responding to finished student papers, which is itself challenging and time-consuming work.
7. The text tries to understand and acknowledge the attitudes that both teachers and students have toward required writing courses. It doesn't pretend that we all love this work, but it does show how we can learn more about it and at the same time enjoy it much more than we ordinarily do.

As Instructor's Manual, available from McGraw-Hill, provides guidelines for the use of all the exercises in this book.

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I'd like to thank the many teachers and editors (in addition to those I've cited in the text) who have helped to improve this work with their examples, their suggestions, and their goodwill. Just because each name is buried in this long list doesn't mean that I don't feel particularly grateful in each case: Phil Butcher, Laura Berkshire, Jim Belser, George Dillon, Jeanne Fahnestock, Michael Marcuse, Betty Day, Carleton Jackson, Sara Edinger, Donna Coyle, Nancy Smith, Sheryl Witkin, Betsy Cohn, Joyce Middleton, Greta Coen, Tom Berninghausen, Trudi Walsh, John Hyman, Theresa DePaolo, Dody Parris, Kristy Beattie, Gail Rossman, Tom Cole, Aimee Doyle, Lucy Schultz, Carolyn Hill, Jane O'Brien, Kathy Riley, Nancy Runion, Kathleen Burke, Tom Moore, Tom Holbrook, Jade Gorman, Patti Rosenberg, Cristina Cheplik, Michael Forschler, Joe Miller, Bobbie Daniels, Margo Hammond, Rebecca Butler, Dan Keranen, Rae Rosenthal, Rowena Cross, Vic Caroscio, Jane McGettrick, Gerry Higgins, Jeanne Marie Etkins, Dragana Perovic, Chenliang Sheng, Pat Noone, Alice Tracy, Kofi Aidoo, Judy Kreger, Douglas Meyers, Ed James, Mary Kay Jordan, Sara Mate, Matthew Wong, Mack Siddoris, Jud Sage, Craig Stoltz, Monika Bilby, Marsha Markman, Anasuya Basu, Margaret Della Torre, Nikhilesh Banerjee, Alba Ben-Barka, Harry Crosby, Richard Marius, Virginia Beauchamp, Leigh Ryan, Betsey Blakeslee, Robert Coogan, Beth Lambert, Brian McLaren, Susan Rosen, Joyce Joyce, Leonard King, Emily Barrosse, Susan Kleimann, Mary Jane Hurst, Bobby Fong, Ernest Fontana, Blair Halsey, Geneva Parker, Nancy McCracken, Jack Folsom, Albert Labriola, Ronald Maxwell, Gratia Murphy, David Rankin, Jim Dodd, and R. Baird Shuman.

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1



Where Do We Start?

Rhetoric . . . should be the study of misunderstanding and its remedies.

I. A. Richards

Writing is an art that requires more soul and sweat than I'm willing to give.

student

2 Informative Writing

Welcome to a course in the practice of writing. If you don't have them already, pick up, in the next day or two, a pen you like to write with and plenty of paper you like to write on. (In this book, I'll call whatever paper you use your "notebook.") These, along with a typewriter or perhaps a word processor, are the tools of our trade. With these tools in the next several weeks, you can expect to improve your writing in at least sixteen ways:

1. You'll become more observant.
2. You'll become an avid collector and user of telling details.
3. You'll learn how to find what you need or want in a library.
4. You'll learn how to organize any chaotic pile of information.
5. You'll become confident (if you aren't already) about your grammar.
6. You'll master the use of commas, semicolons, dashes, and periods.
7. You'll learn to make every sentence in your writing count.
8. You'll learn to write so that your readers can learn easily from you.
9. You'll learn to paragraph in a way that makes reading easier for your readers.
10. You'll learn to link your sentences smoothly.
11. You'll learn how to rethink and revise your first drafts.
12. You'll learn how to write effective introductions and conclusions.
13. You'll learn to write effectively to unsympathetic readers.
14. You'll learn to write with a voice that readers can recognize as yours.
15. You'll learn to write clear essays in class under pressure.
16. You'll learn to compare writing with other forms of communication such as talking, photography, and filmmaking.

You can accomplish all this even if, like most of us, you don't especially like to write. But there is one condition: that you *want* to improve your writing. If you don't want to learn, you might as well drop the course now, sell this book back, get into another course, and come back another semester when you're ready. You can succeed in this course if you're shaky about your grammar or if you think your writing is awkward. You can succeed if you think your aptitude is not for English but for engineering or computers. But if you're not curious, if you're not patient, if you're not willing to work hard, or if you're only taking this course because it is a requirement, you may have real trouble with it. The work load in this course is going to

fall not on your teacher but on you. Neither your teacher nor this book can tell you how to write better. You must decide for yourself that *you* want to improve. If you write badly now, it's not because you are not intelligent but because you haven't been *attentive* about improving your writing. That attention is where we want to start.

You can't learn to write if you don't want to learn. You also can't learn to write by studying about writing. You learn to write by writing (and by *thinking* while you write—if you don't learn something in the process of writing a paper, your reader isn't likely to learn anything in reading it). In this class you will try to produce writing that you and your teacher and your classmates can genuinely admire. Much of your progress as a writer will come from practice—repeated papers in this class and others, repeated essay exams in this class and others, (and later, perhaps) repeated application letters that fail to get you a job, repeated memos that are sent back once you do get a job. You can practice writing—and gain some understanding of yourself—any time you like by writing letters or by keeping a journal of your dreams, your conflicts, your decisions. But you can also practice, in this class, by writing assigned papers for your teacher and for your classmates and by doing the exercises suggested in this book.

Exercises enable you to practice and develop skills one or two at a time until all the skills become part of your intuitive resources, thus improving your writing performance and giving you greater confidence as a writer. All the assignments, discussions, readings, and writing you do in this course will go into building your writing intuitions—intuitions for how to begin, how to organize, how to please your readers, and so on. Writing is a complex task which requires everything from getting your spelling right to making your voice distinctive enough to be heard. Writing any new assignment requires a combination of thought, hard work, and intuition; the more you can rely on intuition for, the more energy you have left for thinking about matters that are really new.

One of the most profitable ways to build up your intuitions is to read—or at least show—your writing to others. When you do so, listen to what people suggest. See how many options you have. As the semester progresses, you'll learn new options from your teacher, from your classmates, from me, and from your increasingly good judgment. Your progress in developing both writing ability and confidence will be gradual but substantial.

In this course you will not simply be delivering enough gradable noise on paper for your teacher to correct. Every paper will require you not just to arrange materials but to think. No paper will be able to be written the night before it's due. You'll be thinking and taking notes about your subject from the day each paper is assigned. Also, you'll be trying to learn much more about writing than simply how to develop a good "style." You'll find that collecting information, sorting it out, and drawing conclusions from it are the most crucial writing skills. If you learn to present pertinent information

4 Informative Writing

clearly, you'll find that you have developed, without even trying to, your own style. From the start, information will be your best friend. The more information you have, the better a paper you can write. But once you have selected the information you most want to pass on, you may find yourself becoming concerned about your writing as a craft. You'll find yourself wanting to present the information you've selected as well as you possibly can. You'll develop your own standards of what way is best with your teacher's help, with the help of your classmates, and with the help of the advice in this book.

This book contains very few rules. If you think you'll do well in college or in life (or in writing) by following rules, you're mistaken. There are guidelines for most situations, writing or otherwise, but success lies in making the most of the options you have within these guidelines. Some so-called *rules* of writing were merely fashions which are now as dead as men's wigs: "Never begin a sentence with *and* or *but*"; "Never end a sentence with a preposition"; "Never split an infinitive." Other "rules" of writing ("Grab the attention of your readers"; "Outline everything you write") are merely rules of thumb: they are useful in many cases, but certainly not in all. The key to good writing is not learning to follow rules but learning what your choices are—choices in tone, in words, in paragraphing, in punctuation. Throughout this course you'll practice making choices. Your teacher and your classmates may make other choices than you make. Pay attention to the choices of the others. And examine at the same time your own choices. Yours may be better in some cases. Theirs may be better in others. But by the end of the semester, you ought to have an excellent sense of how varied your choices are.

Throughout this book, I'll stop talking to you as often as possible to give you time to try exercises that will help develop your thinking about writing. You may interpret the heads that introduce these exercises as invitations to skip over to my next comments. If you do, though, you'll be squandering the money and effort you've invested in this course. My thoughts about writing may stay with you for six months (an optimistic estimate); but your thoughts about writing, as you discover them in these exercises, will stay with you for life.

Exercise 1-1

All of you are starting this course with different writing strengths and different writing weaknesses. So before we can begin sensibly to work on improvement, we have to find out what your current writing abilities are. Perhaps you feel confident about your writing; more likely you do not. To let your teacher know your strengths and your weaknesses, *write*—as well as you can within the limitations of twenty-five minutes and beginning-of-a-course nerves—a *page or two in your notebook about your training in English to this point and about what kind of writer you now are as a result of that training.*

- Be as specific as possible.