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*Writing as Thinking
Thinking as Writing*

Second Edition

WAYNE C. BOOTH
MARSHALL W. GREGORY

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THE HARPER & ROW RHETORIC

WRITING AS THINKING
THINKING AS WRITING

SECOND EDITION

Wayne C. Booth

The University of Chicago

Marshall W. Gregory

Butler University

 HarperCollins *Publishers*

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Preface

We have long been convinced that the required first-year writing course in “English composition” or “rhetoric,” under whatever name, can provide the most important of all college experiences. What happens in this course will largely determine not only whether students survive beyond the first year but whether as they continue they will have a growing commitment to a college education as something worth having. If in their first college writing course they have *learned how to learn*, if they have learned how to read and think and write on their own, if they have learned the joys of such learning, they will almost certainly continue to educate themselves from that point on. If instead they have experienced just one more effort to purge their language of errors, or just one more “service course” geared to get them through the world without reproach, they are likely to remember us teachers—if they remember us at all—as the police force or service staff that we have allowed ourselves to be.

The course is important to teachers as well. What we do in it will determine whether we continue to work with beginning students at all or instead retreat, out of boredom or burnout, to less pedagogically demanding, more discipline-specific courses “upstairs”—or even to some other profession. Unless we can say that each term’s work has been a further step in our own education, at least as challenging and profitable to us as to our students, we will have every reason to follow our many colleagues who now escape the first-year writing course at the first opportunity.

With this view of the course as an important part of the education of both teachers and students, we have tried to construct a guidebook that will be challenging and rewarding for both. (You will note how the collective “we” suddenly becomes here just we two, Wayne Booth and Marshall Gregory, lifetime teachers of the first-year required course, the “we” who will accompany the student throughout the rest of the course.) Without slighting any of the “mere skills” that every student must finally master, we have sought to provide at every point an answer, sometimes explicit but more often implicit, to the twin questions that all successful writers must finally answer: “Why am I doing this? Why should I bother to do it better?” (In addition, we have also included, for teachers only, an Instructor’s Manual that provides both an introduction to teaching and an introduction to the discipline. We hope that many teachers, especially new or inexperienced ones, will find the Manual useful.)

In re-thinking the aims of the first-year writing course as an important step in both the student's and teacher's education, and in considering what this view might require of us, we have found ourselves re-thinking much of what we had taken for granted in our past teaching. Our results, either in the first edition or in this extensively revised version, cannot be summarized briefly; they are best reflected in the systematic organization of the book and in the design of reading and writing assignments within each chapter. Here we can only summarize the more important assumptions and practices that we hope you will share with us as you proceed through the course.

The most important assumption, as our subtitle suggests, undergirds both our overall organization and what we say within each section: any writing worth devoting a life to is inseparable from thinking. Writing well is just *thought directed toward some purpose, conducted in the company of postulated readers*. We suggest throughout, obliquely and directly, that writing is one of our best ways—perhaps our very best way—of addressing real problems, whether in academic subjects, out in “the real world,” or in our private lives. The only possible rivals are talking together and private cogitation, and both of these are almost always closely tied to, if not actually dependent on, writing and reading that occur either before or after talking or meditating. It is true, of course, that some sort of distinctively human culture is conceivable without writing—after all, writing was invented only “quite recently” in the long span of history. But no one can hope to join in the conversations typical of modern times without mastering the special kinds of conversation that take place only in writing.

Whatever writing may have been when invented—perhaps no more than a tool for remembering or for balancing the books—its mastery has long since become essential for anyone hoping to engage in the special kind of reflective, *premeditated* talk that still to an astonishing degree dominates our culture, even in the age of video. Obviously some individuals and cultures have managed to live without writing; some modern theorists have even suggested that we would all be better off if we could break free of its restrictions on spontaneous expression. But we are committed here to the assumption that everyone in our society should experience the liberations that depend on writing: that special kind of discourse available only to those who take time to *think* about their talk, to try out their words, to take them back after reflection, to experiment with rival words (and thoughts), and thus to trim and shape their utterances before launching them into the world.

To see writing as a kind of thinking, to see it as our most important mental discipline, is to see it as a far more complex and important undertaking than most prominent writing doctors suggest. Most obviously, mastering it cannot be reduced simply to learning about words. The writer must indeed learn how to use words; no one has ever denied that. But the reduction of rhetoric to word laundering will almost certainly leave the budding writer with little or nothing to say. Even when writing is taught mainly as “style,” and is thus elevated to the study of how to achieve an appropriate or powerful “voice” or “character” or “ethos,” it is still unlikely to answer certain prior questions: “Why bother?” “To what end?” “So what?” We have put the “so what?” kind of question up front. *What* do you say, to *whom*, and *why*? Such questions lead the writer to think first and always about

purpose, audience, and the invention of substantive content; these are what will control, and often complicate, every stylistic choice.

What they require of the writer can never be reduced to any simple nostrum based on some fragment torn from the rhetoric scene: the process, the product (traditionally called the “speech”), the writer’s experience and “ethos” (traditionally the “speaker”), or simple success with readers (traditionally “audience” or “hearer”). Resisting such reduction, we have stressed throughout our book the complex rhetorical stance attained by every thinking writer.

Audience. Every writer will of course hope to succeed, and success can always be described as some form of “persuasion” worked on some audience. But the writer-as-thinker will not simply sell readers whatever they’re most ready to buy. We have stressed throughout the importance of writers taking into account that special internalized audience that can produce hard thought in the composition process: those counter-voices, the “opposition,” and what they might have to say. Any writing program that pretends to be at the heart of education must surely stress a genuine meeting of minds, rather than mere victory over the opposition.

Subject, Substance, Truth, Logic. Every writer ought to respect whatever truth his or her thought has dealt with or led to; to ignore truth for triumph is to deserve the bad name that “rhetoric” has often suffered. But the writer-as-thinker will always think about what postulated readers are likely to need, if they are to grasp whatever substance is being offered. Again the counter-voices within become one major guide to what should be said—especially when, in revising, they well up in opposition to what seemed clear in a first draft.

Speaker, Self, Ethos. Every writer should recognize that all writing is in a sense the “invention” or “discovery” of an “ethos” or character different from the one that existed before writing; the writer creates or re-creates a “self” at every turn. But the writer-as-thinker will never see that created self as existing in isolation from other selves, will never see it as belligerently indifferent to all purposes except self-exploration and display, and will never see it as unconcerned about whether readers profit or not. Rhetoric as thought-in-dialogue replaces simple privateering.

Each of the three elements in every rhetorical exchange—speaker, speech, hearer—is so important that it can generate oversimplified rhetorical programs that claim to present the one true road to writing success. Our combination of what is valuable in each of them may at first seem unduly complex, especially when compared with various sloganized versions of rhetoric now on our national scene. But we hope that it will finally lead you and your class to a deeper kind of clarity. By placing audience, purpose, and invention at the center of every writing effort, students should be led to the kind of thinking that will make them want to revise—and in our view that is the secret of progress in this infinitely difficult art.

To summarize, then:

Writers can never write effectively until they learn to work for clarity about audience and purpose.

The process of invention, the thoughtful search for substantive appeals in

support of purposes, is not simply a search for icing on the cake, as it became in some Renaissance theorists, but is the very heart of the matter: the search, through thoughtful re-vision, for better thoughts.

All of the other possible topics in the teaching of writing—design, tone, voice, figures of speech, types of reasoning, logical fallacies, product versus process, research and so on—are best worked on in the light of the invention dictated by concern for audience and purpose.

Finally, all of the variables, including even purpose, will shift and alter as the writer engages in an essentially never-ending process: re-viewing, re-thinking, re-shaping in an inherently spiral effort to improve.

Though we do not discuss current controversies or classical theorists directly, we hope that both specialists and beginners will find that our approach capitalizes on the best insights of the major contenders. Theory and research have much to teach us all, but we have yet to find any one theory that provides all that an aspiring teacher might profit from knowing. It is conceivable that someone someday will, through research, discover and demonstrate some one right way to teach writing, suitable for all teachers and classrooms. But meanwhile each of us must work to translate theories and research results into our best pedagogical practice. Every teacher faces certain immediate and highly practical questions: "Which issues do I focus on first and most persistently?" "Where do I go next?" "How do I help students get from *here* to *there*?" "How do I sustain their motivation through weeks of hard work and frequently discouraging results?" "How can I transform a potentially deadening exercise like the 'research paper' into an engaging educational enterprise?" By keeping such questions at the center, *The Harper & Row Rhetoric*, Second Edition, attempts to make practical, rhetorical sense both to you as teacher and to your students reading it on their own.

When we began the rethinking that such questions led to, we were somewhat jarred to discover just how many of our previous views about writing had been borrowed and essentially untested, and how few had been thought through in the light of what other teachers believed. The subsequent years of work, including now the three years of living with and revising the first edition, have not led to a rejection of every opinion we once held dear. But we have found that our own practice illustrates our claims about how writing depends on thinking, thinking that leads to endless revision. The first edition listed ten "reviewers" who had helped us, with their reading of manuscript, to think through several drafts. In its preface we said, "We assume that much that we say will have to be revised later. . . . But we have tried to think every issue afresh, and we will, of course, welcome suggestions from those who discover the book's weaknesses." Many teachers and students, some enthusiastically favorable, some lukewarm, have responded to that invitation, and we have now been led—sometimes with the pain that comes from tough negative criticism—to revise considerably more than half of the first edition. The essentials of the original purpose and structure are not radically changed, but we now see many ways in which our first presentation obscured—and sometimes even violated—our aims. Some of the original essay assignments, for example, were of the purposeless kind that we thought we were

combatting. Much of our talk about language now seems to us to have been simply borrowed, with insufficient thought, from what our own teachers had said to us years ago. Our original "seven basic questions" have come to seem not quite basic enough: they are now six, with only four of the originals remaining roughly as they were.

Though some of these and other changes are substantive, most have been in response to our growing awareness of ways in which the text did not explain its own principles and design with sufficient force and clarity. The progression through the six questions, and the emphasis on how they can be used as guides from first to never-final drafts, are now much clearer—so clear indeed that some readers are sure to think we've overdone the repetition.

In this draft we have worked even harder than before to make our thinking accessible to students as they read on their own. We have more consistently addressed them directly, expunging those moments when we lapsed into issues that concern only professionals. We have risked not only open utilitarian claims about the importance of learning to write but also the more difficult claims about the intrinsic value of writing-as-thinking. Though we know that many beginning students will at first be deeply skeptical about the joys of writing, we hope to persuade them that as "word creatures," they can not only find an intrinsic pleasure in writing well but also create for themselves new "selves" down the line.

The "student" we address does not, we know, come ready-made for such purposes. As teachers we have experienced at first hand students' refusal to embrace, especially in a required course, much of what all serious teachers care about. In the effort to give you the material you need for classroom demonstration of what good writing looks like, we have provided scores of examples. In coming to savor these, even the most "average" student can move from hostility to an eager embrace of a lifetime project.

The project will work, however, only if the student is responding at every point not just orally but in writing, writing that is not confined to the formal weekly essay assignments. Perhaps the strongest testimonies we have ever heard on behalf of any writing course have been in favor of those rare courses that require a "paper a day." Few teachers today with standard current teaching loads could survive a daily batch of papers, but we have suggested a substitute way of ensuring that students perform the regular exercise that will get them going and keep them going. We suggest—and we urge you to insist on—daily "free writing," writing that need not be handed in and that will usually not be done in class. We also sprinkle the text liberally with "Notebook Entries," assignments that ask the student to talk back to us, as it were—sometimes in words actually addressed to ours, more often simply with jottings that relate to our suggestions. Whether you ever look at these or not, the skills and concepts encountered in them should feed into the students' more "official" essays.

In a further attempt to engage students we address them directly throughout. Though we cannot pretend to know their current interests or to address them "personally" (like those "personal" junk mailings), we have sought a tone that draws them into the project: nothing kills good writing faster than the students' sense that is it not *their* project but only ours. Our choice in this matter may

occasionally lead you to feel shut out of a dialogue among Booth, Gregory, and the students. If you are a beginning teacher—and a majority of those who teach this course are in their first year or two of teaching—you may for a time worry about whether we leave you enough to do. That worry will pass quickly with even a month or two of experience: though we have *tried* to make the book self-teaching (“user-friendly”?), we know from our own classroom disasters that the success of every course depends finally and radically on the teacher more than on any text or idea.

From all this it should be clear that we work here with something like a notion of “cultural literacy as the road to education.” But the cultural literacy needed by every student is much richer than can be approached through any list of canonized terms, titles, or nuggets of isolated information. Students who engage with this text should come to see, even if dimly, that the quality of the world they will live in will be determined in large part by the quality of the discourse they can share with the other citizens of that world. It is true that some kinds of writing are in one sense purely private—reserved for the eyes of the writer alone. Such writing may seem to produce no effects on the world beyond the writer’s ego. But even the most private jotting is in a sense already “social,” since the writer’s self has already been largely constituted by “talk” with others. And most writing is more visibly social than that: it is public writing addressed to someone the author hopes will read it. All such writing, from presidential reports to student essays, carries potential power to shape the world by influencing the opinions and feelings of others.

If we can help students to see clearly that this rhetorical point is also a moral and political point—that the way they write is ultimately a moral and political act—they will see that the stake they have in learning goes far beyond merely making grades, earning money, or having a superficial repertory of “knowledge” useful for cocktail conversations. And once they see that, they will be on a path that leads beyond anything you, or we, or anyone, can chart for them.

Finally we would like to express our gratitude to those reviewers who have led us, in a sense *forced* us, with their criticism, into the thinking that yields this revision:

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Wayne Booth
Marshall Gregory



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