



*Toby Fulwiler*

*The*  
**WORKING  
WRITER**

*Second Edition*

1998 MLA  
Guidelines  
Included

# THE WORKING WRITER

SECOND EDITION



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## Preface

I have now taught with *The Working Writer* for three years in my own first-year writing classes. I've been gratified with the way the book teaches and the way the students respond. They don't find the book's voice or ideas stuffy. They don't feel talked down to. What they especially like are the voices of other students in the first chapter talking about writing in honest and open ways. And they like the reoccurrence of those voices throughout the later chapters of the text as well.

Students often single out the chapters on journals, research, or revision, telling me "Now journals makes sense," or "I've never thought of research this way before," or "Revising all the time with new approaches is almost fun." This pleases me as both author and teacher. Writing should be sensible, practical, and fun more often than mysterious, rule-bound, and difficult.

In *The Working Writer* my goal in this edition as well as last, has been to demystify the seemingly arcane rules of academic writing and simplify the way good writing gets done. And to do so in a friendly and approachable voice. As I said in my first edition, this book is especially suitable for teachers who enjoy teaching writing as a messy, unpredictable, and joyful process, and who enjoy reading the many drafts of student writing, which sometimes exhibits all these qualities at once!

The main reason for writing a second edition at this time is the virtual explosion of electronic information sources—especially the Internet—which are substantial and easily accessible by all students who own personal computers or have access to networked computers on their college campuses. The research sections of *The Working Writer* now contain up-to-date information on how to find and document such sources.

I've also added a chapter called "Exploring Identity" after having such tremendous success with several assignments asking first-year students as well as seniors to examine who they are, where they came from, and where they're going by writing personal profiles and language autobiographies. The secret to making these personal assignments substantial and insightful is the addition of strong research dimensions (now a version of self based on historical artifacts) and provocative revision suggestions (now a version written in prose snapshots without transitions).

Since my own classes have generated some wonderful writing these past several years, I've also added new samples of student writing—both excerpts and full essays—in almost every chapter. Also included are more complete explanations of "Writing Portfolios" including story portfolios and student-published "Class Books," and a reference

section on the APA documentation system, which was inadvertently left out of the first edition.

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge the continued stimulation and ideas I receive all the time from my writing students at the University of Vermont, in both first-year and advanced classes. Thanks to my colleague Sue Dinitz, who not only teaches with *The Working Writer* herself but teaches our graduate students to teach with it as well. Thanks to my daughter, Anna, for teaching me to prepare web pages. Thanks to the following reviewers who helped guide my revisions: John Madritch, Lehigh University; Dan Holt, Lansing Community College; Ernest J. Smith, University of Central Florida; and Thomas Hamel, Black Hawk College. Thanks to my new editorial team of Leah Jewell and Patricia Castiglione for being quick studies and wise counsels. And always thanks to Laura for putting up with a writer's often solitary ways.

Toby Fulwiler

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PART ONE



# WRITING TO LEARN

1. College Writing
2. College Reading
3. College Journals





# Chapter 1

## College Writing

*I am the absolute worst writer. I will never forget when I had to write my college essay. I thought it was good and then I brought it downstairs to have my parents read it and they tore it apart. By the time they were finished with it, I had to rewrite it five times. I was so mad, but the weird part was, the final copy was exactly what I wanted to say. They had to tear it out of me.*

JESSICA

*I like to write. Writers are nothing more than observant, perceptive, descriptive people.*

PAT

**Y**ou can count on one thing, attending college means writing papers—personal and critical essays in English, book reviews and reports in history, research reports in psychology and sociology, position papers in political science, lab reports in biology, and so on. Some of these assignments will be similar to those you’ve done in high school, some will be new, and all will be demanding.

When I asked a recent class of first-year college students to talk about themselves as writers, several began by describing their habits and attitudes: John, for example, said he wrote best “under pressure,” while Kevin wanted to write at his own pace, on his own time, and “hated deadlines.” Becky preferred writing when she “felt strongly or was angry about something,” Doug when the assignment “asked for something personal,” but Lisa enjoyed writing any paper so long as the “assignment was clear and fair.”

Other students talked about where and when they wrote. Amy, for example, said she did most of her writing “listening to classical music and, if it is a nice day, under trees.” Jennifer felt “most comfortable writing on her bed and being alone.” Dan said he could write anywhere, so long as he had “a good computer,” and José, “as long as it was after midnight.” In fact, there proved to be as many different perspectives on being a writer as there were students in the class.

### WHY IS WRITING HARD?

Even professional authors admit that writing is not easy. In writing this book, I encountered numerous problems, from organizing material to writing clearly to finding time and meeting publication deadlines. What, I wondered, did first-year college writers find

difficult about writing? Were their problems similar to or different from mine? Here is what they told me:

*Jennifer*: "I don't like being told what to write about."

*Amy*: "I never could fulfill the page requirements. My essays were always several pages shorter than they were supposed to be."

*Jill*: "I always have trouble starting off a paper . . . and I hate it when I think I've written a great paper and I get a bad grade. It's so discouraging and I don't understand what I wrote wrong."

*Omar*: "Teachers are always nitpicking about little things, but I think writing is for communication, not nitpicking. I mean, if you can read it and it makes sense, what else do you want?"

*Cara*: "I hate revising. I had this teacher in high school who insisted we rewrite every paper over and over again, and that got really boring. Once I've said what I have to say, I don't have anything else to say."

*Mike*: "If I'm in a bad mood or don't have the right beginning, I find myself stumbling and not giving a hoot about whether it's right or not."

*Kennon*: "Putting thoughts down on paper as they are in your mind is the hardest thing to do. It is like in music—to make the guitar make the sound you imagine in your head, to make the words on the page paint the picture in your head."

I wasn't surprised by these answers, since I, too, remember wondering: What did teachers want? How long was enough? How do you get thoughts into words? Why all the nitpicking?

## ✍️ WRITING 1

What do you find difficult about writing? Do you have a problem finding subjects to write about? Or do you have trouble getting motivated? Or does something about the act of writing itself cause problems for you? Explain in your own words by writing quickly for five minutes without stopping.

## ✍️ WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT WRITING?

Though any writer will tell you writing isn't easy, most will also describe it as interesting and exciting. So I asked our first-year students what it was about writing that gave them pleasure.

*Jolene*: "If I have a strong opinion on a topic, it makes it so much easier to write a paper."

*Rebecca*: "On occasion I'm inspired by a wonderful idea. Once I get going, I actually enjoy writing a lot."

*Casey*: "I enjoy most to write about my experiences, both good and bad. I like to write about things when I'm upset—it makes me feel better."

*Darren*: "I guess my favorite kind of writing is letters. I get to be myself and just talk in them."

Like my students, I prefer to write about topics that inspire or interest me, and we find personal writing such as letters especially easy, interesting, and enjoyable.

## **WRITING 2: EXPLORATION**

What kind of writing do you most enjoy doing? What do you like about it: Communicating? Exploring a subject? Playing with words? Something else?

## **WHAT SURPRISES ARE IN STORE?**

At the same time I was teaching these first-year students, I was also teaching an advanced writing seminar to seniors. Curious about their attitudes toward writing, I asked them: "What has surprised you the most about writing in college?"

*Scott:* "Papers aren't as hellish as I was told they'd be. In fact, I've actually enjoyed writing a lot of them—especially after they were done."

*Aaron:* "My style has changed a lot. Rather than becoming more complex, it's become simpler."

*Kerry:* "The most surprising and frustrating thing has been the different reactions I've received from different professors."

*Rob:* "I'm always being told that my writing is superficial. That I come up with good ideas but don't develop them."

*John:* "The tutor at our writing lab took out a pair of scissors and said I would have to work on organization. Then she cut up my paper and taped it back together a different way. This really made a difference, and I've been using this method ever since."

*Chrissie:* "Sharing papers with other students is very awkward for me. But it's extremely beneficial when I trust and like my group, when we all relax enough to talk honestly about one another's papers."

As you can see, most advanced students found ways to cope with and enjoy college writing. Several reported satisfying experiences sharing writing with each other. I'm sorry that some students, even in their last year, could not figure out what their instructors wanted—there *are* ways to do that.

## **WRITING 3: EXPLORATION**

Think about your experience with writing in the last school you attended. What surprised you—pleasantly or not—about the experience? What did you learn or not learn?

### ☞ WHY IS WRITING SO IMPORTANT?

I also asked these advanced students why, in their last year, they had enrolled in an elective writing class. "What made the subject so important to you?"

*Kim:* "I have an easier time expressing myself through writing. When I'm speaking, my words get jumbled—writing gives me more time, and my voice doesn't quiver and I don't blush."

*Rick:* "Writing allows me to hold up a mirror to my life and see what clear or distorted images stare back at me."

*Glenn:* "The more I write, the better I become. In terms of finding a job after I graduate, strong writing skills will give me an edge over those who are just mediocre writers."

*Amy:* "I'm still searching for meaning. When I write I feel I can do anything, go anywhere, search and explore."

*Angel:* "I feel I have something to say."

*Carmen:* "It's simple, I love words."

I agree, easily, with virtually all of these reasons. At times writing is therapeutic, at other times it helps us clarify our ideas, and at still other times it helps us get and keep jobs.

### ☞ WRITING 4: EXPLORATION

Look over the various answers given by the college seniors and select one. Do you agree or disagree with the student? Explain.

### ☞ WHAT THE SENIORS ADVISE

Since my advanced students had a lot to say about writing, I asked them to be consultants: "What is your advice to first-year college writers?" Here are their suggestions:

*Aaron:* "Get something down!! The hardest part of writing is starting. Forget the introduction, skip the outline, don't worry about a thesis—just blast your ideas down, see what you've got, then go back and work on them."

*Christa:* "Plan ahead. It sounds dry, but planning makes writing easier than doing laundry."

*Victor:* "Follow the requirements of the assignment to the T. Hand in a draft for the professor to mark up, then rewrite it."

*Allyson:* "Don't think every piece you write has to be a masterpiece. And sometimes the worst assignment turns into the best writing. Don't worry about what the professor wants—write what you believe."

*Carmen:* "Imagine and create, never be content with just retelling a story."

*Rick:* "When someone trashes your writing, thank them and listen to their criticism. It stings, but it helps you become a better writer."

*Jason:* "Say what you are going to say as clearly and as straightforwardly as possible. Don't try to pad it with big words and fancy phrasing."

*Angel:* "Read for pleasure from time to time. The more you read, the better you write—it just happens."

*Kim:* "When choosing topics, choose something that has a place in your heart."

These are good suggestions to any writers: start fast, think ahead, plan to revise and edit, listen to critical advice, consider your audience, be clear, read a lot. I hope, however, that instructors respond to your writing in critically helpful ways and don't "trash" it or put it down. Whether or not you take some of the advice will depend upon what you want from your writing: good grades? self-knowledge? personal satisfaction? clear communication? a response by your audience? When I shared these suggestions with first-year students, they nodded their heads, took some notes, and laughed—often with relief.

## WRITING 5: EXPLORATION

What else would you like to ask advanced college students about writing? Find one and ask; report back.

## WHAT ELSE DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?

I knew that my first-year students had already received twelve years' worth of "good advice" about learning to write, so I asked them one more question: "What do you want to learn about writing that you don't already know?" In parentheses, I've provided references to chapters of this handbook that answer these questions.

*Emma:* "Should I write to please the professor or to please myself?" (See Chapter 6, *The Writer's Audience*.)

*José:* "I'm always being told to state my thesis clearly. What exactly is a thesis and why is it so important?" (See Chapter 5, *The Writer's Purpose*; also Chapters 13, *Explaining Things*; 14, *Arguing For and Against*; and 15, *Interpreting Texts*.)

*Jolene:* "How do I develop a faster way of writing?" (See Chapter 9, *Strategies for Starting*.)

*Amy:* "Is there a trick to making a paper longer without adding useless information?" (See Chapters 22–24, which address revising.)

*Sam:* "How do I learn to express my ideas so they make sense to common intelligent readers and not just to myself?" (See Chapters 25–27, which address editing.)

*Scott:* "How can I make my writing flow better and make smooth transitions from one idea to the next?" (See Chapter 25, *Working Paragraphs*.)

*Terry:* "I want to learn to like to write. Then I won't put off assignments until the last minute." (See Chapter 4, *The Working Writer*.)

*Jennifer:* "I have problems making sentences sound good. How can I learn to do that?" (See Chapter 26, *Working Sentences*.)

*John P.*: "I would like to develop some sort of personal style so when I write people know it's me." (See Chapter 7, *The Writer's Voice*.)

*Jeff*: "I want to become more confident about writing research papers. I don't want to have to worry about whether my documentation is correct or if I've plagiarized or not." (See Part Four, *Conducting Research*.)

*Woody*: "Now that I'm in college, I would like to be challenged when I read and write, to think, and ask good questions, and find good answers." (See Chapter 2, *College Reading*.)

*Pat*: "I don't want to learn nose-to-the-grindstone, straight-from-the-textbook rules. I want to learn to get my mind into motion and pencil in gear." (See Chapters 3, *How Writers Write*, and 9, *Strategies for Starting*.)

*Heidi*: "I would love to increase my vocabulary. If I had a wider range of vocabulary, I would be able to express my thoughts more clearly." (*I'm not sure this book addresses that directly, but the more reading and writing you do, the more words you'll learn!*)

*Jess*: "I'm always afraid that people will laugh at my writing. Can I ever learn to get over that and get more confident about my writing?" (See Chapter 8, *Sharing and Responding*.)

I can't, of course, guarantee that if you read *The Working Writer* your writing will get easier, faster, longer, clearer, or more correct. Or, for that matter, that your style will become more personal and varied, or that you will become a more confident and comfortable writer—no handbook can do that for you. Becoming a better writer depends on your own interest and hard work. It will also depend upon your college experience, the classes you take, and the teachers with whom you study. However, whether in class or on your own, if you read this text carefully and practice its suggestions, you should find possible answers to all these questions and many more.

I admit that there was at least one student's concern for which I really had no good response. Jessica wrote, "My biggest fear is that I'll end up one semester with four or five courses that all involve writing and I'll die." Or maybe I do have a response: If you become comfortable and competent as a writer, you'll be able to handle all the writing assignments thrown your way. Even if you can't, Jessica, you won't die. It's just college.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING AND RESEARCH

### **Individual**

1. Interview a classmate about his or her writing experiences, habits, beliefs, and practices. Include questions such as those asked in this chapter as well as others you think may be important. Write a brief essay profiling your classmate as a writer. Share your profile with a classmate.
2. Over a two-week period, keep a record of every use you make of written language. Record your entries daily in a journal or class notebook. At the end of two weeks, enumerate all the specific uses as well as how often you did each. What activities dominate your list? Write an essay based on this personal research in which you argue for or against the centrality of writing in everyday life.

***Collaborative***

As a class or in small groups, design a questionnaire to elicit information about people's writing habits and attitudes. Distribute the questionnaire to both students and faculty in introductory and advanced writing classes. Compile the results. Compare and contrast the ideas of students at different levels and disciplines and write a report to share with the class. Consider writing a feature article for your student newspaper or faculty newsletter reporting what you found.



