



# SHORT TAKES

Model Essays for Composition  
Second Edition

Elizabeth Penfield

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**SHORT TAKES**  
**Model Essays for Composition**  
**Second Edition**

**Elizabeth Penfield**  
**The University of New Orleans**

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# Preface

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This second edition of *Short Takes* remains a collection of short essays. The framework, however, differs from that of the previous edition by focusing more sharply on how to interrelate reading and writing, and how to write various kinds of essays. The second edition begins with “Freeze Frame: Reading and Writing,” a new essay on the processes involved in these activities; connections between reading and writing are reinforced in the chapter introductions. Also the sequence of chapters has been rearranged so that the more accessible patterns of development come first, with each pattern leading logically to the next. Throughout *Short Takes*, more attention has been devoted to the process of writing.

## Models and Modes

All of the essays contained in *Short Takes* have been chosen with an eye towards their accessibility and flexibility. Composition is regarded as the act of choosing from among alternatives—selecting the most appropriate mode, pattern of organization, persona, and stylistic technique—which best suit the particular writing purpose and audience. Thus, the essays serve as both illustrative models *and* as sources of invention, jumping-off places for developing one’s own ideas in one’s own style.

Many of the fifty-three essays are new to this edition. They

are indeed short—about 1000 words or fewer—and being such, should easily lend themselves to scrutiny and emulation, since most of the papers assigned in composition courses fall in the 400–1000 word range. With one exception, the essays are complete pieces, not excerpts. They represent the basic aims of discourse and illustrate the standard rhetorical modes.

### Rhetorical Modes and The Aims of Discourse

Yet anyone who has used a reader with essays arranged by mode has likely run into two problems: first, few essays are pure examples of a single mode; second, most collections of essays treat argument—an aim of writing—as though it were the equivalent of description, comparison/contrast, and so on. *Short Takes* addresses these inconsistencies.

Because essays usually employ more than one mode, the essays here are grouped according to their *primary* rhetorical pattern; the questions that follow each essay go on to point out the subordinate modes. As for the aims of discourse, the essays represent the various purposes for writing. The writer's self-expressive, informative, and persuasive purposes are underscored in the discussion questions.

Although argument is not the equivalent of example, description, or other standard modes, for many writers it is the most difficult to craft. It is considered, therefore, in its own special chapter—now greatly expanded in this edition. And while Chapters 1–9 contain some essays that are intended to persuade, those in Chapter 10 exemplify the classical appeals: to reason, to emotion, and to the writer's ethical values.

### Apparatus for Reading and Writing

The apparatus is designed to make full use of the essays. Each chapter begins with a brief introduction that depicts the mode,

showing how it can be used in formal essays and in practical, everyday writing situations. The introductions go on to point out specifically how the modes can be shaped by considerations of audience, purpose, particular strategies, thesis, and organization. Each of the essays is preceded by a short explanatory note and a list of key words and phrases. Following each essay are two sets of questions, one on *Thesis and Organization*, the other on *Technique and Style*. The apparatus for writing papers is reserved for the end of the chapter, where it is broken down into three stages: *Finding a Topic*, *Exploring the Topic*, and *Drafting the Paper*.

*Finding the Topic* contains suggestions for writing, all of which are directly related to the essays in the chapter. Each essay is listed by title and followed by at least five suggestions that use the essay as an organizational and thematic model. The assignments allow a good deal of flexibility: some lend themselves to open general information or personal experience essays, some to research papers, and some to the classical technique of imitation. Once the writer selects a subject, *Exploring the Topic* is the next step; the questions in that category are shaped so that no matter what type of paper may be involved, the writer can generate information about it. *Drafting the Paper* then helps organize the material and points out some of the pitfalls and advantages inherent in the particular mode. Throughout, the end-of-chapter material emphasizes both the process of writing and the flexibility of the model and mode.

## Acknowledgments

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Elizabeth Penfield

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# Contents

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## **Freeze Frame: Reading and Writing** **1**

---

### **1 Description** **7**

---

<b>Summer Pond</b>	<b>Edward Hoagland</b>	<b>12</b>
--------------------	------------------------	-----------

*"Floating on one's back is like riding between two skies."*

<b>Twins</b>	<b>E. B. White</b>	<b>15</b>
--------------	--------------------	-----------

*"As I watched, the sun broke weakly through, brightened the rich red of the fawns, and kindled their white spots."*

<b>El Hoyo</b>	<b>Mario Suarez</b>	<b>18</b>
----------------	---------------------	-----------

*"From the center of downtown Tucson the ground slopes gently away to Main Street, drops a few feet, and then rolls to the banks of the Santa Cruz River. Here lies the section of the city known as El Hoyo."*

<b>Gospel Pride</b>	<b>Francis X. Clines</b>	<b>22</b>
---------------------	--------------------------	-----------

*"She held the cup out like a maestro tapping the music stand, and began singing in a very plain and pretty voice filled with the tones of her Kansas church roots: 'What a Friend We Have in Jesus.'"*



<b>In Las Vegas: Working Hard for the Money</b>	Jane O'Reilly	27
---	---------------	----

*"At 2 o'clock in the morning the tourists are as blurred and fading as children allowed up past bedtime."*

<b>In Bed</b>	Joan Didion	33
---------------	-------------	----

*"Tell me that my house is burned down, my husband has left me, that there is gunfighting in the streets and panic in the banks, and I will not respond by getting a headache. It comes instead when I am fighting not an open but a guerrilla war with my own life. . . ."*

<b>Writing Descriptive Essays</b>		39
-----------------------------------	--	----

---

<b>2 Narration</b>		42
--------------------	--	----

---

<b>Tale of the Rodent</b>	Roger Starr	46
---------------------------	-------------	----

*"I felt I had witnessed something small, but supremely serious."*

<b>The Unicorn in the Garden</b>	James Thurber	49
----------------------------------	---------------	----

*"Once upon a sunny morning a man who sat in a breakfast nook looked up from his scrambled eggs to see a white unicorn with a golden horn quietly cropping the roses in the garden."*

<b>On the Road to Nameless</b>	William Least Heat Moon	52
------------------------------------	-------------------------	----

*"Had it not been raining hard that morning on the Livingston square, I never would have learned of Nameless, Tennessee."*

**A Sense of Proportion** Perri Klass **57**

*"It is easy to lose your sense of proportion in a hospital. In fact, it is hard to know what proportion means in a place where people are struggling for their lives, or living with tremendous pain."*

**Angels on a Pin** Alexander Calandra **62**

*"Some time ago, I received a call from a colleague who asked if I would be the referee on the grading of an examination question. He was about to give a student a zero for his answer to a physics question, while the student claimed he should receive a perfect score and would if the system were not set up against the student."*

**Writing Narrative Essays** **66**

**3 Example** **70**

---

**Printed Noise** George F. Will **75**

*"I've nothing against Homeric adjectives ('wine-dark sea,' 'wing-footed Achilles') but isn't coleslaw just coleslaw?"*

**Of Words That Ravage,  
Pillage, Spoil** Otto Friedrich **79**

*"It was only public ridicule, however, that persuaded the Pentagon to abandon the term 'sunshine units' as a measure of nuclear radiation."*

**The "Miracle" of Technofix** Kirkpatrick Sale **84**

*"We have tried the future—and it doesn't work."*

<b>TV's Crime Coverage Is Too Scary and Misleading</b>	Georgette Bennett	89
--	-------------------	----

*"When TV talks crime, people listen."*

<b>Standing His Ground</b>	Michael Norman	94
----------------------------	----------------	----

*"It sometimes seems that the only exclusively male trait left is the impulse to throw a punch, the last male watermark, so to speak, that is clear and readable."*

<b>Writing Example Essays</b>		99
-------------------------------	--	----

---

<b>4 Division and Classification</b>		103
--------------------------------------	--	-----

---

<b>Fastening the Freshman Theme</b>	Walter H. Nelson	108
-------------------------------------	------------------	-----

*"Any classification of binding techniques is of necessity incomplete. I don't include on my list the uses of gum, glue, or egg yolk, for example."*

<b>How Do We Find the Student in a World of Academic Gymnasts and Worker Ants?</b>	James T. Baker	113
--	----------------	-----

*"Has anyone else noticed that the very same students people college classrooms year after year? Has anyone else found the same bodies, faces, personalities returning semester after semester?"*

<b>The Plot Against People</b>	Russell Baker	119
--------------------------------	---------------	-----

*"Inanimate objects are classified scientifically into three major categories—those that don't work, those that break down and those that get lost."*

<b>The Case Against Slamming the Schoolhouse Door</b>	<b>Fred Hechinger</b>	<b>123</b>
---	-----------------------	------------

*"All over America, precious opportunities to build a new relationship between school and community are being irretrievably wasted."*

<b>Writing Classification Essays</b>		<b>129</b>
--------------------------------------	--	------------

<b>5 Comparison and Contrast</b>		<b>132</b>
----------------------------------	--	------------

---

<b>Fashions in Funerals</b>	<b>Shana Alexander</b>	<b>136</b>
-----------------------------	------------------------	------------

*"... The most important advantage of the high-rise mausoleum is that by putting everything-but-everything under one roof you cut down on the high cost of dying."*

<b>Two Views of the Mississippi</b>	<b>Mark Twain</b>	<b>139</b>
-------------------------------------	-------------------	------------

*"Now when I had mastered the language of this water and had come to know every trifling feature that bordered the great river as familiarly as I knew the letters of the alphabet, I had made a valuable acquisition. But I had lost something, too."*

<b>That Lean and Hungry Look</b>	<b>Suzanne Britt Jordan</b>	<b>144</b>
--------------------------------------	-----------------------------	------------

*"Long after fat people have removed their coats and shoes and put their feet up on the coffee table, thin people are still sitting on the edge of the sofa, looking neat as a pin, discussing rutabagas."*

<b>Man, Bytes, Dog</b>	<b>James Gorman</b>	<b>149</b>
------------------------	---------------------	------------

*"In five to ten years, I am sure, the Macintosh will be superseded by a new model, like the Delicious or the Granny"*

*Smith. The Cairn Terrier, on the other hand, has held its share of the market with only minor modifications for hundreds of years."*

## **The End-of-the-World**

### **Scenarios**

Edward Zuckerman 154

*"All of those currently debating whether a nuclear war would be followed by a catastrophic 'nuclear winter' agree on one thing—that their scientific conclusions have important political consequences. And they are happy to point them out."*

### **From Song to Sound**

Russell Baker 159

*"Both Crosby and Presley were creations of the microphone. It made it possible for people with frail voices not only to be heard beyond the third row but also to caress millions."*

### **Writing Comparison and Contrast Essays**

163

## **6 Analogy**

166

### **What True Education Should Do**

Sydney J. Harris 170

*"Pupils are more like oysters than sausages. The job of teaching is not to stuff them and then seal them up, but to help them open and reveal the riches within."*

### **On Mules, Computers, and College Teachers**

J. Julius Scott, Jr. 173

*"Reflecting on my association with mules has been helpful to me in adjusting to computers."*

**Darwin and the Machine**                      Eric Mankin      179

*"Just as whales evolved from wolflike land-dwelling creatures, so carburetors evolved from perfume atomizers."*

**Go to the Ant, Thou Sluggard**              Paul Bohannon      184

*"The ant provides a perfectly sound parable through which to examine our own moral systems."*

**The Iks**    Lewis Thomas      189

*"I have known my share of peculiar, difficult, nervous, grabby people, but I've never encountered any genuinely, consistently detestable human beings in all my life."*

**Writing Analogy Essays**    194

---

**7 Process**    197

**Putting Your Job Interview  
into Rehearsal**    John P. Aigner      201

*"You should consider the interviewer to be in the same category as the tax auditor. He or she is not your friend, and you are under no obligation to volunteer any information that won't help you."*

**Firehouses**    Rebecca Zurier      207

*"The story of the American firehouse is part of that peculiar social institution, the American fire company."*

**History According to Salt**    from *Time*      211

*"As early as the 6th century, in the sub-Sahara, Moorish merchants routinely traded salt ounce for ounce for gold."*

**Symbols of Humankind** Don Lago 216

*"The images these people left in the sand would soon be swept away by the wind, but their new idea would slowly grow until it had remade the human species."*

**Death by Fasting** Joan Stephenson Graf 220

*"Bad news travels fast in Northern Ireland."*

**Writing Process Essays** 224

---

**8 Cause and Effect** 227

---

**The Secret Life of the Common Cold** Frank Trippett 232

*"Cold victims routinely elucidate their suffering; those who are ordinarily laconic grow voluble, and the normally gabby become windy, lugubrious."*

**Rural Stress** Jake Page 237

*"Now when I walk past my neighbors' homes I shall wonder which of them harbors a mentally disturbed person who stays in his closet instead of walking around outside with paper bags talking to himself as they do in healthful midtown Manhattan."*

**The Spread of Sex and the Demise of Romance in the America of Our Times** Frank Gannon 242

*"Culturally, the decade from the mid-'60s to the mid-'70s was one of consciously antiromantic reaction—characterized by a paranoid cynicism, drenched in hype and drugs, and cultivating a disheveled, often violent chic."*

<b>Electronic Gizmos Make Us Stupid</b>	Daniel Greenberg	251
---	------------------	-----

*"There's been another rise reported in the national stupidity index, and, as is their custom, the attending social scientists modestly insist that they don't know why."*

<b>Fear of Dearth</b>	Carll Tucker	255
-----------------------	--------------	-----

*"It is no accident that now, in the last third of the 20th century, personal fitness and health have suddenly become a popular obsession."*

<b>Writing Cause and Effect Essays</b>		259
--	--	-----

---

<b>9 Definition</b>		262
---------------------	--	-----

---

<b>Waiting as a Way of Life</b>	Lance Morrow	267
---------------------------------	--------------	-----

*"Waiting is a form of imprisonment. One is doing time – but why? One is being punished not for an offense of one's own but often for the inefficiencies of those who impose the wait."*

<b>Box Scores</b>	Roger Angell	272
-------------------	--------------	-----

*"To the baseball-bitten, [the box score] is not only informative, pictorial, and gossipy but lovely in aesthetic structure."*

<b>Discrimination Is a Virtue</b>	Robert Keith Miller	276
-----------------------------------	---------------------	-----

*"... Within the last twenty years, this word has been so frequently misused that an entire generation has grown up believing that 'discrimination' means 'racism.'"*



**The Handicap of Definition** William Raspberry 281

*"... It occurs to me that one of the heaviest burdens black Americans—and black children in particular—have to bear is the handicap of definition: the question of what it means to be black."*

**The Most Fungible Fellow** Paul Bohannon 286

*"We are never totally fungible. There are, after all, some things we don't do with just anybody."*

**Writing Definition Essays** 290

---

**10 Argument** 293

---

**The Middle-Class Black's Burden** Leanita McClain 299

*"What a hollow victory we have won when my sister, dressed in her designer everything, is driven to the rear door of the luxury high rise in which she lives because the cab driver, noting only her skin color, assumes she is the maid, or the nanny, or the cook, but certainly not the lady of any house at this address."*

**Bilingualism's Goal** Barbara Mujica 304

*"To isolate Spanish-speaking children from their English-speaking peers may prove more psychologically damaging than hurling them into an English-speaking environment with no transition courses at all."*

**Balancing Academics and Athletics:  
It's Not an Impossible Task** Dennis J. Keihn 308

*'Many people regard the term 'student athlete' as inherently contradictory—and with good reason, considering past abuses.'*