Reading, Thinking, and Writing with Sources

PATRICK J. SLATTERY
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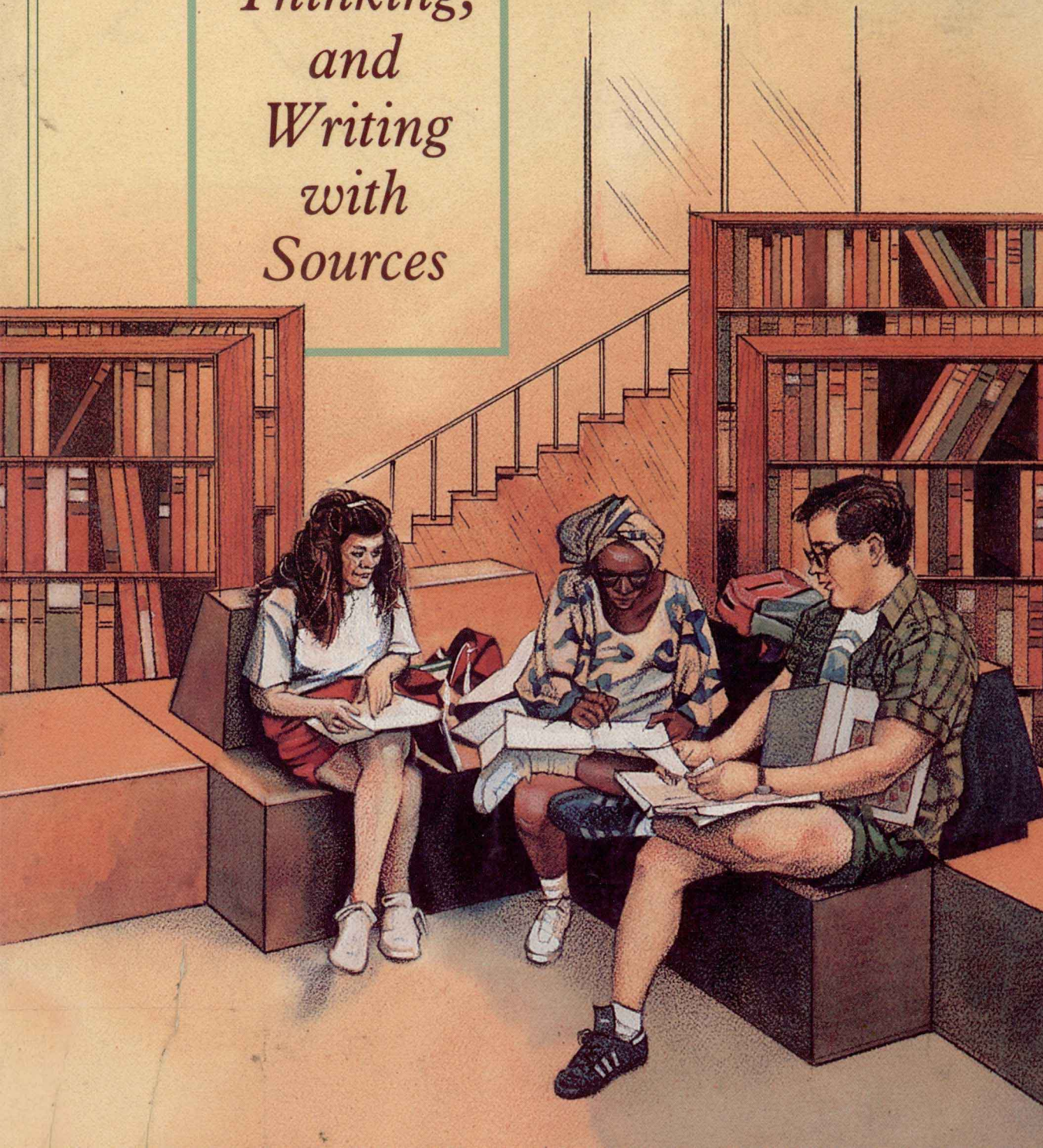

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We wrote *Reading, Thinking, and Writing with Sources* to aid college students with the reading, thinking, and writing processes associated with academic discourse. Because teachers across the curriculum often assign papers on complex topics, undergraduates are required to use multiple, and sometimes contradictory, sources of written information. College instructors typically expect their students to summarize, quote, paraphrase, and document sources correctly; to synthesize, analyze, and evaluate several authors' ideas reflectively; and to justify an original argument persuasively. A college composition course that uses *Reading, Thinking, and Writing with Sources* can help students successfully tackle these challenging writing tasks. The textbook is designed specifically for freshman and sophomore composition courses on writing from sources, academic writing, research writing, and writing across the curriculum but could also work well in argumentative writing classes.

The book's important features include:

- an emphasis on reading empathetically and analytically, so students learn how to understand the feelings and ideas that motivate an author's argument as well as how to evaluate it critically
- a case-study approach allowing students to follow the development of one student's writing process from prewriting through editing and documenting of an argumentative, multiple-source paper
- process-oriented instruction in drafting and revising that moves students from essay-level concerns to the paragraph, sentence, and word levels of their prose
- cross-disciplinary readings that reflect a variety of viewpoints on current, provocative topics

- a research chapter designed to teach students how to use tools such as computer databases, subject indexes, and interviews, how to document sources according to MLA and APA styles, and how to avoid plagiarism
- questions and exercises for both individual and collaborative learning situations.

The Importance of Reading for Empathy and Analysis

Although college writing assignments often call for an argumentative response to sources, *Reading, Thinking, and Writing with Sources* instructs students first to read empathetically—that is, receptively and even sympathetically—because people need to appreciate the feelings and ideas that motivate an author's viewpoint before they can evaluate it effectively. The textbook, for example, teaches paraphrasing, quoting, and summarizing as methods for integrating information into essays but also as opportunities for reading with empathy. We believe empathetic reading can help students understand writers' views more fully and represent them more accurately.

However, students will have difficulty succeeding in college unless they are also taught how to make sound judgments about the competing positions found in sources. Therefore, we also focus much of the text on how to evaluate conflicting ideas, emphasizing comparison and synthesis—thinking processes that can help students analyze competing points of view. For example, our section on evidence and reasoning presents and explains a series of questions that students can ask themselves to determine which authors' arguments are more rational or more fully supported. But we also discuss strategies that will help students acknowledge the limitations of their own arguments, believing that reflective judgments are always contingent upon reevaluation.

A Case-Study Approach

To illustrate the reading, thinking, and writing processes explained throughout the textbook, we offer an extended case study, closely following one student, Jane, as she completes several typical, college-level assignments: a formal summary, a summary-response essay, a synthesis paper, and an argumentative essay based on several sources. In addition to these student papers, the case study includes Jane's writing log entries—which illustrate processes for reading and thinking, and her rough drafts—which illustrate strategies for writing and revising.

Furthermore, all the sources Jane consults are provided within the text, so students can see exactly how she uses them to develop her pa-

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per. Writing about surrogate motherhood—a topic through which many disciplines intersect—Jane draws from articles that take biological, psychological, legal, ethical, sociological, and feminist approaches. As she reads these sources, makes her log entries, and completes the paper assignments, Jane moves from a dogmatic position on surrogate motherhood to a more informed and reflective perspective on the topic, offering students an excellent vantage point from which to observe the relationship of reading, thinking, and writing.

An Emphasis on Writing as Process

Reading, Thinking, and Writing with Sources explains analysis and evaluation as it instructs students in drafting and revising: When students consider the audience of a paper they can begin to work out the details and implications of their arguments, slightly modifying or even drastically changing their theses. Our material on drafting an argumentative paper offers advice on considering audience and then on formulating a thesis statement, integrating information from sources, and organizing a rough draft. In the section on revising, students move from these essay-level concerns to the paragraph, sentence, and word levels of their prose, focusing on introductions, conclusions, topic sentences, transition sentences, strong verbs, and nonsexist language.

Readings on Topics from Across the Disciplines

We also include additional readings that provide opportunities for students to read, think, and write about a topic in business (advertising), in natural science (waste management), and in social science (sports culture). Chosen to discourage the absolutist, right–wrong thinking that pro/con articles can elicit, the essays in this textbook reflect divergent points of view on complex topics. The selections on waste management, for example, invite students to analyze several proposed options for handling the solid waste crisis—landfills, incinerators, recycling programs, and waste reduction—and present case studies of New York City and Seattle.

A Focus on Research

To help students find their own sources, we begin with how to use the research process to identify and brainstorm topics. *Reading, Thinking, and Writing with Sources* also guides students in how to use card catalogs, computer databases, discipline-specific indexes, and interviews. Furthermore, the text thoroughly covers plagiarism and the use of MLA and APA documentation styles. Reflecting our concern with empathy, the information on interviewing instructs students to create a safe environment in which the people being interviewed do not fear disapproval, and all the

research strategies and documentation conventions are illustrated by detailed examples.

Questions and Exercises

Following the case-study student's log entries and drafts are exercises that invite students to apply the tactics she illustrates. For example, after studying the marginal annotations that Jane makes on one of the articles she uses, students are encouraged to annotate one of the other essays included in the textbook. The readings on surrogate motherhood and advertising are followed by questions for reading, synthesizing, and analyzing the multiple perspectives on these topics. And because the group projects that college teachers assign in upper-level courses often require students to work closely as well as independently, many of our research exercises stress collaboration.

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Finally, we thank our students, whose struggles and successes with academic discourse played the most important role in shaping *Reading, Thinking, and Writing with Sources.* To our students we dedicate this book.

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Chapter One

UNDERSTANDING COLLEGE WRITING

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.

John Donne

"No man is an island," wrote John Donne in the seventeenth century, and what was true then is even more true for men and women in contemporary society. Today, we rely extensively on collective wisdom because we are able to retrieve and expand the information that others have stored in libraries and on computer systems. The solitary writer, hunched over a plumed stylus in a garret, spinning out ideas with the originality and creativity of a god, is a mythical figure. Although some writers have worked alone, no writer has ever thought alone: The language and thought of each individual reflect an accumulation of received knowledge, a collection of voices. No writer has ever been an island.

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF COLLEGE WRITING

We have designed this textbook to help you with the social dimension of college writing. Typically, college-level writing assignments require you to base papers not only on personal or individual experiences but also on the ideas of others found in sources such as textbooks, library books, journal articles, lecture notes, and even interviews and films. By analyzing the ideas in sources, you can reflectively form your own beliefs and justify them

to an audience, adding your informed viewpoint to the many voices that surround you.

Most teachers know that one generation does not simply hand down information to the next one, and therefore they expect students not only to summarize but also to analyze and evaluate what they read. In an English class, for example, a teacher may ask you to read several published interpretations of Robert Frost's poem, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," and to evaluate these multiple interpretations in light of your own understanding of the poem. In fulfilling such an assignment, you will probably discover that literary critics seldom agree on any single reading of a poem but offer a variety of insights and arguments to support their differing interpretations. Similarly, an assignment for a history class may require you to find and read several newspaper articles that offer varying reasons for the Allied ground attack in the Persian Gulf War. Your history professor may ask you to write a paper that analyzes the journalists' various arguments and defends one of their positions or a paper that offers your own position. For a psychology course, an instructor may have you read textbook chapters on Sigmund Freud's and Erik Erickson's theories of psychological development and write an essay that compares and evaluates their theories. Or, in an anthropology course, a writing task may require you to read several articles about the gift-giving customs in various cultures, to observe firsthand the customs in your own culture, and to write a paper that compares your observations to the arguments in your readings.

Furthermore, at the urging of your teachers or on your own initiative, you may write college papers that cut across disciplines. For example, while taking a history course about the Holocaust, you may find that the books and articles you read about Hitler and his regime give you new insights into George Orwell's *1984*, a fictional creation of a totalitarian state that you are reading for an English class. Interdisciplinary writing often draws from various kinds of sources, making interesting and creative connections. As you can see from these examples, college writing assignments are not merely perfunctory tasks that you must fulfill to earn a passing grade. Because these assignments provide you with an opportunity to read about important issues and encourage you to decide what you think about them, college writing is a dynamic process of learning and discovery.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Even though you usually compose college papers alone in your room or the library, writing academic essays is still a social act. Explain what makes multiple-source writing social.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

In reading and writing for any of the various disciplines in college, you can use primary and secondary sources, but definitions of "primary" and "secondary" differ according to discipline. Generally, *primary sources*

are events or objects that researchers contemplate directly. In the natural and physical sciences, researchers usually conduct empirical studies, relying on controlled laboratory experiments; the observations and data from such research are primary sources. Researchers in the social sciences rely on empirical studies, too, but their primary sources can include statistical data and personal interviews as well as direct observations of experiments. For example, a sociologist studying the causes of suicide in New York City may gather statistics on the frequency of suicide in different age groups, sexes, races, or neighborhoods and also interview family members of suicide victims or survivors of suicide attempts. In the humanities, methods of inquiry are much less empirical, and primary sources are usually products of human thought, such as philosophical texts, paintings, musical scores, historical documents, or works of literature.

Generally, *secondary sources,* which also differ according to discipline, are *about* some object of study. In English, secondary sources include published critical interpretations of a work of literature; for example, a journal article about Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is a secondary source about a primary source, a poem. In historical research, a film, even a documentary about the Persian Gulf War or the Holocaust, is a secondary source because the producers have studied and interpreted an event, offering an argument or point of view about it. Alain Resnais's film about the Holocaust, *Night and Fog,* which combines scenes of deserted concentration camps and footage of actual victims living in the camps, is a secondary source about a historical event. In most studies, especially in the natural and physical sciences, researchers consult secondary sources before focusing on primary ones. For example, before botanists or sociologists begin their primary research, they read broadly in secondary sources to know what other scientists have written and to build on past knowledge. The distinction between primary and secondary sources, however, is not always clear. You might use the work of a historian as a primary rather than a secondary source if you are studying the methods and theories that Thomas Macaulay used to write *History of England from the Accession of James the Second* in the nineteenth century.

Academic writing assignments can call for using primary or secondary sources. Professors will sometimes ask you to compare primary sources, such as two short stories or two campaign speeches. More often, however, college writing involves secondary sources such as articles and books about an event or a primary object of study. Whether you use primary sources, secondary sources, or a combination of the two, academic writing is a social process because it reveals a community of thinkers who have addressed the same question from different perspectives and it allows you, the student, to join this community.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What is the distinction between primary and secondary sources? Is Thomas Macaulay's *History of England* primary, secondary, or both? Explain your answer.

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