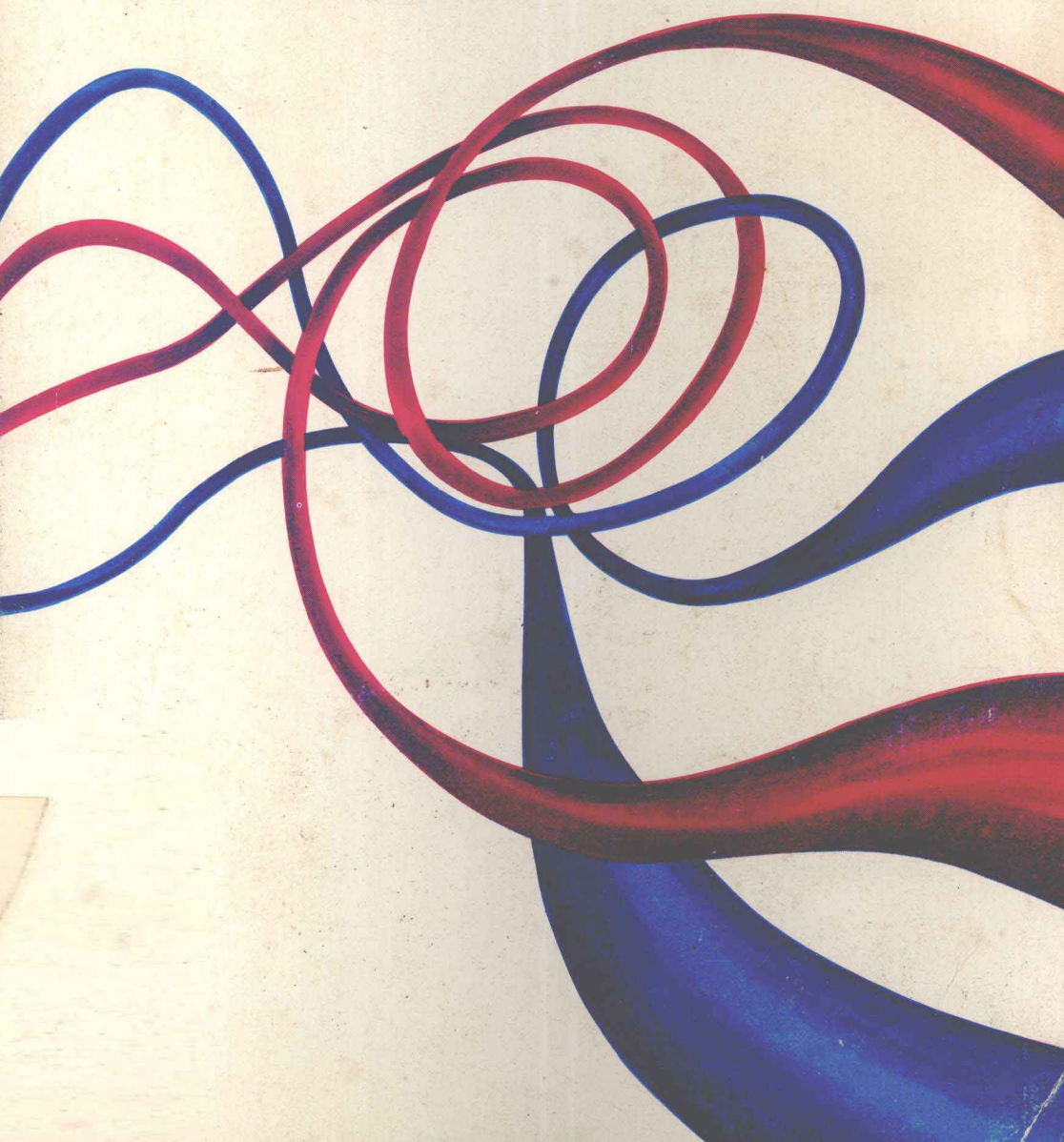


# **Make Your Writing Count**

**From  
Free Writing  
to  
Structured  
Composition**  
Second Edition

**REGINA M. HOOVER**



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**REGINA M. HOOVER**  
*Central Michigan University*

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## PREFACE

This text, like the first edition, is designed to meet one or more of the following goals:

1. To give teachers who wish to spend more time with individual students the freedom to dispense with the traditional classroom model involving lectures and discussions. Often, such lectures are addressed to all students regardless of whether they need the instructions or are ready for them. Because this text provides sequenced, self-instructional activities and assignments consistent with the most recent findings on how students mature in their thinking and writing, it allows individual students and their instructors to concentrate on particular problems while steadily improving general skills.
2. To allow the student to progress smoothly from personal writing—increasingly recognized as the logical starting point for developing improved skills—to more formal, structured essays without loss of personal involvement and intellectual control over the material. Although most teachers today understand the underlying values of such a sequence, the problem of transition remains a major one. Part II of the text helps students to move beyond merely personal viewpoints and to achieve the more sophisticated language flexibility needed in formal writing.
3. To cover a broad range of writing skills and strategies without “overloading the circuits.” Students confronted with a multiplicity of demands can easily become confused and frustrated. This text proceeds in incremental steps from simple tasks in all areas (focus, organization, coherence, style, grammar, and mechanics) to increasingly complex activities, strengthening skills across the board without overtaxing the learner at any point. By linking skill development to the writing activities and assignments, the text avoids the trap of teaching through exercises unrelated to the student’s own writing.
4. To introduce and reinforce an appreciation of the process of writing (prewriting, writing, rewriting) and its relevance to the completed product.
5. To help students overcome negative attitudes about writing. Graduated tasks allow an opportunity for success and personal satisfaction at each step, making writing more meaningful and pleasurable, making it “count.”

The basic design of the course is the same in this edition as in the previous one: from free writing to description and narration, then “over the bridge” to more formal modes. Principles of grammar, mechanics, spelling, and style are introduced gradually as students gain confidence and fluency, and are integrated with the writing called for in the assignments. For best results, Parts I and II should be followed consecutively, although Chapters 4 and 6 can be

omitted by the teacher who wishes to approach language flexibility differently. Part III, although also designed to bring the student step by step to greater verbal effectiveness, provides the instructor with further options: each chapter can be used or not as he or she deems best. Chapter 7, however, is particularly important, since it introduces the basic whole-essay skills of focus, unity, coherence, and development. Chapters 8 and 9 reinforce these elements and add new material; Chapter 10 is for review, permitting students to consolidate their achievements.

The sample papers, all student-written, have been updated, and an annotated research paper has been added as a new feature. My conviction that students react most favorably and productively to writing by their more accomplished peers has not wavered. Throughout, an attempt has been made to give students more assistance in specific writing problems, particularly in Part III, which has been almost totally rewritten. As in the first edition, all the material has been class-tested. Although the text remains basically self-instructional, reinforcement by the instructor at key points helps.

During the past few years, student response to this text has been overwhelmingly positive. Not only do students find it easy to understand and follow, but they surprise themselves by beginning to like to write. Once that happens, the outlook for both student and instructor brightens considerably.

My thanks to all, students and colleagues, who in the past years have expressed their appreciation for this text and to the many who have offered helpful suggestions to improve its usefulness.

RMH

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# **PART I:**

## **Developing Your Ideas**

The best way to begin writing is to do simply that: begin writing ideas, words, and so forth, rather than sit and wait for an inspiration. When you write, remember you can “brainstorm” more easily by groping in the dark until the ideas develop. It’s like standing outside a room totally dark. You’ll never find the light in the room by standing outside. You must go into the room in search of the light switch.

**A STUDENT**





# 1:

## Getting What's Inside Outside

**S**o. You are in a composition course, and if you are like many of the people around you, you will more or less cheerfully admit that (1) you hate English or (2) you can't write or (3) both of the above. A few—probably not more than 25 percent of you—like English and would be in the course, required or not. But if you are not among these few, you are not alone. You needn't be afraid that you are the only one in the class who comes in feeling uneasy, doubtful of your ability to make it through the course, perhaps even somewhat hostile if you are here solely because your curriculum requires it.

If you are mathematically inclined, you probably have figured out that if only 25 percent of the class likes English, or at least sees the necessity of a composition course in college, only two or three out of ten come into the class feeling fairly comfortable. Unfortunately, even some of you in this small minority also have a few attitudes toward English that will rise up to plague you, at least at first. You have perhaps had English composition psyched out since the fifth grade. You know that if you put the commas in the right places and spell words correctly and understand how to use the approved footnote form, you have it made. That is all well and good, but prepare yourself for a bit of a shock. College writing is more than researching and rewording encyclopedias, more than achieving perfect mechanics, more than producing a neatly tied-up package. In college writing, you need to use your own mind, forming your own ideas and expressing them effectively in order both to interest and to enlighten your reader.

Probably many of you have not had much experience in expressing your own thoughts. It's not easy at first, and you may not like what you are asked to do at the beginning of the course. Students say, "But I never had to do

anything like this in high school!" Maybe not, but give it a whirl. You'll find there's more to writing than putting that comma in the right place. You may even like what you find.

A few of you really "like to write." You enjoy sitting down, letting ideas and images take hold, and arranging your thoughts into a clear, organized, compelling whole. But maybe you can learn something, too; even Shakespeare grew more skilled as he grew more experienced. So can you, because writing is a cumulative skill, like playing the piano or skiing.

## WHAT, BASICALLY, THIS COURSE IS ABOUT

A student once wrote:

When I entered English 101 I thought I would have to write one large term paper, but to my surprise I was required to write many smaller papers. Now this seemed quite simple to me for college-level work, and it also frustrated me, because I had been taught to write large papers and use resources in my writing. But in this English class, the only resource needed was my mind.

He was actually complaining about a course similar to the one in this text, but the basic principle of this approach to writing could not be expressed better. *The only resource needed is your mind.* If that is working, all else follows.

Many students have not learned to trust their own minds. They have been told what to do and how to do it for too long. Most students are sharp enough thinkers when it comes to matters of their own interest—sports, the bad food in the dorms, problems of commuting—but to many, the idea of education as personally challenging and rewarding has not yet occurred. As for writing, they seldom think of it as something more than putting together a term paper.

To write well you must think well. You must formulate your scattered thoughts into well-organized and coherent wholes that reach across the barrier between you and your reader, so that your reader says, "Ah! I see exactly what you mean!" or "That's interesting!" Further, because writing well involves thinking well, a composition course affects everything else you will do in every activity of any kind the rest of your life. Taking a composition course isn't the only way to learn to think well, but it is one of the most efficient. Nothing is more mentally demanding than the challenge to say on paper exactly what you are thinking, so that anyone—even in your absence—can understand and respond to your ideas.

If your writing is not a product of your own mind, the picture you put on paper may be quite different from the image of yourself you intend to project. A neat paper, cribbed from two encyclopedias, on market conditions in Outer Mongolia may present the picture of a mind without a thought to call its own. Your flowery description of that perfect evening with the boy or girl of your dreams may reveal a mind convinced that romantic lady teachers like that sort of thing. A paper on justice (or peace or evil or death) heavy with big words and fine-sounding phrases may be the sign of a mind that doesn't think its

own, real thoughts are worth writing down—certainly not worth handing in to a teacher!

You are what you are. You must start where you are and work from there. It's scary sometimes to say honestly what you are thinking. Let's face it: usually the first thoughts of your own that go down on paper aren't brilliant. But they are what you have to work with; they are the basic "resources." What you say has no meaning unless *your mind gives it meaning for you*.

When your mind is working, when it is taking hold of ideas and perceptions and turning them into meaningful information and thoughts, then it is possible to write convincingly and well about markets in Outer Mongolia or a tender evening or even justice. The key is to express the things that interest you in a way that is natural to you. If that sounds easy, don't be fooled. It's not.

Many of you can probably remember a time when writing was easy—even fun—way back when you first started school and were discovering the magic of being able to read and write. You put exactly what was in your mind on your piece of ruled paper, and the teacher said, "How nice!" Then something happened; it no longer seemed important that you put down what you were thinking. Good penmanship took over, along with where to put the periods and the capital letters. Later you had to learn to use the library. These skills are important, of course, but somewhere along the line you forgot *you* were doing the writing.

In a sense, this text tries first to take you back to where you began, when you wrote because you had something to say. As a reminder of those days the next page shows how a third-grader described her school's Spring Festival in a letter to a faraway aunt. If your first efforts sound something like this letter, don't despair. This may have been the last time this third-grader would write naturally about things that mattered to her; already in the word "perform" there was evidence she was trying to conform to what her teacher had told her. Perhaps you have not said on a piece of paper exactly what is on your mind since the third grade either.

You may find the first activities in this text difficult, though they sound easy. But try to suspend your judgment for a while. If your initial response is "I took this course to learn how to write a good term paper for other college courses, and this isn't getting me anywhere," have a little faith. If you keep an open mind and follow along, things may turn out better than you think.

## HOW, GENERALLY, THIS TEXT IS SET UP

If you have not already done so, it would be a good idea now to look at the table of contents, a practice that should become a habit; the table of contents gives you the first clue about what to expect of any text. Note that there is a center section consisting of two chapters, called "The Bridge"; the other chapters have titles like "Getting What's Inside Outside," "Drawing on the World around You," and "Keeping It Your Own." Together with what you now know about the purpose of this text, you should realize that the overall

on May 17 at 2:30 we had  
May day and first came the  
boys and then the girls and  
then the queens and court and  
at the end of the queens court  
was the person who crowned  
the queen and after her two  
girls and then a girl who  
held the mace and other girl  
held the crown and at the last  
was the queen. And then the  
lower school performances  
for the queen first 10 little  
Indians that were the first  
grade boys and then the 2  
grade girls did bow-bow-bow  
Belinda and then the first  
grade girls did shoe fly  
and then the 5<sup>th</sup> grade  
did a sad dance and then  
the 3 grade boys and 4  
grade girls did a cowboy  
dance and then the May  
pole dance and the 3  
grade girls did it. That's  
the dance I was in.

Love Carol



plan is to move (across “The Bridge”) from your unique personal experience to your equally unique relationship with information and ideas available around you.

Each chapter begins with an introductory discussion and then moves into a series of *Activities*. Some composition texts refer to such activities as “prewriting,” a misleading term because it implies that only the finished product qualifies as “writing.” Not so. Every time you write a single word that conveys a portion of your thoughts or feelings, you are “writing.” The activities prepare you for the writing from each chapter that you will hand in as an *Assignment*. Every chapter is designed to help you build the kind of skills needed, not only to do your best on the particular assignment but also to use as a foundation for the *next* chapter and the next assignment. Neglecting the “prewriting” activities, *especially* if you find them hard, will almost certainly mean difficulty later in the course.

Each set of activities, then, leads to an assignment. Starting with Chapter 2, the explanation of the assignment will be followed by one or more *Revising Activities*. You will find a *Checklist* at the end of each chapter, to help you make sure you have completed all the activities and evaluate whether you have achieved the goals of the assignment. In Chapters 1-10, marginal checkmarks have been provided to help you locate the various assignments and activities.

- ✓ Keep everything you write for this course in a folder. Later you may be asked to look back at your early writing; perhaps it will provide ideas for future writing. Looking back occasionally will also help you gauge what you are learning in the course.

## Activity 1-1

## To Get Started

It requires practice to be natural and open: to say what you think and be willing to take the consequences. This activity should help—it's your first step.

- ✓ The idea is to write for fifteen minutes without stopping for any reason. (Well, you can stop to turn a page, and if you do, you can congratulate yourself, because writing more than a page the first time is very good.) Start in and keep writing. Never mind if you haven't anything to say. Almost no one does at this point; if others around you seem to be scribbling away in a manner that intimidates you, they may be writing, “I can't think of anything to say,” over and over. You can do the same thing. Write it forty times if necessary, until something comes to you. Then keep that thought going as long as you can. Write whatever comes to your mind. Write “This is the stupidest thing anyone ever asked me to do,” if that's what you're thinking. Write sentence fragments, write unconnected words, write nonsense. But don't stop. Above all, don't stop!