

# SIMPLIFIED ESSAY SKILLS

KATHERINE M. FLOEGER

# **SIMPLIFIED ESSAY SKILLS**

**Katherine M. Ploeger**



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# PREFACE

**W**elcome to *Simplified Essay Skills*, a complete composition course in one textbook. This text will give you the means to write a clear, complete essay as well as to improve your writing overall. So read on to discover how to develop your essay-writing skills.

## ORGANIZATION

This text is organized into three parts, each with its own purpose. Part I, Creating an Essay, covers the basics of essay writing. Chapter 1 discusses writing and the writing process. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss various techniques for discovering ideas for your writing, from mind flows and visualizing to using questions. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the basics of essay writing and essay structure, and Chapter 6 reviews information about writing paragraphs.

Part II, Using Different Approaches to Essay Writing, discusses ten different approaches to writing essays. Each approach involves a different way of thinking about and organizing information. This section divides the essay approaches into two subsections: expository and persuasive writing. Expository approaches include the following: Chapter 7 discusses description or how to discuss something physical. Chapter 8 discusses narratives or short personal stories used to prove your point. Chapter 9 discusses process analysis, which involves describing directions or step-by-step processes, and it involves information, which involves general advice that tells how to do something. Chapter 10 discusses comparisons and contrasts, along with how to create an analogy. Chapter 11 discusses classification, the grouping of items into categories sharing similar traits. The persuasive approaches are discussed in Chapter 12, evaluation, in which you learn to evaluate or criticize something the reader can then experience. Chapter 13 discusses definition, in which your definition of an abstract term may differ from the reader's definition; thus, your definition becomes a persuasive element of the essay. Chapter 14 discusses cause and effect, in which you describe either the causes, the effects, or both of some issue or event. Chapter 15 discusses the problem/solution approach, in which you discuss a problem, then propose a solution that will work. Chapter 16 discusses take a stand, in which you state your opinion or position on an issue and back up that position with valid evidence.

Part III, Revising and Editing Strategies, offers various revision and editing strategies to help you become a better, more sophisticated writer. Chapter

17 discusses revision on a global level, viewing your writing as a whole and asking whether you have accomplished your purpose and satisfied your audience. Chapters 18 through 22 discuss various revisions made at the sentence level, including using coordinating conjunctions, creating dependent clauses, working with sentence focus, using correct pronouns, and ensuring parallelism. Chapters 23 through 25 help you create better sentences by adding modifiers to your sentences: noun phrase appositives, verbal phrases, and introductory elements. Chapter 26 covers the common problems of fragments and run-on sentences. Chapter 27 discusses techniques to create tighter, more concise writing. Chapters 28 and 29 deal with editing issues: homonyms and word choices, punctuation and capitalization.

Appendix A offers you a discussion of fallacies in logical reasoning, useful for all of the persuasive approaches to essay writing. Appendix B, the glossary, defines terms you may not be familiar with. And finally, the answer key offers answers to those exercises with only one answer. Many exercises involve your own ideas and writing; thus, no answers are offered.

## FEATURES

This book offers several special features to enhance your learning experience.

- The tone is conversational, easy to read and understand.
- Each of the chapters in Part II contains an essay written by one of my students. Later in the chapter is an essay published by a professional writer. Together these essays illustrate the skills discussed in the chapter.
- Each of the chapters in Part II contains a box called “Creating a \_\_\_\_\_ Essay Using the Writing Process.” This box gives step-by-step instructions on how to create an essay using each approach, with specific instructions for when the approach requires different methods or views. For example, description calls for a physical, real, concrete topic, while definition calls for an abstract term.
- Each of the chapters in Part II contains a Table of Topic Suggestions divided into general topics and specific ideas for writing an essay using the approach discussed in the chapter. This table should be helpful for those who draw a blank on topic selection.
- Try-It Exercises, which come right after the instruction, allow you to practice the skill before doing the Practice Exercises, which are interspersed throughout the chapter. This way you can immediately practice what you have learned, without waiting until the chapter ends.
- Each chapter has a Review Exercise and a Chapter Quiz. These reinforce the chapter’s content. In Part II, Using Different Approaches,

these two exercises ask you to write an essay for each, one for practice and one to turn in.

- At the end of each chapter is a box called “Ask Yourself About . . .” that allows you to ask pertinent questions about your writing, and that summarizes the chapter’s main points.
- Each chapter has at least one Collaborative Activity that you may do in small groups in the classroom or outside. These, too, reinforce the information in the chapters.
- This book offers activities and instruction for an entire composition course.
- The Answer Key provides answers to all Practice Exercises that have “correct” answers; some exercises involve individual answers or ideas without “correct” answers.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Lisa De Mol for her expertise and wisdom as an editor. Her e-mails offered questions, information, advice, suggestions, and occasional pep talks, all of which were greatly appreciated. Her written comments on drafts and revisions always helped the book become better. Thank you, Lisa.

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Also important are my students, some of whom contributed essays to this textbook, and all of whom have taught me much more than I ever thought possible about writing and the expression of ideas. I thank them for their questions and efforts with writing, which have shown me how we all struggle with the writing process.

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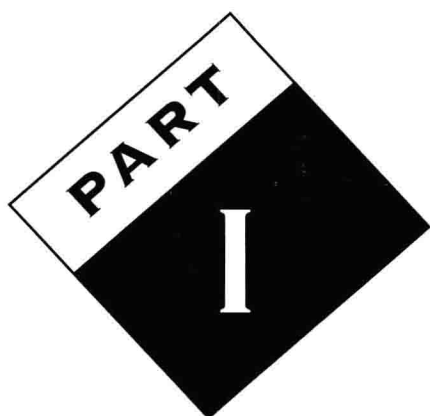
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# **CREATING AN ESSAY**





## THE WRITING PROCESS

**W**elcome to *Simplified Essay Skills*! In this book, you will learn about writing essays. These essays will be your vehicles for communicating your ideas, vision, experiences, and points of view to your readers.

### WHY LEARN TO WRITE BETTER?

Written language is all around you. Stop and look at all the written words you see in a day: on billboards and traffic signs, on flyers, on television, in books and magazines. Someone had to write each one of those words. Being a skilled writer will help you in many aspects of your life.

While you are in school, being a skilled writer will help you succeed because you will be able to inform instructors of your knowledge and interpretations of data through papers and exams. You may become a better note taker. When applying for employment, your writing skills are displayed on the cover letter, resumé, and application. Employers often choose the better writer for the job when all other qualifications are the same. When you are at work, being a skilled writer will bring faster advancement, more status and prestige, and more money. With a higher position comes more responsibility and more writing. If you can perform these writing tasks with ease and expertise, you are more likely to achieve professional success.

Many occupations that you might not think of as writing-intensive jobs actually involve a good deal of writing. For example, a police officer must write clear, objective reports. Not only are those reports crucial for the district attorney's office to prosecute the criminals, but they are also used by insurance companies and others in court cases. Many people will read and use



those reports, so the reports must be accurate, objective, and detailed, in addition to being well written.

Writing is also useful for yourself. You might use writing to write out anger or joy about an experience, or to create love poems or letters. You might use writing to help make a decision or convince someone of your point of view. You can inform and influence people in the community through letters to the editor of the local newspaper or reports to the City Council or school board. Being able to write well will help in many areas of life, both now and in the future.

## THE WRITING PROCESS

When people talk about “the writing process,” they are usually referring to the production process: what it takes to produce a piece of written work. This process includes three stages: planning, drafting, and revising. Each stage can take from a few minutes to days, depending on the task and the time available. Whether you are writing an essay at home or doing an in-class writing activity, these three stages apply.

If you were to break up the time available (given ten hours) to do a piece of writing, the timetable might look like Table 1.1. This table represents a guide only. Your timing will be different, depending on your skills and needs as a writer. Note that revision takes the bulk of the time, along with planning/prewriting.

You will often have to write even though you “do not feel like it.” If you wait until you are “inspired” to write, you might never start. Often, though, once you actually sit down to start writing, you find your rhythm, and the process becomes easier. Begin by thinking about the writing task and topic. This stage is the planning/prewriting stage. Then move on to the drafting and revising stages.

### Planning/Prewriting Stage

Before ever writing one word of your draft, you must plan. You must think about your topic, often using the discovery/prewriting methods described in this book. The more time and thought you put into planning a writing assignment, the easier the writing will be because you will know what to write and how to arrange it. Planning involves two activities: gathering and organizing information.

**TABLE 1.1** *Timetable of the Writing Process*

phase:	Plan/Prewrite	Draft and Simmer		Revise and Edit	
% of time	30%	20%	10%	35%	5%
If 10 hours	3 hours	2 hours	1 hour	3.5 hours	0.5 hour