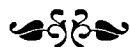


WRITING

FUNDAMENTALS

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Writing Fundamentals



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MACMILLAN PUBLISHING CO., INC.

New York

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Printed in the United States of America

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Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.
866 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022
Collier Macmillan Canada, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

McMurrey, David A.
Writing fundamentals.

1. English language—Rhetoric. I. Campman,
M. Sue. II. Title.
PE1408.M396 1983 808'.042 82-16222
ISBN 0-02-379670-7

Printing: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Year: 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

ISBN 0-02-379670-7

✍ Writing Fundamentals ✍

❧ PREFACE ❧

We have designed *Writing Fundamentals* to familiarize college freshman composition students with the basic structures and techniques used in writing paragraphs and essays. In each unit we discuss one concept involved in the writing process and coordinate that discussion with a pre- and posttest quiz and enough practice exercises to insure mastery. Composition instructors may use these units for testing, homework, or for discussion that is supplementary to their regular classroom presentations.

This book is based on two assumptions. The first is that effective writers make use of certain structures and techniques that enable them to organize and develop their thoughts quickly, efficiently, and coherently. Some writers seem to have an almost innate grasp of these rules and therefore write well and easily. Others, however, have no idea how to begin writing, let alone what principles to follow once they have started. Composition classes usually address this second group of writers when they cover such areas as topic selection and narrowing, organization, thesis sentences, development, and exposition.

This idea of underlying structures and techniques in writing leads to our second assumption. Although composition teachers spend a great deal of classroom time discussing these techniques, they can spend only a limited amount of time defining and illustrating any one concept. However, not all students learn within these time limitations, nor do they learn in the same way. Many students—if not most—would profit from exposure to material designed to supplement and reinforce what they gain in the classroom. *Writing Fundamentals* provides students with the additional reinforcement that is necessary to make these composition skills their own.

The book is divided into three parts. The presentation of the first two parts parallels the pre-writing process. The first, “Preparing to Write,” covers the skills necessary to begin a writing assignment: selecting and narrowing a subject, formulating a thesis statement, and planning the structure of the essay. The second part, “Writing the Essay,” covers skills used in the actual writing of the essay: topic sentences, paragraph organization and development, transitions, and special function paragraphs such as introductions and conclusions. The third part, “Writing the Specific Kinds of Paragraphs and Essays,” covers the major types of writing found in both paragraph- and essay-level writing: description, narration, process, cause-effect, classification, comparison-contrast, exemplification, simple analysis, definition, in addition to presenting the basic elements of persuasive writing.

Each of the twenty units that make up these three parts focuses on one basic element central to effective writing. Each unit utilizes a four-part organization: pretest, discussion, exercises, and posttest. A second posttest is included and can be used as a backup or “second chance.”

This four-part organization of each unit in *Writing Fundamentals* allows students to analyze their own weaknesses and to work independently to eliminate them. Scores on pretests give students an indication of how much they already know. More importantly, the pretest helps to point out what skills need particular attention. Knowing this can help students to search the discussion section actively and efficiently for tips on what they had difficulty with in the pretest. Thus

students gain not only a sharper focus but a sense of involvement. The pretest can also indicate which parts of the exercises they need to cover with particular care. The exercises reinforce students' newly acquired theoretical knowledge by providing them with a variety of items that use concrete examples which have specific answers. In most cases, students need not work all of the exercises but only enough to insure their mastery of the concept.

Next the student should take the first posttest. If some students score low on this test, they should return to the remaining exercises and try to clarify their understanding of the unit. When they feel ready again, they can take the second posttest, which provides another chance for them to test their abilities.

Working through the units in *Writing Fundamentals* will equip students with the ability to recognize and employ the structures and techniques underlying good writing. The exercises and tests are designed to give students practice in manipulating writing concepts in a way that simulates as well as possible actual phrases of the writing process. In addition, students will gain an understanding of the basic terminology used by teachers of composition.

In general, the material in all the exercise and test sections reflects the reading level and interests of the average freshman composition student. It comes from a wide variety of sources, both popular and classical, and contains many sentences and paragraphs that are either direct quotations or paraphrases of modern writing. By reflecting the variety of subject matter and opinion that characterizes modern writing, our book inevitably contains much that is controversial and a certain amount that is now dated. The disputed ideas should not be viewed as the personal beliefs of the authors, but instead as a reflection of the diversity found in freshman composition anthologies and in modern thought in general. As for the dated material, we are more interested in providing students with good exercise material than in providing them with the latest employment and population figures. In any event, students and instructors, as they use these exercises, should remember that the facts and opinions contained in this book are by no means universally accepted.

Acknowledgments

A list of acknowledgments to all of those who helped bring this book about would indeed be lengthy. But in particular the authors would like to thank their families for their patience, cooperation, and support during the writing of this text. Special thanks go to Betty Nelick for having introduced David McMurrey to *English Fundamentals* while at Baker University in Kansas and to Dr. Susan Wittig, whose structural approach to composition provided much of the inspiration for this book. Thanks also go to Sue Campman's early mentors, Dr. John Ramsey, ex-Director of Composition, and Dr. Terry Mosher, Director of the Writing Lab, both of the State University College at Fredonia, New York.

In addition, both authors want to express great thanks for the advice and encouragement of Dr. James Kinneavy and Dr. Maxine Hairston, both at the University of Texas at Austin, to Tom Cameron, and to the support of the staff of the Writing Lab there, which during the work on this book included Ann Levin, Teresa Grant, John Cline, Ann Ferrarese, Jan Hines, Joe Thomas, Kathy Catmull, James Barlow, Daniel Nelson, and Dr. Cynthia Selfe, now at Michigan Technological Institute. Our thanks go also to our typists, Mollie Banks, Deanna Metcalf, Carol Rhoades, and Karen McCormick, for their wonderful efficiency and great patience with difficult drafts.

Thanks finally to the many freshmen composition students who in their work in the Writing Lab contributed, however unknowingly, to the development of this book.

We also wish to express our great thanks to the support and confidence afforded us by Douglas Day, Macmillan college sales representative here in the Texas area, Hurd Hutchins, our production editor, and, above all, Anthony English, our editor.

D. A. M.
M. S. C.

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❧ PART I ❧

PREPARING TO WRITE

Lesson 1

Subject Selection and Narrowing

Pretest

Some of the keys to developing good essay topics involve recognizing good topics in our own personal experiences, knowing some techniques of making them more specific, and knowing how to distinguish the general from the specific.

- A. In some cases the use of personal experience in expository writing is acceptable, but in general, most expository writing uses it sparingly. Read the following suggested subjects and the expository topics below them. Circle the letter of the topic that is *both* the most specific and the freest of personal experience.
1. *Personal Experience*: My favorite actor of the past, Humphrey Bogart
 - a. *Casablanca* and *The Maltese Falcon*: my favorite movies in which he starred.
 - b. The evolution of the movie roles Bogart played.
 - c. How my cousin and I argue whether Bogart or Spencer Tracy was the greatest.
 2. *Personal Experience*: The desire of my friend to go hang gliding this weekend
 - a. How he got interested in hang gliding last year while at a kite-flying contest.
 - b. My family's interest in a variety of forms of flight.
 - c. How a hang glider gets aloft, stays aloft, and lands.
 - d. The techniques and dangers of hang gliding.
 3. *Personal Experience*: My impulse to dig a shelter beneath my house as protection in the event of nuclear war
 - a. How most of the streets leading out of our city would be irrevocably jammed in case of attack.
 - b. Comparison of nuclear weapons possessed by the USSR and the United States.
 - c. How most of my friends feel about the possibility of nuclear war.
 - d. The U.S. neutron bomb: a new defense capability.
 4. *Personal Experience*: My experience at church this past week
 - a. The new ways I learned to view the story of Job and its relationship to my own life.
 - b. The basic components of the Christian church building.
 - c. Christian architecture: structure, symbolism, history, and change.
 - d. What the stained glass windows at our church symbolize to me.

5. *Personal Experience*: My desire to learn about computers and data processing in college
- My interest in a home computer to keep financial accounts.
 - Business uses of computers in the United States.
 - Home computers for my specific needs.
 - The use of computers for automatic financial record-keeping.

B. Certain questions can act as powerful tools to help you develop your ideas about a topic. In the questions below, the *x* stands for the subject. Circle the letter of the topic description that *both* answers the question and is the most specific.

1. *Subject*: Panda bears

Question: What are the causes or effects of X?

- The physical dimensions and diet of pandas.
- An anatomical description of the panda bear.
- The threatened extinction of the panda bear: lack of its preferred species of bamboo.
- The birth in captivity of a panda bear in China in 1978.

2. *Subject*: Energy

Question: What are the reasons for or against X?

- New guidelines and strategies for saving energy in the United States.
- The problem of declining energy resources in the world: causes and cures.
- The reasons that Americans are running out of energy resources.
- The problem of energy shortage: the urgent need to switch to solar energy.

3. *Subject*: Religion

Question: How is X made or done?

- How medieval Christians built the great cathedrals of France, Italy, and Spain.
- How the French cathedral at Chartres was built.
- The basic architectural components of the European cathedral.
- The basic architectural components of the cathedral at Chartres.

4. *Subject*: North American Indians

Question: How does X compare with Y?

- Marital practices of the Sioux Indians.
- Great leaders in Sioux Indian history.
- Sioux and Cheyenne Indians: marital codes in sharp contrast.
- Where the Sioux live now: reservations in Oklahoma and other southwestern states.

5. *Subject*: Farming

Question: How is X defined?

- Three different methods of hybridization used by American farmers.
- Economic gains created by hybridization, a process used by American farmers.
- The basic process of hybridization and its operation.
- What would happen if more hybridized plants were introduced into Third World countries?

Discussion: Subject Selection and Narrowing

One of your first problems as a writer is to find a subject and to develop a topic from it. Two important skills are required: subject selection (often called *invention*) and narrowing. The lack of the second skill, narrowing, often leads to uninteresting essays. Of course, subject selection and narrowing are never the same from one writing situation to the next, but typical assignments in writing classes include the following:

1. You are asked to write an expository essay on any subject of your choice.
2. You are asked to write on an assigned general topic in any way you wish, as long as the essay is expository.
3. You are asked to write a particular type of expository essay (for example, a descriptive essay) on any topic you choose.
4. You are asked to respond to a particular question or statement; this assignment sets up both the topic and the type of writing.

Obviously, the problems of subject selection and narrowing are slightly different in each of these four cases. This unit discusses subject selection and subject narrowing as they relate to the first and second kinds of assignments. If you are comfortable with the first two kinds of assignments, the last should cause you no problems.

Although we discuss it as a separate phase in the writing process, you should remember that narrowing the subject takes place *throughout* the composition of an essay. You may find yourself narrowing the topic when you create the thesis sentence, the essay outline, the rough draft, or even the final copy.

General Subjects. General subjects are extremely broad areas of knowledge or information, such as medicine, science, sports, education, health, money, or government. Any subject can be too general or too specific, depending on the amount of space in which you are asked to discuss it. What may be too general for a three-page paper may be too specific for a twenty-five-page paper.

Narrowing or Limiting a Subject. When you narrow or limit a subject, you make it more specific: for example, "soccer" is a more specific subject than "sports." To narrow or limit or focus a subject, you need to be able to distinguish the general from the specific, and you need to know some strategies for narrowing a subject or topic. This unit is designed to give practice in these two skills.

Topics. A topic, as the term is used here, is simply a more specific version of a general subject. A general subject can produce many specific topics, as the following illustration shows:

General Subject: Sports

More Specific Topics:

| | |
|-------------|---------------------|
| Soccer | Scholarships |
| Baseball | Professional sports |
| Football | Amateur sports |
| Competition | Injuries |
| Rules | |

The two terms, *subject* and *topic*, are used comparatively here: the subject is more general; the topic is more specific. The topic is what you actually write a paper about. Topics themselves may also be too general and may need further limiting or narrowing.

Expository Writing. Dictionaries define *exposition* as the act of conveying information or explaining something difficult to understand. Exposition is usually distinguished from narration, description, and argumentation. However, in practice in classrooms around the United States, it usually involves or combines these three types of writing plus one or more of the following:

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Definition | Cause-effect analysis |
| Classification | Simple analysis |
| Comparison-contrast | Exemplification |

In any event, the main goal of expository writing is to explain, to inform, to interpret, to make clear, and even to instruct.

Traditionally, any mention of personal experience or the use of the first person (*I* or *we*) in expository writing was strongly discouraged. But recently, the interjection of *I* and personal experience has become more acceptable as long as the purpose of the whole essay is to explain or to inform rather than to record private feelings and experiences that strangers reading the essay would not find interesting or informative.

IDEAS FOR FINDING A GENERAL SUBJECT

In many cases, the subject matter of an essay may be left entirely up to you. Although this situation gives you, the writer, a great deal of freedom, it can actually make it more difficult to think of a subject. Here are some suggestions for finding a subject:

1. Choose something that interests you. Don't be afraid that it might not be suitable or that it might be boring. Your job as a writer is to make it suitable and interesting. Look for such subjects as your hobbies, career interests, curiosities, and regular or entertainment activities. As you think of these subjects, write them down on scratch paper.
2. You may also be able to find a subject by jotting down some general words like the following:

| | |
|----------|--------|
| Religion | Health |
| Space | Sports |
| Science | War |

Select one of these and begin the process of narrowing.

3. Other ways of finding a subject or topic include watching television news or documentary programs and flipping through magazines or newspapers. Just by watching the national or local news on any evening, you might produce a list much like the one in item 2.

Once you have found a subject, remember that you have accomplished only the first step. These steps follow:

- a. Narrowing the subject to an appropriate topic.
- b. Developing a thesis sentence.