

THE
RANDOM
HOUSE
HANDBOOK

SIXTH EDITION



FREDERICK CREWS

The Random House Handbook

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Frederick Crews

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THE RANDOM HOUSE HANDBOOK

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About the Author

FREDERICK CREWS, Professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley, received the Ph.D. from Princeton University. In his career he has attained many honors, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, appointment as a Fulbright Lecturer in Italy, an essay award from the National Council on the Arts and Humanities, election to membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and, from his own university, recognition as a Distinguished Teacher and as Faculty Research Lecturer. His writings include the widely used *Borzoi Handbook for Writers* (with Sandra Schor) as well as highly regarded books on Henry James, E. M. Forster, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, the best-selling satire *The Pooh Perplex*, and two volumes of his own essays entitled *Out of My System* and *Skeptical Engagements*. Professor Crews has published numerous articles in *Partisan Review*, *The New York Review of Books*, *Commentary*, *Tri-Quarterly*, *The American Scholar*, and other important journals. He has twice been Chair of Freshman Composition in the English Department at Berkeley.

FOR BETTY
again and always

Preface

Since its original publication in 1974, *The Random House Handbook* has continually evolved toward greater clarity, ease of use, and responsiveness to the concerns of composition instructors and students. Like previous revisions, the sixth edition attempts to retain the *Handbook's* distinctive outlook and tone, including its sometimes whimsical sample sentences. Once again, however, I have made some fundamental changes as well as many smaller ones. Instructors who know the fifth edition will want to be alert to the following developments among others:

1. Much of the represented student writing is new, including a fresh research essay, a new example of "One Essay from Start to Finish," and a complete essay illustrating the assessment of a published text.
2. The number of exercises in the Usage section has been considerably increased, with more emphasis on the student writer's own original sentences as opposed to right/wrong choices.
3. A new Chapter 3, "Planning an Essay," conveniently combines advice on developing a topic and thesis with advice on organization.
4. Material on the presenting of evidence, formerly scattered through three chapters, has been consolidated in a new Chapter 4, "Supporting a Thesis."
5. Chapter 5, now called "Collaborating and Revising," devotes a good deal of emphasis to peer editing, including a Peer Editing Worksheet that instructors can adapt to their own assignments.
6. The segment of chapters on "The Research Essay" has been moved forward to occupy Part III (Chapters 6, 7, and 8), so that it can naturally follow the advice on "Composing Whole Essays."
7. Chapter 6, "Finding and Mastering Sources," now places more emphasis on on-line catalogs and CD databases, provid-

ing fuller information about the latter than any handbook to date.

8. Chapter 7, "Documenting Sources," now keeps the MLA and APA citation styles separate instead of juxtaposing them. (Since only one style will be used in a given paper, close comparisons are not helpful.)
9. With separate chapters on paragraph unity and continuity (9), paragraph development (10), and opening and closing paragraphs (11), instructors can now more easily choose what to emphasize.
10. Similarly, the old chapter on "Sentences" has become Chapters 12, 13, and 14, on "Writing Distinct Sentences," "Subordination," and "Sentence Emphasis and Variety."
11. Again, the old chapter on "Words" is now Chapters 15, 16, and 17: "Appropriate Language," "Efficient Language," and "Figurative Language."
12. Chapter 15 now includes a new point, "Master idioms," showing which prepositions go with certain common phrases. Students for whom English is a second language should find this advice helpful.
13. I have included a whole chapter (19) on "Joining Independent Clauses," thus enabling the key usage problems of sentence fragments and run-on sentences to be highlighted and treated more extensively in chapters of their own (18 and 19, respectively).
14. Chapter 23 has been considerably expanded to cover pronoun agreement as well as pronoun reference.
15. Fifteen separate, and potentially cumbersome, comma rules in the fifth edition are now consolidated and graphically illustrated in three convenient boxes (27a-c).
16. Chapter 38 now shows how to prepare not only business letters but also cover sheets for facsimile transmissions.
17. A new Part XI, "Tools," includes a chapter entitled "Writing with a Word Processor."
18. Throughout the book I have simplified alphanumeric head-

ings to replace difficult grammatical concepts with concrete, readily grasped examples.

19. Highlighted passages in examples are now shown by unmistakable boldface type.
20. Finally, the index, which now devotes separate lines to subtopics, is much easier to consult than before.

These and other changes have brought *The Random House Handbook* closer in content and format to the second edition of *The Borzoi Handbook for Writers*, which the late Sandra Schor and I published in 1989. But whereas *Borzoi* is intended chiefly as a reference tool, this present book gives special attention to rhetorical strategies for the college writer. It is also distinguished by a greater number of examples (including some droll ones) and by the inclusion of exercises.

Since this text can be ordered shrink-wrapped with Michael Hennessy's superb *Random House Practice Book*, instructors who want to go beyond the exercises in the *Handbook* can do so without causing their students much additional cost or any inconvenience. I have prepared a new *Instructor's Manual* explaining alternative ways to use the book and providing answers to the exercises.

There are other supplements as well: the *Random House On-Line Handbook* (IBM Version), *The Random House Diagnostic Tests*, and an *Answer Key for the Random House Practice Books*.

I remain sincerely grateful to everyone who has been mentioned in previous acknowledgments. Space permits me to single out only those generous people who have enriched this edition in distinctive and indispensable ways: James R. Belser, Gladys M. Craig, Alice Jaggard, Judith C. Kohl, Steve Pensinger, Sandra Schor, Jo-Ann M. Sipple, and Anita Wagner.

Frederick Crews

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Introduction

Looking ahead

If you are like most students entering a composition course, you arrive with a mixture of hope and worry. The hope is that the course will help you to put your thoughts into written words with greater precision and effect. The worry is that nothing of the sort will happen and that you will have to go through a painful, humiliating ordeal. Essays, you know, will be required of you on short notice. Will you be able to write them at all? Looking ahead, perhaps you experience a feeling that assails every writer from time to time—the suspicion that words may fail you. (And if words fail you, the instructor may fail you, too.)

It may seem odd at first that putting your thoughts into words should be so challenging. Since childhood, after all, you have been speaking intelligible English. When you talk about things that matter to you, the right words often come to your lips without forethought. Again, in writing letters to friends you scribble away with confidence that you will be understood. But in writing essays you find yourself at a disadvantage. You know that your prose is expected to carry your reader along with a developing idea, but you don't have a clear notion of who that reader is. Instead of exchanging views with someone who can see your face, interpret your gestures, and tell you when a certain point needs explanation or support, you have

to assume a nonexistent relationship and keep on writing. It is almost like composing love letters "to whom it may concern" and mailing them off to "Occupant" or "Boxholder."

Faced with this real but manageable challenge, some students make matters worse by conceiving of "good writing" as a brass ring to be seized or, more probably, missed on their first and only try. Condemning themselves in advance as people who lack a writer's mysterious gifts, they imagine that their function in the months ahead will be merely to produce errors of expression so that their instructor can continue to believe that the language is going downhill. For them, the game is over before its rules have been explained.

To stave off such defeatism you need only realize that effective prose is not like a brass ring at all; it is more like the destination of a journey, approachable by steps that anyone can follow. People who turn out dazzling work without blotting a line are so rarely found that you can put them out of your mind. Everyone who writes for a living knows what you too should remember: by and large, *writing is rewriting*. Even the most accomplished authors start with drafts that would be woefully inadequate except *as* drafts—that is, as means of getting going in an exploratory process that will usually include a good many setbacks and shifts of direction. To feel dissatisfied with a sample of your prose, then, is not a sign of anything about your talent. The "good writer" is the one who can turn such dissatisfaction to a positive end by pressing ahead with the labor of revision, knowing that niceties of style will come more easily once an adequate structure of ideas has been developed.

Thus it is also a mistake to think of yourself as either having or not having "something to say," as if your head were a package that could be opened and inspected for inclusion of the necessary contents. We do not *have* things to say; we acquire them in the process of working on definite problems that catch our attention. If you grasp that crucial fact, you can stop worrying about writing in general and prepare yourself for writing *within a context*—that is, inside a situation that calls for certain ways of treating a typical range of questions.

Everything you encounter in a college course provides elements of context, helping to make your writing projects less like all-or-nothing tests of your inventiveness and more like exercises in the

use of tested procedures. Before long, in any course that calls for written work, you will have picked up important clues about characteristic subject matter and issues, conventions of form and tone, and means of gathering and presenting evidence. And as you do so, you will find yourself not only writing but also thinking somewhat like a historian, an economist, or whatever. That practice in operating within the idiom, or accepted code, of various disciplines is a good part of what a successful college experience is about.

In a composition course, most of your contextual clues will be gleaned not from readings or lectures but from your instructor's way of explaining assignments, discussing common problems, and commenting on your submitted work. It is essential, therefore, that you get over any lingering image of the composition teacher as a mere fussbudget, hungry to pounce on comma faults and dangling modifiers. If you arrive with that stereotype in mind, you may start out by writing papers that are technically careful but windy and devoid of feeling. In other words, you may think that the game is to be won through negative means, by producing the lowest possible number of mistakes. You should realize instead that your instructor's standards, like your own when you pick up a magazine, are chiefly positive. It is perfectly true that English teachers prefer correctly formed sentences to faulty ones; so do you. But you also expect an article to engage you in a lively and well-conceived topic, to support a consistent central idea, and to convey information clearly and efficiently, without needless pomp. Your instructor will hope for nothing less—and nothing fancier—from your own essays.

Nevertheless, like many another freshman student, you may feel ill at ease addressing this still unknown and potentially troublesome person. Very well: don't even try. You can get the desired results if, while you compose, you think of your classmates, not the instructor, as your audience. This is not to say that you should write in dormitory slang. The point is that if you think of trying to convince people of your own age and background, you will get a reliable sense of what needs proving, what can be taken for granted, and what tone to adopt. If the student sitting next to you would probably choke on some contrived generalization, leave it out. If you suspect that the class as a whole would say "Make that clearer" or "Get to the point," do so. Your instructor will be delighted by any paper that would impress most of your classmates.