

Strategies for Successful Writing



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STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL WRITING

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Preface

Strategies For Successful Writing is a comprehensive rhetoric–handbook that offers ample material for a full year of freshman composition. Instructors teaching a one-term course can make selections from chapters 1–10 and from whatever types of specialized writing suit the needs of their students. Our approach is traditional but is tempered by an awareness of recent thinking about the writing process. The process, however, does not become its own objective, overwhelming and intimidating students.

Because we strongly believe that a composition textbook should be written to the student, we have aimed for a style that is informal without being condescending, conversational yet clear and concise. We believe that our style invites students into the book, lessens their apprehensions about writing, and provides a model for their own prose.

The text follows a logical whole-to-parts sequence comprising five parts. The opening section provides an overview of basic writing considerations. The next three focus on the different writing patterns, the elements—paragraphs, sentences, words—that make up compositions, and specialized kinds of writing. The final section is a comprehensive handbook. Each part offers a variety of exercises that reinforce points in our discussion and expand assignment options.

Part I, “The Basics,” includes two chapters. Chapter 1, “Writing: A First Look,” introduces students to the purposes of writing, the qualities of good writing, and audience awareness. Chapter 2 looks at the composing process. After preliminary remarks on understanding the assignment, we explore several strategies for focusing on a suitable topic as well as several ways of generating support for it. Next, we look at the requirements of a good thesis statement and then at organizing information by means of an informal outline. Finally, we discuss writing the first draft and then revising it, posing several sets of questions that serve as revision guidelines. To make the different stages more concrete, an unfolding case history gradually evolves into the first draft and final version of a student paper. Marginal notes highlight key features of the finished product.

The five chapters in Part II, “Writing Strategies,” feature the different modes, or patterns, for developing papers. We discuss every pattern clearly and completely, to enhance students’ understanding and facilitate their writing efforts. The patterns are presented as natural ways of thinking and therefore as effective ways of organizing writing. Except for argument, which rates a separate chapter, patterns are paired according to function, an approach that helps students grasp their utility and importance. Chapter 3 focuses on exploring time, space, and events by means of narration and description, Chapter 4 on showing relationships through classification and comparison, Chapter 5 on explaining how and why through process analysis and cause and effect, and Chapter 6 on achieving clarity with illustration and definition. Chapter 7 shows how to convince others through argument. Instructors who favor different pairings or another sequence will find it easy to mix and match patterns as they choose.

The discussion in each chapter follows a similar approach. We first explore the key elements of each pattern and then provide concise but thorough writing guidelines. The discussion concludes with a handy revision checklist, which highlights main points for students to remember. Two complete essays, one student and one professional, follow the discussion of each pattern. The student essays represent realistic, achievable goals and spur confidence, while the professional ones broaden students’ understanding by displaying a wide range of styles, tones, and subject matter. The questions that follow each essay reinforce the general principles of good writing as well as the key points we make in our discussions. For some instructors these essays will make a separate reader unnecessary. Each chapter ends with fifteen writing suggestions.

In Part III, “Building Blocks,” we shift from full-length essays to the elements that make them up. Chapter 8, “Paragraphs,” first discusses the function and positioning of the topic sentence; then the characteristics of effective paragraphs—unity, organization, coherence, and adequate development; and finally introductory, transitional, and concluding paragraphs. Throughout this chapter, as elsewhere, carefully chosen examples and exercises form an integral part of the instruction.

In Chapter 9, “Effective Sentences,” we briefly review sentence parts and then move to various strategies for writing effective sentences. Here we consider word order in independent clauses, coordinating and subordinating ideas, positioning modifiers to create loose, periodic, and interrupted sentences, and the use of parallelism, verb voice, and fragments. The concluding section, “Beyond the Single Sentence,” offers practical advice on crafting and arranging sentences so they work together harmoniously.

Chapter 10, “Diction, Tone, Style,” deals with words and the effect they create. After an opening caveat on the importance of selecting words with the right meaning, we distinguish between abstract and concrete words as well as between specific and general terms. This part also includes a discussion of the

dictionary and thesaurus. The next part, on rhetorical effect, explains levels of diction and tone as well as how to use them. The third part, “Special Stylistic Techniques,” covers various types of figurative language and irony. The final part focuses on recognizing and avoiding wordiness, euphemisms, clichés, and mixed metaphors.

Part IV, “Special Types of Writing,” concentrates on four specialized types of college and on-the-job writing. Chapter 11, “The Essay Examination,” offers useful advice on studying for exams, assessing test questions, and writing exams. To help students write properly focused and developed responses, we analyze three answers (two poor, one good) to the same exam question. For reinforcement, we include exercises that require students to analyze a good answer and judge two responses to a question.

Chapter 12, “Writing About Literature,” uses Stephen Crane’s “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky” as a springboard for its discussions. The chapter focuses on plot, narrator and point of view, character, setting, symbols, irony, language, and theme—the elements students will most likely be asked to deal with. For each element, we first present basic features and then offer writing guidelines. The chapter ends with general tips for writing about literature and a sample paper that analyzes a character in “The Bride.”

Chapter 13, “The Library Research Paper,” is a thorough and practical guide to writing the research paper. Our presentation includes seven stages: learning about the library, choosing a topic, assembling a working bibliography, taking notes, organizing and outlining, acknowledging and handling sources properly, and writing the paper. In response to reviewer suggestions, we have given special emphasis to recognizing and avoiding plagiarism, introducing quotations, and documenting source material. The documentation style described in Chapter 13 is the 1984 MLA system. Instructors who prefer to have students use footnotes or endnotes will find this system discussed in the appendix. As in Chapter 2, a progressive case history gradually evolves into a first draft and final version of a student paper: “Robots in Industry: A Boon for Everyone.” Marginal notes on the final version indicate changes made during revision. Our detailed treatment should make supplemental handouts or a separate research paper guide unnecessary.

Chapter 14, “Business Letters and Résumés,” speaks to a practical reality by reminding students that the value of writing extends beyond the English classroom. We begin by pointing out the features of successful letter language, then discuss the parts of the business letter and preparations for mailing. The final part explains and illustrates letters of inquiry, order letters, complaint letters, job application letters, and personal data sheets. The example letters address a variety of situations—requesting information for a classroom project, ordering household appliances, asking that a faulty order be replaced, finding a job—that suggest the utility of these kinds of writing.

Part V is a comprehensive handbook that consists of six parts: “Sentence

Elements,” “Sentence Errors,” “Punctuation and Mechanics,” “Spelling,” “Glossary of Word Usage,” and “Glossary of Grammatical Terms.” Explanations skirt unneeded grammatical terminology and are reinforced by exercises in the first three parts. The spelling unit presents four useful spelling rules and an extensive list of commonly misspelled words. The glossary of word usage offers similarly comprehensive coverage of troublesome usages. The glossary of grammatical terms includes brief definitions of terms discussed in detail earlier in the handbook, together with page numbers directing users to the expanded discussions. Instructors can use the handbook either as a reference guide or as a basis for class discussion.

Our instructor’s manual, *Strategies for Successful Teaching*, provides answers to all the discussion questions and, where appropriate, to the exercises. In addition, for those instructors charting their approach or refining their direction, Professor Roxanne Cullen has helped us prepare a smorgasbord of possible approaches to teaching freshman composition, including such options as teacher-centered and student-centered classrooms, peer editing, and workshop writing. In addition, she discusses various ways of assessing writing, provides a selected bibliography of books and articles which may interest composition teachers, and offers useful suggestions for teaching each part of the text.

Like other textbook writers, we are indebted to many people. Our colleagues at Ferris State College and elsewhere assisted us in numerous ways: criticizing portions of the manuscript, testing approaches and exercises in their classrooms, suggesting examples to include, and helping with library research. They include Sandy Balkema, Arthur Bennett, Mary Braun, Ann Breitenwischer, John Caserta, Ada Lou Carson, Roxanne Cullen, Paul Devlin, Joe Dugas, Hugh Griffith, Don Hanzek, Fred Howting, Marvin Mengeling, Elaine Nienhouse, and Elliott Smith. We are also grateful to the many reviewers, too numerous to mention, whose penetrating comments on each draft helped a manuscript gradually evolve into a book. Many thanks also to Maurine Lewis and our friends at Prentice-Hall, whose editorial expertise and congenial guidance were vital to this project: Phil Miller, Joyce Perkins, and Virginia Rubens. We would be remiss if we didn’t mention our typists, particularly Emma Crystal, Coleen Hunsanger, Becky Jacobs, Karen Rynearson, and Sally Walton, who were ever helpful in meeting deadlines. Finally, we’d like to thank Paul Hart for his generous help with cartoons, and St. Martin’s Press for allowing us to incorporate material from our textbook *Writing for Career-Education Students* into this book.

J.A.R.
A.W.H.

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