JOHN TRIMBUR

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BRIEF EDITION

THE CALL TO WRITE

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John Trimbur

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The Call to Write

Brief Edition

Preface

The Call to Write offers students a broad introduction to writing, so that they can learn to write with flexibility and influence in a variety of settings. One of these settings, certainly, is school. Often a person's earliest formative experience with writing takes place in school, and for this reason people often think of writing as an academic subject to be studied, learned, and tested. Many of the assignments in the following chapters are typical of the writing college students are called on to do. A central aim of this book, after all, is to help students become effective writers in their college coursework.

At the same time, *The Call to Write* takes as its starting point the view that writing is much more than a school subject. Writing is an activity individuals and groups rely on to communicate with others, organize their social lives, get work done, entertain themselves, and voice their needs and aspirations. People write lists to remember what they need to do, letters to stay in touch with friends and relatives, memos and reports to communicate with coworkers on the job, newsletters to publicize what a club or organization is doing, brochures to inform readers, and flyers and petitions to persuade others to support causes. This textbook presents a wide range of situations that call on people to write—in everyday life, in school, in the workplace, and in the public sphere.

Just as the situations that give rise to writing differ, so do the tools available to writers. Technologies of writing range from the hand-written note to the typed or word-processed essay to the new means of composing e-mail and hypertext in cyberspace. Writing no longer refers simply to print literacy and the words on the page. It also involves electronic communication media and the integration of text, graphics, sound, and video. While *The Call to Write* cannot teach many of the skills needed to operate new writing technologies, it takes into account how writers use these new means of communication and how many forms of writing combine words and graphics to present a message.

One of the main premises of this book is that writing should belong to everyone in the various roles people play—as private individuals, as students, as workers, and as participants in public life. *The Call to Write* offers students an education in writing, with the goal of enabling them to see how writing connects individuals to others and to the cultural practices and social institutions that shape their lives. In this regard, the call to write—the felt sense that something

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needs to be said—presents writing not just as a skill to master but as a means to participate meaningfully in the common life and to influence its direction.

Distinctive Features of *The Call to Write*

The distinctive features of *The Call to Write* follow from its commitment to help students understand what calls on people to write and the means of written communication available to them:

A WIDE ARRAY OF WRITING

The Call to Write includes examples of public writing—ranging from speeches, news stories, government reports, and op-ed pieces, to comic strips, graffiti, listservs, ads, flyers, and newsletters—as well as academic articles, literary essays, and student work.

GUIDED WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

The chapters in Part Two, "Writing Projects," include individual and collaborative writing assignments based on eight familiar genres—letters, memoirs, public documents, profiles, reports, commentary, proposals, and reviews. Each chapter includes extensive treatment of invention, planning, peer commentary, and revision, as well as student commentaries on their own writing (Writers' Workshop) and an opportunity for students to reflect on the process of writing (Writing Inventory). Discussions of Paragraph Development, Beginnings and Endings, and Connections and Coherence pertinent to each genre are integrated into the assignments.

AN EMPHASIS ON COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The Call to Write includes many opportunities for group discussions, as well as a collaborative project (Working Together) and guidelines for peer commentaries in each of the chapters in Part Two. Part Three, "Writers at Work," demonstrates how writers work together on both individual and collaborative writing projects.

INTEGRATION OF READING AND WRITING

Chapter 2, "Reading and Writing: The Critical Connection," offers an overview of reading strategies and explains how writers integrate reading into their work. Throughout the book, questions for Critical Inquiry ask students to read closely and carefully, to understand their responses as readers and the decisions writers have made.

A FOCUS ON VISUAL DESIGN

Many of the writing samples in *The Call to Write* include both text and graphics, and each chapter in Part Two includes a section on Designing Documents that asks students to evaluate critically the visual design of various documents. Chapter 18, "Document Design," presents basic principles of manuscript preparation, page layout, and how text and visual design features work together.

ON-LINE ACTIVITIES

Throughout *The Call to Write* there are many samples of online writing—e-mail messages, listservs, newsgroups, and Web sites—as well as activities that invite students to explore and evaluate new electronic communication media. Chapter 14, "The Writer's Tools: Word Processing and Electronic Communication," offers a convenient overview of new writing technologies.

AN EMPHASIS ON ETHICS AND THE WRITER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

The Call to Write presents boxes on the ethics of writing that raise issues concerning writers' responsibilities toward their readers and their subjects. Chapter 3, "Argument: Persuasion and Responsibility," includes coverage of how writers can deal responsibly with disagreements and negotiate their differences with others.

Using *The Call to Write*

The Call to Write is meant to be used flexibly, to fit the goals and local needs of teachers, courses, and writing programs.

While there is no single path to follow in teaching *The Call to Write,* for most teachers the core of the book will be the Writing Projects in Part Two—the guided writing assignments based on eight common genres. Teachers can choose from among these genres and assign them in the order that best suits their course design.

A rich array of material appears in the other sections of *The Call to Write,* and teachers may draw on the various chapters to introduce key concepts and deepen students' understanding of reading and writing. It can be helpful to think of the organization of the book as a modular one that enables teachers to combine chapters in ways that emphasize their own interests and priorities.

The following overview of the organization of *The Call to Write* describes the six main parts of the book and explains how these parts might be used.

- **Part One, "Writing and Reading,"** introduces students to the notion of the call to write, offers strategies for critical reading, and presents methods for identifying disputed issues, planning responsible arguments, and negotiating differences with others.

  Chapter 1, "The Call to Write in Context," is a good starting point in any writing course because it explains what calls on people to write in a variety of settings, enhancing students' understanding of how writing is interwoven into so many aspects of contemporary life and how writing takes on force and consequence in the world.

  The following two chapters—Chapter 2, "Reading and Writing: The Critical Connection," and Chapter 3, "Argument: Persuasion and Responsibility"—emphasize the belief held throughout this book that to write responsibly means to write in a way that engages with others and takes their views seriously. Chapter 2 focuses on how to read closely and carefully, analyzing and evaluating what others have said. Chapter 3 focuses

on understanding the controversies that divide people and how to plan arguments that can clarify points of contention and negotiate differences. These two chapters can serve to introduce central themes at the beginning of a course, or they can be integrated throughout the course as issues of critical reading and argument come up.

- **Part Two, "Writing Projects,"** presents eight familiar genres of writing with examples, questions for Critical Inquiry, and individual and collaborative writing assignments. Assignments call on students to write for a number of different audiences and in a number of different settings, ranging from everyday life to the academic world to public forums. Moreover, the aims of the writing assignments vary, from expressive to informative to persuasive. Each assignment contains extensive guidelines for invention, planning, peer commentary, and revision. These chapters form the core of *The Call to Write.*
- **Part Three, "Writers at Work,"** looks at how writers can work together on individual and collaborative writing projects and at the new writing technologies currently available.

  Chapter 12, "Working Together: Individual Writing Projects," includes a case study of an individual writing project from invention to editing, with examples of peer response and commentary at each step. Chapter 13, "Working Together: Collaborative Writing Projects," provides suggestions about how to work on group projects and includes a number of possible collaborative writing projects. These chapters can be integrated into a course at a number of points—to initiate discussion of how writers manage individual writing projects, to enhance students' understanding of peer commentary, and to prepare students for collaborative writing projects.

  Chapter 14, "The Writer's Tools: Word Processing and Electronic Communication," is especially appropriate for courses that emphasize on-line writing but can also be assigned usefully in any writing course.
- **Part Four, "Doing Research,"** explores what calls on people to do research, how they formulate meaningful questions, and the sources they typically use. Chapter 15, "Research Projects: Using Print and Electronic Sources," provides an overview of the research process and introduces students to library and on-line research. Chapter 16, "Field Research," includes information about research projects that use observation, interviews, and questionnaires.
- **Part Five, "Presenting Your Work,"** looks at how writers communicate the results of their work to readers.

  Chapter 17, "Research Papers: Using MLA, APA, and COS Styles," includes extensive coverage of how researchers integrate sources into their own writing and of the conventions of citation and documentation. This chapter also provides sample student research papers in MLA and APA styles.

Chapter 18, "Document Design," contains basic information on manuscript preparation and the design of such documents as letters, memos, resumés, flyers, newsletters, brochures, and Web pages. This chapter will be of special interest to teachers who want to explore more fully the focus on visual design that appears throughout the book and to students whose writing projects call for attention to layout and the integration of text and graphics.

Chapter 19, "Essay Exams," provides basic advice about how to prepare for, plan, and write essay exams successfully.

Chapter 20, "Writing Portfolios," provides guidelines about how to design a writing portfolio and examples of student work. This chapter is available for teachers who use a portfolio system of evaluation.

- **Part Six, "Guide to Editing,"** offers instruction in composing and editing sentences and serves as a basic reference on matters of grammar, style, and usage. It includes instruction on ten common problems that second-language writers may have.

Additional Resources for *The Call to Write*

The Instructor's Manual, by Rebecca Moore Howard, Amy Rupiper, Kurt Schick, Ryan Stark, and Elizabeth Woodworth, all of Texas Christian University, provides background on the genre approach of *The Call to Write* and practical teaching approaches to public writing, the ethics of writing, literacy narratives, portfolios, and collaboration. Sample syllabi are included.

The Call to Write Web Site, http://longman.awl.com/trimbur, by Brooke Hessler of Texas Christian University and Lucia Trimbur of University of London, features seven to ten activities for each chapter, with annotated links to numerous other sites that offer additional resources. "Calls to Write in the News," updated monthly, analyzes how a particular "headline event" in the news sparks written responses, and it provides a writing activity and annotated links for further inquiry.

Visual Communication: A Writer's Guide, by Susan Hilligoss of Clemson University, examines the rhetoric and principles of visual design, with an emphasis throughout on audience and genre. Practical guidelines for incorporating graphics and visuals are featured along with sample planning worksheets and design samples and exercises.

Analyzing Literature: A Guide for Students, by Sharon James McGee of Kansas State University, Salina, provides advice and sample student papers to help students interpret and discuss works from a variety of literary genres.

The Longman "English Pages" Web Site, http://longman.awl.com/englishpages, provides continuously updated resources for reading, writing, and research practice: simulated search activities for finding and evaluating information from the World Wide Web; "The Faces of Composition," essays from everyday people who discuss how studying composition has benefited their civic and work activities; and annotated links to a variety of library and scholarly sites on writing and research topics.

Acknowledgments

Preparing *The Call to Write* has made me acutely aware of the intellectual, professional, and personal debts I have accumulated over the years teaching writing, training writing teachers and peer tutors, and administering writing programs and writing centers. I want to acknowledge the contributions so many rhetoricians and composition specialists have made to my thinking about the study and teaching of writing, and I hope they will recognize—and perhaps approve of—the way their work has influenced the design of this book.

The unifying theme of the "call to write," as many will note immediately, comes from Lloyd Bitzer's notion of "exigence" and the "rhetorical situation." My treatment of argument and persuasion is informed by Aristotle's appeals (by way of Wayne Booth's sense of "rhetorical stance") and stasis theory (as articulated recently in Dick Fulkerson's *Teaching Argument in Writing*), and my understanding of reasoning in argument is altogether indebted to Stephen Toulmin (though the terminology I use differs somewhat). The influence of Carolyn Miller's seminal work on genre as "social action" should be apparent at every turn.

I learned to teach writing from two great mentors, Ken Bruffee and Peter Elbow, and their mark is everywhere in the book. My interest in visual design grows in part out of an ongoing collaboration with Diana George. Lester Faigley got me to pay attention to electronic communication and cyberspace. Bob Schwegler listened and offered key advice at many points.

I am happy to feature so much writing from students I have taught at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, where I developed and taught the bulk of the material that now appears in *The Call to Write.* Some of the student writing, I should note, has been edited for this book.

Leslie Taggart was the development editor for *The Call to Write,* and Anne Smith provided the in-house editorial support at Longman. I want to acknowledge their hard work, careful attention, good senses of humor, and loyalty to this project as it stretched over five years. Libby Miles worked on the assignment sequences in Part Two and developed the scheme of integrating Paragraph Development, Beginnings and Endings, and Connections and Coherence into each of the genre chapters. Janice Walker provided an early draft of the chapters on research. I appreciate their work.

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