



STUDENT'S GUIDE FOR

THE BORZOI COLLEGE READER

S I X T H E D I T I O N

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Student's Guide for
The Borzoi College Reader
Sixth Edition

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Student's Guide for

The Borzoi College Reader

TO THE STUDENT

We offer this Student's Guide in the hope that it will help you to see beneath the surface of what you read, particularly if you are looking for general guidance in your first encounter with the essays or considering what topics raised by the essays give promising openings for writing.

In any case, we have tried to supply examples of the kinds of questions that get at the central meaning of an essay, that uncover the issues that the essay raises, and that sharpen awareness of how the writer's organization, diction, and style shape the reader's responses.

We cannot emphasize strongly enough, however, that *the best questions are your own*. Use this Guide to suggest models for your own questions and responses, not to supplant them. You may want to do a first reading of each essay before consulting this Guide. You may, indeed, want to put your first responses in writing in a reading journal, and then compare them with ours.

Our general approach to reading and the terms and ideas we use are explained in the essay titled "Advice to the Student: On Reading an Essay," printed at the beginning of *The Borzoi College Reader*, Sixth Edition. Our questions tend to follow that advice. We have tried to avoid questions that tell you what to think, and we have tried not to let you get away without being invited to make a point for yourself.

C.M.
M.G.
J.O.

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PROLOGUE

Harold J. Morowitz

Prison of Socrates

(pp. 1–4)

1. What is the main idea of this essay? Where is it first stated?
2. Why does the author choose to write (or at least present the essay as originally written) “on a rock on the Acropolis”? Name two or three different ideas or feelings that he hopes to convey by this setting.
3. By the end of the essay, does the author present a characterization of himself? What is it? How is it related to his presentation of his ideas?
4. In the first paragraph, why does the author choose to include mention of his pausing at the chapel door, and of the “kindly waiter”? What have they to do with the ideas or feelings he wants to express?
5. How does the author use the view of the modern city of Athens under its “dark cloud of pollutants”? In what ways does this image point beyond itself? Name at least three ideas that the author draws from this image.
6. What kinds of “problems,” in the author’s view, “have only arisen with the industrial revolution and the enormous population growth of the last 200 years” (p. 3, middle)? Can you think of any other kinds?
7. If the past does not give us answers to these problems, what, in the author’s view, can we learn from the past? What implications does this have for education?
8. Read also the second essay by Morowitz in this book (pp. 206–209); then write your own essay explaining his view of education and evaluating it. Where will we get the “annoying, troublesome, Socratic-like thinkers” (p. 3, last paragraph) that Morowitz wants? Should the college curriculum be designed to produce them? Would you like to be one? Could there be too many?
9. What do you mean by a good society?

ON WRITING

Anaïs Nin

from *The Personal Life Deeply Lived*

(pp. 6–8)

1. What does Nin mean when she says that writing is “necessary to our lives”? Find all passages that explain that idea. If you have done the kind of writing she advocates, demonstrate her idea with some specific examples from your own experience.
2. Keep a daily journal or diary for seven days; in your last entry reflect on how and why you agree or disagree with Nin.
3. At the end of paragraph 3, Nin talks about finally becoming “a craftsman and a writer.” Is there a difference between the two? If yes, how would you describe it?
4. Nin sees daily writing as one way of “stopping life in order to become aware of it,” even of “peeling off false selves” (p. 8). What other activities do you know that have this effect? Are they in any way similar to writing?
5. Read the short narrative by Helen Keller (pp. 116–118). Do you see any way Keller could have “become aware” this way before she discovered words?
6. This piece is patched together from a number of talks. Do the seams show? If you didn’t know, are there any cues that suggest a speaking voice? Any cues that suggest it was first written to be spoken?

William Stafford

A Way of Writing

(pp. 9–11)

1. How does Stafford define the word “writer”? Do you think of writing as a “process,” an “activity” (par. 1)? Describe Stafford’s process.
2. Why does Stafford interrupt his first paragraph with the exclamation “but wait”? What is different about the second paragraph? Its tone? Its focus?
3. Have you ever felt “that certain richness” (par. 2) of new things to say when you write? Is there a particular time when you are “receptive” (par. 3) to the “nibble” of an idea? Begin to write on how you write—the time of day, the best place, the kind of paper and writing implement, “environmental” requirements (rock music, coffee, people, privacy, silence, or whatever).

4. In the third paragraph the author says that writing is like fishing. What activity would you compare it to? Whittling? Jogging? Cooking? Explain.
5. "If I put down something, that thing will help the next thing come, and I'm off" (par. 3). Try using Stafford's free way of writing, and then write a short essay describing your experience. Did you feel receptive? Free to fail? Worried about "standards"? Was your writing coherent?
6. Perhaps the most difficult idea to accept here is that "most of what I write, like most of what I say in casual conversation, will not amount to much" (par. 9), that "it will be like practice." Would Anaïs Nin agree? Do you feel you are "writing for others" when you write? Write an essay evaluating this assertion: "My guide is the self, and its adventuring in the language brings about communication" (par. 9).
7. Reread the dual reflection that concludes the essay. Do you agree that "Writers may not be special"? How does the "process-rather-than-substance view of writing" substantiate this idea?

Lawrence Langer

The Human Use of Language

(pp. 11–15)

1. What does Langer mean by "the human use of language"? Where in the essay is the term "human" explained most fully?
2. The essay begins with an anecdote about a paper on behavior modification written in simple English; the student was asked to rewrite it in "behavioral terms." Make a list of terms from specialized vocabularies in current use—for instance, computer jargon such as "feedback" and "input."
3. Paragraphs 3 and 4 examine the "comedy" of behavioral jargon used in an education textbook. Find a jargon-filled passage in one of your textbooks; rewrite it in "the language of simplicity and spontaneity" (par. 2), or find a passage written in simple English and rewrite it in jargon.
4. According to the essay, what "risk" is involved in "using language meaningfully" (par. 6)? Look at the language of one of your own essays. Does it have the "anonymity of abstract diction and technical jargon" (par. 7)? Write an essay trying to account for the language you used.
5. Reread the paper "People I Have Forgotten," and describe its language. How is the instructor's language different from the writer's? What risk does the reader refuse to take?
6. The author notes that the essay's "metaphor of insulation . . . is a metaphor governing the response of readers, too" (p. 15, middle).

Pick out the words (“wall,” for example) used by both the Polish woman survivor and Langer to create images of insulation.

7. In its concluding paragraphs the essay returns to behavior modification. How did the instructor’s comment and circled large D— modify the writer’s behavior? *Has* the instructor increased “the emission of desirable student behavior” (pp. 12 and 15)? If you have had a similar experience, write an essay about it.
8. Write an essay describing the ideal writer-reader relationship. Have you ever had a reader you could trust? What made that trust possible?
9. How do you interpret the essay’s final sentence? That some things are perhaps best left unsaid? Or that some things cannot be expressed in language?

Josephine Miles

Essay in Reason

(pp. 16–19)

1. What is the main idea of this essay? (Be sure you understand what Miles means by “predication.”) Where do you first find this idea expressed? Can you express it as a “leading statement” (par. 1)? Are there other, related, ideas in the essay?
2. The essay is divided into two sections. What is the first section about? The second? How are the two sections related?
3. Look for the “leading statements” in some of the other essays in this book. How well do they fit the model presented in the first paragraph?
4. Do you have difficulty writing a sentence about ideas, as Miles’s students did? Write a sentence about some idea that interests you. What is its subject? Its predicate? What kind of organization does that predication require? For instance, what connectives (p. 18) would you use in developing your idea? Rewrite your sentence until it is supportable (p. 18).
5. Write an essay using the sentence you developed in question four.
6. How useful did you find Miles’s analysis of her student’s leading sentence in writing your essay? If you used an outline, examine it to see whether you outlined your material or your idea.
7. Why does the author think it important that the student writer learn to write “responsible statements”? What dangers does she see in reports and journals? What benefits does she see in learning to compose our thoughts (concluding paragraph)?
8. Reread one of your own essays and write a paragraph evaluating your leading statement’s predication of its subject.

1. What does Zinsser mean by “clutter”? Do you agree with his diagnosis of American writing? What treatment does he prescribe?
2. “Our national tendency is to inflate and thereby sound important” (par. 2). Look for examples of clutter in statements by politicians or educators, for instance; rewrite some of these examples, simplifying them, or find a simple and clear statement and rewrite it with clutter.
3. Reread paragraph 3. Then take a paragraph of your own writing and “strip every sentence to its clearest components.” Write a short essay comparing the two versions of your paragraph.
4. “Clear thinking becomes clear writing: one can’t exist without the other” (p. 21, top). Using your own experience as a writer, evaluate this assertion.
5. “Simplify, simplify” (p. 20). Why do you think Zinsser admires Thoreau’s writing? Write an essay comparing Thoreau’s paragraph to one of Zinsser’s.
6. We are all both readers and writers. How well does Zinsser’s description of the reader fit you?
7. Although it is a truism that writers write for readers to read, we often fail to think about the reader’s response to our writing. Choose one of your paragraphs that confused your reader or a paragraph by someone else that confused you, and look for the forms of “carelessness” Zinsser includes in paragraph 10. Rewrite the paragraph, removing the “fuzz” (par. 12).
8. Does Zinsser persuade you that “Good writing takes self-discipline and, very often, self-knowledge” (p. 22)? Why does he conclude this essay with the student who couldn’t “get rid of anything”?
9. How would you compare Zinsser’s advice to that offered by Stafford (pp. 9–11)? Is one’s advice more useful than the other’s, as you begin writing? As you write your first serious draft? As you revise?
10. How would you compare what Zinsser implies about the *purpose* for writing to the ideas of any other writer in this section?

THINKING ABOUT THINKING

William Golding

Thinking as a Hobby

(pp. 25–31)

1. Although Golding's essay is informal, it has a precise underlying arrangement, and its parts are neatly unified. Consider how each of the three grades of thinking is explained and illustrated. What use does Golding make of repetition to hold his essay together?
2. Golding is dealing with a subject of potential seriousness, but he prefers to handle it rather informally and humorously. Is any reason for this approach suggested by the experience he records in the early part of the essay? At what points is his underlying seriousness most apparent?
3. Consider some of the factors contributing to the essay's tone—for instance, Golding's characterization of himself; his decision to cast his ideas into a first-person narrative; his choice of words, such as "write" in paragraph 3, "plonked," "skittles." When he describes his "coherent system for living" (p. 30, bottom) is he serious or ironic? How can you tell?
4. Golding employs other storytelling devices in this essay. One of them is description, which is rarely used in good writing merely to convey factual information. Try to determine the purpose of individual descriptions, for instance, of the headmaster's spectacles, or of Mr. Houghton's neck.
5. Examine the essay to see in what proportion Golding allows himself direct statement of his ideas and how much of his meaning is conveyed indirectly.
6. Golding uses the plaster statuettes to indicate various possible attitudes toward beauty, nature, and thought. What is the basic difference between the headmaster's arrangement of the statuettes and the narrator's successive arrangements? What meanings are the narrator's different arrangements supposed to convey?
7. Write an essay on "grade-three-thinkers," using three people of your acquaintance for illustration.
8. Write an essay on college students and grade-two thinking. Is grade-two thinking characteristic of college students?
9. Taking your cue from Golding's final paragraphs, write an essay on the advantages and disadvantages of grade-one thinking.