

FROM THOUGHT TO THEME

A Rhetoric and Reader for College English
Eighth Edition

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Eighth Edition

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PREFACE

Although this Eighth Edition is thoroughly revised and reorganized, the book's purpose and plan are essentially the same as in previous editions: to guide students from thought to theme—to show them, through both precept and practice, how they can shape the raw materials of personal experience, observation, and reflection into clear and convincing expository or argumentative prose.

The text is divided into two parts, rhetoric and readings. In this edition, Chapters 1 and 5 of Part One, the Rhetoric, have been most substantially modified. Chapter 1 presents a brief overview of the process of writing an expository theme, focusing on the important stages of that process. Chapter 5 provides a full, detailed discussion of these stages, giving more attention in this edition to prewriting and revision. Chapter 5 also contains a brief discussion of emphasis as a rhetorical principle, material on diction, a checklist of steps to follow in preparing the final draft of the theme, and a summary of the important points covered in the first five chapters.

Giving students a preliminary view of the entire expository writing process should help them to understand better the relevance of Chapters 2, 3, and 4. These middle chapters concentrate primarily on the paragraph, presenting it as a theme in miniature and providing explicit, detailed discussions of unity, development, and coherence as these principles relate to the expository paragraph and theme.

Chapter 6 introduces, in clear and simple terms, the fundamentals of sound thinking—and shows students how to apply them to their own

writing. This chapter explains and illustrates how a deductive argument, in this case the categorical syllogism, can be used as the basis of an argumentative theme. Chapter 6 also presents another pattern of paragraph development—tracing cause and effect relationships—to supplement the discussion of that subject introduced in Chapter 3.

Nine sample themes and more than 70 sample paragraphs are used to illustrate the rhetorical principles presented in Part One. About 40 percent of the paragraphs are new to this edition. Most of these paragraphs are intrinsically interesting and are sufficiently self-contained to afford opportunities for discussion and writing. In addition to the illustrative paragraphs, more than 75 exercises on tear-out sheets encourage immediate application of the lessons as they are studied.

Part Two, the Reader, presents 36 essays arranged in nine groups of four selections each. For the first time, they are organized rhetorically rather than thematically, leading to an even closer connection between the two parts of the book. This new arrangement and the additional readings (four more than in previous editions) give the second half of the text a greater breadth of subject matter than ever before.

Seventeen of the selections are new to this edition; another seven are reintroduced from earlier editions because they are excellent examples of the forms they represent. Twelve essays are carried over from the Seventh Edition for the same reason. As in the past, two-thirds of the total have never before, to the best of our knowledge, been published in a college composition text. Authors appearing here for the first time are Jeffrey Cressy, Joan Didion, Roger Ebert, Peter Elbow, Ellen Goodman, Suzanne Britt Jordan, Manuel J. Martinez, N. Scott Momaday, Donald Murray, Jewell Parker Rhodes, William Stafford, Lewis Thomas, Alvin Toffler, Mark Twain, and Joel M. Vance.

The first three essays in each group are accompanied by headnotes that introduce each selection and point out rhetorical devices and techniques students should look for as they read; related questions on the author's use of language and the rhetorical principles and practices employed follow these selections, along with a list of vocabulary items. Additional questions and exercises designed to stimulate student discussion and writing complete the apparatus. Although some of these questions and exercises do not call explicitly for writing, most of them readily lend themselves to such assignments. The fourth and final selection in each group is presented without editorial apparatus in order to challenge students to evaluate their mastery of the material at hand. The guidelines provided through the headnotes and follow-up questions for the first three selections in each group should enable students to approach the final essay with a reasonable degree of confidence and to analyze it with a minimum of additional assistance.

Three indexes are provided for Part Two—Index to Reading Selec-

tions by Subject Matter, Index to Reading Selections by Basic Rhetorical Type, and Index to Questions on Language and Rhetoric. The first index will help those who wish to utilize a thematic approach; the second and third should facilitate a closer integration of the study of rhetorical principles in Part One with the analysis of rhetorical models in Part Two.

Both the Rhetoric and the Reader concentrate on expository and argumentative prose, because these are the forms of writing that are most essential to success in college studies and because they contribute to the development of responsible critical thought as well as expression. We have, however, included readings and exercises in personal narrative and description because these forms are initially more accessible for beginning college students.

From Thought to Theme has been planned as a basic text to help students clarify, organize, and explain their thoughts and feelings. The rhetoric leads students through a sequence of lessons to an understanding and application of the principles that govern effective expository and argumentative prose. The readings have been selected and arranged to extend and expand these lessons. Although there is obviously more than one way to help students improve their writing, we believe that our emphasis on a sequential, structured approach is especially helpful to students with limited background or experience in writing. The response to the book in its previous editions has reinforced our confidence in the soundness of this approach.

Over the past twenty years we have been indebted to countless instructors and students in colleges and universities throughout the United States for their responses to, and recommendations for, the various editions of this book. We thank Professor Barry M. Maid of the University of Arkansas, Little Rock; Professor Janis Keller of State University Agricultural and Technical College, Farmingdale, New York; Professor Walt Klarner of Johnson City Community College; and Professor Joyce O. Jenkins of Alcorn State University for their suggestions for revision of this edition. We appreciate the editorial assistance we received from our publisher: in particular from Marlane Agriesti and Bill McLane for their helpful suggestions on the inclusion of new material as well as on organization and focus, and from Cate Safranek for her careful, patient supervision of the final preparation of the manuscript. And, as always, we are most deeply indebted to our wives, Dorothy and Martha.

W. F. S.
R. D. L.

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PART ONE

RHETORIC

CHAPTER ONE

AN OVERVIEW

The general purpose of this book is to help you to use and respond to language with greater assurance and skill. A more specific, practical purpose is to help you to write clear, coherent paragraphs and essays as well as to read and analyze expository prose more effectively. The discussion and writing assignments focus primarily on expository, persuasive prose, the kind of writing most frequently demanded of college students. As you develop greater skill in discovering, developing, and expressing your thoughts and feelings, you will also learn to think more clearly, more logically, since writing necessarily uses words, and most of our thinking is done with words. The ability to think and write clearly will be important to you in college because almost every subject you study will require writing in some form—essay examinations, laboratory reports, term papers, book reviews, and application forms of one kind or another. But the principles you will study, the skills you will acquire in reading, writing, and thinking more effectively, will have a broader relevance as well, for they will help you to function more successfully after college in your social, public, and professional life, as a citizen and human being in an increasingly sophisticated industrial society.

The first five chapters deal with rhetoric, the art of persuasive speech and writing. This subject has been studied by college students for hundreds of years; in fact, you have been using rhetoric in all your attempts at explanation or persuasion, in and out of school, whether you were aware of it or not. In these chapters we will concentrate on the basic principles of unity, development, coherence, and emphasis as they relate to the paragraph and essay. Chapter Six will take a brief look at some common problems of sentence construction beginning writers often encounter.

THE EXPOSITORY THEME

In your college classes you will frequently be asked to write papers of several hundred words, compositions consisting of several paragraphs

linked together in support of one central idea. Since the paragraph is the basic unit of expository and persuasive writing, in the next three chapters we will concentrate primarily on the paragraph in illustrating the principles of unity, development, and coherence. But since the paragraphs you write will generally be a part of a longer paper, we will begin here by presenting a brief preview of the process of writing the longer paper and then return to this subject in greater depth and detail in Chapter Five.

Many students who have trouble with writing assignments think that writing is simply an intuitive, inherited aptitude; that those who write well simply have a natural facility for it; and that if one lacks this facility, there is little to be done about it. To these students writing is the product of unconscious inspiration, a "bolt from the blue," and if one isn't blessed, well . . . that's that. The ability to write is, of course, enhanced by a natural aptitude for words and their arrangement. Some persons do seem to have a gift for language, an intuitive grasp of what might be called the "art" of writing that teachers and texts can't impart. But good writing does not result from natural ability alone; it is the result of thoughtful planning, intelligently directed effort, and the practice of writing and rewriting. These are matters of the "craft" of writing, and they *can* be taught and learned. And even those who have language in their bones do not simply reach for a piece of paper, tune in to some creative instinct, and write lucid, polished prose. They must think about their subject, explore their memory, their feelings, plan what they want to say, and revise their work carefully. In short, good writing doesn't demand genius, but a willingness to learn and a steady application of what has been learned.

There are no simple mechanical rules to follow in writing a theme; a system that works well for one writer may not work well for another. There is a uniqueness, an intuitive aspect, to all writing; but by following a series of steps, moving through a number of closely related stages in the process of writing a theme, you should be able to avoid many of the frustrations and false starts that plague and panic students who have no plan of procedure. These steps include (1) selecting a subject, (2) focusing your subject, (3) exploring your subject and developing a thesis statement, (4) devising a plan, (5) writing the first draft, (6) revising the first draft, and (7) preparing the final copy. The first four stages involve important pre-writing activities, the last three the writing itself.

(1) Selecting a Subject

The problem of selecting a subject is simplified when you are asked to write an expository essay on an assigned, restricted subject. In this

case make certain you understand precisely what the subject, or question as in an essay examination, calls for and organize your material to focus on that subject. When you are given greater latitude in choice of subject, as for example when you are writing about a personal experience and your own feelings, judgments, and attitudes are important, you will need to take more time to work up your subject, making certain it will have some interest and significance for your reader. When you have a choice, choose a subject you know something about or one you want to know more about. Don't undervalue the significance of your own experience, especially one that taught you something important about yourself or changed your life in some way.

(2) Focusing Your Subject

After you have decided upon a subject, you must limit it sufficiently so that you can deal with it satisfactorily within the length of the paper you intend to write. You could not write a 300–500 word paper on “The World of Work,” but one aspect of it, the benefits college students gain by working while going to college, could serve as a more specific, interesting, and therefore more satisfactory topic for an audience of college students. Similarly, a loosely focused, autobiographical essay on your childhood, adolescence, and late teen years would be less successful than a paper limited to one experience that taught you something important.

(3) Exploring Your Subject and Developing a Thesis Statement

In this stage you begin to explore your subject, to think about what you want to accomplish in your paper, what effect you want to have on your reader. If, for example, you want to inform and persuade your readers of the benefits of foreign travel, you must ask yourself what information they'll need to understand and accept your ideas and opinions. Your own travel experience, your reading and observations, conversations with others—all will serve as sources of material. If your subject is a personal experience, you'll have to dig into your memory bank for material.

Formulate, at least tentatively, a thesis for your paper, one major point you want to get across, a central question you want to answer. Though you may change your thesis as your paper evolves, devising a thesis statement at this stage will give direction to your writing; it will provide a foundation upon which to build your detail. Purpose and thesis are related concepts, but they are not the same thing. Your purpose—what you want to do in a paper—provides an overall design, a basis for choosing the kind of detail and strategies you will use in organizing

your paper. Your thesis statement, on the other hand, expresses your controlling idea, the point you want to make. It is useful to write them down at this stage so that you'll keep them in mind as you develop your ideas. For a paper on the benefit of foreign travel, they might look something like this:

- PURPOSE In this paper I want to inform and persuade my fellow students of the benefits I see in foreign travel.
- THESIS Foreign travel is an exciting, culturally enriching, and maturing experience for college students.

(4) *Devising a Plan: The Scratch Outline*

Having thought about your purpose and come up with a tentative thesis, you must now generate and organize ideas in support of that thesis. You must supply *enough* detail so that your readers fully understand your ideas and use the *appropriate* detail and strategies to persuade them of the validity of those ideas. The time you spend in pre-writing, in working up your detail—facts, illustrations, judgments—is time well spent, for it will make the later assembling of your sentences and paragraphs in their final form much easier.

As you think about your subject, jot down ideas that come to mind from your own experience and observations, and take notes on your reading as well. Then work up a brief scratch outline of your material, organizing the body of it around three or four main points that support your thesis. As you do this, *keep your readers in mind*: What do they already know about the subject? What do they need to know? What biases or prejudices might they possess that would shape their response to your subject? What do you expect them to learn from your paper? Such questions are important, for they will help you decide on the kinds of detail you'll include, the terms and concepts you'll have to define, the words you'll use, the tone you'll adopt, and so on. The more you know about your readers, the better you'll be able to stimulate their interests and satisfy their expectations.

A scratch outline for a five paragraph essay on why married women want to work outside the home might take this form:

1. Mental stimulation
 - Keep mind active
 - Break up monotony of housework, add spice to life
 - Help to contribute to livelier, more stimulating conversation with husband, children, and friends
2. Financial benefits
 - Help pay family expenses, fight inflation