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# ***WRITING AS PROCESS: INVENTION AND CONVENTION***

**Helen Rothschild Ewald**

Iowa State University

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# PREFACE

As part of your college composition course, *Writing as Process* assumes that writing is a process, that invention or discovery occurs throughout this process, and that the writer's readers implicitly participate in the writer's composing. This text sees the writer as analyzer, problem-solver, and critic engaged in bringing ideas and audience together.

Part I of this text explores what both the writer and the reader bring to and take from the composing situation, as well as what the composing process itself entails. It forges a link between reader expectations and writer principles. Part II examines how generating and clarifying topics, locating supporting information, forming arrangements, and making stylistic choices all involve invention and discovery. Part III shows various ways of arranging ideas and evidence while Part IV focuses on revision strategies.

This text offers several distinctive features. Within each chapter are Process Sheets that suggest what the writer can look for while composing. These sheets should serve as rough guides only, and not as signposts showing THE WAY to write. There is no one way to write. Writing strategies are as various as writers themselves and the audiences they address.

Excellent yet accessible student writing examples are also a feature of this text. These examples represent a blend of personal, academic, and business writings on a variety of subjects. In keeping with a process-oriented approach, the examples variously appear as prep work, rough drafts, or finished products.

This text also presents a new and logical way of classifying arrangements into patterns that isolate, that cluster, and that sequence ideas and evidence. And it shows specialized and mixed patterns. Because this classification is more logical than the traditional narrative, descriptive, expository, and argumentative modes, it is more workable for both students and instructors.

For their writings, I am indebted to my student contributors and to my former Indiana University colleague, Michael Harris, whose narrative appears within these pages. I must also thank Michael Flanigan of The

University of Oklahoma, who introduced me to the process-centered approach; Elaine Gardiner of Washburn University, who class-tested the initial manuscript; and Susan Galenbeck, Neil Nakadate, Lee Poague, Nancy Roundy, and Dave Tedlock of Iowa State University who offered encouragement and support. Not to be forgotten is Sally Dyke who typed the initial manuscript. I am sincerely grateful to the reviewers, Robert L. Brown, University of Minnesota; Eddye Gallagher, Tarrant County Community College; Tori Haring-Smith, Brown University; and Susan Helgeson, Ohio State University, who provided such helpful input and to the editors at Merrill, Beverly Kolz, Vicki Knight, and Cindy Peck. Finally, thanks to my husband Bob, my best critic and friend.

***Helen Rothschild Ewald***

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# PART I

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## WRITING AS PROCESS

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- 1 *Process and Product*
  - 2 *Readers, Writers,  
and Ideas*
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# ***PROCESS AND PRODUCT***

Before this fall, I don't really remember thinking about my audience as I wrote my papers. I was more concerned with getting the paper done, and I saw the writing of the paper as a way for just me to learn, not the reader. But this fall I found myself constantly thinking about how my audience would react to a certain word or phrase. Earlier, this would have been one of the last things I worried about.

Another aspect of writing that I had never really considered before was a purpose for writing. Before there was only one purpose—passing the course. But this fall I began to pick out topics that really interested me (like legal aid services), and I actually found myself trying to educate not only myself but also my audience on the subject of each paper.

*Kirk Leeds*

This self-evaluation suggests that writing, when meaningful, encourages growth not only in the writer but also in the reader.

This chapter introduces you to such writing by focusing on what the writer brings to the composing situation, what the composing process itself entails, and what both the writer and reader gain from composition.

## **WHAT THE WRITER BRINGS**

To understand what a writer brings to the composing situation we must first consider what a writer is. What is a writer's role? What does the writer offer to his readers? The following student writers have different opinions:

1. A writer is a professional who uses language and established forms well to express his or her point of view. The purpose or role of a

writer is to help us see beyond our own limited scope. He or she can do this either by giving us a new perspective on a familiar subject or by establishing a new subject we had never considered before.

2. A writer is a person who can manipulate words. His role includes persuading and entertaining. Another thing he does is to open our minds to new subjects.

Both of these students think the writer knows a lot more than the audience, and both seem to identify themselves with this less-informed group of readers. Other students see the writer in less distant terms, as a “relay” between the subject and the reader:

1. A writer is the link between his thoughts or imagination and his audience. He takes a subject, idea, or viewpoint, and molds it to interest his readers. The writer’s role is to put his thoughts and images into universal symbolism that all readers can understand.
2. A writer transmits her thoughts and ideas to the reader. This is what a writer is, a transmitter. The writer’s role is to give the reader something of value through her writing. This may be entertainment, a new way of thinking, or new information like a scientific breakthrough.

In both of the preceding definitions, the students assume that the writer comes to the composing situation with something to say. For them, a writer is someone “in the know” who conveys that knowledge to others.

### ▼ EXERCISE 1.1

Jot down your own answers to the questions: What is a writer? What is a writer’s role? Do you agree that a writer is someone “in the know”? Do you consider yourself a writer?▲

Many people believe that writers are *born* with a natural talent for their craft. They believe that writers automatically have something to say. Does this mean then that a person cannot *become* a writer?

Although some writers do start out with something interesting and important to say, others—many others—discover ideas and topics *while* writing. If writers do not always bring “something to say” to the composing situation, then what do they bring?

Writers bring basically three things: (1) a way of viewing the world, (2) a general knowledge of how discourse (communicating through language) works, and (3) an approach to composing. Let's examine these in more detail.

## Your World View

Your world view is the set of assumptions that you accept as true. For example, your world view may consist, in part, of the following beliefs:

1. People are fundamentally good by nature.
2. The way for the U.S. to prevent war is to be strong militarily.
3. Marijuana should be legalized.
4. My parents don't understand me.
5. If you try hard enough at something, you will eventually succeed.

Your own set of assumptions can contain both general and specific ideas or premises just as these do.

### ▼ EXERCISE 1.2

List a dozen or so assumptions that help define your world view. How many of these assumptions have you acquired recently? How many have you held for a long time?▲

When you compose, your set of assumptions helps you answer questions such as “*Why* does this topic seem relevant to me?” and “*How well* does my main idea reflect my social and/or ethical beliefs?” It also helps answer: “*What* is the audience in relationship to me? Is it hostile? Objective? Educated?” “*Who* is the audience in relationship to me? Is it a teacher? A peer? A mixed group of friends and strangers?” “*How well* does my audience know my subject? Does my audience share my world view?” In short, your set of assumptions not only provides you with initial ideas but also helps you define your relationship to the subject and audience, as well as their relationship to you.

## Your Knowledge of Discourse

Another element that you as a writer bring to the composing process is a knowledge of *discourse*, or the orderly expression of thought. When

someone is telling you a story or anecdote, you have certain expectations: the story's beginning will somehow set up the main point and establish the characters and the setting; the middle will contain a happening (a complicating action) and clues or statements explaining the importance of the happening; the end will finish the action and round things off. These expectations represent conventions of ordinary discourse and are highlighted in the sample below:

<i>Main point and character set up:</i>	You'll never believe who I saw today! The Shopping Bag Lady!
<i>Action:</i>	When I was a little kid, there was this old, white-haired lady who lugged two shopping bags—one on each arm—house to house. These were full of hand-made stuffed animals which she sold. She was literally bent out of shape. Us kids all thought she was ancient . . . and we were just a little afraid of her.
<i>Evaluative statements about action:</i>	I guess she sold her stuff to make a living. She sure was independent. She'd be making her rounds in the coldest weather and wouldn't take anything off of nobody.
<i>Conclusion:</i>	Well, today I saw her in the Steak Shop, bags and all. Twenty years later! As old as ever.
<i>Rounding off:</i>	I guess she was doing all right. She was ordering herself a meal when I left.

### ▼ EXERCISE 1.3

Listen to the stories people tell as part of everyday conversation. Record one, either by taking notes or using a tape recorder, and then write it up as a one to two page narrative. Note how this narrative fulfills the expectations of ordinary discourse suggested above by labeling its elements. ▲

Your knowledge of discourse goes beyond an understanding of how “natural narratives” work, however. For example, you know that *how* a person says something affects *what* is being said. If Jay says, “That’s a nice hat,” he can do so genuinely or sarcastically, happily or sadly. In other words, any grammatical statement can have a number of “rhetorical” meanings. Furthermore, you know that context can often influence meaning. If Jay says in his most sarcastic manner to Mary, “That’s a *nice* hat,”



and she doesn't get upset, you know there's something in the situation that prevents her negative reaction. It may be that she doesn't want it to be a nice hat, because it's part of her Halloween witch costume. In short, each statement has a grammatical, rhetorical, and contextual (or social) meaning.

In composing, you can apply your general knowledge of discourse in answering such questions as “*How* should I present my message?” and “*How* will my particular context color the grammatical and rhetorical meaning of what I'm saying?”

In short, your knowledge of discourse provides, in any form of written communication, the following principles:

1. The speaker/writer shares certain *conventions* of how discourse works with the listener/reader.
2. These conventions serve as general *principles* for the speaker/writer to follow.
3. These conventions also create *expectations* on the part of the listener/reader.
4. The principles can be applied and the expectations met in a variety of ways.
5. This variety is, in part, represented by the fact that any one statement may have a grammatical, rhetorical, and contextual meaning.
6. These levels of meaning may complement or contradict each other.

With these points in mind, let's turn more specifically to your background in written communication.

## Your Approach to Composing

Each writer has a composing style that may operate quite independently from the composing process itself. The following comments outline several student composing styles:

1. I write slowly, stopping often to reread and revise as I go. The speed of my writing depends on how much I know about the subject to begin with, but I am never what you would call fast.
2. After choosing a topic, I sit down and write one draft straight through as fast as possible. Sometimes I can't even read my own writing, but that doesn't matter, because I usually end up throwing most of this first stuff away anyway. It just helps to get something down.