

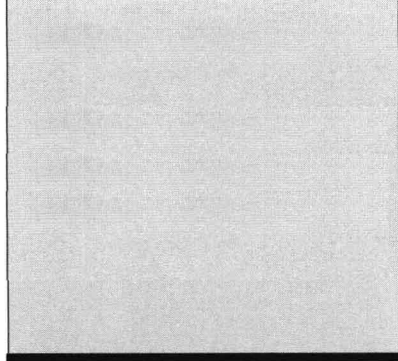
short takes

model essays for composition

sixth edition



elizabeth penfield



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Model Essays for Composition

Sixth Edition

Elizabeth Penfield

University of New Orleans



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Preface

This book combines the old and the new. Back when the first edition was only an idea, I was teaching freshman English in a highly structured program that emphasized both the rhetorical modes and the final product. My dilemma then was one that many teachers still face: how to incorporate the modes with invention and the whole tangle of the writing process. But once I focused on the aims of discourse, the modes fell into place as means, not ends, and as patterns of organization used in combination, not just singly. There remained the problem of the textbooks, many of which contained essays of imposing length and complexity, essays that intimidated and overwhelmed many a student. Often, any essay that was short was so because it was an excerpt. *Short Takes* was the result of my frustrations. The sixth edition of *Short Takes* still reflects the rhetorical framework of the first one, but it is a flexible framework. You can even ignore it and use the thematic table of contents. But if you find the modes useful, you'll see them here.

This edition remains a collection of short, readable, interesting essays written by professionals and students, and the commentary continues to focus on reading and writing as interrelated activities. But much is new. You'll find new introductions for each chapter, introductions that focus primarily on students and the writing process, as well as the kinds of choices and decisions all writers face. Much else is new as well. Ideas for writing in journals supplement the ideas for writing essays, and there are more suggestions for writing than in previous editions. As for the essays, you'll still find a large number, all of which are complete—no excerpts here. Each author's background and the context for the essay, as well as "What to Look For," the brief description of a notable feature of the writer's style, have been updated and expanded. "Key Words and Phrases," a feature that alerted readers to allusions and vocabulary, has been moved to the Instructor's Manual to allow more space for the explanatory introductions that begin each chapter. Back by popular demand is "Freeze Frame," an initial essay that sets the tone for the book by emphasizing reading and writing as

active and interrelated processes, a concept reinforced in each chapter's introduction and apparatus.

If you are familiar with previous editions, you'll also notice that the sequencing of the chapters has changed. Description, narration, and example are still at the beginning, but they are now followed by definition because it plays such an important role in expository and argumentative writing. Each chapter builds on the previous one and leads to the one that follows, culminating in argument, but argument with a difference. The chapter on argument is a basic introduction, an extension of the kind of emphasis on thesis and evidence that exists throughout the text. Within each chapter, the essays are presented in order of difficulty. All the supplementary information—the chapter introductions, background information, notes on style, questions on the essays, and suggestions for writing—balance process and product, working on the premise that the two, like reading and writing, are so closely interrelated that one cannot be considered without the other.

THE ESSAYS

This edition contains fifty-four essays, twenty-one of which are new. All are indeed short—about one thousand words at most—and as such should easily lend themselves to scrutiny and emulation, since most of the papers assigned in composition courses fall in the four hundred to one thousand word range. A few of the essays are longer and rely on the kind of research that students may be asked to carry out. And a few illustrate forms that differ from the classic short essay: the question/answer organization found in how-to or advice columns; a fully developed rhetorical situation calling for the student to respond by adopting a particular persona; and an opinion piece followed by two letters to the editor. Two essays also serve as a basic introduction to the Modern Language Association's system of documentation. All of the essays also represent complete pieces, not excerpts, illustrating the basic aims of discourse and standard rhetorical modes.

To write is to choose among alternatives, to select the most appropriate organization, persona, diction, and techniques for a given audience and purpose. Each of the essays included in this edition was chosen because it exemplifies the author's choices, and the apparatus emphasizes those choices and alternatives. Thus the essays serve as illustrative models of organization and stylistic techniques available to the writer. The essays were also chosen because their authors represent

different genders, ages, and cultures; as a result, the subjects of the essays are accessible and their perspectives are lively, qualities that also allow them to serve as sources of invention, as jumping-off places for students to develop their own ideas in their own styles.

RHETORICAL MODES AND THE AIMS OF DISCOURSE

Anyone who has used a reader with essays arranged by mode has probably run into two problems: first, few essays are pure examples of a single mode; second, most collections of essays treat argument—an aim of writing—as though it were the equivalent of description, comparison/contrast, and so on. *Short Takes* addresses these inconsistencies by emphasizing the difference between mode—how an essay is organized—and purpose—how an essay is intended to affect the reader—and by pointing out how writing frequently blends two or more modes.

Because essays usually employ more than one mode, the essays here are grouped according to the *primary* rhetorical pattern that guides their organization; the questions that follow each essay go on to point out the subordinate modes. As for the aims of discourse, the essays represent the various purposes for writing. The writers' self-expressive, informative, and persuasive purposes are underscored in the discussion questions. In addition, the apparatus connects academic writing and the kind of writing found outside the classroom.

Example, description, or other standard modes are used in developing all kinds of nonfiction prose—self-expression, exposition, and argument. Of these three types of writing, self-expression is the easiest and argument the most difficult. For that reason, argument has its own special chapter. Of the eleven pieces in that chapter, eight are interrelated: an essay and two letters focusing on anti-intellectualism, three essays on hunting, and two on the role of African-American studies within the college curriculum. All of these interrelated essays are written from very different perspectives. And while chapters 1–8 contain some essays intended to persuade, those in chapter 9 exemplify the classical appeals: to reason, to emotion, and to the writer's credibility.

APPARATUS FOR READING AND WRITING

The apparatus makes full use of the essays. Each chapter begins with a brief introduction aimed at the student and depicts the mode or pur-

pose under discussion, showing how it can be used in formal essays and in practical, everyday writing tasks. The introductions go on to point out specifically how the modes can be shaped by considerations of audience, purpose, particular strategies, thesis, and organization, ending with advice on finding a subject, exploring a topic, and drafting a paper. This division of the writing process approximates the classic one of invention, arrangement, and style, but is not intended to imply that these are separate stages.

To emphasize both what a text says and how it says it, each essay is preceded by background information on the author and the text and a brief discussion of a stylistic strategy. Two sets of questions—"Thesis and Organization" and "Technique and Style"—follow the essay. Then ideas for journal and essay writing are presented. Throughout, process and product, as well as reading and writing, are interrelated, emphasizing the recursive nature of the act of writing. Writers constantly invent, organize, and revise; the lines that distinguish those activities are narrow, if not downright blurred.

The suggestions for writing following each essay contain a number of options for both journal entries and essays, all related by theme, organization, or ideas to the work that has just been read. The assignments allow a good deal of flexibility: some lend themselves to general information or personal experience, some to research papers, and some to the classic technique of imitation. Once students select a subject, they will find flipping back to the introduction helpful. There the section "Exploring the Topic" shapes questions so that no matter what type of paper they are writing, students can generate information about it. "Drafting the Paper" then helps students organize the material and points out some of the pitfalls and advantages inherent in a particular mode or aim.

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ELIZABETH PENFIELD

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"Smells detonate softly in our memory like poignant land mines, hidden under the weedy mass of many years and experiences."

A Confederacy of Friends	Kristy Guarino	25
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"Her head hangs as though she hasn't the strength or need to lift it. Hidden beneath a dingy pile of polyester, she drags her fingertips across the leather of her face, which she shifts slowly, side-to-side, as her lips scrunch roundabout as if she's talking to someone. But no one is there."

El Hoyo	Mario Suarez	30
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"From the center of downtown Tucson the ground slopes gently away to Main Street, drops a few feet, and then rolls to the banks of the Santa Cruz River. Here lies the section of the city known as El Hoyo."

Frightened by Loss	J. Merrill-Foster	34
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"Widowed, alone, children and grandchildren flung wide from California to New England, she fills her days with little things."

Left Sink	Ellery Akers	38
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"In the world of the bathroom the light shelf was a delicatessen of the highest order. Light Buddha sat there night after glorious night, lazily snapping up moths as they fluttered past. The other two frogs seemed content to stake out the sinks, which weren't quite as dependable a food source, though they weren't bad."

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The Night of Oranges Flavius Stan 54

"It is Christmas Eve in 1989 in Timisoara and the ice is still dirty from the boots of the Romanian revolution."

The Pie Gary Soto 58

"I nearly wept trying to decide which to steal and, forgetting the flowery dust priests give off, the shadow of angels and the proximity of God howling in the plumbing underneath the house, sneaked a pie behind my coffee-lid Frisbee and walked to the door, grinning to the bald grocer whose forehead shone with a window of light."

My Inner Shrimp Garry Trudeau 62

"Adolescent hierarchies have a way of enduring; I'm sure I am still recalled as the Midget I myself have never really left behind."

I Have a Gun Tania Nyman 67

"I don't want a gun. I don't even like guns. But it seems I need one."

Angels on a Pin Alexander Calandra 71

"Some time ago, I received a call from a colleague who asked if I would be the referee on the grading of an examination question. He was about to give a student a zero for his answer to a physics question, while the student claimed he should receive a perfect score and would if the system were not set up against the student."

3 Example 75

Honky Tonking Molly Ivins 83

"Contrary to popular opinion, it is not easy to write country songs: many try and fail. One guy who never made it is Robin Dorsey from Matador, Texas. He went to Tech and had a girlfriend from Muleshoe about whom he wrote the love song 'Her Teeth Was Stained but Her Heart Was Pure.'"

Sweatin' for Nothin' Michael Barlow **88**

"We have treadmills, rowing machines, stairmasters, stationary bikes, Nordic Tracks, butt busters, and wall climbers and we labor at them while going nowhere. Absolutely nowhere! We do work that is beyond useless; we do work that takes energy and casts it to the wind like lint. And we don't even enjoy the work. Look at people in a health club. See anybody smiling?"

Stop Ordering Me Around Stacey Wilkins **92**

"Food-service positions are the last bastion of accepted prejudice. People go into a restaurant and openly torment the waiter, leave a small tip and don't think twice about it."

When Only Monsters Are Real Brent Staples **97**

"Never forget Edmund Perry, the black Phillips Exeter graduate who seemed destined for Wall Street or Congress until he was shot to death trying to rob an undercover cop."

Electronic Intimacies Peter Steinhart **101**

"Our living rooms are livelier than any national park. Any day you can switch on Nature or the National Geographic Specials and watch monkeys cavorting in trees or lions slinking through the grass."

4**Definition****109****In All Ways a Woman** Maya Angelou **116**

"Being a woman is hard work. Not without joy and even ecstasy, but still relentless, unending work."

O the Porch Garrison Keillor **119**

"A good porch gets you out of the parlor, lets you smoke, talk loud, eat with your fingers—without apology and without having to run away from home."

Picket Fences J. Decker **124**

"Wisconsin is the land of the Green Bay Packers, most of the serial killers you've seen on television, three cows for every person, and the

Cheddar Heads. This alone is enough to scare many longtime residents away, let alone a visitor."

The Myth of the Matriarch

Gloria Naylor **129**

"I've seen how this female image has permeated the American consciousness to the point of influencing everything from the selling of pancakes to the structuring of welfare benefits. But the strangest thing is that when I walked around my neighborhood or went into the homes of family and friends, this matriarch was nowhere to be found."

Discrimination Is a Virtue

Robert Keith Miller **134**

" . . . [W]ithin the last 30 years, this word has been so frequently misused that an entire generation has grown up believing that 'discrimination' means 'racism.'"

The Handicap of Definition

William Raspberry **139**

" . . . [I]t occurs to me that one of the heaviest burdens black Americans—and black children in particular—have to bear is the handicap of definition: the question of what it means to be black."

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Division and Classification

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Not Sold by Intellectual Weight

Tom Kuntz **150**

"Ah, those dewy, yawn-filled childhood morns at the breakfast table, when a glazed perusal of the cereal box during milky-sweet crunches of flakes was just the ritual to clear the brain's cobwebs for a new day of rascality."

Always, Always, Always

Bill Rohde **156**

"Tell the metaphor-happy student that commas are like dividers between ketchup, mustard, and mayonnaise; fences between dogs, cats, and chickens; or borders between Israel, Syria, and Lebanon. Without them, messes result."

The New York Walk:

Survival of the Fiercest

Caryn James **161**

"I know better than to talk back to guys who hassle women on the street. But on one weird August afternoon, I was caught in pedes-

trian gridlock in Times Square and the humidity turned my common sense to mush."

Intense! Richard Brookhiser 165

"Intense cuts across such categories as good and evil, great and mediocre, success and failure, happiness and the lack of it. Jimmy Carter in office was decent, piddling, unsuccessful, and troubled, whereas Lenin was wicked, grand, triumphant, and possibly happy (he was known to laugh at the murder of his enemies)."

The Plot Against People Russell Baker 169

"Inanimate objects are classified into three major categories—those that don't work, those that break down and those that get lost."

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"The Writer steps into the roller coaster car and straps himself in as he anticipates the ride to come."

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"... [T]he most important advantage of the high-rise mausoleum is that by putting everything-but-everything under one roof you cut down on the high cost of dying."

That Lean and Hungry Look Suzanne Britt 186

"Long after fat people have removed their coats and shoes and put their feet up on the coffee table, thin people are still sitting on the edge of the sofa, looking neat as a pin, discussing rutabagas."

Two Ways to Belong in America Bharati Mukherjee 191

"This is a tale of two sisters from Calcutta, Mira and Bharati, who have lived in the United States for some 35 years, but who find themselves on different sides in the current debate over the status of immigrants."

Man, Bytes, Dog James Gorman 196

"In five to ten years, I am sure, the Macintosh will be superseded by a new model, like the Delicious or the Granny Smith. The Cairn

Terrier, on the other hand, has held its share of the market with only minor modifications for hundreds of years."

Of Prophets and Protesters Robert C. Maynard 200

"And, although Huey Newton and Dr. King differed on solutions, their deaths are joined as reminders of the nation's unfinished business."

7 Process 204

How to Cram Jill Young Miller 210

"Cramming is like going to the dentist; if you have to do it, you want it to be as painless and as productive as it can be."

Love of the Putrid Laura Van Dyne 216

"A bath might be in order following a 'Pass through the putrid,' so I'd like to take this opportunity to cover that topic."

A Room Without a View Christina Erwin 219

"Under the pressure of a six P.M. deadline, I know I'd have to work quickly for my house to pass my mother-in-law's white-glove inspection. I had completed the major events of my cleaning the day before, bulldozing through the laundry, sandblasting the dirty dishes. All that remained was the detail work."

A Woman's Place Naomi Wolf 223

"Next time, ask: What's the worst that will happen? Then push yourself a little further than you dare. Once you start to speak, people will yell at you. They will interrupt, put you down and suggest it's personal. And the world won't end."

You Sure You Want to Do This? Maneka Gandhi 228

"Are you one of those women who feel that lipstick is one of the essentials of life? That to be seen without it is the equivalent of facial nudity? Then you might like to know what goes into that attractive color tube that you smear on your lips."

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"Every 11 days, on the average, a convicted member of the Irish Republican Army dies of starvation in the Maze prison near Belfast."

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"Real life can be grim, unlike mystery fiction, where writers can wrap up those loose ends, solve the mysteries and best of all, write the last chapter, where the good guys win and the bad guys get what they deserve—so unlike real life."

Tiffany Stephenson—An Apology Bjorn Skogquist **245**

"I know now that people need each other, and I wish I could tell the fourth grade that we could all be friends, that we could help each other with our problems. I wish that I could go back. But all I can do is apologize."

Wrestling with Myself George Felton **251**

"Wrestling may be a hybrid genre—the epic poem meets Marvel Comics via the soap opera—but its themes, with their medieval tone, could hardly be simpler: warrior kings doing battle after battle to see who is worthy, women pushed almost to the very edges of the landscape, Beowulf's heroic ideal expressed in the language of an after-school brawl: 'I wanna do what I wanna do. You gonna try to stop me?'"

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"While there are myriad public and private programs that provide aid and comfort to unwed mothers, there are precious few that support unwed fathers. That's because our culture tends to view the role of fathers in family life as less important than mothers."

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"Each Victorian home would be surrounded by a lush, green lawn and a multitude of trees and bushes. The houses would be situated on straight, narrow streets, and nestled between approximately every 20 homes would be a park."

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"What if museums, universities, and government agencies could put your dead relatives on display or keep them in boxes to be cut up and otherwise studied?"

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"The decision whether or not to marry belongs properly to individuals—not the government."

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"Mr. Fridman is equating two distinct perspectives on the student to substantiate a broad generalization on which he has no factual data."

Lessing and Herne

"... [O]ur pedagogic goal ought not to be to produce nerds or jocks, but human beings who are thoughtful, healthy and socially adept."

Frome

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"For me the essence of hunting is not the indulgence of the instinct to kill, nor is it to be found in the instant one kills."

Why I Don't Hunt Steve Ruggeri **304**

"Hunting is wrong, and should be acknowledged to be so not only by those who espouse the strict precepts of the animal-rights credo, but by those who hold a common sense of decency, respect, and justice."

Why We Hunt Humberto Fontova **306**

"We like to kill animals. I can no more explain this predatory instinct to the satisfaction of Friends of Animals than anyone else can."

Putting Africa at the Center Molefi Kete Asante **310**

"Since Africans in America have been dislocated—that is, taken off their own terms for the past 345 years—we seldom operate as the subjects of our own historical experiences."

Beware of the New Pharaohs Henry Louis Gates, Jr. **312**

"African-American studies should be the home of free inquiry into the very complexity of being of African descent in the world, rather than a place where critical inquiry is drowned out by ethnic fundamentalism."

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