

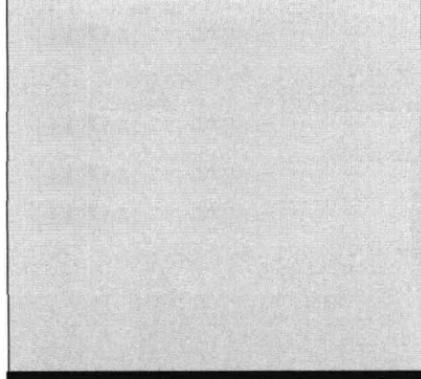
short takes

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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"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."

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"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.'"

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"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?"

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"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."

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"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."

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"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."

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"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

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". . . [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.'"

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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)."

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"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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That Lean and Hungry Look Suzanne Britt 186

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"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

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"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."

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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.”

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“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.”

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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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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."

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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**

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

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