# THE RANDOM HOUSE PRACTICE BOOK



MICHAEL HENNESSY

# The Random House Practice Book

Second Edition

Michael Hennessy
Southwest Texas State University

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#### THE RANDOM HOUSE PRACTICE BOOK

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# About the Author

MICHAEL HENNESSY (Ph.D., Marquette University) is Professor of English at Southwest Texas State University, where he directs the first-year writing program and teaches courses in beginning and advanced composition, modern literature, and the teaching of writing. He has also taught at Memphis State University and John Carroll University. His publications include *The Borzoi Practice Book for Writers* as well as articles and reviews on composition pedagogy and on the work of Shakespeare, Auden, and the contemporary British poet Charles Tomlinson. He has recently served as chair of the Texas Association of Writing Program Directors.

# **Preface**

The Random House Practice Book, second edition, is a collection of some 250 exercises designed to accompany The Random House Handbook, sixth edition, by Frederick Crews. The Practice Book offers a full range of material for students who need to review basics, but it also stresses rhetorical effectiveness, with ample coverage of the larger elements of composition. Because the book is available, shrink-wrapped with new copies of the Handbook, instructors can adopt it at only a small added cost for their students.

In its new edition, the *Practice Book* continues to take a positive approach to writing. Students learn to correct errors, but they also learn to use language effectively. The chapters on the sentence, for example, put as much emphasis on constructing strong sentences as they do on revising weak ones. In the exercises on usage, punctuation, and mechanics, students study errors in context by editing sentences and paragraphs rather than filling in blanks. Wherever possible, the book stresses flexible practice rather than rote drill.

Several of the book's distinctive features are strengthened in this edition:

- Exercises on every aspect of the writing process. I have enlarged or added nearly fifty exercises, some adapted from a related text, The Borzoi Practice Book for Writers, and others designed specifically for this book. There are new exercises on thesis, peer editing, and note taking; on idioms, jargon, and figurative language; on fragments, comma splices, and agreement; and on semicolons, dashes, and capitalization. Many exercises ask students to revise draft prose. And three new review exercises invite them to examine paragraphs, sentences, and words in the context of finished student essays.
- Exercises based on student and professional writing. I have added more than twenty samples of student writing to the dozens already in the book. There are now eight complete essays, including research papers showing both MLA and APA styles. (An asterisk at the end of a selection indicates student writing.) Also, new examples of professional writing appear throughout the book, including excerpts by Joan Didion, Annie Dillard, Paul Fussell, Thomas Jefferson, Martin Luther King, Richard Rodriguez, Alice Walker, and Virginia Woolf.
- Exercises drawn from an array of colorful, informative sources. Many exercises incorporate material from speeches, popular magazines, newspapers, historical documents, novels, short stories, and classic essays. Students study diction in the United States Constitution, parallelism in a speech by John F. Kennedy, and paragraph coherence in a passage by Eudora Welty. They learn about mermaids, cucumbers, elephants, and computers; about colonial women and Viking warriors; about theories of language and styles of dress. Exercises are meant to delight as well as to teach.

The organization of the *Practice Book* follows that of the *Handbook*. The first part introduces various prose strategies, illustrating them with model passages and inviting students to practice the strategies in their own writing. In the second and third parts of the book, students will find a step-by-step guide for writing essays, including a detailed treatment of prewriting, drafting, and revising, as well as a set of chapters on writing a research paper. Parts Four through Six emphasize the shaping of effective paragraphs and sentences as well as the selection of precise, lively words. And the last three parts of the book (Seven through Nine) give ample coverage to the nuts-and-bolts of writing—usage, punctuation, and conventions.

Each exercise in the *Practice Book* is keyed to the section of the *Handbook* that students should consult as they do the exercise. This scheme makes it easy to use the two books in tandem and helps students

learn the *Handbook*'s reference system. An Answer Key for the *Practice Book* is available on request from McGraw-Hill.

I owe special thanks to Frederick Crews for his continuing support of my work and to Steve Pensinger for his expert advice in developing the *Practice Book*. At McGraw-Hill, James Belser, Kathy Porzio, and Alice Jaggard quickly turned a bulky manuscript into a finished book; they have my thanks. I am also grateful to colleagues at Southwest Texas State University who helped in various ways—especially Lisa Lundstedt, Carolyn Pate, Pat Pohl, and Miles Wilson—and to the many students who allowed me to reprint, and often adapt, their writing in the exercises. Those who supplied full essays are credited in the text; others whose writing is new to this edition include Shelby Cash, Dana Cobb, Chris Jenkins, Heidi Prather, Eva Reed, and Lisa Valerian. Another student, Lovell White, helped track down sources. Finally, I wish to thank my family—Susie, Nora, Kevin, Bridget, and Mary—for their many contributions to the book.

Michael Hennessy

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# EXPLORING PROSE STRATEGIES

# 1 Strategies of Description and Narration

#### DESCRIPTION

#### 1.1 Sharpening Your Powers of Observation (RHH 1a)

Vivid descriptive writing often begins with careful observation of the physical world. Find a place that interests you—a park, a beach, a crowded shopping mall, a cluttered kitchen—and spend some time there observing and recording details. Try not to limit yourself to things you see; use your ears, nose, and skin as well as your eyes. Record the details below.

Place observed	 	
Details		


# 1.2 Using Details to Build a Descriptive Paragraph (RHH 1a-b)

Review the details you gathered for Exercise 1.1. Then write a paragraph describing the place you observed. Start the paragraph with a general statement that summarizes your overall impression; then supply concrete, specific details to flesh out that impression.

#### 1.3 Using Concrete, Specific Language (RHH 1a)

Expand the following sentences, using concrete, specific language to sharpen their descriptive power.

Example: The ashtray was full.

Standing among empty glasses,

bottles, and Coke cans, the

yellow ashtray overflowed with a

week's worth of stale cigarette

butts and discarded gum wrappers.

_	The lawn was well groomed.
-	The air felt very cold.
	The snack was delicious.
	Paul's kitchen smelled wonderful.
	Julia's face looked strained.

# 1.4 Establishing a Descriptive Point of View: Physical Perspective (*RHH* 1b)

Write two paragraphs in which you describe the same person, animal, object, or scene from drastically different physical vantage points. Use your imagination.

Example: A baby's view of an adult, first looking up from the floor, then face-to-face after the adult picks up the child.

# 1.5 Establishing a Descriptive Point of View: Attitude (*RHH* 1b)

Choose one of the following topics or a topic of your own, and write two descriptive paragraphs, one indicating a favorable attitude toward the subject, the other an unfavorable attitude. Instead of directly telling the reader your attitude, use descriptive details that show how you feel. Be prepared to discuss the kind of detail you selected for each paragraph.

- 1. A thunderstorm
- 2. A ride in a speeding car
- 3. A desert landscape
- 4. An actor's face
- 5. A weightlifter's body

#### 1.6 Using a Characteristic Action to Describe (RHH 1c)

We recognize animals most obviously by the way they look, but we also associate certain actions or mannerisms with many animals, actions that reveal the animal's "personality"—a kitten playing with a string; an elephant swaying rhythmically from side to side, the top of its trunk brushing the ground; a bat swooping and dipping in the night air. Write a paragraph in which you describe an animal, revealing its "personality" through characteristic actions.

Example: Two of the most appealing characteristics of Lutra canadensis are its playfulness and the fact that it is easily tamed and shows no great fear of humans. During the winter often