

JENIA
WALTER

Building

WRITING SKILLS

— THE —

HANDS-ON WAY

Building WRITING SKILLS

— THE —

HANDS-ON WAY

JENIA WALTER



Building Writing Skills the Hands-on Way
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Brief Contents

Preface for Instructors xi

Acknowledgments xv

Introduction for Students xviii

PART I

Writing as Communication and Expression 1

- 1 Freewriting: Thoughts into Words 5
- 2 Generating and Organizing Ideas: Your Raw Materials 17
- 3 Developing Powerful Paragraphs: A Structure for Ideas 35
- 4 Crafting Purposeful Paragraphs: Strategies and Patterns 57
- 5 Building an Essay: Concepts and Skills 77
- 6 Writing for a Purpose: Essay Strategies and Structures 97
- 7 The Revision Process: Refining Your Work 129
- 8 The Editing Process: Polishing Your Work 145

PART II

Building a Strong Foundation 159

- 9 Overview of Parts of Speech: A Crash Course 163
- 10 Simple Sentence Structure: The Basic Construction Unit 179
- 11 Using Commas Correctly: Working within the Sentence 199
- 12 Compound Sentence Structure: Key to Understanding Punctuation 211
- 13 Catching Run-ons: Using Sentence Structure Tools to Fix Errors 231
- 14 Complex Sentence Structure: The Final Pieces of the Puzzle 243
- 15 Fixing Fragments: Editing Incomplete Ideas 267
- 16 Modifiers: Expanding and Adding to Sentences 281
- 17 Sentence Types: Creating Variety 291
- 18 Nouns: The Stuff That Everything Is Made Of 301
- 19 Pronouns: Stand-ins for Nouns 313
- 20 Verbs: The Action That *Is* in Every Sentence 323
- 21 Adjectives and Adverbs: Words That Add More 339

PART III

A Handbook of Sentence Mechanics and Academic Conventions 347

- 22 A Guide to Punctuation Patterns 349
- 23 Research Skills for Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Citing Sources 363
- 24 Tips on Language and Style 389
- 25 An Overview of Vocabulary Skills 403

PART IV

Building Reading Skills the Hands-on Way 421

- 26 Building Reading Skills 423
- Selected Readings 439

PART V

Appendixes 525

- A-1 Ways of Learning, Challenges, and the Brain 525
- A-2 Grammar and Usage Tips for ESL Students and Others 528
- A-3 Employment Document Skills for Success 534
- Glossary 539
- Resource Pages
- R-1 Pronoun Types in Context: *Whose Watch Is It?* 545
- R-2 Helping Verbs and Irregular Verbs 546
- R-3 Common Prepositions 548
- R-4 Conjunction Families 548
- Index 549

Contents

Preface for Instructors xi
Acknowledgments xv
Introduction for Students xviii



Writing as Communication and Expression 1

Writing Is a Way of Speaking with a Pen, Keyboard, Keypad... 1

The Writing Process: A Less Stressful Way to Write 2

Learn by Doing! Stages of the Writing Process 3

Fluency and Accuracy: A Journey in Two Directions 3

1 Freewriting: Thoughts into Words 5

The Magic of Freewriting 5

Freewriting in Action 6

Reality Check: Freewriting 6

Freewriting List 7

Flowing Lines 7

A Freewriting How-To Guide 8

Freewriting Guidelines 8

Freewriting as a Tool 10

Finding Pearls of Descriptive Imagery 10

Freewriting for Academic Ideas 14

Freewriting Prompts 15

Exploring Optimum Conditions for Freewriting 16

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 16

2 Generating and Organizing Ideas: Your Raw Materials 17

Brainstorming Fresh Ideas 17

Planning Ahead: Understanding Your Assignment 18

Reality Check: Brainstorming Works! 18

Skills for Effective Brainstorming 20

Cultivating the Brainstorm Mind 20

Principles of BRAINstorming 20

Asking the Right Questions 21

Brainstorming Tools for Your Learning Preferences 22

Raindropping: Jotting Thoughts on a Page 22

From Raindrops to Clouds: Organizing Your RAINdrops 22

Generating Ideas by Listing 23

Organizing Your Brainstorm List 23

Moving from List to Outline 24

Creating Outline Boxes for Visual and Hands-on Learners 24

Freewriting as a Brainstorming Tool 25

Mining the Deeper Levels 26

Organizing a Freewritten Brainstorm 27

Brainstorming with Idea Webs 27

Organizing Your Idea Web 28

Brainstorming with Storyboards 29

Moving from Storyboard to Text 29

Auditory Brainstorming 30

Arranging Your Auditory Ideas 31

From Brainstorm to Outline 31

Writing from Your Outline 34

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 34

3 Developing Powerful Paragraphs: A Structure for Ideas 35

The Power of the Paragraph 36

Reality Check: The Importance of a Paragraph 37

The Shape of the Paragraph 37

The Structure of the Paragraph 37

Opening a Paragraph 38

Placement of the Topic Sentence 38

Supporting the Main Idea of a Paragraph 39

Developing Main Ideas with Details 40

Closing a Paragraph 42

Revising Skills for Strong Paragraphs 44

Ideas Unite! Creating a Unified Paragraph 44

Creating an Organized Flow of Ideas 46

Creating a Cohesive Paragraph 48

Connections and Transitions between Sentences and Ideas 48

Creating a Consistent Paragraph 50

Parallel Structures in Paragraphs 50

Consistent Language, Style, and Tone 51

Paragraph Breaks in Longer Writing 52

Paragraph Breaks in a Student Essay 52

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 56

4 Crafting Purposeful Paragraphs: Strategies and Patterns 57

Introduction to Rhetorical Modes 57

Using Paragraph Development Patterns for a Purpose 58

Reality Check: Writing in the Modes 58

Strategy: Narrate 59

Structure of a Narrative Paragraph 59

Strategies for Effective Narration 60

Writers' Tips 60

Strategy: Describe 60

Structure of a Descriptive Paragraph 61

Strategies for Effective Description 61

Writers' Tips 62

Strategy: Classify 63

Structure of a Classification Paragraph 64

Strategies for Effective Classification 65

Writers' Tips 65

Strategy: Define 65

Structure of a Definition Paragraph 66

Strategies for Effective Definitions 66

Writers' Tips 67

Strategy: Explain a Process 67

Structure of a Process Paragraph 68

Strategies for Effective Process Explanations 68

Writers' Tips 68

Strategy: Trace Cause and Effect 69

Structure of a Cause and Effect Paragraph 69

Strategies for Cause and Effect Analysis 70

Writers' Tips 70

Strategy: Compare and Contrast 71

Structure of a Compare and Contrast Paragraph 71

Strategies for Effective Comparison and Contrast 72

Writers' Tips 73

Strategy: Persuade 73

Structure of a Persuasive Paragraph 74

Strategies for Effective Persuasion 74

Writers' Tips 75

Combining Patterns of Development 75

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 76

5 Building an Essay: Concepts and Skills 77

What Is an Essay? 77

How Can Essay Skills Be Used in Real Life? 78

How Does an Essay Convey Ideas? 78

An Example of Essay Structure 78

Reality Check: The Process of Building an Essay 82

Constructing an Essay 82

How Do I Start? 82

Organizing Ideas in the Early Stages 83

Forming a Thesis Statement: Your Point "in a Nutshell" 83

What Makes a Thesis Statement? 83

Previewing Main Ideas: The Essay Map 84

Limiting Your Thesis Statement 84

Sketching Out a Working Thesis 85

Placing Your Thesis Statement in Your Essay 85

Crafting an Eye-Opening Introduction 87

Examples of Introduction Strategies 87

Intro Strategies to Use with Caution 89

Developing Body Paragraphs: Chunks of Related Ideas 90

Building Paragraph Development and Support 90

Tracking with Topic Sentences: Keeping Your Reader Oriented 91

Topic Sentences Need Not Apply? 92

Leading Readers with Transitions 92

Wrapping Up with Your Conclusion: "So What?" 93

Using Strong Conclusion Strategies 93

Examples of Conclusion Strategies 94

Conclusion Patterns to Avoid 95

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 96

6 Writing for a Purpose: Essay Strategies and Structures 97

Different Essays for Different Purposes 98

Reality Check: Writing in Different Genres 98

Writing About Your Life: The Narrative 98

Choosing a Topic 98

Drafting a Narrative Essay 99

Thinking (and Writing) Critically in This Genre 99

Guidelines for Narrative Essay Structure 99

Observing Your World: The Descriptive Essay 103

Choosing a Topic 103

Drafting a Descriptive Essay 103

Thinking (and Writing) Critically in This Genre 104

Guidelines for Descriptive Essay Structure 104

Interacting with Other Writers: Summary and Response 106

Choosing a Topic 106

Drafting a Summary and Response Essay 106

Thinking (and Writing) Critically in This Genre 107

Guidelines for Summary and Response Essay Structure 108

Taking a Stand: The Argument Essay 111

Choosing a Topic 111

Drafting an Argument Essay 112

Thinking (and Writing) Critically in This Genre 112

Guidelines for Argument Essay Structure 114

Analyzing Similarities and Differences: Compare and Contrast Essays 118

Choosing a Topic 118

Drafting a Compare and Contrast Essay 118

Thinking (and Writing) Critically in This Genre 119

Guidelines for Compare and Contrast Essay Structure 119

Making Judgments: The Evaluative Essay 123

Choosing a Topic 123

Drafting an Evaluative Essay 123

Thinking (and Writing) Critically in This Genre 124

Guidelines for Evaluative Essay Structure 124

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 128

7 The Revision Process: Refining Your Work 129

What Is Revision All About? 129

Reality Check: The Revision Process 130

Revising with Feedback from Classmates 130

Essentials of Peer Review 130

What Makes Writing Workshops Work? 131

How to Take and Give Criticism (in a Positive Way) 131

Workshopping a Paper 132

Revising on Your Own 135

Seven Steps to Revising 136

Student Example: Lily's Revision Process 138

Lily's Revisions with the Seven Steps 140

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 144

8 The Editing Process: Polishing Your Work: 145

The Power of Polishing Your Work 145

Developing Editing Skills 146

Reality Check: The Power of Editing 147

Using Editing Tools 148

Proofreading: The Final Polish 149

Using Editing Symbols 151

Guided Practice with Editing Skills 152

Knowing What to Look For, and How to Fix It 157

A Side-by-Side Approach to Editing 158

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 158



Building a Strong Foundation 159

Building a House—and a Sentence 159

Sentence Types as Structures: Simple, Compound, and Complex 160

9 Overview of Parts of Speech: A Crash Course 163

Parts of Speech: Dresser Drawers for Words 163

Nuts 'n Bolts of Parts of Speech 164

Learn by Doing! Word Match—Where Does This Word Belong? 164

Nouns 165

Pronouns 167

Verbs 169

Adjectives 171

Adverbs 172

Prepositions 173

Conjunctions 174

Interjections 174

Wow! More About Interjections! Cool! 174

Articles 175

How Can There Be More to Say about a One-Letter Word? 176

Hands-on Review: What Have You Learned...about Parts of Speech? 177

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 178

10 Simple Sentence Structure: The Basic Construction Unit 179

Nuts 'n Bolts of Simple Sentences 179

Adding to the Bare Bones of Simple Sentences 180

Recognizing Simple Sentence Patterns 180

Learn by Doing! The Human Simple Sentence 181

Digging Deeper: Getting to Know the Simple Sentence 182

Finding the Subject of the Sentence 182

Simple versus Complete Subjects 183

Compound Subjects 183

Pronouns as Subjects 183

Multiple-Word Subjects 184

Invisible Subjects! 184

Finding the Verb of the Sentence 185

The Main Sentence Verb 185

Compound Verbs 185

What Is Not the Main Sentence Verb? 186

Recognizing the Predicate 187

Prepositional Phrases in the Sentence Mix 188

Deceptive Position of Prepositions 188

Prepositional Phrases Stuck Between Subject and Verb 188

Sentences Starting with *There* 189

Verb Before Subject for Style 190

Focus on Writing and Editing: Subject-Verb

Agreement 191

Building Editing Skills: Practice with a Paragraph 194

Writing in Daily Life: Practice with Workplace Email 196

In Your Own Writing: Working with the Real Thing 197

Hands-on Review: What Have You Learned...about Simple Sentence Structure? 197

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 198

11 Using Commas Correctly: Working within the Sentence 199

Nuts 'n Bolts of Commas within the Simple Sentence 200

Learn by Doing! Comma Rhythms 200

Three Ways to Use Commas in a Simple Sentence 200

Digging Deeper: Commas within Sentence Structure 201

Commas at the End of Introductory Phrases 201

Commas in a List of Items 202

Brown Shoe, Black Shoe: Avoiding Faulty Parallelism 203

Commas on Each Side of an Appositive 205

When Do You Not Need a Comma? 206

- Writing in Daily Life: Practice with an Insurance Claim Form 206
 In Your Own Writing: Working with the Real Thing 208
 Hands-on Review: What Have You Learned...about Commas within
 the Simple Sentence? 209
 Reflecting on Your Learning Process 210

12 Compound Sentence Structure: Key to Understanding Punctuation 211

- Nuts 'n Bolts of Compound Sentences 211**
 Three Ways to Create Compound Sentences 212
 Learn by Doing! The Human Compound Sentence 212
 Joining More Than Two Simple Sentences 213
- Digging Deeper: Compound Sentences and Punctuation 213**
 Joining Sentences with a Comma and a Coordinating Conjunction
 (FANBOYS) 214
 Writers' Tips for Working with the FANBOYS Conjunctions 216
Too Many "And's"? 216
FANBOYS Conjunctions Joining Words and Phrases 217
 Joining Sentences with a Semicolon (;) 217
 Joining Sentences with a Semicolon and an Adverbial
 Conjunction 218
Punctuating Adverbial Conjunctions 219
 Choosing Compound Punctuation Patterns 221
 Punctuation in Simple versus Compound Sentences 222
- Focus on Writing and Editing 224**
 Paragraph Flow: Developing Awareness 224
 Find Your Own Punctuation "Code" 224
 Learn by Doing! Walking and Talking Punctuation 225
 Building Editing Skills: Practice with a Paragraph 226
 Writing in Daily Life: Practice with a Work Report 227
 In Your Own Writing: Working with the Real Thing 228
 Hands-on Review: What Have You Learned...about Compound
 Sentence Structure? 229
 Reflecting on Your Learning Process 230

13 Catching Run-ons: Using Sentence Structure Tools to Fix Errors 231

- Nuts 'n Bolts of Run-ons and Comma Splices 231**
 Common Methods for Fixing a Run-on Sentence 232
 Learn by Doing! Running On: Stop Sign Editing 233
- Digging Deeper: Using Punctuation Strategies to Edit 233**
 Long Run-on Sentences 234
Fixing On-and-on Run-ons 234
Fixing Fused Sentences 235
 Comma Splice Errors 236
Fixing Comma Splice Errors 237
More Tips on Catching the Slippery Comma Splice 237
 Writing in Daily Life: Practice with a Cover Letter 239
 In Your Own Writing: Working with the Real Thing 241
 Hands-on Review: What Have You Learned...about
 Run-ons and Comma Splices? 241
 Reflecting on Your Learning Process 242

14 Complex Sentence Structure: The Final Pieces of the Puzzle 243

- Nuts 'n Bolts of Complex Sentences 244**
 Three Kinds of Dependent Clauses 244
 Learn by Doing! The Human Complex Sentence 245
- Digging Deeper: Subordinate Clauses 246**
 Punctuating Subordinate Clauses 248
Red Flags in Subordinate Clause Punctuation 249
- Digging Deeper: Relative Clauses 250**
 Punctuating Relative Clauses 252
Which or That? 254
- Digging Deeper: Noun Clauses 255**
 Using the "This Thing" Test 256
 Punctuating Noun Clauses 257
- Focus on Writing and Editing 258**
 Paragraph Flow: Building Awareness 259
 Building Editing Skills: Practice with a Paragraph 260
 Writing in Daily Life: Practice with a Formal Letter 262
 In Your Own Writing: Working with the Real Thing 263
 Hands-on Review: What Have You Learned...about Complex
 Sentence Structure? 264
 Reflecting on Your Learning Process 266

15 Fixing Fragments: Editing Incomplete Ideas 267

- Nuts 'n Bolts of Sentence Fragments 267**
 Fragmented Forms and Quick Fixes 268
Missing Person Fragments 268
Missing (in) Action Fragments 268
Dependent Fragments 269
Added Info Fragments 270
Sentence Stopper Fragments 271
 Learn by Doing! Shattering Sentences into Fragments 271
- Digging Deeper: Mining for Fragments 273**
 Identifying Fragments by Ear and Eye 273
 Style Fragments versus Problem Fragments 273
 Recognizing and Repairing Fragment Types 273
 Writing in Daily Life: Practice with a Memo 277
 In Your Own Writing: Working with the Real Thing 278
 Hands-on Review: What Have You Learned...about Fragments? 278
 Reflecting on Your Learning Process 280

16 Modifiers: Expanding and Adding to Sentences 281

- Nuts 'n Bolts of Modifying Sentences 281**
 Adjective Phrases Modify Nouns 282
 Adverb Phrases Modify Verbs 282
 Prepositional Phrases Are Modifiers, Too 282
 Verb Forms Like Participial Phrases Can Also Become
 Modifiers 283
*Present Participial Phrases Use -ing to Describe
 Something* 283

Past Participial Phrases Use *-ed* to Describe 284

Punctuation of Participial Phrases 284

Sentence Appositives Add Extra Info 285

Punctuation of Appositives 285

Absolute Phrases Are *Absolutely* Great Modifiers 285

Punctuation and Placement of Absolute Phrases 286

Learn by Doing! The Cumulative Sentence 286

Digging Deeper: When the Modifier Messes with the Meaning 287

Misplaced Modifiers 287

Dangling Modifiers 287

Writing in Daily Life: Practice with a Short Workplace Report 289

In Your Own Writing: Working with the Real Thing 290

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 290

17 Sentence Types: Creating Variety 291

Nuts 'n Bolts of Sentence Types 291

Learn by Doing! Combining Sentence Types 292

Digging Deeper: Sentence Types and Sentence Variety 293

Compound-Complex Sentences 293

Sentence Type Recognition 294

The Importance of Sentence Variety 295

Creating Sentence Types through Coordination and

Subordination 296

Coordination 296

Subordination 296

Coordination and Subordination in One Sentence 297

Writing in Daily Life: Practice with a Progress Note 298

In Your Own Writing: Working with the Real Thing 299

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 300

18 Nouns: The Stuff That Everything Is Made Of 301

Nuts 'n Bolts of Nouns 301

Noun Signals: A Noun on the Way 302

Digging Deeper: Helpful Noun Patterns for Writers 303

Singular Nouns 303

Plural Nouns: Regular and Irregular Patterns 303

Regular Plural Nouns 304

The Silent or Forgotten *-s* 304

Irregular Plural Nouns 305

Noncount Nouns: Popcorn versus Chips 307

Possessive Nouns (and the Misunderstood Apostrophe) 309

Singular Possessive Nouns 309

Plural Possessive Nouns 309

Plural or Possessive? 310

Tricky Possessive Apostrophes 311

In Your Own Writing: Working with the Real Thing 312

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 312

19 Pronouns: Stand-ins for Nouns 313

Nuts 'n Bolts of Pronouns 313

Digging Deeper: Helpful Pronoun Patterns for Writers 315

Subject and Object Pronouns (*I* versus *me*) 315

Possessive Pronouns 316

Indefinite Pronouns 317

Pronoun Agreement 317

Pronoun Reference 318

Person and Number 320

In Your Own Writing: Working with the Real Thing 322

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 322

20 Verbs: The Action That Is in Every Sentence 323

Nuts 'n Bolts of Verbs 323

Verb Forms 323

Conjugating Verbs 324

Main Verbs 324

Helping Verbs 325

Learn by Doing! Verb Charades 327

Digging Deeper: Helpful Verb Patterns for Writers 328

Verb Endings and Spelling Patterns 328

Informal Uses of Helping and *Be* Verbs 328

Subject-Verb Agreement 329

"D-uh!" Add *-ed* for Regular Past Tense Verbs 329

Irregular Past Tense Verbs 329

Past-Present Tense Shifts 331

The Past Participle Form 332

Base Form after Other Helping Verbs (Modals, Semi-modals, and *Do*) 333

Verbs and Time: Present and Past Perfect Aspect 336

Active and Passive Voice: *He Was Arrested* 336

In Your Own Writing: Working with the Real Thing 337

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 338

21 Adjectives and Adverbs: Words That Add More 339

Nuts 'n Bolts of Adjectives 339

Digging Deeper: Helpful Adjective Patterns for Writers 340

Adjectives for Academic Use 341

Comparative Adjectives 342

Punctuation between Adjectives 342

Nuts 'n Bolts of Adverbs 343

Digging Deeper: Helpful Adverb Patterns for Writers 344

Comparative Adverbs 345

In Your Own Writing: Working with the Real Thing 346

Reflecting on Your Learning Process 346



A Handbook of Sentence Mechanics and Academic Conventions 347

22 A Guide to Punctuation Patterns 349

Using Punctuation to End a Sentence 349

- Most Sentences End with a Period. 349
- What about Ending with a Question Mark? 349
- Take Care When Ending with an Exclamation Point! 350

Using Punctuation within a Sentence 350

- Using Commas in a Sentence 350
 - Comma at the End of an Introductory Phrase* 350
 - Commas "Tacking" Phrases into a Sentence* 351
 - Commas "Tacking" Appositive Words and Phrases into a Sentence* 351
 - Commas Separating Items in a Series* 351
 - Commas between More Than One Adjective* 352
 - Comma before a Coordinating Conjunction (FANBOYS)* 352
 - Commas with Dependent Clauses* 352
 - Commas between City and State, or City/State/Province and Country* 354
 - Commas Separating Numbers in a Date* 354
 - Comma after a Verb Introducing a Quotation* 354
- How Not to Use a Comma in a Sentence 354
- Using a Semicolon 355
 - Semicolons Grouping Items in a List* 355
 - Semicolon Connecting Two or More Complete Ideas* 355
- Using a Colon: Two Eyes Looking Forward 356
 - Colon Introducing List Items, Examples, or Ideas* 356
 - Colon Introducing Quotation or Dialogue* 356
 - How Not to Use a Colon* 357
- Using a Dash—with Care 357
 - A Single Dash to Add Information* 357
 - Two Dashes to Dash in and out of a Sentence* 357
 - Dashes to Enclose Phrases Linked by Commas* 357
 - Dashes to Convey Broken or Interrupted Speech* 358
 - Dash Clashes to Avoid* 358
- Using Parentheses (To Enclose Extra Information) 358

Using the Apostrophe 358

- Using Apostrophes to Form Possessive Nouns 358
 - Where Not to Use an Apostrophe* 359
- Using Apostrophes for Contractions 359
- Using Apostrophes with Letters and Numbers 359

Using Quotation Marks for Spoken Words and Specific Language 360

- Using Quotation Marks for Dialogue 360
- Using Quotation Marks to Signal Nonstandard Uses 361
- Using Punctuation with Quotation Marks 361
- Using Quotation Marks around Article Titles 362

23 Research Skills for Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Citing Sources 363

Welcome to the World of Research 363

- Using Reliable Sources 363

Keeping Track of What You Borrow 364

Avoiding Plagiarism Like the Plague 365

Quoting Exact Words from a Source 368

- Using Quotations in Your Essay 368
- Quoting from a Source 368
- Punctuation with Quotations 370
- Shortening or Clarifying Quotations 371

Paraphrasing: Saying It Your Own Way 372

- Academic Paraphrasing 373
 - Paraphrase Boundary Zones* 374
- Paraphrasing versus Summarizing 375

Citing Your Sources 375

- MLA Citation Style 376
- What to Cite (and How Often) 376
- In-text (Parenthetical) Citations 377
- Title Formats for Sources 381
- The Final Works Cited List 382
- Examples of MLA Works Cited Formats 383
- Format of the Works Cited Page 385

A Researched Argument Essay in MLA Style 385

24 Tips on Language and Style 389

Rules and Conventions—"With a Certain Degree of Elasticity" 389

Academic Language Use 389

- Register, Audience, and Purpose 390
- Dialect Forms and "Standard" Written English 390
- Formal Writing, Slang, and Other Language Choices 391
 - Conversational versus Academic or Professional Tone* 391
 - Online and Text Message Influences on How U Rite* ☺ 392
- Gender and Language in the Not-So-New Millennium 392
- Culture and Language in the Academic Conversation 394

Academic Style 394

- Objective and Subjective Writing 394
- Clarity 395
- Keep It Simple 395
- Be Specific 396
- How We Say Things: Academic Usage 396
 - Clichés, Mixed Metaphors, and Overused Phrases* 397
- Strong Verb Usage 398
 - Passive Voice and Academic Style* 398
- Parallel Structures in Academic Style 399
 - Connections That Make Sense* 400
- Repetition: Dramatic or Distracting 401
- Format and Presentation 401
- Numbers in Academic Style 401

Developing Awareness of Style, Tone, and Your Own Voice 402

25 An Overview of Vocabulary Skills 403

Skills for Working with Words 403

Investigating the Parts of a Word 403

Roots: The Home Base of the Word 403

Prefixes: Word Beginnings 405

Suffixes: Word Endings 406

Using a Dictionary for Spelling and Vocabulary 408

Working with the Dictionary in Your Writing 409

Homophones and Other Confused Words 411

Not Quite Homophones 411

Skills for Working with Vocabulary 414

Using Context Clues: How Words Relate to What's around Them 415

Asking What It Really Means 417

Learning Specialized Vocabulary 418

Building Vocabulary: Strategies for Different Styles 419

Remembering New Words: Tips and Tricks 419



Building Reading Skills the Hands-On Way 421

Getting Ready to Read 421

Previewing Your Reading 421

FLASHES Pre-Reading Checklist 422

26 Building Reading Skills 423

How to Be a Strong Reader 423

Effective Reading Techniques 423

An Effective Academic Reading Process 427

Pre-Reading Strategies That Can Save Your Day (and Your Grade) 428

Reflecting on Your Preview 429

Successful Strategies to Use As You Read 430

Skimming for a Bird's-Eye View 430

Reading Closely 430

Details of the Close Read 430

Finding the Main Idea 433

Topic Sentences and Main Ideas 433

Thesis Statements and Main Ideas 434

Implied Main Ideas 434

Finding Supporting Ideas 436

Pinpointing Main Ideas in Technical Documents 437

Effective Post-Reading Strategies and Skills 438

Selected Readings 439

Academic Textbook Selections 439

U.S. History 439

Howard Zinn, "A People's History of the United States: 1492–Present" 439

Psychology – Human Services 445

Stephen A. Maisto, Mark Galizio, and Gerald J. Connors, "Drug Use and Abuse" 445

Environmental Science 452

Norman Myers and Scott E. Spoolman, "Environmental Issues and Solutions: Climate Change" 452

Thematic Readings 459

Challenging Identities 459

Alice Walker, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self" 459

Roberto Santiago, "Black and Latino" 466

Student Author: Mollie McGaughey, "Experience as a Hard of Hearing Student" 470

Communicating Cultures 474

Georgianna Lincoln, "Lack of True American Indian History in Textbooks" 474

Deborah Tannen, "CrossTalk: Women and Men Talking" 479

Student Author: Blake Reffner, "Theater and Life (and Death): Revisiting the Laramie Project" 484

Surviving Conflicts 488

Michelle Alexander, "Locked Out of America" 488

Erin Finley, "Fields of Combat: Understanding PTSD among Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan" 495

Student Author: Kim Allen, "The Purple Dress" 500

Responding to Media 506

Amanda Moutinho, "Inspiring Social Change through Hip Hop" 506

Julia Bluhm, "Seventeen Magazine: Give Girls Images of Real Girls!" 511

Student Author: Annette Miller, "The Effects of a Violent Pastime" 515

Student Author: Adan Holguin Lopez, "The Effect on the Brain: Video Games" 520



Appendixes 525

A-1 Ways of Learning, Challenges, and the Brain 525

A-2 Grammar and Usage Tips for ESL Students and Others 528

A-3 Employment Document Skills for Success 534

Glossary 539

Resource Pages 545

R-1 Pronoun Types in Context: *Whose Watch Is It?* 545

R-2 Helping Verbs and Irregular Verbs 546

R-3 Common Prepositions 548

R-4 Conjunction Families 548

Index 549

Preface for Instructors

What Is This Book About?

Building Writing Skills the Hands-on Way is a student-friendly, developmental English textbook centered on building students' fluency in academic and real-world writing. Rich with multisensory exercises that activate multiple learning styles, this book covers the basic skills that lead to proficiency, while addressing the widely expressed need for a new way to reach a diverse population of learners.

Why Is It Needed?

Today's techno-literate, multitasking, visual, and auditory students learn differently, and instructors often experience challenges in creating an engaging, inclusive academic setting. The research and personal teaching experience behind this book show that students respond most positively to an encouraging approach to their writing, grounded in respect for their intelligence and experience. Students learn better in an environment that helps them discover—visually and clearly, through a hands-on presentation of concepts—the structure of the sentence, the patterns behind different punctuation techniques, and logical ways to correct errors. This is the environment *Building Writing Skills the Hands-on Way* creates.

How Can I Use It?

Building Writing Skills the Hands-on Way takes an innovative pedagogical approach to teaching basic writing skills by integrating a kinesthetic learning component proven highly effective with students from a range of backgrounds. It teaches academic writing from the ground up, sharing with students not just the structures and the concepts involved in effective writing, but also the skills for and benefits of using them in their academic, personal, and professional lives. The text is organized into the following parts:

- **Part I: Writing as Communication and Expression** covers the writing process in action, using a variety of student-friendly methods to teach the skills involved. It builds from **paragraph development** to **essay writing**, with the goal of fully preparing students for the next steps in college composition. This section demystifies the writing process by relating its steps to examples, illustrations, and metaphors students can easily understand.
- **Part II: Building a Strong Foundation** lays the groundwork students need to develop and revise their writing at the sentence level. The core chapters progress from parts of speech and simple sentences to competence in **sentence structure** and **punctuation**. Additional chapters provide **thorough grammar instruction** that's easy to teach and to learn. Instructors can link the writing generated in Part I to the hands-on editing skills covered in this section, using a side-by-side approach to make students' revision work truly meaningful.
- **Part III: A Handbook of Sentence Mechanics and Academic Conventions** gathers the conventions of punctuation into a **student-friendly punctuation guide** and an **introduction to the basic elements of style**. A practical chapter covers **basic research skills**, including quoting, paraphrasing, and citing sources using **MLA style**, with clear explanations and examples. A final chapter provides resources for **vocabulary**

"The material took a hands on approach to get myself and the other students out of our seats and practicing some new methods and things that helped achieve a higher rate of learning. Other textbooks that I usually read are comprehensible and full of knowledge, but not as engaging . . . I found that having fun while learning new things was the best way to go, opposed to sitting, reading, and listening to lecture."

—Stephen Bradley, Student, Aims Community College

"[The reading section] is probably my favorite part of this text. I love how it teaches students to be critical readers. I think the selections are right on target, and I love that the selections are diverse and from other disciplines."

—Molly Goodson, Northeast
Mississippi Community College

building, a popular request from students and an important element for integrated reading and writing courses.

- **Part IV: Building Reading Skills the Hands-on Way** teaches students the vital connection between writing and reading, thus strengthening their skills in both contexts. The final section features a collection of **academically focused readings** and **high-quality student essays**, fully supported by critical thinking questions and engaging writing prompts.
- **Appendix** addresses additional instructional needs, including information on learning styles and brain-compatible learning, grammar issues geared toward the needs of ESL students, and models for employment documents.

This book has been specifically designed to help instructors overcome the challenges of teaching so much in so little time. The structure is dynamic and flexible enough to be used in a variety of courses. For example:

- In **sentence-level writing courses**, instructors can teach the comprehensive core chapters of Part II and assign additional grammar chapters as needed.
- In **paragraph-level writing courses**, instructors can teach Part I, focusing on paragraph development chapters, and assign foundational Part II chapters as needed.
- In **essay-level writing courses**, instructors can teach Part I chapters on freewriting and brainstorming, essay development, and revising and editing. They can additionally assign the research chapter in Part III, which includes coverage of MLA style and a complete, level-appropriate student essay example.
- In **technical composition courses**, instructors can focus on Part II core chapters (including workplace-oriented "Writing in Daily Life" sections) and relevant sections of Part I, with annotated workplace document models provided in the Appendix and online.
- In **Integrated Reading and Writing (IRW) courses**, instructors can incorporate reading and vocabulary skills from Part IV at each stage of the writing development process.
- In **Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) courses**, instructors can focus on Part I essay-level sections in composition class, with in-depth time on Part II sentence-level skills and Parts III and IV and reading techniques for the developmental cohort.

Because the lessons are designed with student-friendly explanations and plentiful online support, instructors can assign additional coverage for groups or individuals to learn on their own.

How Does This Book Address Multiple Learning Styles?

The growing body of research on learning styles and brain-compatible learning shows that multisensory hands-on activities are an extremely useful learning tool for many students. When information enters the brain along multiple sensory pathways, it is processed, retained, and recalled more effectively. This concept also holds true for methods that engage students' interest, link material to personal meaning, stimulate energy and laughter, and involve cooperative learning. With hands-on activities that reach multiple learning styles, students discover that learning about writing can be creative, fun, and invigorating. This book utilizes the combined input of visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic techniques to help students build their writing skills.

- **Learn By Doing!** activities and action shots offer students access to grammatical concepts in a body-and-movement-centered format that crosses over the "print barrier" raised by reading-based instructional methods. With engaging, low-pressure practice, the written mode becomes more familiar and less intimidating, encouraging students to gain ownership of their learning process.

- **Practice Exercises** give students the chance to extensively practice the covered material in a variety of contexts and in a multitude of ways. Because practice exercises appear throughout the lessons—as well as at the end of sections and chapters—students learn in a more integrated, engaged way.
- **Hands-on Review: What Have You Learned?** sections provide a checklist and fill-in-the-blank end-of-chapter review to reinforce student learning.
- **Reflections on Your Learning Process**, appearing at the end of each chapter, incorporate brain-based learning theory to guide students in focusing on their learning process, integrating what they have learned, and following up on any questions.
- **Learning Tips** offer useful hints on brain-compatible learning and suggestions for a range of learning preferences. More than standard annotations, these tips are linked to specific content material and help students develop successful learning strategies as they move through the text.
- **The Annotated Instructor's Edition** provides theoretical concepts and detailed modeling techniques to support instructors new to the kinesthetic learning approach.

Focusing on Positive Patterns

Building Writing Skills the Hands-on Way also focuses on the vital importance of a positive approach to language, learning, and teaching error correction within a logical progression of sentence structures and grammatical patterns. Students observe and notice language first.

- The **conversational tone** of the book blends a relaxed, slightly irreverent informality with the highest academic standard of instruction. This tone fosters a high comfort level and sense of rapport; students receive the information they need in a format they can absorb and enjoy.
- **Nuts 'n Bolts** sections introduce the basic concepts and patterns of language, serving as a review or refresher for more advanced students. Instructors can focus on these sections to give an overview of subject matter when time is limited.
- **Digging Deeper** sections explore the concepts in more depth, with practice activities and online resources. Concepts are explained starting with structural patterns, rather than error correction, to build language context for writing and editing skills.

Celebrating Diversity

The rich, expressive writing in this text represents the voices of diversity. As students see wide-ranging realities reflected, they are encouraged to articulate their own experiences, learn about the experiences of others, and connect these experiences in their writing.

- **Diverse content themes** draw on topics of high interest and relevance to adult learners, including the often-neglected domains of rural, western, and Native American life. Chapters are not focused on one central theme; however, “currents” of related material running through the chapters help students build schema and connect ideas.
- **High-quality student writing** conveys powerful stories, which are nourishing to read and full of creativity. Students have the chance to learn from others’ experiences—and their own, as they write about them.

Learn by Doing! Walking and Talking Punctuation

Observe the role of punctuation on a kinesthetic level. Reading while in motion, and demonstrating the pauses and breaks physically, can help you to feel the effects of punctuation in the flow of your writing.

- Read out loud, walking as you read (imagining your body's motion as the flow of language).
 - When you get to a **comma**, pause with one foot in the air.
 - When you get to a **semicolon**, pause with just the toes of one foot touching the floor (or step back a pace).
 - When you get to a **period**, stop, stamping a foot flat on the floor.



FIGURE 12.5 Walking and Talking Punctuation in Action

“The author thoroughly covers the topic and offers plenty of activities to reinforce learning. The variety of activity is also important; it’s not just exercise after exercise as you see in many texts.”

—Ronald Peacock, Edgecombe Community College

“The author continues to use a tone that engages student readers...and keeps them reading so they can find ways to ‘beat the system.’ When the text refers to academic or grammatical rules, the explanations are accurate and the coverage is complete.”

—Kathleen McCann Klaiber, Asst. Prof. of ESL and English, Genesee Community College

Reality Check Brainstorming Works!

Brainstorming is the most challenging stage of the writing process for me. Coming up with something original without knowing exactly what the end product will look like is terrifying. You have to push those doubts aside. Just write anything, anything at all. The greatest thing about brainstorming is, there are no wrong answers. As long as I have started, I'm winning.

—Stacie Brown, Information Management/Creative Writing major



One of my favorite ways to brainstorm is to visually imagine my topic to get myself involved as much as I possibly can. At times I like to sketch out my topic even if it's the worst drawings. In a way it makes me more involved.

—Miguel Reyes, Architectural Management major

- **Reality Check** sections feature observations and learning tips from real students, which foster confidence and a sense of community among learners from a variety of backgrounds.
- **A positive approach to language diversity** when discussing dialect forms and ESL students' language patterns explains why errors may occur, with respect for the speakers and their language backgrounds. This approach treats academic language as an “additive” form, and helps students build skills for their own analysis of linguistic patterns.

How Does This Book Help Students Transfer Skills to “Real” Writing?

Another vital component of this text is an in-depth, practical focus on transferring skills from sentence-level practice to “real” writing. Sentence-level skills are integrated into students' own writing with specific, scaffolded guidance for lasting retention of the concepts.

- **Building Editing Skills** sections contain carefully sequenced activities that help students develop editing techniques while working with the chapter concepts. Students learn to read like an editor and build a repertoire of specific methods to help them zoom in on different error patterns.
- **In Your Own Writing—Working with the Real Thing** sections zoom back out to the “big picture” and guide students in the transfer of sentence-level skills to their works in progress. This process integrates skills and gives students a sense of purpose, along with a chance to exercise creativity and share ideas. This opportunity to apply sentence-level skills to the student's own writing in a meaningful way is essential to the success of basic skills instruction.
- **Writing in Daily Life** sections give students practice editing a personal, workplace, or technical document, applying their editing skills in the context of their lives beyond the classroom.



Writing in Daily Life Practice with Workplace Email

Scenario

In your current job for a business management firm, you are responsible for conducting background checks on job applicants. Your boss has sent you an urgent request for an update on a background check you completed at the end of your workday. Typing out a reply on your smartphone, you realize you've been using informal texting style and have not included any punctuation or capitals between “sentences.”

Using editing techniques to identify sentence boundaries, punctuate the body of this email message (just the main paragraph) for formal workplace communication. For this exercise,

create simple sentence structures. Circle added periods and draw three lines under the first letter of each new sentence, writing the capitalized form above it. *Tip:* You can add five sentence boundaries to this brief message, not counting the marked example.

To... Larry Furston
Cc...
Bcc...
Subject: David Smithers background check 8-12-15

Larry,

The background check came back successful, David Smithers was cleared to begin working his job starts a week from Monday there are a few more documents he must submit prior to employment these include Direct Deposit, W-2, and I-9 forms let me know if you have any questions

Thanks,

Niko

NOTE: This is a confidential communication and may contain privileged and/or confidential information. If you are not the intended recipient, please delete this message and any attachments. If you have received this communication in error, please notify us immediately.

How Does the Online Teaching Program Help Students Learn?

Building Writing Skills the Hands-on Way's technology package provides comprehensive tools and resources to help students—and instructors!—succeed:

- **Aplia for Building Writing Skills the Hands-on Way** offers instruction, practice, and immediate feedback to help developmental students master their basic writing and grammar skills. Add, drop, mix and match chapters and lessons, or opt for the **Individualized Study Path (ISP)**, which assesses students' skills through a

comprehensive diagnostic and generates a list of assignments tailored to each student's needs. This Aplia option also introduces **Author's Corner**, a special interactive feature in each chapter that gives students an opportunity to practice lesson skills with authentic writing from diverse literary sources.

- **MindTap for *Building Writing Skills the Hands-on Way*** is a personalized teaching experience with relevant assignments that guide students to analyze, apply, and improve thinking, allowing instructors to measure skills and outcomes with ease.
 - **Personalized Teaching:** Adopt a Learning Path that is built with key student objectives. Control what students see and when they see it. Use it as-is or match to your syllabus exactly. Hide, rearrange, add and create your own content.
 - **Guide Students:** Provide a unique learning path of relevant readings, multimedia and activities that move students up the learning taxonomy from basic knowledge and comprehension to analysis and application.
 - **Promote Better Outcomes:** Empower instructors and motivate students with analytics and reports that provide a snapshot of class progress, time in course, engagement and completion rates.
- **Cognero** is Cengage Learning's flexible, online system that gives instructors the freedom to author, edit, and manage test-bank content from multiple Cengage Learning solutions.
- **Instructor Companion Site** offers instructors a wide array of helpful teaching tools, specially designed by the author to address the needs of a variety of instructors and course structures, including additional hands-on exercises with example photos and helpful tips, sample syllabi for a variety of courses, and information for facilitating brain-based and kinesthetic learning in the classroom.

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Introduction for Students

Welcome to *Building Writing Skills the Hands-on Way!*

When I first envisioned this book, I was in an airplane, high above the clouds in a pure blue sky. I pictured the book as a clear, aqua-emerald pool students could dive into. The project itself has become more like an ocean liner, but as I've done these years of writing, revising, and editing, I've held on to the image of the clear, sunlit pool. I wanted to take the “grr” out of grammar, to make it accessible and fun. My own teachers, and my students, showed me the way, and I wanted to pass it on. So, welcome—this book is for you!

Speaking of YOU, you'll notice that the tone of this book is informal and friendly. I use the pronoun “you” (yes, that's a pronoun!) to address *you*, the student, as reader. The informal tone I use here is intended to make the book easy to read and *yours* to use. As you go through the text, you'll find lots of information about academic language and tone, pointing out the customs and conventions of communicating in academia.

The hands-on way is the heart of this book. Throughout the text you'll find activities that invite you to learn by doing, a.k.a. *kinesthetic learning* (like the video game *Kinect*). These activities will help you to connect—to connect with ideas about grammar, to connect parts of the linguistic system in your brain, to connect with other human beings in the study of communication.

That's what academic writing is, as unfamiliar as it may seem: another form of communication. I'd like to ask you to trust your speaking voice (or for Deaf students, your signing voice) as your own way of expressing yourself. Once you get ideas on paper or screen, you can shape them, revise them, edit them—because as you are voicing ideas, you will also be learning the skills to work with your writing.

All languages are welcome here, in this pool of knowledge about writing. All languages are equally worthy of respect, as long as they are doing their job. You may be coming to this class with some anxiety or concern, or perhaps with memories of bad experiences. Try to let yourself start fresh and believe you can.

You may be an ESL student, or a signer of ASL. You may be a Generation 1.5 student, with family roots in other languages, other cultures. You may be Generation Native, with roots that go deep in the earth of this continent, and equally deep and complex relationships with language. Perhaps you are a speaker of Black English (respectably called African American Vernacular English by linguists) or of other established, creative dialect forms. Or, you may be someone without any language background other than English, but who finds academic English a little foreign. Welcome to this book—you *all* have so much to offer.

As your formal understanding of language catches up with your innate intelligence, you may find yourself out of breath at times, tongue-tied or confused. Try to be patient with yourself and with your classmates (and instructor). Your brain will catch up as long as you give it lots of help: practice, study, attention, and care.

One more thought, for those who can: Please mess up this book! Mark it up, highlight, write in the margins if possible. Bookmark pages, decorate with bright sticky notes, make the text your own. You will learn faster and remember longer if you do.

Most important, I want to say thank you. I appreciate the trust you are extending by opening these pages and reading these words. I hope I can do you justice—educational justice—by offering skills you can use on the path to your own success and future dreams.

—Jenia Walter, Author



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PART

I

Writing as Communication and Expression

Writing Is a Way of Speaking with a Pen, Keyboard, Keypad...

All of us have a voice—something to say—that is special and unique to offer the world. We share our gifts in lots of ways: in our relationships, in our work, in our creativity. We all have stories to tell: where we’ve come from, what we’ve been through, and where we dream of going. Some stories are painful and others joyful, but all are important to tell.

Although there are many ways to share our experiences, written language is especially important. Writing leaves a record; it’s something we can shape and improve until we are expressing what we want to say, just the way we mean it. We can’t do that with spoken words. In a conversation or even a speech, we can’t say, “Wait—cross that out—go back a step—let me tell it *this way*.” We can mess with writing and rearrange it. No one can say something exactly the way *you* can, and what you have to say matters.

Writing is your own power. Some of you may look forward to writing, to having the luxury of time and space to express yourself. But many of you may have given up that freedom, or felt it was taken from you. Give it another chance. Just open the first chapter on

freewriting and dare to put some thoughts on paper. It may feel awkward, but keep trying. Take the chance to see what writing is like when it's just *yours*—not judged by others, not even read by others if you don't choose to share. Come back to it at different times and places, just for a few minutes, and see where you end up.

This book will offer you ways to work with your writing, using hands-on techniques to climb over the print barrier that may have stopped you in the past. It will also help you to create a solid foundation for academic success. You will learn to write strong paragraphs and essays, with a clear understanding of academically correct grammar and usage. However, to start out, you have to take that first step. Put pen to paper, or fingers to keys, and write!

The Writing Process: A Less Stressful Way to Write

When I (the author of this book) was in college, I didn't know the term *the writing process* (which means approaching a writing project one step at a time, rather than thinking a paper has to be finished and correct on your first try). I struggled to get things right the first time (usually alone, in the middle of the night). Then, in the midst of an all-nighter working with two others on a group project, my classmate, Barb Fontaine, clued me in—thank you, Barb, wherever you are! She took our group's brainstormed ideas, left blanks where we couldn't think of the right words, and kept writing until we had a rough draft to work with. Then she went back and started filling in the gaps, and to my surprise, our writing began to take shape.

By this point, I knew how to help. My editing gears kicked in and I took the next shift, making corrections and polishing the wording. Next, we read the draft aloud and made more changes. We ended up with a pretty solid paper to turn in the next day, and we even got a few hours of sleep. After that, writing projects became much less stressful for me.

Over time, I learned that the writing process is not a straight line from start to finish. It's *recursive*—you can go back and revisit, or repeat, any stage along the way. In general, though, we can approach the process in an order that tends to be more productive or efficient. Imagine yourself working at each of these stages, starting with the big picture and later focusing on the small stuff.

Stages of the writing process:

- Brainstorm** ideas.
- Plan** your writing.
- Organize** your ideas.
- Write** a rough draft.
- Revise** your writing, focusing on the ideas and how they connect and flow.
- Edit** your writing, focusing on grammar and usage.
- Proofread** your writing, zooming in on the small spelling and typing errors.

Learn by Doing! Stages of the Writing Process

Construct the stages of the writing process hands-on. Colored cards representing each stage provide a visual sense of the process. Arranging the stages in order kinesthetically helps to bring the concepts to life.



Kellie Sapp

FIGURE 1.1 Stages of the writing process.

- Visualize yourself engaged in each stage of the process. How do brainstorming, planning, and organizing help you prepare to write a rough draft? Why does it make the most sense to focus on the big stuff (drafting and revising) before the small stuff (editing and proofreading)?
- Notice how you can revisit any stage at any time. If you go back and do more brainstorming to add ideas, for example, then you'll need to revise sections of your draft again to be sure the new ideas make sense and flow well.
- List the stages of the writing process in your notes, and if possible, leave the cards taped to a wall as a reminder: *You don't have to get it perfect the first time—writing can be a process!*

Fluency and Accuracy: A Journey in Two Directions

Wherever you are, that's where you start. Each individual is at a different place with his or her writing. Each of us has different strengths, and all of us—and I mean *all*—can improve in some ways. Think of writing as a magical journey, because you get to travel in two directions at once, arriving at the same destination.

- **Fluency.** Part of the writer's journey is in the direction of *fluency*. Like the word *fluid*, or the concept of being *fluent* in different languages, this direction has to do with flow. It takes a special skill to put words together so your thoughts make sense and readers can follow your ideas. This skill is gained primarily by practice: writing a lot. Certain exercises can increase your fluency, just as training can increase your ability to run a long distance race. But mostly, writing fluency improves with more writing. Imagine if you didn't speak for a few years and then tried to hold a conversation. You'd be a little rusty at first! So keep the wheels moving as you travel in the direction of fluency.

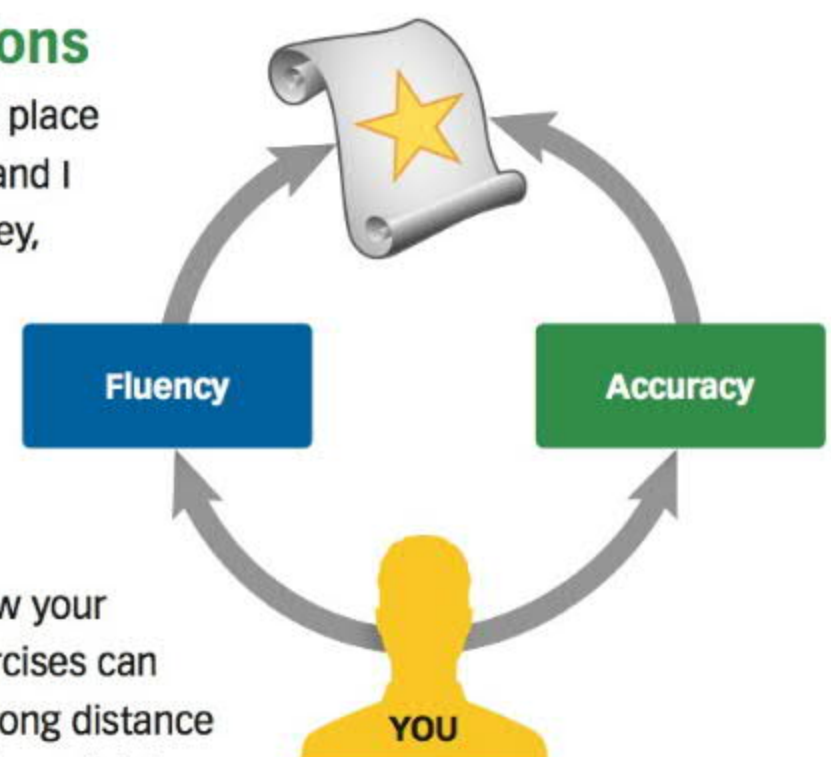


FIGURE 1.2 Fluency and Accuracy in a Writer's Process

- **Accuracy.** As you journey toward fluency, you can also travel toward *accuracy*. Starting wherever you are, you can focus on improving the skills you use to express your ideas. The more exact you can be in your choice of words, and the more clearly and grammatically you can put those words together, the better you'll be able to communicate. Accuracy takes lots of practice, too, but creative techniques can make the learning process more fun.

Fluency and accuracy are both essential to strong writing. You may have perfect grammar skills but still not be *fluent* in English. The reverse is also true: you may express yourself powerfully, but you may make errors that interfere with your readers' understanding of your ideas. Regardless of where you start, with practice, your skills will develop along each arc of the circle, meeting in your writing.

- **Part I** of this book focuses on fluency: generating ideas and expressing them in different forms to join the academic conversation.
- **Part II** focuses on accuracy: forming words and sentences and putting them together with academically correct grammar and usage.

The two parts of the book can be used *side by side* as you travel through the semester. Write, and then work with your writing. Revise and edit to clarify your meaning. Polish your language so it clearly reflects what you want to say. Writing, as a way of speaking, offers the unique opportunity to shape your words and ideas before, during, and after the process of sharing them.



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CHAPTER

1

Freewriting: Thoughts into Words

You're About to Learn...

- › How to use freewriting techniques to strengthen your connection between thoughts and written words
- › How to use freewriting to add vivid descriptive details and imagery to your writing
- › How to use freewriting as a tool to develop, express, and clarify ideas in your academic work

Q How can freewriting help me with my academic work? I expect to get down to business in my college classes, and freewriting seems more like playing around with words.

A This chapter will show you how playing around with words can actually help you to get down to business in your writing. The freewriting process strengthens your ability to express ideas in written form. Like the vital warm-ups players do before sports to loosen their muscles, freewriting makes your thinking more flexible. If you're not someone who has liked writing in the past, freewriting can open up an enjoyable, safe place to express thoughts, without pressure or judgment—just for yourself.

The Magic of Freewriting

Freewriting is letting your imagination flow; letting the words in your head just hit your paper without much thought. With freewriting there are no rules or guidelines, you get to play by your own rules. You choose the topic, setting, and the direction of the story. These are usually the easiest works to write because not very often in school or in the real world do you get to freely express your opinion. It's always "write this way" or "write about this."

Freewriting allows a person to let go of any hung up emotions and turns them into words, I believe relieving stress, expressing happiness or other emotions. I'd suggest to anyone freewriting to just let the brain and hand go. Don't think about it, write what interests you.

—Aspen Sanders, Nursing major

Freewriting means writing without stopping to think. The simple flow of pen across the page or fingers across the keys moves our thoughts past the blocks that many writers run into as they try to express their ideas. With practice, freewriting does more than get us past our blocks. It also strengthens the connection between ideas in our minds and words in written form. According to brain research on creativity, freewriting stimulates alpha waves, the wavelength associated with dreaming. This dreamlike state provides access to creative language and images, as well as ideas.

For centuries, authors have used freewriting as a literary technique. *Stream of consciousness* writing allows readers to see inside the mind of a character or narrator. This technique simulates the free flow of ideas in our minds, with all our fragmented thoughts, run-on impressions, and vivid imagery.

Here is a short example of stream of consciousness writing from Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Beloved*. She uses this technique to convey the inner thoughts of her characters, scarred by memories of slavery, in a house haunted by a child-ghost:

I am Beloved and she is mine. I see her take flowers away from leaves she puts them in a round basket the leaves are not for her she fills the basket she opens the grass I would help her but the clouds are in the way how can I say things that are pictures I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too....

Source: Morrison, Toni. (1987, 2004). *Beloved*. New York: Random House, 210.

Freewriting in Action

The following freewriting activities will allow you to step out of the box and focus on the power of language, without worrying about punctuation mistakes, grammar errors, or incomplete ideas. Start with a list, as simple and free from pressure as a shopping list or any jotted-down collection of words.

Reality Check Freewriting

Freewriting is an amazing process when you have no idea of how you should start your essay.

—Ablellom Asgedom, Psychology/Criminal Justice major



Kellie Sapp

Freewriting is an escape from the real world. The paper is your canvas, on which you can write and be anyone you want. Your only limitation is your imagination. Whatever is on my mind that day is what I write about. Freewriting helps me feel heard.

—Amanda Jones, Nursing major

For me, freewriting is a way to express thoughts, feelings, and actions while practicing in actual writing. Personally I feel there's a lot more freedom in writing that way than when it's topic-based or assigned ... You're not trying to make a word count or anything—you just write.

—Eddie Jaramillo, Chemical Engineering major



Kellie Sapp



Kellie Sapp

Freewriting List

- **Pass an object or objects (such as a pine cone or colorful beads) around the room** so everyone can look at each object closely and handle it. All objects should end up in a place where everyone can see them.
- Choose one object to focus on and list whatever words come into your mind for two minutes, without stopping. If you draw a blank, write the name of your object, or repeat the word you just wrote until you come up with another word. Keep the pen moving, but don't rush.

Using a pine cone as an example, you may end up with a list of words like *brown, sharp, pointy, tree, forest*, and maybe a few phrases like *smells good* or *reminds me of holidays*. It's okay to go off on sidetracks and see where you end up!

- Keep in mind these guidelines:
 - Don't slow down to think about spelling or grammar.
 - Don't stop to cross things out.
 - Do feel free to shorten words or leave blanks.
 - Do feel free to write whatever comes into your head.
- After two minutes, stop writing. Read through your list. You don't have to read it to anyone else. (If you do decide to read it, you can skip over anything you don't want to share.) Don't judge yourself by how many words you have or what you've written. Whatever you freewrite is fine!

Freewriting must be free! As you read the examples in this chapter, keep in mind that your freewriting doesn't have to look like anyone else's. Every freewrite is unique.

Green pearl necklace
round
playful
rolling
green
fun
necklace
kids

stringy
rolling
shiny
light
airy
necklace
neck
wear

playing
colorful
small
beads
jewelry
string
circle
circumference

—Annette Miller, Music Education major



Kellie Sapp

Flowing Lines

After you've experimented with a list, try freewriting lines that flow across the page. Write without stopping to think, but without hurrying. Record whatever comes to your mind, as best you can, skipping from one thought to the next if you need to.

- First, go back and read through your list. This time, underline a few words that interest you, that you like the sound of, or that have some special meaning to you. Don't think too much about this process—just underline whatever catches your eye.
- Now, choose one of your underlined words—again without too much thinking—and write it at the top of a clear space on your paper.
- Write for four minutes, focusing on this word or line, letting your thoughts flow across the page. Your words might create a story or express thoughts, or they might turn into a poem or a song. They might come out as nonsense. Follow your thoughts and just try to keep up, without judging. Don't worry about spelling, grammar, or punctuation, and don't stop to reread as you go.
- After four minutes, finish your thought and stop writing. You can come back to a freewrite later if you want to continue with an idea. Put the date at the top and save what you've written. What you see now may look strange or meaningless—but you'll be surprised at what you discover when you read it over later.

Here is Patty's freewriting example, starting from one of the words she underlined in her list.

Friends

We were friends, best friends. No expectations, no games. Just friends. A relationship built over 20 years, since I was in junior high and I trusted him with my life. But he was holding on to his with every ounce of energy he had and I was throwing mine away with every hit I took. He suffered melanoma skin cancer and I suffered drug addiction. For 3 really intense years the 2 of us traveled back and forth to U of A and sat through many chemo treatments rite here at the cancer center in town. We always talked about which one of us would go first, we cried alot and we prayed. We were eachothers strength. Willard didnt make it, he past away on my birthday. I had been clean 3 months. We smiled before he left. I miss him.

—Patty Tafoya, *Social Work major*

Patty traveled a long way between an underlined word and this powerful memory. But that's what freewriting can do. It frees up our minds and opens us up to important stories, memories, and ideas that may be hard to express or are locked away out of reach. So, if you can, let the thoughts out. You can decide what to do with them, and no one has to see them but you. If you don't have any interest in unlocking doors, focus on the present. Either way, with every word, you strengthen the connection between your brain and your written ideas.

A Freewriting How-to Guide

All you need to freewrite is something to write on and something to write with (if you are computer friendly, the two can be combined). Experiment to find the ways you enjoy most and that are most productive. Some people prefer to write on their own, but many find that writing with a friend or a group encourages their practice.

Freewriting Guidelines

- **Choose writing materials** that work for you; many freewriters keep a separate journal. For a class with scheduled assignments, a three-ring binder can be helpful.

Visual thinkers may prefer an unlined pad so they can free-draw as well as freewrite. Add concert tickets, photos, or other mementos—whatever makes the journal *yours*. If you find that you enjoy freewriting on the computer, use a special folder or flash drive to save your work in one place.

- **Make time to write** every day. Grab five or ten minutes whenever you can—in the parking lot, on the bus across town, or on your break at work. If you don't have your journal, write in the notes section of your smartphone or on a paper bag. Aim for daily writing, but don't stress if you have to miss a day here or there. Remember that the more you write, the stronger your writing will get.
- **Note the date** at the beginning of every entry (and the location, if you write in different places). Looking back over your work can be fascinating, especially after time has passed. You may discover lines or sections that you can use in other writing assignments.
- **Write without stopping** for a given period of time. If you are writing on your own, find five or ten minutes to write or type your thoughts. You can start with a topic or a "prompt" (an opening line) or just write about your day. If you get involved, keep going, and always feel free to come back to a freewrite later.
- **Listen to what your mind is saying**, and write down what it tells you. Don't censor or correct, but simply get the words down. Skip from one thought to another or write sentences that don't make sense or aren't even complete sentences. If the flow of ideas dries up, repeat the same words you just wrote or go back to your topic. Eventually, something new will occur to you.
- **Don't worry about spelling or grammar** as you freewrite. If you end up with words or ideas you want to use in another piece of writing, you can work with them later. Don't cross out, delete, or change things. The most interesting wording, or a whole new idea, can come from a typo or a misspelled word.
- **Think of freewriting as a chance to clear out your brain**, making room for fresh ideas. Don't try to control what comes out or make it look "good." The minute you start to worry about looking good, you lose the freedom of freewriting.
- **Keep yourself safe.** Writing freely can bring up memories, vulnerable emotions, and fears. As the writer, you always get to choose your level of depth. Only go as far as you are comfortable.

Keep in mind that this writing is just for you. Reading freewriting in a group where you feel safe can be a positive, rewarding experience. However, you as the writer must choose what to share and in what situations. Take chances only as you feel comfortable, and respect the chances that others in your group take as well.

Everyone's freewriting is unique, from person to person and from day to day. Here are three examples, all based on the opening prompt "I remember..."

I remember the first day of school mainly high school. The first night of the first day of school was probably the most exciting night in my life, the thought of all that cool stuff you got for school, clothes, new shoes, new backpack, and can't wait to see all the other girls that you had a crush on the last school year. And wondering which one I think I have a chance to date. And maybe wondering how I would do this year. Entering the school



Kellie Sapp

See the end of the chapter for examples of starting lines or "prompts," along with suggestions for places and times to freewrite.