

# The Curious Writer



SIXTH EDITION

**Bruce Ballenger**

**Kelly Myers**

**Michelle Payne**



# THE CURIOUS WRITER

Sixth Edition

Bruce Ballenger  
Kelly Myers  
Michelle Payne

*Boise State University*

**New!**  
**APA 7<sup>th</sup> Edition**  
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# Preface

*By Bruce Ballenger*

I have a friend, a painter, who teaches art at my university, and his introductory courses teach the subskills of painting, things like how to use a brush, mix paints, and understand color theory. Common sense suggests that such fundamentals are the starting place for any creative activity, including writing. But college writers walk into our classes with a lifetime of language use. They already know a lot about making meaning with words, more than they think they know. Yet there is much to teach, and perhaps the most powerful thing we can teach them is that writing isn't just for getting down what you know but for discovering what you think. I've learned to never underestimate the power of this discovery process, and that's why discovery is the beating heart of this book.

## What's New in This Edition?

---

The first thing you'll notice about the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Curious Writer* is that there are two new co-authors—Drs. Kelly Myers and Michelle Payne—both of whom are colleagues and close friends at Boise State University, where I taught for nearly 25 years. They not only bring fresh voices to the book but considerable expertise in argument, reflection, multimodality, and rhetorical theory. Most important, they are both fine writers. The addition of their voices to this book enriches it tremendously, as you will see.

### **Learning About Genre Through Re-genre**

Though its focus is on academic inquiry, this book has also always been about genre: what it is, how it works, and why it's relevant to writers. In this edition, we bring that into center stage. One way we do this is with an exclusive assignment that prompts students to take an earlier writing assignment and turn it into a multimedia project. I introduced this idea in the last edition, but the new *Curious Writer* refines and expands the approach in Chapter 13. Among other things, we've added social media campaigns as an option, and focused video work on the creation of Hollywood-type movie trailers using iMovie. We think this is one of the more innovative approaches to re-purposing a writing assignment. Your students will love it.

### **Focusing on Climate Change**

The 6<sup>th</sup> edition includes a series of readings that address this inquiry question: *How will a changing climate influence the way we live?* We've chosen this theme not only because it's a compelling issue, especially for the generation of students reading the book, but it's also a way of seeing how different writing genres approach the

same inquiry question. Nearly every genre chapter in Part 2 of *The Curious Writer* includes a new reading on the topic.

### **Expanding the Emphasis on Reflection and Transfer**

A major focus in this edition is actively encouraging students to think about how they write, what they're learning about writing, and how they might apply what they learn. This not only helps students get control over the process of writing but helps them to transfer what they've learned to new situations. While reflection has always been a part of *The Curious Writer*, it's now a major focus. We do this by structuring reflection activities into a **three-act narrative**: first thoughts, second thoughts, and final thoughts. By creating these three moments to reflect on their learning, students begin to tell themselves the story of how they're developing as writers.

### **Updating Approaches to Argument**

The treatment of argument is an important way to evaluate the effectiveness of any writing text. In every edition, I've tried to improve *The Curious Writer's* approach. Now, with the addition of two new co-authors with specific expertise in argumentative writing, I think this edition is, by far, the best yet in helping students to understand how to analyze arguments, make arguments, and connect argument to inquiry. We've also tried to clarify the connections between different forms of argument, in part by restructuring Part 2 of the book into two kinds of assignments: interpretive inquiry and persuasive inquiry. Now all the argumentative genres are linked in one section so we can draw connections between them. Michelle and Kelly have also significantly refocused and revised Chapter 9, "Writing an Argument." Among other things, they introduce "stasis theory" as a useful way of thinking about how to make arguments.

### **A "Binocular" Reading Strategy**

Teaching students how to tackle difficult texts, and how to use them in their own writing, has always been an important part of *The Curious Writer*. But the 6<sup>th</sup> edition features a new description of the process, something we call a "binocular" reading. This approach suggests that there really are three readings: one that is personal, one that is rhetorical, and a third that combines them both, much like looking through a pair of binoculars. We ask students to apply this reading strategy throughout the book.

We take our ethical obligation to students seriously—the new edition of a textbook should be significantly better than the previous edition. Otherwise, why should they spend money on it? I'm confident that the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Curious Writer* is worth their investment. The contributions of my co-authors, Kelly and Michelle, have been key to improving the book, making it the best edition yet.

### **Enhancing the Digital Writing Text**

When we began work on the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of this book, we wanted to create a more exciting and robust digital text. Revel users should immediately notice that there are now multiple places to write online while working through the text. Readers can also watch videos, listen to audio from the authors, and use interactive features like hover-over annotations in some of the readings. We will continue to update *The Curious Writer* on Revel with the goal of making this the most innovative and

user-friendly digital writing text available. Instructors who teach hybrid or online courses will love how easily the book integrates into their classes.

## Why Teach Inquiry in the Writing Classroom?

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Anyone who has taught first-year writing for long knows that there are competing theories about why and how to do it. Should the course focus on writing academic discourse? Should students read and write about writing? Is understanding genres and how they work the key to developing new writing skills? Is first-year writing a class in rhetorical theory? Or must it focus on fundamentals: sentences, paragraphs, and basic structures for exposition like the five-paragraph theme? Behind this debate is the growing interest in how to maximize what students *transfer* from a writing class to other courses, and later into their lives.

It's clear where we stand in this debate. *The Curious Writer* argues that we should build the first-year writing class around inquiry. Here's why:

- **The “spirit of inquiry” is “the heart of the academic enterprise.”** This is what the Boyer Commission argued in 1998 when it encouraged universities to transform the freshman year into inquiry-based experience. Students should be introduced to the university by inviting them to experience discovery by exploring questions in some of the ways their teachers do.
- **Inquiry makes students the agents of their own learning.** This is consistent with the composition field's long-time commitment to encouraging students to feel a sense of authority over their own writing. By encouraging them to choose their own inquiry topics, and identify the questions that interest them, students honor their own curiosity, and see writing as a vehicle to discover things they want to know.
- **Inquiry promotes transferable knowledge.** If you accept that it is impossible for first-year courses to teach students the many forms of writing in the disciplines, then what they *can* teach is fundamental habits of mind and practices that *are* common in much disciplinary writing. Perhaps none is more important than the power of a well-crafted inquiry question, and the willingness to suspend judgment.
- **Inquiry emphasizes invention.** Since inquiry-based pedagogies emphasize exploration more than any other method of writing instruction, they are especially appealing to those of us who are committed to teaching writing as a form of learning and discovery.

## How This Book Is Organized

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*The Curious Writer* includes four parts. Because the inquiry-based approach is central to *The Curious Writer*, it's crucial for students to work through the first two chapters in Part 1, “The Spirit of Inquiry.” Part 2—the largest—focuses on

“inquiry projects,” and these are grouped into two sections: those assignments that involve interpretation as a method of inquiry, and those that focus on persuasion. The distinction isn’t without problems (e.g., some inquiry projects use both methods) but we think it’s also extremely useful. Here’s how we think about it:

- **Interpretive inquiry** includes projects that explore questions about social meanings. How do certain behaviors reflect a group’s values (ethnography)? What does a university logo imply about that university’s brand (analysis)? What insights do I have about isolation from my experience contracting Covid-19 (personal essay)? As a group, interpretive inquiry projects involve research that may be speculative, or conclusions that depend on specific contexts.
- **Persuasive inquiry** involves projects that focus on changing things—behaviors, policies, or attitudes. What should we do about student debt (proposal)? What’s the best way to train a dog—positive or negative reinforcement (review)? Does failure *always* teach us good things about ourselves (argument)? Persuasive inquiry genres often offer claims that may apply to a range of contexts, and that imply a degree of certainty about what’s true.

Part 3 focuses on research, but it does so differently than most textbooks. We do not believe that the “research paper” is a separate genre, but rather a more extended inquiry project that may incorporate features of the assignments students practiced in Part 2. In other words, a research project may be interpretive, or persuasive, or perhaps both. It may include profiles, analysis, proposals, or personal experience. If learning a single genre of writing is like mastering an instrument, then the research project is a chance to play with a band.

One of the things that really sets this book apart from the others is the unique focus on revision. This is the only text I’m aware of that includes two separate chapters on revision strategies. In Part 4 of *The Curious Writer*, students will find a field guide to revision (Chapter 14), featuring approaches to address the most common problems in a draft. We’re particularly excited about the chapter on “deep revision” (Chapter 13). This asks students to re-purpose a writing assignment using multimedia features.

We organized the book to span, if necessary, a two-semester composition course, though it can easily be adapted for use in one semester. Typically, in a two-semester sequence, the first course focuses on the writing process, exposition, critical analysis, writing to learn, and so on. The second semester often focuses on argument and research. A single-semester composition course combines all these areas. Fortunately, *The Curious Writer* is extremely flexible, with ample material to keep students busy for one or two semesters.

This is the third textbook with the “curious” moniker. Because all are inquiry based, the word is a natural choice. And although I’m very interested in encouraging my students to be curious researchers, readers, and writers, I also hope to remind my colleagues who use these books that we should be curious, too. We should model for our students our own passion for inquiring into the world. We should also celebrate what we can learn from our students, and not just about writing or the many topics they might choose to write about. Every time I walk into the writing classroom, I’m curious about what my students will teach me about myself. That’s a lifetime inquiry project for all of us, as teachers and as people.

## Using the Exercises

Learning follows experience, and the exercises in *The Curious Writer* are intended to help students make sense of the ideas in the text. New features in Revel make this easier than ever. The new version allows students to write online, responding to the many writing prompts in the book. In some cases, students can share what they write with not just their instructor but other students.

There are several categories of writing exercises in the book:

- **Three-Act Reflection.** Every chapter prompts students to reflect on what they're learning. These occur three times—in the beginning of the chapter (“First Thoughts”), in the middle (“Second Thoughts”), and at the end (“Final Thoughts”). This way, students create a kind of three-act narrative, one that reveals the story of what they're learning, how it's changing the way they think about writing, and how they might apply this knowledge.
- **Chapter Opening Exercises.** Rather than “talk at” students at the beginning of every chapter, we get them writing. These exercises are designed to introduce them to some key concept of the writing genre they are about to try. These opening exercises are a lively entry into in-class discussions of the kind of writing they are being asked to do.
- **Invention Exercises.** Since inquiry emphasizes exploration, invention is a key part of the process. Every genre chapter in Part 2 includes a wide range of exercises to help students find and develop writing topics. These include fastwriting, listing, visual, and research activities.
- **Discussion Board Posts.** Some of the exercises in this edition of *The Curious Writer* prompt students to post to a class discussion. Revel makes this easier than ever. Instructors who teach hybrid or online courses will appreciate this especially.

Don't mistake the abundance of exercises in the book as an indication that you must march your students in lockstep through every one or they won't learn what they need to. *The Curious Writer* is more flexible than that. Use the exercises and activities that seem to emphasize key points that you think are important. Skip those you don't have time for or that don't seem necessary. If you're like me, you also have a few of your own rabbits in your hat—exercises and activities that may work better with the text than the ones we suggest.

## Other Features of *The Curious Writer*

A number of recurring features are designed to offer additional support to students. These include:

- **Learning Objectives and End-of-Chapter Assessment.** We've revised the learning objectives for each chapter and tied each of them to an assessment at the end of every chapter. Notes throughout the chapter highlight where the objectives come into play.



- **Navigating *The Curious Writer*.** In a new audio feature located in the middle of a chapter, the authors reinforce key concepts that students are learning and prepare them for what's to come.
- **Re-Genre Examples.** In keeping with the book's focus on how genre influences what we write and to whom, every chapter includes a multimedia example of the writing genre students are learning.

## Supplements

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Supplements are available to adopters at the Instructor's Resource Center at [www.pearsonhighered.com/irc](http://www.pearsonhighered.com/irc) and also within the Resources folder within the Revel<sup>®</sup> product.

### The Instructor's Resource Manual

ISBN 0-13-660030-1/978-0-13-660030-5

This manual, written by Michelle Payne, includes sample syllabi as well as a helpful introduction that offers general teaching strategies and ideas for teaching writing as a form of inquiry. It also provides a detailed overview of each chapter and its goals, ideas for discussion starters, handouts and overheads, and many additional writing activities that teachers can use in their classrooms to supplement the textbook.

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## Acknowledgments

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Making a book is a team effort, and the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Curious Writer*, which features two new co-authors—Drs. Kelly Myers and Michelle Payne—is more collaborative than ever. But there are also talented people working behind the scenes who rarely receive much credit. The most important of these is the editor who ushers the book through various drafts. The best of these have a sharp eye for inconsistencies, insufficient explanations, redundancy, and lack of clarity. They also ask the kind of questions that good writing teachers ask: “What are you trying to do here? Can you think of other, better ways to do it?” Thomas Finn is just that kind of editor, and we were lucky enough to get him at the very moment we most needed guidance. We are also grateful for the support of Pearson staff, especially Rachel Ross and Heather Torres.

The 6<sup>th</sup> edition includes new contributions from talented students, most of whom studied here at Boise State. These include Grace Burgert and Abbey Keh, both of whom wrote essays for us after the pandemic shut down campus. They worked alone at home on their contributions, which is becoming the norm these days. We’re grateful for their persistence in writing and revising their work without much input from us or their instructors. In addition, we want to thank Yung Stiffler for allowing us to use her wonderful conference poster in Chapter 13, which focuses on “re-genre.” Two of our colleagues who are master photographers, Professors Michal Temkin Martinez and Jackie O’Connor, generously contributed images to the 6<sup>th</sup> edition in Chapter 3, Writing a Personal Essay, and Chapter 5, Writing an Ethnographic Essay. We are deeply grateful.

We also had help from one of our spectacular former graduate students, Emery Ross, who helped us to understand Google search analytics, and from Michelle’s daughter, Nicole Barrett, who told us, from a student’s perspective, when we weren’t making much sense.

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As always, I'm especially grateful to my wife Karen, who has endured multiple editions of these books and their hold on my attention, which has often come at her expense. She's the beacon I follow through this blizzard of words, always guiding me home.

BRUCE BALENGER

# About the Authors

**Bruce Ballenger** is an emeritus professor of English at Boise State University where he taught courses in composition, composition theory, the essay tradition, and creative nonfiction. He's the author of seven books, including the three texts in the Curious series: *The Curious Researcher*, *The Curious Reader*, and *The Curious Writer*, all from Pearson. His text *Crafting Truth: Short Studies in Creative Nonfiction* is from the same publisher. He is thrilled to be joined by his colleagues, Drs. Kelly Myers and Michelle Payne, in writing the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of this book.

**Kelly Myers**, associate professor of English at Boise State University, teaches argument and rhetoric courses, nonfiction workshops, and capstone courses. She writes about revision strategies, opportunity, and regret. She also works with undergraduate students to design and implement student success initiatives across the university. *The Curious Writer* was the textbook she used in her first semester of teaching, twenty years ago, and she feels honored to contribute to a book she loves.

**Michelle Payne** is a professor of English at Boise State University and Assistant Provost for Academic Leadership and Faculty Affairs. She teaches courses in nonfiction writing, argument, and composition theory. She is the author of *Bodily Discourses: When Students Write about Abuse and Eating Disorders* and co-author of *The Curious Reader* with Bruce Ballenger. She has also written the Instructor Manual for each edition of *The Curious Writer* and has enjoyed being a thinking partner with Bruce on the textbook over the years. It's an honor to now be collaborating with her colleagues on this new edition.

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# Writing as Inquiry

## Learning Objectives

**In this chapter, you'll learn to**

- 1.1** Articulate how you think of yourself as a writer.
- 1.2** Identify and practice the habits of mind that are the foundation of academic inquiry.
- 1.3** Reflect on your own writing process and apply a problem-solving approach.
- 1.4** Apply creative and critical thinking to a writing process that will help you generate ideas.
- 1.5** Describe what kinds of questions will sustain inquiry into any subject.
- 1.6** Distinguish between “open” writing situations that invite inquiry and less exploratory “direct” writing.

## What Do We Mean by Inquiry?

This is a book about inquiry and writing. But what do we mean by “inquiry?” Rather than explain it to you, let’s start by jumping right in and inquiring about something very ordinary: a water bottle. What is there to say about a water bottle? A lot, it turns out, if you begin with questions. Good questions have the power to open doors to discovery, even with things you at first never considered that interesting (like water bottles). And questions are the fuel that powers academic inquiry, which begins, of course, with something quite simple but under-appreciated: Curiosity.





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If you don't have a water bottle available, use the picture here to help you brainstorm a quick list of relationship questions. For example, *What's the relationship between heavy use of water bottles and income levels?* Or, *Is there a relationship between the purity of the water in water bottles and their source?*

1. Which of these questions stand out? Which are particularly interesting?
2. What question might be the focus of an article that you would want to read?

Rediscovering your curiosity, and learning to use it to sustain inquiry into the things that interest you, is a major goal of *The Curious Writer*. But so is harnessing writing to help you do it. If the motive behind inquiry is to *find out*, then we write to discover and to learn. If you've mostly used writing in school to simply get down what you already think, then this book proposes a new way to use your writing: *To find out what you think*. We'll show you how, but it will require that you reassess your writing habits and assumptions. That's where this book begins.

## Beliefs About Writing and Writing Development

### 1.1 Articulate how you think of yourself as a writer.

Most of us have been taught about writing since the first grade. We usually enter college with beliefs not only about what makes a good paper and what "rules" of writing to follow, but also about how we can develop as writers. The three of us have learned a lot about writing since our first years in college, and a big part of that learning involved unraveling some prior beliefs about writing. In fact, we'd say that our development as writers initially had more to do with *unlearning* some of what we already knew than it did with discovering new ways to write. But you have to make your beliefs explicit if you're going to make decisions about which are helpful and which aren't. So, take a moment to find out what your beliefs are and to think about whether they actually make sense.

### Unlearning Unhelpful Beliefs

You won't be surprised when we say that we have a lot of theories about writing development; after all, we're supposedly the experts. But we are *all* writing theorists, with beliefs that grow out of our successes and failures as people who write. Because you don't think much about them, these beliefs often shape your response

to writing instruction without your even knowing it. For example, we've had a number of students who believe that people are born writers. This belief, of course, would make any kind of writing class a waste of time, because writing ability would be a matter of genetics.

A much more common belief is that learning to write is a process of building on basics, beginning with words, and then working up to sentences, paragraphs, and perhaps whole compositions. There are those who still argue that the reason people supposedly don't write well is that English teachers don't teach enough formal grammar, despite considerable evidence that it makes little difference. It's also easy to infer from our experiences that all school writing follows a basic structure (#10); that seems to be the lesson of the five-paragraph theme. But as you'll learn later, how we organize writing depends very much on the genre we're working with and the situation we're writing in.

Some of these beliefs, even if unhelpful, strike us as common sense. This brings up an important point: Unlearning involves rejecting common sense *if* it conflicts with what actually works. Throughout this book, we hope you'll constantly test your beliefs about writing against the experiences you're having with it. Pay attention to what seems to work for you and what doesn't. Mostly, we'd like you, at least initially, to play what one writing instructor calls the *believing game*. Ask yourself: *What will I gain as a writer if I try believing this is true?* For example, even if you've believed for much of your life that you should never write anything in school that doesn't follow an outline, you might discover that abandoning this "rule" sometimes helps you use writing to *discover* what you think.

**Unlearning involves rejecting common sense if it conflicts with what actually works.**

## Tools for Inquiry-based Writing: Fastwriting and Journaling

As you begin to imagine yourself as a writer—your habits, beliefs, and typical practices—you may recall keeping a diary or journal, something that may prompt you to remember late nights in your room, furiously writing about what happened that day. Most of us, however, never kept a journal, and the whole idea of using it in an academic class seems weird. We hope to convince you otherwise. A premise of *The Curious Writer* is that we can think *through* writing, not just before we write. There are two conditions that make this easier to do.

1. You have someplace to write where *you* are the audience, a writing space that won't be evaluated by anyone else.
2. You find a way to call a truce with your internal critic, silencing the voice in your head that tells you that everything you write is stupid, or some variation of that theme.



An ungraded journal or notebook, physical or digital, is a really good way to create these two conditions. But you have to use it. As you work your way through this book, we'll invite you to do a lot of journal work, generating material for an assignment, reflecting on your writing practices, and exploring your reaction to readings. One of the things we'll often ask you to do in your journal is what we call "fastwriting." You may have done something like this before, especially in English classes, where it's often called "freewriting." We like the term "fastwriting" a little better because it emphasizes speed.

You may resist this kind of writing. Sometimes it seems pointless. Or maybe you can't bear to write badly. But it's an extraordinarily useful method because it is much more likely you'll say what you don't expect to say, and in turn, discover what you didn't know you knew. The key, however, is to accept that writing like this, which is sometimes messy, unfocused, grammatically incorrect, and disorganized, can be really useful. You'll learn to believe this because often enough you experience surprise: "Wow, I hadn't remembered that!" or "That's an important question that hadn't occurred to me before!" or "That's what I was trying to say!"

As we already noted, the key to fastwriting is to write as fast as you can, not bothering to "fix" things or meditate on them. You just follow along with the words to see where they take you. This takes some practice. As you're developing your own approach to fastwriting, consider the following:

- Where do you write faster? In a physical notebook or on a screen?
- Inevitably, you will run out of things to say. Don't panic. Just skip a line, wait a moment, and get started with a new thought. Sometimes, just to keep your pen or fingers moving, you might talk to yourself about being stuck until you find a groove again. Or if you're responding to a text, go back and find a new passage to get you going again.
- Sometimes, you are asked to do focused fastwrites (see an example below). In those, you generally try to stay on topic, though digressions can be super interesting. In a focused fastwrite, when you run out of one idea, skip a line and start another.
- Fastwriting doesn't always work in every situation. Don't fret if a session just doesn't seem to go anywhere. That happens. Just don't lose the faith that it can!

Here's part of a focused fastwrite that Bruce did during the pandemic, as he was trying to sort through his thoughts about warnings by experts that it would cause serious mental health problems:

*Experts are unsure what the mental fallout will be from the pandemic, but after studying disasters and wars they estimate that about a third of those living through trauma will suffer from mental health problems, especially those who are predisposed to it.*

*I told Karen yesterday that I was feeling depressed, or that I was "edging" toward it. She was surprised. "You seemed happy this morning," she said. I think I was, but as*

*the day wore on—a bright and pleasant Sunday—I felt more adrift, going through the motions, and looking forward to an afternoon nap. In a few short months, the world has shrunk...*

In this example, Bruce started with an idea gleaned from something he read, and began to try to explore it through his own experience, ultimately ending with a new idea: One response to the psychological stresses of the pandemic was that the world shrinks, and that has implications. It was a little discovery that wouldn't have occurred to him unless he'd written his way to it, following behind—not ahead—of the writing.

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## Exercise 1.1

### What Is Your Process?

Before going further, take a moment to think about your own beliefs about writing, and the practices you usually follow when you're given a school writing assignment. The following self-evaluation survey should give you a good baseline to identify your writing process as you enter this course.

**STEP ONE:** Complete the Self-Evaluation Survey.

#### Self-Evaluation Survey

1. When you're given a school writing assignment, do you wait until the last minute to finish it?  
Always——Often——Sometimes——Rarely——Never
2. How often have you had the experience of learning something you didn't expect through writing about it?  
Very often——Fairly often——Sometimes——Rarely——Never
3. Do you generally plan out what you're going to write before you write it?  
Always——Often——Sometimes——Rarely——Never
4. *Prewriting* describes activities that some writers engage in before they begin a first draft. Prewriting might include such invention activities as freewriting or fastwriting, making lists, brainstorming or mapping, collecting information, browsing the web, talking to someone about the essay topic, reading up on it, or jotting down ideas in a notebook or journal. How much prewriting do you tend to do for the following types of assignments? Circle the appropriate answer.
  - A personal narrative:  
A great deal——Some——Very little——None——Haven't written one

■ A critical essay about a short story, novel, or poem:  
 A great deal——Some——Very little——None——Haven't  
 written one

■ A research paper:  
 A great deal——Some——Very little——None——Haven't  
 written one

■ An essay exam:  
 A great deal——Some——Very little——None——Haven't  
 written one

5. At what point(s) in writing an academic paper do you often find yourself getting stuck? Check all that apply.

Getting started

In the middle

Finishing

I never/rarely get stuck (go on to question 9)

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. If you usually have problems getting started on a paper, which of the following do you often find hardest to do? Check all that apply. (If you don't have trouble getting started, go on to question 7.)

Deciding on a topic

Writing an introduction

Finding the time to begin

Figuring out exactly what I'm supposed to do for the assignment

Finding a purpose or focus for the paper

Finding the right tone

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. If you usually get stuck in the middle of a paper, which of the following cause(s) the most problems? Check all that apply. (If writing the middle of a paper isn't a problem for you, go on to question 8.)

Keeping focused on the topic

Finding enough information to meet page-length requirements

Following my plan for how I want to write the paper

Bringing in other research or points of view

Organizing all of my information

Trying to avoid plagiarism

Worrying about whether the paper meets the requirements of the assignment

Worrying that the paper just isn't any good

Messing with citations

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. If you have difficulty finishing a paper, which of the following difficulties are typical for you? Check all that apply. (If finishing isn't a problem for you, go on to question 9.)

Composing a last paragraph or conclusion

Worrying that the paper doesn't meet the requirements of the assignment

Worrying that the paper just isn't any good

Trying to keep focused on the main idea or thesis

Trying to avoid repeating myself

Realizing I don't have enough information

Dealing with the bibliography or citations

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Rank the following list of approaches to revision so that it reflects the strategies you use *most often* to *least often* when rewriting academic papers. Rank the items 1–6, with the strategy you use most often as a 1 and the strategy you use least often as a 6.

\_\_\_ I just tidy things up—editing sentences, checking spelling, looking for grammatical errors, fixing formatting, and performing other proofreading activities.

\_\_\_ I look for ways to reorganize existing information in the draft to make it more effective.

\_\_\_ I try to fill holes by adding more information.

\_\_\_ I do more research.

\_\_\_ I change the focus or even the main idea, rewriting sections, adding or removing information, and changing the order of things.

\_\_\_ I rarely do any revision.

10. Do you tend to impose a lot of conditions on when, where, or how you think you write most effectively? (For example, do you need a certain pen? Do you always have to write on a computer? Do you need to be in certain kinds of places? Must it be quiet or noisy? Do you write best under pressure?) Or can you write under a range of circumstances, with few or no conditions? Circle one.

Lots of conditions——Some——A few——No conditions

If you impose conditions on when, where, or how you write, list some of those conditions here:

1.

2.

3.

11. From the following list, identify the one belief about writing that you agree with most strongly and the one that you think isn't true.
- People get better at writing by learning the basics first, starting with grammar, then composing sentences and paragraphs before attempting whole compositions.
  - The best way to develop as a writer is to imitate the writing of the people you want to write like.
  - People are born writers like people are born good at math. Either you can do it or you can't.
  - It's important to nail most things down in the first draft so that revision mostly involves fixing the small things.
  - Practice is the key to a writer's development. The more a writer writes, the more he or she will improve.
  - It's essential to know what you want to say before you say it in writing.
  - Developing writers should start with simple writing tasks, such as telling stories, and move to harder writing tasks, such as writing a research paper.
  - The most important thing that influences a writer's growth is believing that he or she can improve.
  - The key to becoming a better writer is finding your voice.
  - All school writing has a basic structure that you're supposed to follow.

Belief I think is true: \_\_\_\_

Belief I think isn't true: \_\_\_\_

**STEP TWO:** On the class discussion-board, or in class, discuss the results of the survey.

- Are there patterns in the responses? Do most group members seem to answer certain questions in similar or different ways? Are there interesting contradictions?
  - Based on these results, what "typical" habits or challenges do writers in your class seem to share?
  - What struck you most?
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## The Beliefs of This Book

**Allatonce**. One of the metaphors we very much like about writing development is offered by writing theorist Ann E. Berthoff. She said learning to write is like learning to ride a bike. You don't start by practicing handlebar skills, move on to pedaling practice, and then finally learn balancing techniques. You get on the bike

and fall off, get up, and try again, doing all of those separate things at once. At some point, you don't fall and you pedal off down the street. Berthoff said writing is a process that involves allatonce-ness (all-at-once-ness), and it's simply not helpful to try to practice the subskills separately. This book shares the belief in the allatonce-ness of writing development.

**Believing You Can Learn to Write Well.** Various other beliefs about writing development—the importance of critical thinking, the connection between reading and writing, the power of voice and fluency, and the need to listen to voices other than your own—also help to guide this book. One belief, though, undergirds them all: *The most important thing that influences a writer's growth is believing that he or she can learn to write well.* Faith in your ability to become a better writer is key. From it grows the motivation to learn how to write well.

Faith isn't easy to come by. Bruce didn't have it as a writer through most of his school career, because he assumed that being placed in the English class for underachievers meant that writing was simply another thing, like track and math, that he was mediocre at. For a long time, he was a captive to this attitude. But then, in college he wrote a paper he cared about; writing started to matter, because he discovered something he really wanted to say and say well. This was the beginning of a belief that he could become a better writer, despite all those C minuses in high school English. Belief requires motivation, and one powerful motivator is to approach a writing assignment as an opportunity to learn something—that is, to approach it with the spirit of inquiry.

## Habits of Mind

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### 1.2 Identify and practice the habits of mind that are the foundation of academic inquiry.

If you were trying to design a curriculum to prepare athletes to play a range of sports like basketball, baseball, and soccer, would you begin with a general “ball-handling” class? In other words, are there basic ball-handling skills that will help prepare students to play all those sports? What would that course look like? That was a question that writing expert David Russell asked as he wondered whether a course like this one—composition—would adequately prepare students for all the different kinds of writing they would face inside and outside of school. Russell was really asking this question: Are there “generalizable” writing skills that students can learn and apply in all kinds of situations?

This is a great question. One answer—the one at the foundation of *The Curious Writer*—is that while there may not be a set of generalizable writing skills that are always

