

# EVERYONE'S AN AUTHOR

WITH READINGS



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Beverly J. Moss • Carole Clark Papper • Keith Walters

# Everyone's an Author

## WITH READINGS

SECOND EDITION



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W. W. NORTON AND COMPANY  
New York • London

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Printed in the United States of America

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Photo Editor: Ted Szczepanski

Permissions: Elizabeth Trammell

Composition and Layout: Carole Desnoes

Manufacturing: RRD Crawfordsville

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#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Lunsford, Andrea A., 1942- author. | Brody, Michal, author. | Ede, Lisa S., 1947- author. | Moss, Beverly J., author. | Papper, Carole Clark, author. | Walters, Keith, 1952- author.

Title: Everyone's an author with readings / Andrea Lunsford ; Michal Brody ; Lisa Ede ; Beverly J. Moss ; Carole Clark Papper ; Keith Walters.

Description: Second Edition. | New York : W.W. Norton & Company, [2017] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015044578 | ISBN 9780393265293 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: English language--Rhetoric. | Report writing. | Authorship. | College readers.

Classification: LCC PE1408 .L874 2016 | DDC 808/.0427--dc23 LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015044578>

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10110  
[wwnorton.com](http://wwnorton.com)

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House, 75/76 Wells Street, London W1T 3QT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

*For our students, authors all.*





# Preface



**IS EVERYONE AN AUTHOR?** In the first edition of this book, we answered that question with an emphatic “yes!” and hoped teachers and students would agree. We’re happy to say they did, embracing what is now even more obvious than it was during the years we spent drafting that first edition: that writers today have important things to say and want—indeed demand—to be heard, and that anyone with access to a computer can publish their writing, can in fact become an *author*. So we are thrilled that our book has found a large and enthusiastic audience.

As we began work on the second edition, we went back to our title, which has come to have many levels of meaning for us. Two key words: “author” and “everyone.” Certainly “author” informs our book throughout, from the Introduction that shows students the many ways they are already authors to the final chapter that offers advice on ways of publishing their writing. Indeed, every chapter in the book assumes that students are capable of creating and producing knowledge and of sharing that knowledge with others, of being *authors*. And we know that this focus has struck a chord with teachers and students across the country; in fact, we now meet students who talk comfortably about their role as authors, something we surely didn’t see a decade or even five years ago.

And then we thought about the other key word in our title: “everyone.” And like good rhetoricians, we thought about the primary audience for this book: our students. Have we reached every one of them? When they read what we say or imply about college students, will they see themselves, their friends, their communities? Will our book interest them? Will the examples and readings we’ve chosen inspire them to write? Have we, in other words, written a book for *everyone*? We went on to ask ourselves just who this “everyone” is: as it turns out, it’s a very

expansive group, including students in community and two-year colleges, in historically black colleges and universities, in Hispanic-serving and Tribal colleges, in dual enrollment classes, on regional campuses of large state universities, in private liberal arts schools, in research one universities. Students from many different communities, from all socioeconomic backgrounds, with a wide range of abilities and ableness. In short, anyone who has something to say—and that’s EVERYONE.

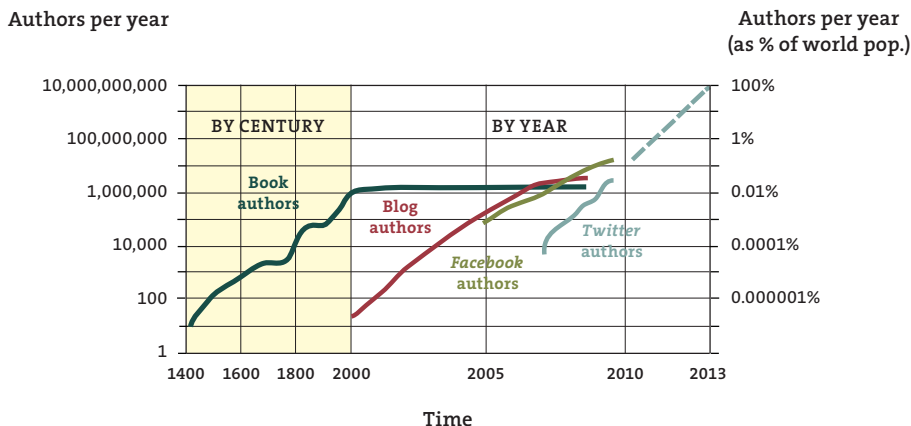
But let’s back up for a moment and ask another question: what led us to pursue this goal of inviting every student to take on the responsibility of authorship? When we began teaching (we won’t even say how many years ago that was), our students wrote traditional academic essays by hand—or sometimes typed them on typewriters. But that was then. Those were the days when writing was something students were assigned, rather than something they did every single day and night. When “text” was a noun, not a verb. When tweets were sounds birds made. When blogs didn’t even exist. The writing scene has changed radically. Now students write, text, tweet, and post to everything from *Facebook* to *Blackboard* to *Instagram* at home, in the library, on the bus, while walking down the street. Writing is ubiquitous—they barely even notice it.

What students are learning to write has changed as well. Instead of “essays,” students today engage a range of genres: position papers, analyses of all kinds, reports, narratives—and more. In addition, they work across media, embedding images and even audio and video in what they write. They do research, not just for assigned “research papers” but for pretty much everything they write. And they write and research not just to report or analyze but to join conversations. With the click of a mouse they can respond to a *Washington Post* blog, publishing their views alongside those of the *Post* writer. They can create posters for the We Are the 99% *Facebook* page, post a review of a novel on *Amazon*, contribute to a wiki, submit a poem or story to their college literary magazine, assemble a digital portfolio to use in applying for jobs or internships. The work of these students speaks clearly to a sea change in literacy and to a major premise of this book: if you have access to a computer, you can publish what you write. Today, everyone can be an author.

We began to get a hint of this shift nearly a decade ago. In a 2009 article in *Seed* magazine, researchers Denis Pelli and Charles Bigelow argue that while “nearly universal literacy is a defining characteristic of today’s modern civilization, nearly universal authorship will shape tomorrow’s.”<sup>1</sup>

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1. Denis G. Pelli and Charles Bigelow, “A Writing Revolution,” *Seedmagazine.com*, 20 Oct. 2009, Web, 3 Jan. 2012.



Number of authors who published in each year for various media since 1400 by century (left) and by year (right). Source: Denis G. Pelli and Charles Bigelow, "A Writing Revolution," *Seed-magazine.com*, 20 Oct. 2009, Web, 3 Jan. 2012.

They go on to offer a graph of the history of "authorship" from 1400 projected through 2013, noting that while we've seen steep rises in authorship before (especially around 1500 and 1800), the current rise is more precipitous by far.

Tracking another shift, rhetorician Deborah Brandt suggests that now that a majority of Americans make their living in the so-called information economy, where writing is part of what they do during their workday, it could be said that "writing is . . . eclipsing reading as the literate skill of consequence."<sup>2</sup> Pelli and Bigelow put this shift more starkly, saying, "As readers, we consume. As authors, we create."

Today's authors are certainly creators, in the broadest sense. Protestors are using *Twitter* to organize and demonstrate on behalf of pressing social and political issues around the world. Fans create websites for those who follow certain bands, TV shows, sports teams. As this book goes to press, U.S. presidential candidates are using *Facebook* and *Twitter* to broadcast their messages, raise money, and mobilize voters.

Clearly, we are experiencing a major transition in what it means to be a writer. Such a massive shift brings challenges as well as opportunities. Many worry, for example, about the dangers the internet poses to our privacy. As authors, we also understand that being a *productive* author brings

2. Deborah Brandt, "Writing at Work," Hunter College, New York, 12 Nov. 2011, Lecture.



certain responsibilities: working fairly and generously with others, taking seriously the challenges of writing with authority, standing behind the texts we create, being scrupulous about where we get information and how we use it, and using available technologies in wise and productive ways.

This book aims to guide student writers as they take on the responsibilities, challenges, and joys of authorship. As teachers who have been active participants in the literacy revolution brought on by changes in modes and technologies of communication, we've been learning with our students how best to engage such changes. As scholars, we have read widely in what many refer to as the "new literacies"; as researchers, we have studied the changing scene of writing with excitement. Our goal in writing this textbook has been to take some of the best ideas animating the field of rhetoric and writing and make them accessible to and usable by students and teachers—and to invite *everyone* to become authors.

As Beverly Moss put it in a recent presentation, one challenge in writing any composition textbook is to find a balance between meeting students where they are and where they come from—and yet at the same time challenging them to move out of their comfort zones: to embrace the unfamiliar, to see themselves as meaning makers and see writing in whatever medium as an opportunity to create, to inform, to entertain, to move, to connect with others—including those who are not like them, who maybe do not speak the same language or hail from the same communities. With each page that we write, we try to achieve that balance. Every one of our students has important things to say, and we aim to help them do just that.

## Highlights

- ***On the genres college students need to write:*** arguments, analyses, narratives, reports, reviews—a *new* chapter on proposals—and *new* guidance in visual analysis, literacy narratives, profiles, and literature reviews. Chapter 10 gives students help “Choosing Genres” when the choice is theirs.
- ***On the need for rhetoric.*** From Chapter 1 on “Thinking Rhetorically” to Chapter 5 on “Writing and Rhetoric as a Field of Study” to the many prompts throughout the book that help students think about their own rhetorical situations and choices, this book makes them aware of the importance of rhetoric.

- **On academic writing.** We've tried to demystify academic writing—and to show students how to enter academic conversations. Chapter 4 offers advice on “Meeting the Demands of Academic Writing,” and we've added *new* guidance on writing visual analyses, literature reviews, literacy narratives, and other common college assignments.
- **On argument.** Chapter 11 covers “Arguing a Position,” Chapter 17 covers “Analyzing and Constructing Arguments” (with *new* coverage of Classical, Toulmin, Rogerian, and Invitational approaches), and Chapter 18 offers “Strategies for Supporting an Argument.”
- **On reading.** Chapter 3 offers guidelines on “Reading Rhetorically”: to read not only with careful attention but also with careful *intention*—to listen, engage, and then respond. And it offers strategies for reading texts of all kinds—written in words or images, on-screen or off.
- **On research.** The challenge today's students face is not gathering data, but making sense of massive amounts of information and using it effectively in support of their own arguments. Chapters 19–28 cover all stages of research, from finding and evaluating sources to citing and documenting them. Chapter 20, on “Finding Sources,” has been reorganized to combine print and online sources in a way that better aligns with how students today search for information, and *new* examples guide students through annotating, summarizing, and synthesizing the sources they find.
- **On writing in multiple modes.** Chapter 34 provides practical advice on writing illustrated essays, blogs, wikis, audio and video essays, and posters, and Chapter 35 covers oral presentations—both *new* to this edition. The companion *Tumblr* site provides a regularly updated source of multimodal readings.
- **On social media.** We've tried to bridge the gap between the writing students do on social media sites and the writing they do in college. We reject the notion that *Google* is making us stupid; in fact, we find that student writers are adept at crafting messages that will reach their intended audiences *because* they do so every day on *Facebook* and other such sites. Chapter 30 shows how the rhetorical strategies they use instinctively in social media are used in academic writing—and also how social media is now used in academia.

- **On style.** We pay attention to style, with guidelines that will help students think carefully and creatively about the stylistic choices open to them. Chapter 29 defines style as a matter of appropriateness, and Chapter 31 covers “How to Write Good Sentences.”
- **On social justice.** Minimum wages, affordable housing, Black Lives Matter: many of the examples in this book demonstrate how people from various walks of life use writing in ways that strive to help create “a more perfect union,” a society that is more just and equitable for all its members. We don’t always agree on how to go about reaching those goals, and that’s why rhetoric and civic discourse matter.
- **Many new examples about topics students will relate to.** From a description of how Steph Curry shoots a basketball and a rhetorical analysis of what makes Pharrell’s “Happy” so catchy to a blog post from a student NASCAR driver and a visual analysis of the *New Yorker*’s Bert and Ernie cover, we hope that all students will find examples and images that will make them smile—and inspire them to read and write.
- **An anthology of 32 readings—and more readings posted weekly on Tumblr.** Marginal links refer readers from the rhetoric to examples in the readings—and vice versa. You can center your course on either the rhetoric or the readings, and the links will help you draw from the other part as need be.
- **Menus, directories, documentation templates, and a glossary / index** make the book easy to use—and to understand.

*Everyone’s an Author* is available in two versions, with and without an anthology of readings. Readings are arranged alphabetically by author, with menus indexing the readings by genre and theme. And the book is formatted as two books in one, rhetoric in front and readings in the back. You can therefore center your course on either the rhetoric or the readings, since links in the margins will help you draw from the other part as you wish to.

## What’s Online

**As an ebook.** Both versions of *Everyone’s an Author* are available as ebooks and include all the readings and images found in the print books. At a fraction of the price of the print books, the ebooks allow students to access the entire book, search, highlight, bookmark, take and share notes with

ease, and click on online examples—and can be viewed and synched on all computers and mobile devices.

**Everyonesanauthor.tumblr.com** adds essays, videos, audio clips, speeches, infographics, and more. Searchable by genres, themes, and chapters in the book, the site is updated with new readings weekly. Each item is introduced with a brief contextual note and followed by questions that prompt students to analyze, reflect on, and respond to the text. A “comments” button lets students post comments and share texts with others. The site also includes clusters of texts, conversations on topics being widely discussed. Find a chapter-by-chapter menu of the online examples in this book by clicking “Links from the Book.” See you and your students at [everyonesanauthor.tumblr.com!](http://everyonesanauthor.tumblr.com)

**Norton/write.** Find a library of model student papers; more than 1,000 online exercises and quizzes; research and plagiarism tutorials; documentation guidelines for MLA, APA, *Chicago*, and CSE styles; MLA citation drills, and more—all just a click away. Free and open, no password required. Access the site at [wnnorton.com/write](http://wnnorton.com/write).

**Coursepacks** are available for free and in a variety of formats, including *Blackboard*, *Desire2Learn*, *Moodle*, *Canvas*, and *Angel*. Coursepacks work within your existing learning management system, so there’s no new system to learn, and access is free and easy. The *Everyone’s an Author* coursepack includes the “Think Beyond Words” exercises that prompt students to analyze interesting online examples of multimodal writing; the “Reflect” exercises found throughout the book; model student papers; quizzes and exercises on grammar and research; documentation guidelines; revision worksheets, and more. Coursepacks are ready to use, right from the start—but are also easy to customize, using the system you already know and understand. Download the coursepack at [wnnorton.com/instructors](http://wnnorton.com/instructors).

**Author videos.** Andrea Lunsford, Lisa Ede, Beverly Moss, Carole Clark Papper, and Keith Walters answer questions they’re often asked by other instructors: about fostering collaboration, teaching multimodal writing, taking advantage of the writing center, teaching classes that include both L1 and L2 students, and more. View the videos at [wnnorton.com/instructors](http://wnnorton.com/instructors).

Go to [wnnorton.com/instructors](http://wnnorton.com/instructors) to find all of the resources described here. Select “Composition,” and then choose *Everyone’s an Author 2e* to get started.

## The Guide to Teaching *Everyone's an Author*

Available in a tabbed three-ring binder that will also hold your own class notes, this guide offers practical advice and activities from Lisa Ede for teaching all the chapters and readings in the book, including a new chapter by Michal Brody on how to use the companion *Tumblr* site with your students. In addition, it offers detailed advice from Richard Bullock, Andrea Lunsford, Maureen Daly Goggin, and others about teaching writing more generally: how to create a syllabus, respond to student writing, help students whose primary language isn't English, and more. Order a print copy or access the online version at [www.norton.com/instructors](http://www.norton.com/instructors).

### Acknowledgments

We are profoundly grateful to the many people who have helped bring *Everyone's an Author* into existence. Indeed, this text provides a perfect example of what an eighteenth-century German encyclopedia meant when it defined *book* as “the work of many hands.” Certainly this one is the work of many hands, and among those hands none have been more instrumental than those of Marilyn Moller: the breadth of her vision is matched by her meticulous attention to detail, keen sense of style and design, and ability to get more work done than anyone we have ever known. Throughout the process of composing this text, she has set the bar high for us, and we've tried hard to reach it. And our deep gratitude goes to Tenyia Lee, whose astute judgment and analytical eye have guided us through this edition. A big thank you as well to Marian Johnson for making time to read and respond to many of the chapters in the first edition—and especially for stepping in at the eleventh hour of this second edition to make it happen! Thanks also to John Elliott, whose careful and graceful line editing helped shape the first edition.

We are similarly grateful to many others who contributed their talents to this book, especially Carole Desnoes and Jane Searle, for all they did to produce this book in record time (no small undertaking). Thanks as well to Elizabeth Trammell for her work clearing the many text permissions and to Ted Szczepanski and Elyse Rieder for their work finding and clearing permissions for the many images. Last but certainly not least, we thank Claire Wallace for undertaking countless tasks large and small with energy and unprecedented efficiency.

The design of this book is something we are particularly proud of, and for that we offer very special thanks to several amazing designers. Stephen Doyle created the spectacular cover that embodies a key message of our book: that we live in a world made of words and images. Carin Berger created the illuminated alphabet, also made of text, that opens every chapter. JoAnne Metsch did the lovely interior design. And Debra Morton-Hoyt, Rubina Yeh, Michael Wood, and Tiani Kennedy oversaw the whole thing as well as adding their own elegant—and whimsical!—touches inside and out. Best thanks to all of them.

*Everyone's an Author* is more than just a print book, and we thank Erica Wnek, Kim Yi, Mateus Teixeira, Ava Bramson, and Cooper Wilhelm for creating and producing the superb ebook and instructors' site. And we again want to thank Cliff Landesman for his work in creating the fantastic *Tumblr* site.

Special thanks to the fabled Norton Travelers, who have worked so hard to introduce teachers across the country to what *Everyone's an Author* can offer them. And a big thank you to Megan Zwilling, Maureen Connelly, Lib Triplett, and Doug Day for helping us keep our eye on our audience: teachers and students at colleges where rhetorics of this kind are assigned. Finally, we are grateful to Roby Harrington, Julia Reidhead, and Steve Dunn, who have given their unwavering support to this project for more than a decade now. We are fortunate indeed to have had the talent and hard work of this distinguished Norton team.

An astute and extremely helpful group of reviewers has helped us more than we can say: we have depended on their good pedagogical sense and advice in revising every chapter of this book. Special thanks to Stevens Amidon, Indiana University-Purdue Fort Wayne; Georgana Atkins, University of Mississippi; Kristen Belcher, University of Colorado, Denver; Samantha Bell, Johnson County Community College; Dawn Bergeron, St. Johns River State College; Cassandra Bishop, Southern Illinois University; Erin Breaux, South Louisiana Community College; Ellie Bunting, Edison State College; Maggie Callahan, Louisiana State University; Laura Chartier, University of Alaska, Anchorage; Tera Joy Cole, Idaho State University; Anne-Marie Deitering, Oregon State University; Debra Dew, Valparaiso University; Robyn DeWall, Idaho State University; Patrick Dolan Jr., University of Iowa; Maryam El-Shall, Jamestown Community College; Lindsay Ferrara, Fairfield University; Maureen Fitzpatrick, Johnson County Community College; Kitty Flowers, University of Indianapolis; Robin Gallaher, Northwest Missouri State University; Tara Hembrough, Southern Illinois University; Samuel Head, Idaho

State University; Emma Howes, Coastal Carolina University; Joyce Inman, University of Southern Mississippi; Michelle S. Lee, Daytona State College; Sonja Lynch, Wartburg College; Chelsea Murdock, University of Kansas; Jessie Nixon, University of Alaska, Anchorage; Thomas Reynolds, Northwestern State University; Matthew Schmeer, Johnson County Community College; John Sherrill, Purdue University; Mary Lourdes Silva, Ithaca College; Marc Simoes, California State University, Long Beach; Susan Smith, Georgia Southern University; Tracie Smith, University of Indianapolis; Paulette Swartzfager, Rochester Institute of Technology; Jason Tham, St. Cloud State University; Tom Thompson, The Citadel; Verne Underwood, Rogue Community College; Jennifer Vala, Georgia State University; Emily Ward, Idaho State University; and Lauren Woolbright, Clemson University.

We'd also like to thank those reviewers who helped us to shape the first edition: Edward Baldwin, College of Southern Nevada; Michelle Ballif, University of Georgia; Larry Beason, University of South Alabama, Mobile; Kevin Boyle, College of Southern Nevada; Elizabeth Brockman, Central Michigan University; Stephen Brown, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Vicki Byard, Northeastern Illinois University; Beth Daniell, Kennesaw State University; Nancy DeJoy, Michigan State University; Ronda Dively, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale; Douglas Downs, Montana State University; Suellynn Duffey, University of Missouri, St. Louis; Anne Dvorak, Longview Community College; Patricia Ericsson, Washington State University; Frank Farmer, University of Kansas; Casie Fedukovich, North Carolina State University; Lauren Fitzgerald, Yeshiva University; Diana Grumbles, Southern Methodist University; Ann Guess, Alvin Community College; Michael Harker, Georgia State University; Charlotte Hogg, Texas Christian University; Melissa Ianetta, University of Delaware; Jordynn Jack, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Sara Jameson, Oregon State University; David A. Jolliffe, University of Arkansas; Ann Jurecic, Rutgers University; Connie Kendall, University of Cincinnati; William Lalicker, West Chester University; Phillip Marzluf, Kansas State University; Richard Matzen, Woodbury University; Moriah McCracken, The University of Texas, Pan American; Mary Pat McQueeney, Johnson County Community College; Clyde Moneyhun, Boise State University; Whitney Myers, Texas Wesleyan University; Carroll Ferguson Nardone, Sam Houston State University; Rolf Norgaard, University of Colorado, Boulder; Katherine Durham Oldmixon, Huston-Tillotson University; Matthew Oliver, Old Dominion University; Gary Olson, Idaho State University; Paula Patch, Elon University; Scott Payne, University of Central Arkansas; Mary Jo Reiff, University of Kansas; Albert Rouzie, Ohio

University; Alison Russell, Xavier University; Kathleen J. Ryan, University of Montana; Emily Robins Sharpe, Penn State University; Eddie Singleton, The Ohio State University; Allison Smith, Middle Tennessee State University; Deborah Coxwell Teague, Florida State University; Rex Veeder, St. Cloud State University; Matthew Wiles, University of Louisville; and Mary Wright, Christopher Newport University.

Collectively, we have taught for over 150 years: that's a lot of classes, a lot of students—and we are grateful for every single one of them. We owe some of the best moments of our lives to them—and in our most challenging moments, they have inspired us to carry on. In *Everyone's an Author*, we are particularly grateful to the student writers whose work adds so much to this text: Ade Adegboyega, Rutgers University; Crystal Aymelek, Portland State University; Amanda Baker, The Ohio State University; Carrie Barker, Kirkwood Community College; Ryan Joy, Portland State University; Julia Landauer, Stanford University; Larry Lehna, University of Michigan, Dearborn; Melanie Luken, The Ohio State University; Mitchell Oliver, Georgia State University; David Pasini, The Ohio State University; Walter Przybylowski, Rutgers University; Melissa Rubin, Hofstra University; Anya Schulz, University of California, Berkeley; Katryn Sheppard, Portland State University; Katherine Spriggs, Stanford University; Shuqiao Song, Stanford University; Saurabh Vaish, Hofstra University; and Kameron Wiles, Ball State University.

Each of us also has special debts of gratitude. Andrea Lunsford thanks her students and colleagues at the Bread Loaf Graduate School of English and in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric at Stanford, along with her sisters Ellen Ashdown and Liz Middleton, editor and friend Carolyn Lengel, friends and life supporters Shirley Brice Heath, Betty Bailey, Cheryl Glenn, and Jackie Royster; and especially—and forever—her grandnieces Audrey and Lila Ashdown, who are already budding authors.

Michal Brody would like to thank her two wonderful families in California and Yucatan who so graciously support (and endure) her crazy and restless transnational life. Her conversations—both the actual and the imagined—with each and all of those loved ones provide the constant impetus to reach for both the texture and depth of experience and the clarity with which to express it. She also thanks her students in both countries, who remind her every day that we are all teachers, all learners.

Lisa Ede thanks her husband, Greg Pfarr, for his support, for his commitment to his own art, and for their year-round vegetable garden. Thanks as well to her siblings, who have stuck together through thick and thin: Leni



Ede Smith, Andrew Ede, Sara Ede Rowkamp, Jeffrey Ede, Michele Ede Smith, Laurie Ede Drake, Robert Ede, and Julie Ede Campbell. She also thanks her colleagues in the Oregon State School of Writing, Literature, and Film for their encouragement and support. Special thanks go to the school's director, Anita Helle, and to their amazing administrative staff: Ann Leen, Aurora Terhune, and Felicia Phillips.

Beverly Moss thanks her parents, Harry and Sarah Moss, for their love, encouragement, and confidence in her when her own wavered. In addition, she thanks her Ohio State and Bread Loaf students, who inspire her and teach her so much about teaching. She also wants to express gratitude to her colleagues in Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy at Ohio State for their incredible support. Finally, she thanks two of her own former English teachers, Dorothy Bratton and Jackie Royster, for the way they modeled excellence inside and outside the classroom.

Carole Clark Papper would like to thank her husband, Bob, and wonderful children—Dana, Matt, Zack, and Kate—without whose loving support little would happen and nothing would matter. In addition, she is grateful to the Hofstra University Writing Center faculty and tutors, whose dedication and commitment to students always inspire.

Keith Walters thanks his partner of thirty years, Jonathan Tamez, for sharing a love of life, language, travel, flowers, and beauty. He is also grateful to his students in Tunisia, South Carolina, Texas, and Oregon, who have challenged him to find ways of talking about what good writing is and how to do it.

Finally, we thank those who have taught us—who first helped us learn to hold a pencil and print our names, who inspired a love of language and of reading and writing, who encouraged us to take chances in writing our lives as best we could, who prodded and pushed when we needed it, and who most of all set brilliant examples for us to follow. One person who taught almost all of us—about rhetoric, about writing, and about life—was Edward P. J. Corbett. We remember him with love and with gratitude

—Andrea Lunsford, Michal Brody, Lisa Ede,  
Beverly Moss, Carole Clark Papper, Keith Walters

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## INTRODUCTION

# Is Everyone an Author?



**E'VE CHOSEN A PROVOCATIVE TITLE** for this book, so it's fair to ask if we've gotten it right, if everyone is an author. Let's take just a few examples that can help to make the point:

- A student creates a *Facebook* page, which immediately finds a large audience of other interested students.
- A visitor to the United States sends an email to a few friends and family members in Slovakia—and they begin forwarding it. The message circles the globe in a day.
- A professor assigns students in her class to work together to write a number of entries for *Wikipedia*, and they are surprised to find how quickly their entries are revised by others.
- An airline executive writes a letter of apology for unconscionable delays in service and publishes the letter in newspapers, where millions will read it.
- A small group of high school students who are keen on cooking post their recipe for Crazy Candy Cookies on their *Cook's Corner* blog and are overwhelmed with the number of responses to their invention.
- Five women nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actress prepare acceptance speeches: one of them will deliver the speech live before an international audience.

- You get your next assignment in your college writing class and set out to do the research necessary to complete it. When you're finished, you turn in your twelve-page argument to your instructor and classmates for their responses—and you also post it on your webpage under “What I’m Writing Now.”

All of these examples represent important messages written by people who probably do not consider themselves authors. Yet they illustrate what we mean when we say that today “everyone’s an author.” Once upon a time, the ability to compose a message that reached wide and varied audiences was restricted to a small group; now, however, this opportunity is available to anyone with access to the internet.

The word *author* has a long history, but it is most associated with the rise of print and the ability of a writer to claim what he or she has written as property. The first copyright act, in the early eighteenth century, ruled that authors held the primary rights to their work. And while anyone could potentially be a writer, an author was someone whose work had been published. That rough definition worked pretty well until recently, when traditional copyright laws began to show the strain of their 300-year history, most notably with the simple and easy file sharing that the internet makes possible.

In fact, the web has blurred the distinction between writers and authors, offering anyone with access to a computer the opportunity to publish what they write. Whether or not you own a computer, if you have access to one (at school, at a library), you can publish what you write and thus make what you say available to readers around the world.

Think for a minute about the impact of blogs, which first appeared in 1997. When this book was first published, there were more than 156 million public blogs, and as this new edition goes to press, there are more than 250 million blogs on *Tumblr* and *WordPress* alone. Add to blogs the rise of *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube*, *Instagram*, and other social networking sites for even more evidence to support our claim: today, everyone’s an author. Moreover, twenty-first-century authors just don’t fit the image of the Romantic writer, alone in a garret, struggling to bring forth something unique. Rather, today’s authors are part of a huge, often global, conversation; they build on what others have thought and written, they create mash-ups and remixes, and they practice teamwork at almost every turn. They are authoring for the digital age.

## Redefining Writing

If the definition of *author* has changed in recent years, so has our understanding of the definition, nature, and scope of *writing*.

Writing, for example, now includes much more than words, as images and graphics take on an important part of the job of conveying meaning. In addition, writing can now include sound, video, and other media. Perhaps more important, writing now often contains many voices, as information from the web is incorporated into the texts we write with increasing ease. Finally, as we noted above, writing today is almost always part of a larger conversation. Rather than rising mysteriously from the depths of a writer's original thoughts, a stereotype made popular during the Romantic period, writing almost always responds to some other written piece or to other ideas. If “no man [or woman] is an island, entire of itself,” then the same holds true for writing.

Writing now is also often highly collaborative. You work with a team to produce an illustrated report, the basis of which is used by members of the team to make a key presentation to management; you and a classmate carry out an experiment, argue over and write up the results together, and present your findings to the class; a business class project calls on you and others in your group to divide up the work along lines of expertise and then to pool your efforts in meeting the assignment. In all of these cases, writing is also performative—it performs an action or, in the words of many students we have talked with, it “makes something happen in the world.”

Perhaps most notable, this expanded sense of writing challenges us to think very carefully about what our writing is for and whom it can and might reach. Email provides a good case in point. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, Tamim Ansary, a writer who was born in Afghanistan, found himself stunned by the number of people calling for bombing Afghanistan “back to the Stone Age.” He sent an email to a few friends expressing his horror at the events, his condemnation of Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, and his hope that those in the United States would not act on the basis of gross stereotyping. The few dozen friends to whom Ansary wrote hit their forward buttons. Within days, the letter had circled the globe more than once, and Ansary's words were published by the Africa News Service, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the *Evening Standard* in London, the *San Francisco Chronicle* and many other papers in the United States, as well as on many websites.



Authors whose messages can be instantly transported around the world need to consider those who will receive those messages. As the example of Tamim Ansary shows, no longer can writers assume that they write only to a specified audience or that they can easily control the dissemination of their messages. We now live not only in a city, a state, and a country but in a global community as well—and we write, intentionally or not, to speakers of many languages, to members of many cultures, to believers of many creeds.

### Everyone's a Researcher

Since all writing responds to the ideas and words of others, it usually draws on some kind of research. Think for a moment of how often you carry out research. We're guessing that a little reflection will turn up lots of examples: you may find yourself digging up information on the pricing of new cars, searching *Craigslist* or the want ads for a good job, comparing two new smartphones, looking up statistics on a favorite sports figure, or searching for a recipe for tabbouleh. All of these everyday activities involve research. In addition, many of your most important life decisions involve research—what colleges to apply to, what jobs to pursue, where to live, and more. Once you begin to think about research in this broad way—as a form of inquiry related to important decisions—you'll probably find that research is something you do almost every day. Moreover, you'll see the ways in which the research you do adds to your credibility—giving you the authority that goes along with being an author.

But research today is very different from the research of only a few decades ago. Take the example of the concordance, an alphabetized listing of every instance of all topics and words in a work. Before the computer age, concordances were done by hand: the first full concordance to the works of Shakespeare took decades of eye-straining, painstaking research, counting, and sorting. Some scholars spent years, even whole careers, developing concordances that then served as major resources for other scholars. As soon as Shakespeare's plays and poems were in digital form—voilà!—a concordance could be produced automatically and accessed by writers with the click of a mouse.

To take a more recent example, first-year college students just twenty years ago had no access to the internet. Just think of how easy it is now to check temperatures around the world, track a news story, or keep up to the

minute on stock prices. These are items that you can *Google*, but you may also have many expensive subscription databases available to you through your school's library. It's not too much of an exaggeration to say that the world is literally at your fingertips.

What has *not* changed is the need to carry out research with great care, to read all sources with a critical eye, and to evaluate sources before depending on them for an important decision or using them in your own work. What also has not changed is the sheer thrill research can bring: while much research work can seem plodding and even repetitious, the excitement of discovering materials you didn't know existed, of analyzing information in a new way, or of tracing a question through one particular historical period brings its own reward. Moreover, your research adds to what philosopher Kenneth Burke calls "the conversation of humankind," as you build on what others have done and begin to make significant contributions of your own to the world's accumulated knowledge.

### Everyone's a Student

More than 2,000 years ago, the Roman writer Quintilian set out a plan for education, beginning with birth and ending only with old age and death. Surprisingly enough, Quintilian's recommendation for a lifelong education has never been more relevant than it is in the twenty-first century, as knowledge is increasing and changing so fast that most people must continue to be active learners long after they graduate from college. This explosion of knowledge also puts great demands on communication. As a result, one of your biggest challenges will be learning how to learn and how to communicate what you have learned across wider distances, to larger and increasingly diverse sets of audiences, and using an expanding range of media and genres.

When did you first decide to attend college, and what paths did you take to achieve that goal? Chances are greater today than at any time in our past that you may have taken time off to work before beginning college, or that you returned to college for new training when your job changed, or that you are attending college while working part-time or even full-time. These characteristics of college students are not new, but they are increasingly important, indicating that the path to college is not as straightforward as it was once thought to be. In addition, college is now clearly a part of a process of lifetime learning: you are likely to hold a number of positions—and each new position will call for new learning.

Citizens today need more years of education and more advanced skills than ever before: even entry-level jobs now call for a college diploma. But what you'll need isn't just a college education. Instead, you'll need an education that puts you in a position to take responsibility for your own learning and to take a direct, hands-on approach to that learning. Most of us learn best by *doing* what we're trying to learn rather than just being told about it. What does this change mean in practice? First, it means you will be doing much more writing, speaking, and researching than ever before. You may, for instance, conduct research on an economic trend and then use that research to create a theory capable of accounting for the trend; you may join a research group in an electrical engineering class that designs, tests, and implements a new system; you may be a member of a writing class that works to build a website for the local fire department, writes brochures for a nonprofit agency, or makes presentations before municipal boards. In each case, you will be doing what you are studying, whether it is economics, engineering, or writing.

Without a doubt, the challenges and opportunities for students today are immense. The chapters that follow try to keep these challenges and opportunities in the foreground, offering you concrete ways to think about yourself as a writer—and yes, as an author; to think carefully about the rhetorical situations you face and about the many and varied audiences for your work; and to expand your writing repertoire to include new genres, new media, and new ways of producing and communicating knowledge.

## PART I

# The Need for Rhetoric and Writing

**C**LOSE YOUR EYES and imagine a world without any form of language—no spoken or written words, no drawings, no mathematical formulas, no music—no way, that is, to communicate or express yourself. It's pretty hard to imagine such a world, and with good reason. For better or worse, we seem to be hardwired to communicate, to long to express ourselves to others. That's why philosopher Kenneth Burke says that people are, at their essence, “symbol-using animals” who have a basic need to communicate.

We can look across history and find early attempts to create systems of communication. Think, for instance, of the



Horses in prehistoric art: Uffington White Horse, Oxfordshire, England (approx. 3,000 years old); Chauvet Cave, near Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, France (approx. 30,000 years old); rock paintings, Bhimbetka, India (approx. 30,000 years old).

chalk horses of England, huge figures carved into trenches that were then filled with white chalk some 3,000 years ago. What do they say? Do they act as maps or road signs? Do they celebrate, or commemorate, or tell a story? Whatever their original intent, they echo the need to communicate to us from millennia away.

Cave paintings, many of them hauntingly beautiful, have been discovered across Europe, some thought to be 30,000 years old. Such communicative art—all early forms of writing—has been discovered in many other places, from Africa to Australia to South America to Asia.

While these carvings and paintings have been interpreted in many different ways, they all attest to the human desire to leave messages. And we don't need to look far to find other very early attempts to communicate—from makeshift drums and whistles to early pictographic languages to the symbols associated with the earliest astronomers.

As languages and other symbolic forms of communication like our own alphabet evolved, so did a need for ways to interpret and organize these forms and to use them in effective and meaningful ways. And out of these needs grew rhetoric—the art, theory, and practice of communication. In discussing rhetoric, Aristotle says we need to understand this art for two main reasons: first, in order to express our own ideas and thoughts, and second, to protect ourselves from those who would try to manipulate or harm us. Language, then, can be used for good or ill, to provide information that may help someone—or to deliberately mislead.

We believe the need for understanding rhetoric may be greater today than at any time in our history. At first glance, it may look as if communication has never been easier. We can send messages in a nanosecond, reaching people in all parts of the world with ease. We can broadcast our thoughts, hopes, and dreams—and invectives—in emails, blogs, status updates, tweets, text messages, and a plethora of other ways.

So far, perhaps, so good. But consider the story of the Tower of Babel, told in different ways in both the Qur'an and the Bible. When the people sought to build a tower that would reach the heavens, God responded to their hubris by creating so many languages that communication became impossible and the tower had to be abandoned. As with the languages in Babel, the means of communication are proliferating today, bringing with them the potential for miscommunication. From the struggle to sift through the amount of information created in a day—more than was previously created in several lifetimes—to the difficulty of trying to communicate across vast differences in languages and cultures, we face challenges that our parents and grandparents never did.



Pieter Brueghel the Elder, *Tower of Babel*, 1563.



“The need for rhetoric” translated from English to Japanese.

In a time when new (and sometimes confusing) forms of communication are available, many of us are looking for help with making our messages known. *Google Translate* and *Bing Translator*, for example, are attempts to offer instant translation of texts from one language to another.

Such new technologies and tools can certainly help us as we move into twenty-first-century global villages. But they are not likely to reduce the need for an art and a theory that can inform the conversations we have there—that can encourage thoughtfulness, empathy, and responsible use of such technologies. Rhetoric responds to this need. Along with writing, which we define broadly to include speaking and drawing and performing as well as the literal inscription of words, rhetoric offers you solid ground on which to build both your education and your communicative ability and style. The chapters that follow will introduce you more fully to rhetoric and writing—and engage you in acquiring and using their powers.

## ONE

# Thinking Rhetorically

*The only real alternative to war is rhetoric.*

—WAYNE BOOTH



**PROFESSOR WAYNE BOOTH** made this statement at a national conference of scholars and teachers of writing held only months after 9/11, and it quickly drew a range of responses. Just what did Booth mean by this stark statement? How could rhetoric—the art and practice of persuasion—act as a counter to war?

A noted critic and scholar, Booth explored these questions throughout his long career, identifying rhetoric as an ethical art that begins with deep and intense listening and that searches for mutual understanding and common ground as an alternative to violence and war. Put another way, two of the most potent tools we have for persuasion are language—and violence: when words fail us, violence often wins the day. Booth sees the careful, persistent, and ethical use of language as our best approach to keeping violence and war at bay.

During the summer of 2014, Booth’s words echoed again, as Israel and Hamas faced off in another armed conflict that raged for months, leaving thousands dead and resolving nothing. Meanwhile, in the United States, people across the country protested the killings of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri; Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York; and other African American men, all at the hands of police officers. At marches and sit-ins, protesters held up signs saying “Black Lives Matter” and “I can’t breathe,” echoing Eric Garner’s last words after being wrestled to the





Protestors use posters, raised fists, and more to communicate their positions.

---

We didn't burn  
down buildings. . . .  
You can do a lot  
with a pen and pad.  
—ICE CUBE

---

ground in a chokehold. Protestors took to social media as well, using these dramatic and memorable statements as rhetorical strategies that captured and held the attention of millions of Americans.

So how can you go about developing your own careful, ethical use of language? Our short answer: by learning to think and act rhetorically, that is, by developing habits of mind that begin with listening and searching for understanding before you decide what you yourself think, and by thinking hard about your own beliefs before trying to persuade others to listen to and act on what you say.

Learning to think rhetorically can serve you well as you negotiate the complexities of life in today's world. In many everyday situations, you'll need to communicate successfully with others in order to get things done, and done in a responsible and ethical way. On the job, for example, you may need to bring coworkers to consensus on how best to raise productivity when there is little, if any, money for raises. Or in your college community, you may find yourself negotiating difficult waters.

When a group of students became aware of how little the temporary workers on their campus were paid, for example, they met with the workers and listened to gather information about the issue. They then mounted a campaign using flyers, newsletters, speeches, and sit-ins—in other words, using the available means of persuasion—to win attention and convince



Students use posters and conversation to protest the low wages paid to campus workers.

the administration to raise the workers' pay. These students were thinking and acting rhetorically, and doing so responsibly and ethically. Note that these students, like the protesters in Ferguson, worked together, both with the workers and with each other. In other words, none of us can manage such actions all by ourselves; we need to engage in conversation with others and listen hard to what they say. Perhaps that's what philosopher Kenneth Burke had in mind when he created his famous "parlor" metaphor:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. . . . You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar.

—KENNETH BURKE, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*

In this parable, each of us is the person arriving late to a room full of animated conversation; we don't understand what is going on. Yet instead of butting in or trying to take over, we listen closely until we catch on to what people are saying. Then we join in, using language and rhetorical strategies to engage with others as we add our own voices to the conversation.

This book aims to teach you to *think and act rhetorically*—to listen carefully and then to “put in your oar,” join conversations about important issues, and develop strong critical and ethical habits of mind that will help you engage with others in responsible ways. This chapter will help you develop the habit of thinking rhetorically.

## First, Listen

We have two ears  
and one mouth so  
we may listen more  
and talk less.

—EPICTETUS

Thinking rhetorically begins with listening, with being willing to hear the words of others in an open and understanding way. It means paying attention to what others say before and even *as a way* of making your own contributions to a conversation. Think of the times you are grateful to others for listening closely to you: when you’re talking through a conflict with a family member, for instance, or even when you’re trying to explain to a salesperson what it is you’re looking for. On those occasions, you want the person you’re addressing to really *listen* to what you say.

This is a kind of listening that rhetorician Krista Ratcliffe dubs “rhetorical listening,” opening yourself to the thoughts of others and making the effort not only to hear their words but to take those words in and fully understand what people are saying. It means paying attention to what others say as a way of establishing good will and acknowledging the importance of their views. And yes, it means taking seriously and engaging with views that differ, sometimes radically, from your own.

Rhetorical listening is what middle school teacher Julia Blount asked for in a *Facebook* post following the 2015 riots in Baltimore after the death of Freddie Gray, who suffered fatal spinal injuries while in police custody:

Every comment or post I have read today voicing some version of disdain for the people of Baltimore—“I can’t understand” or “They’re destroying their own community”—tells me that many of you are not listening. I am not asking you to condone or agree with violence. I just need you to listen. . . . If you are not listening, not exposing yourself to unfamiliar perspectives . . . not engaging in conversation, then you are perpetuating white privilege. . . . It is exactly your ability to *not* hear, to ignore the situation, that is a mark of your privilege.

—JULIA BLOUNT, “Dear White *Facebook* Friends: I Need You to Respect What Black America Is Feeling Right Now”

## Hear What Others Are Saying—and Think about Why

When you enter any conversation, whether academic, professional, or personal, take the time to understand what is being said rather than rushing to a conclusion or a judgment. Listen carefully to what others are saying and consider what motivates them: where are they coming from?

Developing such habits of mind will be useful to you almost every day, whether you are participating in a class discussion, negotiating with friends over what movie is most worth seeing, or studying a local ballot issue to decide how you'll vote. In each case, thinking rhetorically means being flexible and fair, able to hear and consider varying—and sometimes conflicting—points of view.

In ancient Rome, Cicero argued that considering alternative points of view and counterarguments was key to making a successful argument, and it is just as important today. Even when you disagree with a point of view—perhaps especially when you disagree with it—allow yourself to see the issue from the viewpoint of its advocates before you reject their positions. You may be skeptical that hydrogen fuel will be the solution to global warming—but don't reject the idea until you have thought hard about others' perspectives and carefully considered alternative solutions.

Thinking hard about others' views also includes considering the larger context and how it shapes what they are saying. This aspect of rhetorical thinking goes beyond the kind of reading you probably learned to do in high school literature classes, where you looked very closely at a particular text and interpreted it on its own terms, without looking at secondary sources. When you think rhetorically, you go one step further and put that close analysis into a larger context—historical, political, or cultural, for example—to recognize and consider where the analysis is “coming from.”

In analyzing the issue of gay marriage, for instance, you would not merely consider your own thinking or do a close reading of texts that address the issue. In addition, you would look at the whole debate in context by considering its historical development over time, thinking about the broader political agendas of both those who advocate for and those who oppose gay marriage, asking what economic ramifications adopting—or rejecting—gay marriage might have, examining the role of religion in the debate, and so on. In short, you would try to see the issue from as many different perspectives and in as broad a context as possible before you formulate your own stance. When you write, you draw on these sources—what others have said about the issue—to support your own position and to help you consider counterarguments to it.

See how carefully Brent Staples considers the positions and reasoning that he is opposing on p. 1065.