

PREFACE TO THE STUDENT

Accurate thinking is the beginning and fountain of writing.

—Horace

THE PURPOSE OF THIS TEXT

Have you ever had trouble expressing your thoughts? If so, you're not alone. Many people have this difficulty—especially when they are asked to write their thoughts down.

The good news is that this “ailment” can be cured. We've learned over the years that the more clearly students think about the world around them, the more easily they can express their ideas through written and spoken language. As a result, this textbook intends to improve your writing by helping you think clearly, logically, and critically about important ideas and issues that exist in our world today. You will learn to reason, read, and write about your environment in increasingly complex ways, moving steadily from a simple, literal understanding of topics to interpretation and analysis. Inspired by well-crafted prose models and guided by carefully worded questions, you can actually raise the level of your thinking skills while improving your reading and writing abilities.

Reader's Choice is organized on the assumption that as a college student you should be able to think, read, and write on three increasingly difficult levels:

1. *Literal*, which involves a basic understanding of a selection and the ability to repeat or restate the material;
2. *Interpretive*, which requires you to make associations and draw inferences from information in your reading; and
3. *Analytical or critical*, which invites you to systematically separate, explain, evaluate, and reassemble various important ideas discovered in your reading.

For example, students with a *literal* grasp of an essay would be able to understand the words on the page, cite details from the selection, and paraphrase certain sections of the essay. Students equipped with *interpretive* skills will see implicit relationships within a selection (such as comparison/contrast or cause/effect), make inferences from information that is supplied, and comprehend the intricacies of figurative language. Finally, students functioning *analytically* will be able to summarize and explain difficult concepts and generate plausible hypotheses from a series of related ideas. In short, this book leads you systematically toward higher levels of thinking and writing.

In order to stimulate your thinking on all levels, this text encourages you to participate in the making of meaning—as both a reader and a writer. As a reader, you have a responsibility to work with the author

of each essay and story to help create sense out of the words on the page; as a writer, you must be conscious enough of your audience so that they perceive your intended purpose clearly and precisely through the ideas, opinions, and details that you provide. Because of this unique relationship, we envision reading and writing as companion acts in which writer and reader are partners in the development of meaning.

To demonstrate this vital interrelationship between reader and writer, our text provides you with prose models that are intended to inspire your own thinking and writing. In the introduction to each chapter, we include a student paragraph and a student essay that feature the particular rhetorical strategy under discussion. The essay is highlighted by annotations and by underlining to illustrate how to write that type of essay and to help bridge the gap between student writing and the professional selections in the text. The essays and stories that follow each chapter introduction, selected from a wide variety of contemporary authors, are intended to encourage you to improve your writing through a partnership with some of the best examples of professional prose available today. Just as musicians and athletes richly benefit from studying the techniques of the foremost people in their fields, you will, we hope, grow in spirit and language use from your collaborative work with the writers in this collection.

HOW TO USE THIS TEXT

Reader's Choice contains essays representing the four main purposes of writing:

Description

Narration

Exposition

Persuasion

Our primary focus within this framework is on exposition (which means "explanation"), because you will need to master this type of verbal expression to succeed in both the academic and the professional worlds. Although the essays in this text can be read in any order, we begin with

description

because it is a basic technique that often appears in other forms of discourse. We then move to

narration, or storytelling,

and next to the six traditional expository strategies:

example

comparison/contrast

process analysis

definition

division/classification

cause/effect

The text continues with a chapter on

argument and persuasion,

including a set of opposing viewpoint essays. Chapter 10 discusses and presents

documented research papers,

and the anthology concludes with a selection of short stories.

"Pure" rhetorical types rarely exist, of course, and when they do, the result often seems artificial. Therefore, although each essay in this collection focuses on a single rhetorical mode as its primary strategy, other strategies are always at work in it. These selections concentrate on one primary technique at a time in much the same way a well-arranged photograph highlights a certain visual detail, though many other elements function in the background to make the picture an organic whole.

Each chapter begins with an explanation of a single rhetorical technique. These explanations are divided into six sections that move from the effect of this technique on our daily lives to its integral role in the writing process. The first section catalogs the use of each rhetorical mode in our lives. The second section, "Defining _____" (e.g., "Defining Description"), offers a working definition of the technique and a sample/student paragraph so that we all have the same fundamental understanding of the term. A third section, entitled "Thinking Critically by Using _____," introduces each rhetorical mode as a pattern of thought that helps us organize and more fully understand our experiences. A fourth section, called "Reading and Writing _____ Essays" (e.g., "Reading and Writing Descriptive Essays"), explains the processes of reading and writing an essay in each rhetorical mode, and a fifth section presents an annotated student essay showing this particular rhetorical method "at work." The last part offers some final comments on each rhetorical strategy including a summary review checklist.

Before each reading selection, we have designed some material to focus your attention on a particular writer and topic. This "prereading" segment begins with biographical information about the author and ends with a number of questions to whet your appetite for the selection that follows. The prereading questions forecast not only the material in the essay, but also the questions and writing assignments that follow.

The questions following each reading selection are designed as guides for thinking about the essay. These questions are at the heart of the relationship represented in this book among thinking, reading, and writing. They are divided into four interrelated sections that move you smoothly from a literal understanding of what you have just read, to interpretation, and finally to analysis. The first set of questions, "Understanding Details," focuses on the basic facts and opinions in

the selection. The second set of questions, “Analyzing Meaning,” asks you to explain certain facts and to evaluate various assumptions of the essay in an effort to understand the entire selection on an analytical level. The third set of questions, “Discovering Rhetorical Strategies,” guides your thinking on how the author achieved certain effects through word choice, sentence structure, organization of ideas, and selection of details. This third series of questions often requires you to apply to your reading of an essay material you learned about a particular mode of writing in the chapter introduction. And “Making Connections,” the fourth group of questions, asks you to identify and process relationships and connections that you may not have noticed between the essay or story and other selections in the book.

The last section of questions consists of three “Ideas for Discussion/Writing.” These topics are preceded by “prewriting” questions to help you generate new ideas. Most of the Discussion/Writing topics specify a purpose (a definite reason for writing the essay) and an audience (an identifiable person or group of people you should address in your essay) so that you can focus your work as precisely as possible. These assignments outline realistic scenes and roles for you to play in those scenes so that, as you write, your relationship to your subject and audience will be clear and precise.

Visit the *Reader’s Choice* Web page—www.pearsoned.ca/flachmann/—to find a glossary of useful terms, as well as a collection of Web sites that will give you more information about the readings. This might be information about the author, the original source of the piece of writing, or the topic of the essay you have read.

The word *essay* (which comes from the Old French *essai*, meaning a “try” or an “attempt”) is an appropriate label for these writing assignments, because they all ask you to grapple with an idea or problem and then try to give shape to your conclusions in some effective manner. Such “exercises” can be equated with the development of athletic ability in sports: The essay itself demonstrates that you can put together all the various skills you have learned; it proves that you can actually play the sport. After you have studied the different techniques at work in a reading selection, a specific essay assignment lets you practise them all in unison and allows you to discover for yourself even more secrets about the intricate details of effective communication.