Brief Contents

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Preface

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 fifth edition of *The Curious Writer* represents a substantial revision, including a new chapter on repurposing academic writing into contemporary genres like podcasts and infographics, and substantially revised chapters on argument and analytic writing. As always, I have also made revisions throughout with the overall aim of making the book more teachable and more reflective of the world in which today's students live. Here's what you will find:

- **A completely new chapter on repurposing ("re-genre-ing") writing (Ch. 13)** encourages students to transform academic writing into contemporary genres including blogs, audio and video podcasts, infographics, and more. In creating these transformations, students gain a deeper rhetorical knowledge of genre conventions, strengths, and limitations.
- **A thoroughly reorganized and revised chapter on argument (Ch. 7)** now offers clearer, more comprehensive guidance on what an argument is and how to write one—knowledge and skills that are at the center of almost all good writing.
- **A significantly revised chapter on critical analysis (Ch. 8)** widens its focus beyond literature to include images, objects, ads, and more—any "texts" in our lives that may have ambiguous meanings.
- **A significantly revised section on research** includes updated information about data searches, a new section on online interviews and surveys, and new student and professional essays, as well as expanded coverage of plagiarism and synthesizing sources.
- **New readings and illustrations throughout** offer fresh perspectives on current topics to engage students more effectively.

Inquiry in the Writing Classroom

Composition teachers often struggle to define what skills we can offer to students—beyond the acts of reading and writing—that they can export to their other classes and, later, into their lives. Often we vaguely refer to "critical thinking" skills. *The Curious Writer* suggests that what we can offer is the skill of *inquiring.* Most of us already teach inquiry, although we may not all realize it. For example, our writing classes invite students to be active participants in making knowledge in the classroom through peer review. When we ask students to fastwrite or brainstorm, we encourage them to suspend judgment and openly explore their feelings or ideas. And when we urge students to see a draft as a first look at a topic, and revision as a means of discovering what they may not have noticed before, we teach a process that makes discovery its purpose. Indeed, most composition classrooms create a "culture of inquirers."

For inquiry-based courses on any subject, I believe instructors should take five key actions:

1. **Create an atmosphere of mutual inquiry.** Students are used to seeing their teachers as experts who know everything. But in an inquiry-based classroom, instructors are learners too. They ask questions not because they already know the answers but because there might be answers they haven't considered.
2. **Emphasize questions before answers.** The idea that student writers should begin with an inflexible thesis or a firm position on a topic before engaging in the process of writing is anathema to inquiry-based learning. Questions, not preconceived answers, lead to new discoveries.
3. **Encourage a willingness to suspend judgment.** To suspend judgment demands that we trust that the process will lead us to new insights. This requires both faith in the process and the time to engage in it. The composition course, with its emphasis on process, is uniquely suited to nurture such faith.
4. **Introduce a strategy of inquiry.** Announcing that we're teaching an inquiry-based class is not enough. We have to introduce students to the strategy of inquiry we'll be using. In the sciences, the experimental method provides a foundation for investigations. What guidance will we give our students in the composition course?
5. **Present inquiry in a rhetorical context.** An essay, a research project, an experiment, any kind of investigation is always pursued with particular purposes and audiences in mind. In an inquiry-based class, the situation in which the inquiry project is taking place is always considered.

The Curious Writer is built on all of these elements. It features a strategy of inquiry that is genuinely multidisciplinary, borrowing from the sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. Each assignment in Part 2, "Inquiry Projects," for example, leads students toward subjects that offer the most potential for learning. Rather than write about what they already know, students are encouraged

to choose topics that they want to learn more about. In addition, the discussion questions that follow the student and professional essays do more than simply test students' comprehension or reduce the reading to a single theme. In many cases, these questions are open ended and can lead students in many directions. And throughout, I have tried to maintain a voice and persona that suggests I am working along with the students as a writer and a thinker—which is exactly the experience of mutual inquiry that I try to create in my classes. Finally, *The Curious Writer* is organized around a strategy of inquiry that is present in every assignment and nearly every exercise. I revisit the model "The Spirit of Inquiry," which is introduced in Part 1, in every subsequent chapter. This inquiry strategy is the thematic core of the book.

The Inquiry Strategy of *The Curious Writer*

A strategy of inquiry is simply a process of discovery. In the sciences, this process is systematic and often quite formal. The model I use in this book borrows from science in some ways through its insistence on continually looking closely at the "data" (sensory details, facts, evidence, textual passages, and so on) and using that data to shape or test the writer's ideas about a subject. But the heart of the model is the alternating movement between two modes of thinking—creative and critical—in a dialectical process. One way of describing this movement is as a shifting back and forth between suspending judgment and making judgments (see Figure A).

This inquiry strategy works with both reading and writing, but in Chapter 2, "Reading as Inquiry," I offer four categories of questions—those that explore, explain, evaluate, and reflect—that I think will help guide students in reading most texts more strategically. These types of questions will be most evident in the follow-up questions to the many readings throughout *The Curious Writer*.

Finally, a strategy of inquiry is useful only if it makes sense to students; I've tried very hard, particularly in the first section of the book, to make the model comprehensible.

How This Book Is Organized

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." The range of assignments in this part should satisfy the needs of most composition instructors. If your university is lucky enough to have a two-semester sequence, *The Curious Writer* includes assignments suitable for both courses, including personal, argument, and research essays. (There is even enough here to allow the book's use in advanced composition courses.) Part 3 focuses

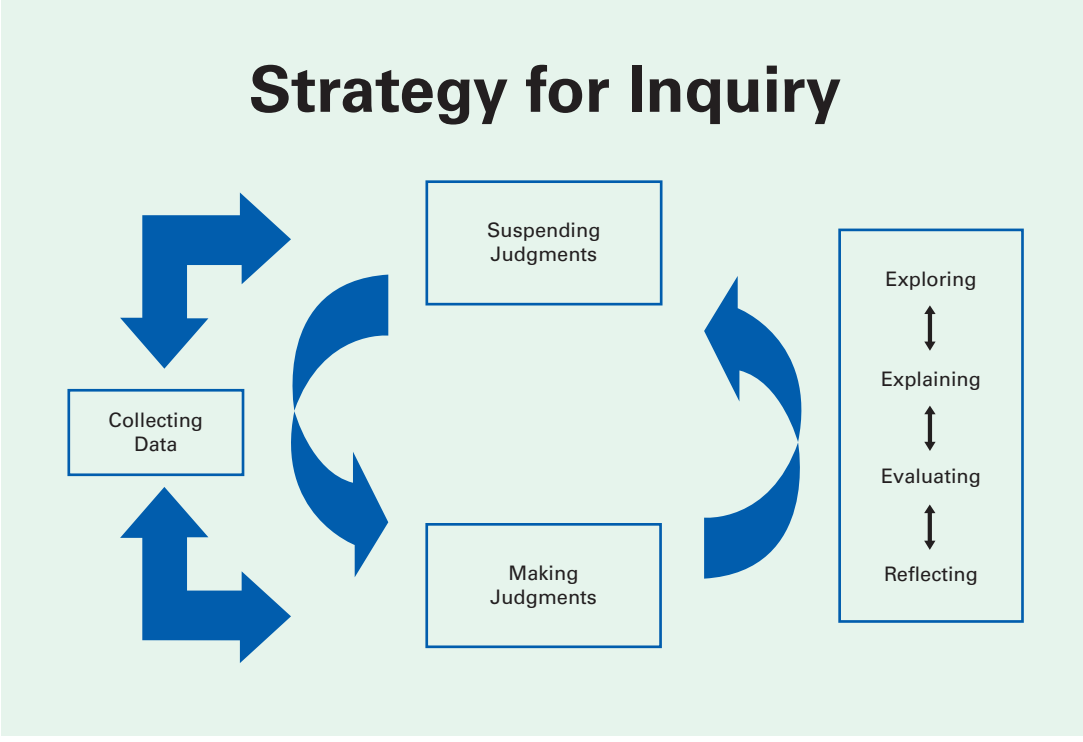

Figure A In nearly every assignment in *The Curious Writer*, students will use this strategy of inquiry.

on research—the tools, strategies, and skills associated with academic research, including avoiding plagiarism and synthesizing and citing sources appropriately. Part 4 explores the critical process of revision, now with a new chapter about transforming writing into new, contemporary genres.

I 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.

- **PART 1.** While composition classes have—obviously—always focused on writing, in recent years, I've become interested in reading strategies, a topic that I never mentioned as a novice teacher. There was simply so much to say about the writing process that I didn't think reading was a topic that should get much airtime. Yet, as in writing, students bring many prior beliefs and assumptions about reading into our classrooms, and because reading

is always an important part of teaching writing, I've come around to talking more about it in my classes. *The Curious Writer* reflects this. Chapter 2, "Reading as Inquiry," is devoted to the topic, including an emphasis on visual rhetoric that responds to our students' growing need for visual literacy. Whether you use this book for one course or two, it's wise to introduce *The Curious Writer* to students by first working through Part 1, "The Spirit of Inquiry," because this part lays the foundation for all that follows. The many exercises in these two chapters will help students experience firsthand what we mean by inquiry.

- **PART 2.** "Inquiry Projects" is the heart of the book. I've organized chapters in an order that roughly follows typical composition courses, beginning with genres that draw heavily on students' personal experiences and observations and then moving outward to explore other sources of information and encounters with other people's experiences and ideas. In a one-semester course, you might begin with the personal essay and then move to the profile, followed by the review, and then the argument or research essay. This structure builds nicely by challenging students to work with more sources of information and leads to a more sophisticated understanding of persuasion and rhetoric. A two-semester course has the luxury of more assignments, of course, allowing you to potentially use most of the inquiry projects in Part 2.

  Certain assignments go together. For example, while arguably all writing is persuasive, the following genres are most explicitly so: proposal, review, argument, analysis, and often the research essay. A course that focuses on argument might emphasize these assignments. A research-oriented course might exploit the book's wealth of material that has a strong emphasis on outside sources, including the proposal, review, argument, research essay, and ethnography sections. A single-semester composition course that covers critical thinking and writing as well as research and argument might move from personal essay to profile and then cover persuasion through the review or analytical essay, move on to the argument, and finish with the ethnographic and research essays.

  Each inquiry, or genre, chapter is divided into three parts: an initial exploration of the genre and its rhetorical conventions and features; a selection of representative readings; and The Writing Process, a step-by-step guide to writing in that genre.

- **PART 3.** The approach of *The Curious Writer* grows in part from my own scholarship on research writing, particularly the criticism that research is too often isolated in the writing course, which, understandably, leads students to get the idea that research is reserved for the research paper. This book makes research a part of every assignment, emphasizing that it is a useful source of information, not a separate genre. But research also receives special attention in Part 3, "Inquiring Deeper," where students are introduced not only to the research essay but also to research strategies and skills, including citing and synthesizing sources and avoiding plagiarism. I hope you will find that this part, particularly Chapter 11, "Research Techniques,"

is immediately relevant because students will be encouraged to consider research angles in every assignment they tackle. Consider assigning this chapter early in your course, particularly the sections on developing a working and focused knowledge of a subject.

- **PART 4.** Similarly, revision is an element of every assignment. That's hardly an innovative idea, but what is unusual about *The Curious Writer* is that the book devotes an entire part—Part 4, "Re-Inquiring"—to revision. Like the chapters on research, the chapters on revision are relevant to students from their very first assignment. Chapter 13, "Re-Genre" is a unique—and completely new—chapter that encourages students to consider how to transform classroom essays into contemporary genres like infographics, blogs, and video and audio podcasts. In exploring how to repurpose writing, students dive more deeply into the rhetorical strategies and tools associated with each genre. Finally, Chapter 14, "Revision Strategies," is a useful introduction to what it means to revise a piece of writing and features specific revision strategies that your students will use in every assignment. You might want to assign the first part of this chapter early on in your course.

This is the third textbook I've written 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. I often plan the exercises as an in-class activity, and then assign the relevant reading to follow up that experience. Sometimes the discussion following these in-class exercises is so rich that some of the assigned reading becomes unnecessary. The students get the main idea without having to hear it again from the author. More often, though, the reading helps students deepen their understanding of what they've done and how they can apply it to their own work.

However, assigning all of the exercises isn't necessary. Don't mistake their abundance in the book as an indication that you must march your students in lockstep through every activity, 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 rabbits of your own in your hat—exercises and activities that may work better with the text than the ones I 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 Using What You Have Learned.** Each chapter begins by establishing learning objectives, which are then revisited at the end of each chapter to reinforce the chapter's content. Notes throughout the chapter highlight where the objectives come into play.
- **Features of the Form.** These charts in each chapter of Part 2 summarize the particular features and conventions of the genre being explored.
- **Inquiring into the Details.** These boxed features dig deeper into specific, relevant topics.
- **Prose+.** This feature reflects the increasing importance of visual literacy by offering images for analysis.

Resources for Instructors and Students

The following resources are available to qualified adopters of Pearson English textbooks.

The Instructor's Resource Manual

ISBN 0-13-412158-9/978-0-13-412158-1
This manual, written by my colleague 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 a large number of additional writing activities that teachers can use in their classrooms to supplement the textbook.

PowerPoint Presentation

A downloadable set of PowerPoint slides can be used by instructors who want to accompany chapter readings and discussions with presentable visuals. These slides, also designed by Michelle Payne, illustrate each learning objective and key idea in the text in visual form. Each slide includes instructors' notes.

MyWritingLab

MyWritingLab is an online practice, tutorial, and assessment program that provides engaging experiences for teaching and learning.

MyWritingLab includes most of the writing assignments from your accompanying textbook. Now, students can complete and submit assignments, and teachers can then track and respond to submissions easily—right in MyWritingLab—

making the response process easier for the instructor and more engaging for the student.

In the Writing Assignments, students can use instructor-created peer review rubrics to evaluate and comment on other students' writing. When giving feedback on student writing, instructors can add links to activities that address issues and strategies needed for review. Instructors may link to multimedia resources in Pearson Writer, which include curated content from Purdue OWL. Paper review by specialized tutors through SmartThinking is available, as is plagiarism detection through TurnItIn.

Respond to Student Writing with Targeted Feedback and Remediation

MyWritingLab unites instructor comments and feedback with targeted remediation via rich multimedia activities, allowing students to learn from and through their own writing.

Writing Help for Varying Skill Levels

For students who enter the course at widely varying skill levels, MyWritingLab provides unique, targeted remediation through personalized and adaptive instruction. Starting with a pre-assessment known as the Path Builder, MyWritingLab diagnoses students' strengths and weaknesses on prerequisite writing skills. The results of the pre-assessment inform each student's Learning Path, a personalized pathway for students to work on requisite skills through multimodal activities. In doing so, students feel supported and ready to succeed in class.

Learning Tools for Student Engagement

Learning Catalytics. Generate class discussion, guide lectures, and promote peer-to-peer learning with real-time analytics. MyLab and Mastering with eText now provides Learning Catalytics—an interactive student response tool that uses students' smartphones, tablets, or laptops to engage them in more sophisticated tasks and thinking.

MediaShare. MediaShare allows students to post multimodal assignments easily—whether they are audio, video, or visual compositions—for peer review and instructor feedback. In both face-to-face and online course settings, MediaShare saves instructors valuable time and enriches the student learning experience by enabling contextual feedback to be provided quickly and easily.

Direct Access to MyLab. Users can link from any Learning Management System (LMS) to Pearson's MyWritingLab. Access MyLab assignments, rosters, and resources, and synchronize MyLab grades with the LMS gradebook. New direct, single sign-on provides access to all the personalized learning MyLab resources that make studying more efficient and effective.

Visit www.mywritinglab.com for more information

REVEL for *The Curious Writer,* 5/e by Bruce Ballenger

REVEL is designed for the way today's composition students read, think, and learn. In English, reading is never the endgame. Instead—whether in a textbook, an exemplar essay, or a source—it begins a conversation that plays out in writing. REVEL complements the written word with a variety of writing opportunities, brief assessments, model documents, and rich annotation tools to deepen students' understanding of their reading. By providing regular opportunities to write and new ways to interact with their reading, REVEL engages students and sets them up to be more successful readers and writers—in and out of class.

Video and Rich Multimedia Content. Videos, audio recordings, animations, and multimedia instruction encourage students to engage with the text in a more meaningful way.

Interactive Readings and Exercises. Students explore reading assignments through interactive texts. Robust annotation tools allow students to take notes, and low-stakes assessments and writing exercises enable students to engage meaningfully with the text outside of the classroom.

Integrated Writing Assignments. Minimal-stakes, low-stakes, and high-stakes writing tasks allow students multiple opportunities to interact with the ideas presented in the reading assignments, ensuring that they come to class better prepared.

Pearson eText

An interactive online version of *The Curious Writer* is available as an eText, which brings together the many resources of the MyLabs with the instructional content of this successful book to create an enhanced learning experience for students.

Acknowledgments

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My students are also key collaborators, though they often don't know it. For their assistance in the fifth edition, I'd like to thank Hailie Johnson-Waskow, Andrea Oyarzabal, Bernice Olivas, Seth Marlin, Amy Garrett, Amanda Stewart, Kersti Harter, Micaela Fisher and many others whose work may not appear here but who taught the teacher how to teach writing.

Reviewers of books like these can be crucial to their development. For the first four editions, I relied on feedback from the following folks:

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Finally, I want to thank my daughters, Rebecca and Julia, who allow themselves to be characters in all of my books. They are both actors, and like good theater people, they are more than willing to play their parts in these texts, no matter what roles I assign. I'm especially grateful to Karen, my wife, 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 BALLENGER

1

Writing as Inquiry

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you'll learn to

1.1 Reflect on and revise your beliefs about yourself as a writer.

1.2 Understand what kinds of questions will sustain inquiry into any subject.

1.3 Practice a method of writing and thinking that will help you generate ideas.

1.4 Apply rhetorical knowledge to make choices in specific writing situations.

Yesterday in class, Tina wrote an essay about whether adultery is forgivable. She isn't married but has good friends who are, a couple she said everyone thought had the "perfect" marriage. The woman's husband, apparently, had an affair. Tina, who is in a pretty tight relationship with her boyfriend, has strong feelings about cheating on a partner. It ticks her off. "If it happened to me," she wrote, "I would have dumped him." Tina's essay could easily have become a rant about infidelity—a blunt, perhaps shrill argument about adultery's immorality or the depravity of two-timing men. It wasn't. Instead, she wondered about the relationship between friendship and love in marriage. She wondered about what kind of communication between spouses might short-circuit cheating. She wondered how attitudes towards sex differ between men and women. Many of these questions were explored by Michel de Montaigne, a sixteenth-century writer we were studying in that class, and Tina began to wrap his thinking around hers as she struggled to make sense of how she felt about what happened to her friends.

Tina was engaged in an act of inquiry.

Her motive was to *find out* what she thought rather than prove what she already knew. And writing was the way Tina chose to think it through.

Many of us admit that we really don't like to write, particularly when forced to do it. Or we clearly prefer certain kinds of writing and dislike others: "I just like to write funny stories," or "I like writing for myself and not for other people," or "I hate writing research papers." I can understand this, because for years I felt much the same way. I saw virtually no similarities between a note to a friend and the paper I wrote for my philosophy class in college. Words had power in one context but seemed flimsy and vacant in another. One kind of writing was fairly easy; the other was like sweating blood. How could my experiences as a writer be so fundamentally different? In other words, what's the secret of writing well in a range of writing contexts *and* enjoying it more in all contexts? Here's what I had to learn:

1. You don't have to know what you think before you're ready to write. Writing can be a way of *discovering* what you think.
2. A key to writing well is understanding the *process* of doing it.

They're not particularly novel ideas, but both were a revelation to me when I finally figured them out late in my career as a student, and they changed for good the way I wrote. These two insights—that writing is a means of discovery and that reflecting on how we write can help us write—are guiding principles of this book. I won't guarantee that after they read *The Curious Writer*, haters of writing will come to love it or that lovers of writing won't find writing to be hard work. But I hope that by the end of the book, you'll experience the pleasure of discovery in different writing situations, and that you'll understand your writing process well enough to adapt it to the demands of whatever situation you encounter.

Motives for Writing

Why write? To start, I'd propose two motives, one obvious and the other less so:

1. To share ideas or information—*to communicate.*
2. To think—*to discover.*

These two motives for writing—to *communicate* with others and to *discover* what the writer thinks and feels—are equally important. And both may ultimately relate to what I call our *spirit of inquiry*, which is born of

our deeper sense of wonder and curiosity or even confusion and doubt, our desire to touch other people, our urge to solve problems. The spirit of inquiry is a kind of perspective toward the world that invites questions, accepts uncertainty, and makes each of us feel some responsibility for what we say. This inquiring spirit should be familiar to you. It's the feeling you had when you discovered that the sun and a simple magnifying glass could be used to burn a hole in an oak leaf. It's wondering what a teacher meant when he said that World War II was a "good" war and Vietnam was a "bad" war. It's the questions that haunted you yesterday as you listened to a good friend describe her struggles with anorexia. The inquiring spirit even drives your quest to find a smartphone, an effort that inspires you to read about the technology and visit the *Consumer Reports* website at consumerreports.org. Inquiry was Tina's motive when she decided to turn her academic essay on adultery away from a shrill argument based on what she already believed into a more thoughtful exploration of why people cheat.

Beliefs About Writing and Writing Development

1.1 Reflect on and revise your beliefs about 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. As I mentioned earlier, I've learned a lot about writing since my first years in college, and a big part of that learning involved unraveling some of my prior beliefs about writing. In fact, I'd say that my development as a writer initially had more to do with *unlearning* some of what I 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.

Exercise 1.1

This I Believe (and This I Don't)

STEP ONE: From the following list, identify the one belief about writing that you agree with most strongly and the one that you're convinced isn't true.

1. Writing proficiency begins with learning the basics and then building on them, working from words to sentences to paragraphs to compositions.
2. The best way to develop as a writer is to imitate the writing of the people you want to write like.
3. People are born writers like people are born good at math. Either you can do it or you can't.

4. The best way to develop as a writer is to develop good reading skills.
5. Practice is the key to a writer's development. The more a writer writes, the more he or she will improve.
6. Developing writers need to learn the modes of writing (argument, exposition, description, narration) and the genres (essays, research papers, position papers, and so on).
7. Developing writers should start with simple writing tasks, such as telling stories, and move to harder writing tasks, such as writing a research paper.
8. The most important thing that influences a writer's growth is believing that he or she can improve.
9. The key to becoming a better writer is finding your voice.

STEP TWO: Look over the following journal prompts (for more on journals, see the "Inquiring into the Details: Journals" box). Then spend five minutes writing in your journal about *why* you agree with the one belief and disagree with the other. This is an open-ended "fastwrite." You should write fast and without stopping, letting your thoughts flow in whatever direction they go. In your fastwrite, you can respond to any or all of the prompts to whatever extent you want.

Rules for Fastwriting

1. There are no rules.
2. Don't try to write badly, but give yourself permission to do so.
3. To the extent you can, think through writing rather than before it.
4. Keep your pen moving.
5. If you run out of things to say, write about how weird it is to run out of things to say until new thoughts arrive.
6. Silence your internal critic to suspend judgment.
7. Don't censor yourself.

Journal Prompts

- *What* do you mean, exactly, when you say you agree or disagree with the belief? Can you explain more fully why you think the belief is true or false?
- *When* did you start agreeing or disagreeing with the belief? Can you remember a particular moment or experience as a student learning to write that this agreement or disagreement connects to?
- *Who* was most influential in convincing you of the truth or falsity of the belief?

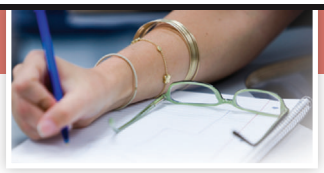
One Student's Response

Bernice's Journal

EXERCISE 1.1
STEP TWO

I used to be a firm believer in the idea of born writers—it was a genetic thing. People were gifted with the gold pen genes, or they weren't. Writing as a process involved a muse, inspiration, and luck. Things uncontrollable by the writer. Then I started writing, mostly for my 101 class, and I started to feel powerful when I put words on paper. In control. The idea of my voice, my words, just being on the page and other people reading it and maybe liking it was a rush. I was always the girl who specialized in the art of being unnoticed, unseen, blending in. My Comp 101 prof. liked my writing and pushed me really hard to work on my basics, to think about my process, to prewrite and revise. I started to see a clear distinction between how to write and what to write. How is all mixed up with the process, with discipline, with practice and perseverance. . . . The how isn't something you are born with; it's something you develop, something you practice, a skill you hone. . . . Becoming a good writer takes learning how to write, figuring out a process that works for you, and then letting your voice be heard on the page.

Inquiring into the Details



Journals

Here are five things that make a journal especially useful for writers:

- *Feel comfortable writing badly.* Whether print or digital, the journal must be a place where you're able to largely ignore your internal critic.
- *Use it throughout the writing process.* Journals can be indispensable for invention whenever you need more information, not just at the beginning. They can also be a place where you talk to yourself about how to solve a writing problem.
- *Write both specifically and abstractly.* Sometimes you'll be trying to be as concrete as possible, generating details, collecting facts, exploring particular experiences. Other times, use the journal to think in more-abstract language, thinking through ideas, reflecting on process, analyzing claims.
- *Don't make any rules about your journal.* These rules usually begin with a thought like "I'll only write in my journal when. . . ." Write in your journal whenever you find it useful, and in any way that you find useful, especially if it keeps you writing.
- *Experiment.* Your journal will be different from my journal, which will be different from the journal of the woman sitting next to you in class. The only way to make a journal genuinely useful is to keep trying ways to make it useful.

Unlearning Unhelpful Beliefs

You won't be surprised when I say that I have a lot of theories about writing development; after all, I'm supposedly the expert. 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, I'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. This belief was very common when I was taught writing. I remember slogging my way through Warriner's *English Grammar and Composition* in the seventh and eighth grades, dutifully working through chapter after chapter.

Today, along with a lot of experts on writing instruction, I don't think that this foundational approach to writing development is very effective. While I can still diagram a sentence, for example, that's never a skill I call on when I'm composing.

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

And yet building on the basics seems like common sense, doesn't it? This brings up an important point: Unlearning involves rejecting common sense *if* it conflicts with what actually works. Throughout this book, I 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, I'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 to use writing to *discover* what you think.

The Beliefs of This Book

Allatonceness. One of the metaphors I 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 allatonceness (all-at-once-ness), and it's simply not helpful to try to practice the subskills separately. This book shares the belief in the allatonceness 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. I didn't have it as a writer through most of my school career, because I assumed that being placed in the English class for underachievers meant that writing was simply another thing, like track and math, that I was mediocre at. For a long time, I was a captive to this attitude. But then, in college I wrote a paper I cared about; writing started to matter, because I discovered something I really wanted to say and say well. This was the beginning of my belief in myself—and of my becoming a better writer. 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 what I have called the spirit of inquiry.

Habits of Mind

When I first started teaching writing, I noticed a strange thing in my classes. What students learned about writing through the early assignments in the class didn't seem to transfer to later assignments, particularly research papers. What was I doing wrong? I wondered. Among other things, what I'd failed to make clear to my students was that certain "habits of mind" (or *dispositions*, as one writer terms them) could be consistently useful to them, in writing papers in my course and in any course involving academic inquiry—habits related to seeing writing as a process of discovery. We'll look at several closely related habits here; later in this chapter, you'll see how they play a role in the writing process.

Starting with Questions, Not Answers

1.2 Understand what kinds of questions will sustain inquiry into any subject.

A lot of people think that writing is about recording what you already know, which accounts for those who choose familiar topics to write on when given the choice. "I think I'll write about _____," the thinking goes, "because I know that topic really well and already have an idea what I can say." Writers who write about what they know usually start with answers rather than questions. In some writing situations this makes a lot of sense, because you're being asked specifically to prove that you know something. I'm thinking of an essay exam, for instance.

But more often, writing in a university is about inquiry, not reporting information. It's about discovery. It's about finding the questions that ultimately lead to interesting answers.

Making the Familiar Strange. Starting with questions rather than answers changes everything. *It means finding new ways to see what you've seen before*. Take this for example:

What is it? An iPhone, of course. Not much more to say, right? But imagine that your purpose isn't to simply provide the quickest answer possible to the simple factual question *What is it?* Consider instead starting with questions that might inspire you to think about the iPhone in ways you haven't before; for example,

- *What does it mean* that iPhone owners spend twice as much time playing games as other smartphone users?
- *What should be done* about the environmental impacts of iPhone production in China?

Both these questions lead you to potentially new information and new ways of seeing that familiar phone in your pocket. They promise that you'll discover something you didn't know before.

Questions open up the inquiry process, while quick answers close it down. When you discover what you think, you don't cook up a thesis before you start—you discover the thesis as you explore. But to work, the inquiry process demands something of us that most of us aren't used to: suspending judgment.

Suspending Judgment

We jerk our knee when physicians tap the patellar tendon. If everything is working, we do it reflexively. We're often just as reflexive in our responses to the world:

- "What do you think of American politicians?"

  "They're all corrupt."
- "Is it possible to reconcile economic growth with the preservation of natural resources?"

  "No."
- "Isn't this an interesting stone?"

  "It's just a rock."

It's okay to write badly. Resist the tendency to judge too soon and too harshly.

We make these judgments out of habit. But this habit is in fact a way of seeing, based on this premise: Some things are really pretty simple, more or less black-and-white, good or bad, boring or interesting. Academic inquiry works from another, very different premise: The world is really a wonderfully complex place, and *if we look closely and long enough*, and ask the right questions, we are likely to be surprised at what we see. A condition of inquiry is that you *don't* rush to judgment; you tolerate uncertainty while you explore your subject. Academic inquiry requires that you see your preconceptions as hypotheses that can be tested, not established truths. It is, in short, associated with a habit of *suspending* judgment.

Being Willing to Write Badly

In a writing course such as this one, the challenge of suspending judgment begins with how you approach your own writing. What's one of the most common problems I see in student writers? Poor grammar? Lack of organization? A missing thesis? Nope. *It's the tendency to judge too soon and too harshly*. A great majority of my students—including really smart, capable writers—have powerful internal critics, or, as the novelist Gail Godwin once called them, "Watchers at the Gates." This is the voice you may hear when you're starting to write a paper, the one that has you crossing out that first sentence or that first paragraph over and over until you "get it perfect."

The only way to overcome this problem is to suspend judgment. In doing so, you essentially tell your Watcher this: *It's okay to write badly*. Godwin once suggested that writers confront their internal critics by writing them a letter.

> Dear Watcher,
>
> Ever since the eighth grade, when I had Mrs. O'Neal for English, I've been seeing red. This is the color of every correction and every comment ("awk") you've made in the margins on my school writing. Now, years later, I just imagine you, ready to pick away at my prose every time I sit down to write. This time will be different. . . .

It might help to write your internal critic a letter like this. Rein in that self-critical part of yourself, and you'll find that writing can be a tool for *invention*—a way to generate material—and that you can *think through writing* rather than waiting around for the thoughts to come. You need your internal critic. But you need it to work with you, not against you. Later in this chapter, I'll show you how to accomplish this.

Searching for Surprise

1.3 Practice a method of writing and thinking that will help you generate ideas.

Starting with questions, making the familiar strange, suspending judgment, and writing badly—all are related to searching for surprise. In fact, one of the key

benefits of writing badly is *surprise*. This was a revelation for me. I was convinced that you never pick up the pen unless you know what you want to say. Once I realized I could write badly and use writing not to *record* what I already knew, but to *discover* what I thought, this way of writing promised a feast of surprises that made me hunger to put words on the page. If you're skeptical that your own writing can surprise you, try the following exercise.

Conditions That Make "Bad" Writing Possible

1. Willingness to suspend judgment
2. Ability to write fast enough to outrun your internal critic
3. Belief that confusion, uncertainty, and ambiguity help thought rather than hinder it
4. Interest in writing about "risky" subjects, or those about which you don't know what you want to say until you say it

Exercise 1.2

A Roomful of Details

STEP ONE: Spend ten minutes brainstorming a list of details based on the following prompt. Write down whatever comes into your mind, no matter how silly. Be specific and don't censor yourself.

> Try to remember a room you spent a lot of time in as a child. It may be your bedroom in the back of your house or apartment, or the kitchen where your grandmother made thick, red pasta sauce or latkes. Put yourself back in that room. Now look around you. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell?

Brainstorming

- Anything goes.
- Don't censor yourself.
- Write everything down.
- Be playful but stay focused.

STEP TWO: Examine your list. If things went well, you will have a fairly long list of details. As you review the list, identify the one detail that surprises you the most, a detail that seems somehow to carry an unexpected charge. This might be

something that seems connected to a feeling or a story. You might be drawn to a detail that confuses you a little. Whatever its particular appeal, circle it.

STEP THREE: Use the circled detail as a prompt for a seven-minute fastwrite. Begin by focusing on the detail: What does it make you think of? And then what? And then? Alternatively, begin by simply describing the detail more fully: What does it look like? Where did it come from? What stories are attached to it? How does it make you feel? Avoid writing in generalities. Write about specifics—that is, particular times, places, moments, and people. Write fast, and chase after the words to see where they want to go. Give yourself permission to write badly.

You may experience at least three kinds of surprise after completing a fastwriting exercise such as the one above:

1. Surprise about *how much* writing you did in such a short time
2. Surprise about discovering a topic you didn't expect to find
3. Surprise about discovering a *new way of understanding or seeing a familiar topic*

One Student's Response

Bernice's Journal

EXERCISE 1.2
STEP THREE

DETAIL: STAINLESS STEEL COUNTERS

When I was five or six my father and I made cookies for the first time. I don't remember what prompted him to bake cookies, he liked to cook but he didn't read very well so he didn't like to use cook books. I remember sitting on the cold stainless steel, the big red and white cook book splayed over my lap. I was reading it out loud to my dad. The kitchen was warm but everything gleamed; it was industrial and functional. It was the only room in our house that still looked like it belonged to the "Old Pioneer School." My dad and uncles had renovated every other room into bedrooms, playrooms, family rooms. The place was huge but cozy, it was home. I remember reading off ingredients until I got to the sugar. It called for 3/4 cup and I didn't understand the fraction. I thought it meant three or four cups. We poured so much sugar into the bowl. The cookies were terrible. Hard and glassy, too sweet and brittle. It wasn't until years later that I understood that my dad didn't understand the measurement either. He was persistent though. We pulled down every cook book in the house until we found one that described the measuring cups and what they meant. We started all over and our

second batch was perfect. My dad is one of the smartest people I know, inventive, imaginative but he only has a rudimentary education. He can read and write enough to get by, he's gifted with numbers, but I can't help looking back and wondering what he could have been, what he could have done for the world if just one person had taken him by the hand and showed him what he showed me. If just one person had told him not to give up, to keep trying, that in the end it will be worth all the work, I wonder who he could have been if one person had seen his curiosity and imagination and fostered it instead of seeing his muscles and capable hands and putting him to work. If just one person had told him that his mind was the greatest tool he possessed. If just one person baked cookies with him.

The kind of surprises you encounter doing this sort of writing may not always be profound. They may not even provide you with obvious essay topics. With any luck, though, by hunting for surprises in your own work, you will begin to experience the pleasure of writing *to learn*. That's no small thing, particularly if you've always believed that writers should have it all figured out before they pick up the pen.

Writing Situations and Rhetorical Choices

1.4 Apply rhetorical knowledge to make choices in specific writing situations.

The following isn't good writing, is it?

> im happy to be back w/u guys it was a too long of a weekend- dancing friday then? u hailey and i runnin tomorrow- sounds fun 2 me

Actually, the answer is, of course, that it depends.

Writing occurs in a writing situation, and different writing situations are associated with different types of writing and forms of communication—different genres and media. Think of how many writing situations we encounter these days and how many types of writing we do. For example, besides writing part of this textbook chapter, I wrote e-mails to an editor and a student, freewrote in my journal, drafted some text for a web page, sent a text to my daughter, and posted a comment on Facebook.

In each case, the writing situation demanded something different from me. In each, however, I had to make appropriate *rhetorical* choices—choices related to the following four considerations:

- **Purpose for writing:** What is the text trying to do?
- **Audience:** For whom is it intended?
- **Subject:** What is it about?
- **Genre/Medium:** What type of writing—what form of communication—would work best in view of my purpose, audience, and subject? What are its strengths and limitations, and what are its conventions?

That is, to write effectively, I had to think about why I was writing, to whom I was writing, what I was writing about, and what type of text I was writing. The effectiveness of my writing depended on my making appropriate choices in light of these considerations. And the rhetorical choices that we make in a writing situation are wide ranging; they include not only big choices (What's the best genre for accomplishing my purpose with this audience?), but also many smaller choices (Is it okay to say "ur" instead of "you're"?).

Now let's go back to the text message, written by my daughter to a friend.

Rhetorical Consideration	The Text Message
Purpose	Expressive and informational purposes: to reinforce intimacy; to plan
Audience	A close friend, with considerable shared knowledge
Subject	Personal details related to knowledge of a shared experience
Genre/Medium	Text message; limited to 160 characters, with a shorthand shared by users

Based on this analysis, my daughter's text message is clearly good writing after all. It uses the conventions of the genre/medium to fulfill its purpose—reinforce intimacy and make a Friday-night plan—for the audience the writer had in mind. My daughter used her *rhetorical knowledge* to make choices that resulted in an effective piece of writing. Of course, she would think it is weird to call her understanding of how to write a text message "rhetorical knowledge." But that's exactly what it is. She just doesn't think about it that way.

But what happens when you *do* think about it?

1. You become more skillful at composing in writing situations with which you are familiar.
2. You can learn to master unfamiliar writing situations much more quickly.

You have more rhetorical knowledge than you think. After all, you've been writing and speaking all your life. But when you start becoming aware of this knowledge, it becomes more powerful, and you become a better writer. Throughout *The Curious Writer*, I'll encourage you to think rhetorically.

In the next years of college, you'll be encountering unfamiliar writing situations, so learning to reflect on how each involves *rhetorical choices* will make you a much better communicator. (By the way, we also use this rhetorical knowledge to analyze how well someone else communicates, which is the focus of Chapter 2.) Learning to write well, then, isn't simply learning how to craft transitions, organize information, and follow grammatical "rules"—it's also learning to recognize that

each writing situation asks you for something different. For example, in college writing situations, the basic rhetorical considerations, as in Figure 1.1, "Thinking rhetorically," may be expanded with questions such as these:

- What is the purpose of the assignment? To interpret or analyze? Synthesize or summarize? Argue or explore?
- What is the subject, and what does that imply about my approach? Are there certain ways of writing about topics in history, psychology, or literature that differ from writing about topics in biology, social science, or business?
- Am I writing for an expert audience or a general audience? For my instructor or my peers?
- What is the form or genre for this assignment, and what are its conventions? What kind of evidence should I use? How is it organized?

You won't always have control over all of these choices. In college, you'll get writing assignments that may supply you with a purpose: "Write an essay that compares the energy efficiency of solar panels with that of a conventional coal power plant." Sometimes the form isn't up to you: "Write a five-page argument paper." But even when you have such constraints, you still have a lot of rhetorical choices to make—things like: "Should I use the first person? What evidence do I need, and where should it come from?"

Each genre and medium imposes its own conditions on the writer. For example, my daughter's text message can't be more than 160 characters, and that

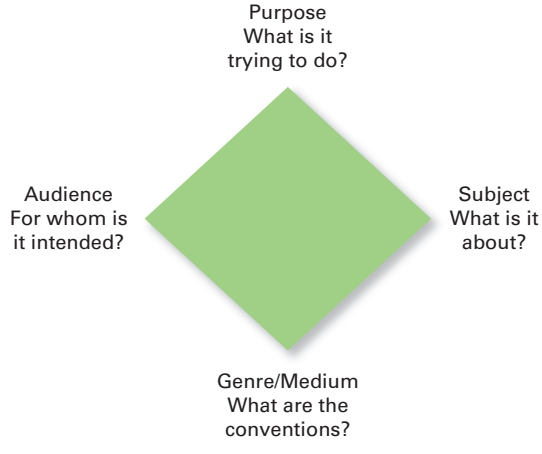


Figure 1.1 Thinking rhetorically. Rhetorical choices involve four considerations: purpose, subject, audience, and genre/medium. Each consideration is associated with questions. For genre/medium, these include conditions and conventions regarding what you can say and especially how you say it. While all considerations have always been important in rhetorical thinking, genre and medium are especially critical to consider now that you may have alternatives to writing traditional term papers, including PowerPoints, podcasts, video, visuals, and a host of other multimodal approaches.

limitation inspired, among other things, a shorthand for composing that uses characters sparingly. Considering genre and medium is especially important now that the forms of communication have expanded radically, even in academia. You may write not just a term paper. You might do a PowerPoint, make a poster, build a web page, collaborate on a wiki, or produce a podcast.

Thinking about rhetorical contexts increases the chance that you'll make good choices when you solve problems as a writer, particularly in revision. Much like riding Berthoff's bike, in composing, writers usually think about purpose, audience, subject, and genre/medium all at once, drawing on their experience with similar writing situations.

A First Reflection on Your Writing Process

There is a process for doing almost anything—fixing a broken washing machine, learning how to play tennis, studying for the SAT, and, of course, writing. Why, then, do some English teachers seem to make such a big deal out of reflecting on your writing process? Here's why:

- First, the process of writing, like any process that we do frequently, is not something that we think about.
- As a consequence, when we write, we tend to focus just on *what* and not on *how*, just on the product and not on the process. And then, when problems arise, we don't see many options for solving them—we get stuck and we get frustrated.
- If, however, we start to pay attention to how we write in a variety of situations, two things happen: We become aware of our old habits that don't always help and may actually hinder our success with writing. Second—and this is most important—we begin to understand that there are actually *choices* we can make when problems arise, and we become aware of what some of those choices are.
- In short, *the more we understand the writing process, the more control we get over it*. Getting control of the process means the product gets better.[1]

A Case Study

Here's an example of what I mean. Chauntain summarized her process this way: "Do one and be done." She always wrote her essays at the last minute and only wrote a single draft. She approached nearly every writing assignment the same way: Start with a thesis, and then develop five topic sentences that support the thesis, with three supporting details under each. This structure was a container

[1]There is considerable research in learning theory that confirms these conclusions; in particular, so-called metacognitive thinking—the awareness of how you do things—increases the transfer of relevant knowledge from one situation to another. In other words, what you learn about how to do something in one situation gets more easily activated in another situation.

into which she poured all her prose. Chauntain deliberated over every sentence, trying to make each one perfect, and as a result, she spent considerable time staring off into space searching for the right word or phrase. It was agony. The papers were almost always dull—she thought so too—and just as often she struggled to reach the required page length. Chauntain had no idea of any other way to write a school essay. As a matter of fact, she thought it was really the *only* way. So when she got an assignment in her economics class to write an essay in which she was to use economic principles to analyze a question that arose from a personal observation, Chauntain was bewildered. How should she start? Could she rely on her old standby structure—thesis, topic sentences, supporting details? She felt stuck.

Because she failed to see that she had choices related to both process and this particular writing situation, she also had no clue what those choices were. That's why we study process. It helps us solve problems such as these. And it must begin with a self-study of your own habits as a writer, identifying not just how you tend to do things, but the patterns of problems that might arise when you do them.

Thinking About Your Process

You will reflect on your writing and reading processes again and again throughout this book, so that by the end you may be able to tell the story of your processes and how you are changing them to produce better writing more efficiently. The reflective letter in your portfolio (see Appendix A) might be where you finally share that story in full. Now is a good time to begin telling yourself that story.

What do you remember about your own journey as a writer both inside and outside of school? One of my earliest, most pleasant memories of writing is listening to the sound of the clacking of my father's old Royal typewriter in the room down the hall as I was going to sleep. I imagine him there now, in the small study that we called the "blue room," enveloped in a cloud of pipe smoke. It is likely that he was writing advertising copy back then, or perhaps a script for a commercial in which my mother, an actress, would appear. I loved the idea of writing then. The steady hammering of typewriter keys sounded effortless yet at the same time solid, significant. This all changed, I think, in the eighth grade when it seemed that writing was much more about following rules than tapping along to a lively dance of words.

Spend some time telling your own story about how your relationship to writing evolved.

When you get a writing assignment, your habit may be to compose carefully. This assignment, in contrast, is all about invention—about generating ideas.

Exercise 1.3

Literacy Narrative Collage

In your journal, create a collage of moments, memories, and reflections related to your experience with writing. *For each prompt, write fast for about four minutes. Keep your pen or fingers on the keyboard moving, and give yourself permission to*

write badly. After you've responded to one prompt, skip a line and move on to the next one. Set aside about twenty minutes for this generating activity.

1. What is your earliest memory of writing? Tell the story.
2. We usually divide our experiences as writers into private writing and school writing, or writing we do by choice and writing we are required to do for a grade. Let's focus on school writing. Tell the story of a teacher, a class, an essay, an exam, or a moment that you consider a *turning point* in your understanding of yourself as a writer or your understanding of school writing.
3. Writing is part of the fabric of everyday life in the United States, and this is truer than ever with Internet communication. Describe the roles that writing plays in a typical day for you. How have these daily roles of writing changed in your lifetime so far?
4. What is the most successful (or least successful) thing you've ever written in or out of school? Tell the story.

Congratulations. You've made a mess. But I hope this collage of your experiences as a writer is an interesting mess, one that brought some little surprises. As you look at these four fragments of fastwriting, you might begin to sense a pattern. Is there a certain idea about yourself as a writer that seems to emerge in these various contexts? It's more likely that one, or perhaps two, of the prompts really took off for you, presenting trails you'd like to continue following. Or maybe nothing happened. For now, set your journal aside. You may return to this material if your instructor invites you to draft a longer narrative about your writing experiences, or you might find a place for some of this writing in your portfolio.

Now that you've spent some time telling a story of your background as a writer, use the following survey to pin down some of your habits and experiences related to school writing. The questions in the survey can help you develop a profile of your writing process and help you identify problems you might want to address by altering your process.

Exercise 1.4

What Is Your Process?

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 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 is/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. Finally, 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.

STEP TWO: In small groups, discuss the results of the survey. Begin by picking someone to tally the answers to each question. Post these on the board, a large sheet of paper, or a spreadsheet, so they can then be added up for the class. Analyze the results for your group. In particular, discuss the following questions:

- 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?

Problem Solving in Your Writing Process

If you took the survey, you probably uncovered some problems with your writing process. The great news for those of us who struggle with certain aspects of writing—and who doesn't?—is that you can do something about it. As you identify the obstacles to doing better work, you can change the way you approach writing tasks. For instance, consider some of the more common problems students struggle with and some ideas about how *The Curious Writer* can help you with them.

Writing Problem	Possible Cause	A Solution
Consistently writes short. Often can't meet page requirements for assignments.	Writer works from scarcity. Begins the draft with too little information on the topic.	Focus on invention. Generate more material *before* you begin the draft, through research, fastwriting, etc. (see "Inquiring into the Details: Invention Strategies" in this chapter).
Dislikes revision, especially if it involves more than "tidying" things up.	Writer spends a great deal of time writing the first draft and trying to make it "perfect." Gets overcommitted to the initial approach to the topic.	Write a fast draft and then do deeper revision. Attack the draft physically (see Revision Strategy 14.18 in Chapter 14).
Writer's block.	Internal critic is too harsh too early in the writing process. Often involves anxiety about audience.	Find a place where you can write badly without it feeling like a performance. A journal or notebook often works (see "Inquiring into the Details: Journals" in this chapter).
Dislikes open-ended assignments. Would rather be told what to write about.	Writer may be unused to valuing own thinking. Little experience with assignments in which writer must discover own purpose.	Use your own curiosity and questions to drive the process. Craft questions that are useful guides for exploration and promise discovery and learning (see "Starting with Questions, Not Answers" in this chapter).
Struggles with focus. Able to write a lot but can't seem to stay on topic.	Writer doesn't exploit key opportunities to look at writing critically, to evaluate and judge what she has generated.	Effectively combine invention with evaluation, generating with judging, by using a process that makes room for both as you write (see "The Nature of the Writing Process" below).

The Nature of the Writing Process

Earlier you saw Chauntain's writing process. Here was my writing process when I was in school:

1. Get the assignment. Find out when it is due and how long it is supposed to be.
2. Wait until the night before it is due and get started.
3. Stare off into space.
4. Eat ice cream.

5. Write a sketchy outline.
6. Write a sentence; then cross it out.
7. Stare off into space.
8. Write another sentence, and then squeeze out a few more.
9. Think about Lori Jo Flink, and then stare off into space.
10. Write a paragraph. Feel relief and disgust.

Suspending judgment feels freer, exploratory.... Making judgments shifts the writer into an analytical mode.

I would get the work done eventually, but the process was agonizing and the product mediocre. What did I conclude from this back then? That I wasn't good at writing, which was no big surprise because I pretty much hated it. Something happened to me to change that view, of course, because you hold my book in your hands. I came to understand the problems in my writing process: I viewed writing as a straight march forward from beginning to end, one where I had to wait for something to come into my head and then try to get it down. At all costs, I avoided things like new ideas or other ways of seeing a topic—anything that might get in the way of the drive to the conclusion. If I thought about anything, it was trying to find the "perfect" way of saying things or worrying about whether I was faithfully following a certain structure. I rarely learned anything from my writing. I certainly never expected I should.

The Writing Process as Recursive and Flexible

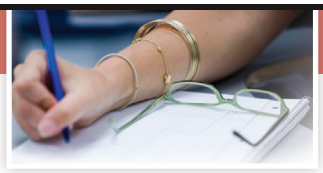
But this straight march isn't the way experienced writers work at all. The writing process isn't a linear trajectory, but a looping, recursive process—one that encourages *thinking*, not simply recording the thoughts that you already have. Writing doesn't involve a series of steps that you must follow in every situation; on the contrary:

- The writing process is *recursive*, a much messier zigzag between collecting information and focusing on it, exploring things and thinking about them, writing and rewriting, reviewing and rearranging, and so on. For example, invention strategies are useful at many points in the writing process.
- The process is *flexible* and always influenced by the writing situation. For instance, experienced writers have a keen sense of audience, and they use this to cue their choices about a change in tone or whether an example might help clarify a point. These are exactly the kinds of adjustments you make in social situations all the time.

A System for Using Writing to Think

What do I mean when I say the writing process encourages thinking? Usually, when we imagine someone who is "deep in thought," we see him staring off into space with a furrowed brow, chin nested in one hand. He is not writing. He may be

Inquiring into the Details



Invention Strategies

Invention is a term from rhetoric that means the act of generating ideas. While we typically think of *rhetoric* as something vaguely dishonest and often associated with politics, it's actually a several-thousand-year-old body of knowledge about speaking and writing well. Invention is a key element in rhetoric. It can occur at any time during the writing process, not just at the beginning in the "prewriting" stage. Some useful invention strategies include:

- ***Fastwriting:*** The emphasis is on speed, not correctness. Don't compose, don't think about what you want to say before you say it. Instead, let the writing lead, helping you discover what you think.
- ***Listing:*** Fast lists can help you generate lots of information quickly. They are often in code, with words and phrases that have meaning only for you. Let your lists grow in waves—think of two or three items and then pause until the next few items rush in.
- ***Clustering:*** This nonlinear method of generating information, also called *mapping*, relies on *webs* and often free association of ideas or information. Begin with a core word, phrase, or concept at the center of a page, and build branches off it. Follow each branch until it dies out, return to the core, and build another. (For an example, see p. 80.)
- ***Questioning:*** Questions are to ideas what knives are to onions. They help you cut through to the less obvious insights and perspectives, revealing layers of possible meanings, interpretations, and ways of understanding. Asking questions complicates things but rewards you with new discoveries.
- ***Conversing:*** Conversing is fastwriting with the mouth. When we talk, especially to someone we trust, we work out what we think and feel about things. We listen to what we say, but we also invite a response, which leads us to new insights.
- ***Researching:*** This is a kind of conversation, too. We listen and respond to other voices that have said something, or will say something if asked, about topics that interest us. Reading and interviewing are not simply things you do when you write a research paper, but activities you use whenever you have questions you can't answer on your own.
- ***Observing:*** When we look closely at anything, we see what we didn't notice at first. Careful observation of people, objects, experiments, images, and so on generates specific information that leads to informed judgments.

thinking about what he's *going* to write, but in the meantime the cursor is parked on the computer screen or the pen rests on the desk. Thinking like this is good—I do it all the time. But imagine if you also make thought external by following your thinking on paper or screen and not just in your head. Here is some of what happens:

- You have a record of what you've thought that you can return to again and again.
- As you *see* what you've just said, you discover something else to say.
- Because the process of thinking through writing is slower than thinking in your head, you think differently.
- Because externalizing thought takes mental effort, you are more immersed in thought, creating what one theorist called a state of "flow."

As I've already mentioned, thinking through writing is most productive when you suspend judgment, reining in your internal critic. You may actually do some pretty good thinking with some pretty bad writing.

Using writing as a way of thinking is even more powerful if there is a *system* for doing it that reliably produces insight. One method, which we could call a *dialectical system*, exploits two different kinds of thinking—one creative and the other critical, one wide open and the other more closed. So far in this chapter, we've focused on the creative side, the generating activities I've called "writing badly" that restrain your internal critic. But you need that critical side. You need it to make sense of things, to evaluate what's significant and what's not, to help you figure out what you might be trying to say. If you use both kinds of thinking, "dialectically" moving back and forth from one to the other, then you're using a method that is at the heart of the process you'll use throughout *The Curious Writer*.[2] Try the next exercise to see how this might work for you.

Exercise 1.5

Two Kinds of Thinking

Let's return to the subject you began writing about in Exercise 1.3—your experiences as a writer—but focus on something that was probably part of your response to the third prompt in that exercise: your experience with writing technology.

Using Creative Thinking

STEP ONE: What are your earliest memories of using a computer for writing? In your journal or on the computer, begin by telling the story and then let the writing lead from there. Keep your pen or the cursor moving, and allow yourself to write badly.

[2] For Greek philosophers such as Plato, dialectic was a way of arriving at truth through back-and-forth conversation between two people who were open to changing their minds. Similarly, the process of writing and thinking I propose here is a back and forth between two parts of yourself—each receptive to the other—in an effort to discover your own "truths," ideas, and insights.

STEP TWO: Brainstorm a list of words or phrases that you associate with the word *literate* or *literacy*.

Reread what you just wrote in steps 1 and 2, underlining things that surprise you or that seem significant or interesting to you. Skip a line and move on to step 3.

Using Critical Thinking

STEP THREE: Choose one of the following sentence frames as a starting point. Complete the sentence and then develop it as a paragraph. This time, compose each sentence while thinking about what you want to say before you say it and trying to say it as well as you can.

> What I understand now about my experiences with writing on computers that I didn't understand when I started out is _____.
>
> When they think about writing with computers, most people think _____, but my experience was _____.
>
> The most important thing I had to discover before I considered myself "computer literate" was _____.

Reflecting

If you're like most people, then the parts of this exercise where you creatively generated material felt different than the part where you judged as you wrote. But *how* were they different? How would you distinguish between the experiences of generating and judging? Talk about this or write about it in your journal.

A Writing Process That Harnesses Two Currents of Thought

The two parts of Exercise 1.5 involving creative and critical thinking were designed to show you the difference between the two and also to simulate the shift between them, the shift from suspending judgments to making judgments—something I referred to as "dialectical" thinking. In the first two steps, you spent some time fastwriting without much critical interference, trying to generate some information from your own experience. In the third step, which began with "seed" sentences that forced you into a more reflective, analytical mode, you were encouraged to look for patterns of meaning in what you generated.

As you probably noticed, these two distinct ways of thinking each have advantages for the writer:

- *Suspending judgment* feels freer, is exploratory, and may spark emotion.
- *Making judgments* shifts the writer into an analytical mode, one that might lower the temperature, allowing writers to see their initial explorations with less feeling and more understanding.

Thus, creative thinking creates the conditions for discovery—new insights or ways of seeing—while critical thinking helps writers refine their discoveries and focus on the most significant of them.

The Sea and the Mountain. Here's another way to conceptualize creative and critical thinking (see Figure 1.2):

- When you write creatively, you plunge into the sea of information. You don't swim in one direction, but eagerly explore in all directions, including the depths.
- When you write critically, you emerge from the water to find a vantage point—a mountain—from which to see where you've swum. From the mountain (which occasionally erupts and belches forth two words: "So What?"), you are able to see patterns that aren't visible from the water. You are able to make judgments about what you encountered there: What's significant? What isn't? Why?

The key is not to stay on the mountain. Instead, you take the patterns you saw and the judgments you made and plunge back into the sea, this time with a stronger

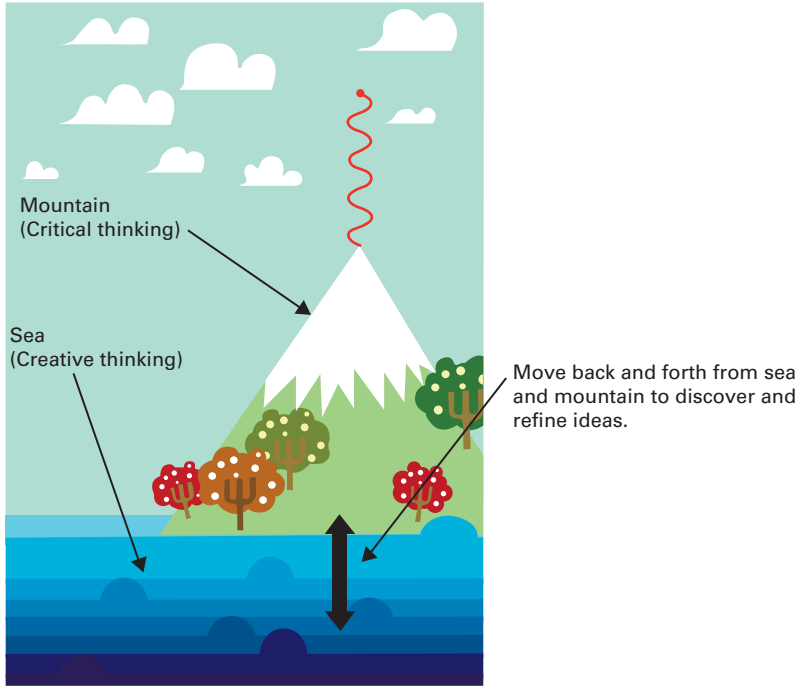


Figure 1.2 Generating insight using critical and creative thinking. Thinking to inquire is like the movement back and forth from the sea of information to the mountain of reflection. In one you explore, and on the other you evaluate. Insight develops when you continually move back and forth; as you refine your ideas, when in the sea, you swim in ever smaller circles with a stronger sense of purpose.

sense of purpose. You're clearer about what you want to know and where you need to swim to find it. This back and forth between mountain and sea continues until you've discovered what you want to say. In fact, you made just this sort of movement in Exercise 1.2 and then in Exercise 1.5 when you moved from generating to judging. It is a process of induction and deduction, working upwards from specifics to infer ideas, and then taking those ideas and testing them against specifics.

Figure 1.3 lists yet other ways in which you can visualize the movement between creative and critical thinking. In narrative writing, for instance, creative thinking helps you generate information about *what happened*, while critical thinking may lead you to insights about *what happens*. Likewise, in research writing, investigators often move back and forth between their *observations of* things and their *ideas about* them.

As you work through the book, you'll find it easier to shift between contrasting modes of thought—from collecting to focusing, from generating to judging, from showing to telling, from exploring to reflecting, from believing to doubting, from playing to evaluating. In short, you'll become better able to balance creative and critical thinking. You'll know when it's useful to open up the process of thinking to explore and when it's necessary to work at making sense of what you've discovered.

Answering the *So What?* Question. An important function on the critical thinking side is to make sure you can answer the one question you must answer when writing for an audience:

So what?

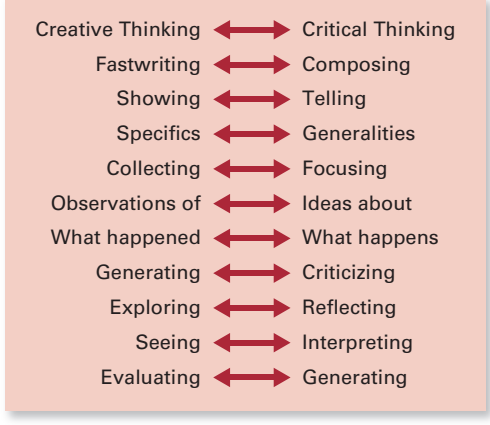


Figure 1.3 Alternating currents of thought. When writers alternate between creative and critical thinking, they move back and forth between two opposing modes of thought—the creative and the critical. One seems playful and the other judgmental; one feels open ended and the other more closed. Activities such as fastwriting and brainstorming promote one mode of thought, and careful composing and reflection promote the other.