The Curious Writer

SIXTH EDITION

Bruce Ballenger

Kelly Myers

Michelle Payne

THE CURIOUS WRITER

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Kelly Myers
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Boise State University

New!
APA 7th Edition
Updates

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Preface

By Bruce Ballenger

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

What's New in This Edition?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why Teach Inquiry in the Writing Classroom?

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

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

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

How This Book Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Using the Exercises

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

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

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

Other Features of *The Curious Writer*

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

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

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

Supplements

Supplements are available to adopters at the Instructor's Resource Center at www.pearsonhighered.com/irc and also within the Resources folder within the Revel® product.

The Instructor's Resource Manual

ISBN 0-13-660030-1/978-0-13-660030-5
This manual, written by Michelle Payne, includes sample syllabi as well as a helpful introduction that offers general teaching strategies and ideas for teaching writing as a form of inquiry. It also provides a detailed overview of each chapter and its goals, ideas for discussion starters, handouts and overheads, and many additional writing activities that teachers can use in their classrooms to supplement the textbook.

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 illustrate each learning objective and key idea in the text in visual form. Each slide includes instructors' notes.

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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.

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Acknowledgments

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

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

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

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

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Finally, I want to thank my co-authors, Kelly Myers and Michelle Payne. Collaborative writing isn't always easy, but I was fortunate enough to find two people who made it fun. I've known Michelle for thirty years. We met back in graduate school at the University of New Hampshire, and then I talked her into joining me on the faculty at Boise State University, where she is now an Assistant Provost. I met Kelly more recently when she became a faculty member here in 2013. She quickly became a cherished friend. While we all have very different expertise in writing instruction, we share the same values about how it should be done, including a commitment to write-to-learn pedagogies. Consequently, when I retired from teaching in 2018, I began looking for colleagues who would share the responsibility of writing this book. I'm so grateful that Michelle and Kelly said they'd be willing, and the result is, I think, the best edition of *The Curious Writer* ever.

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

Bruce Ballenger

About the Authors

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

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

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

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1

Writing as Inquiry

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you'll learn to

1.1 Articulate how you think of yourself as a writer.

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

1.3 Reflect on your own writing process and apply a problem-solving approach.

1.4 Apply creative and critical thinking to a writing process that will help you generate ideas.

1.5 Describe what kinds of questions will sustain inquiry into any subject.

1.6 Distinguish between "open" writing situations that invite inquiry and less exploratory "direct" writing.

What Do We Mean by Inquiry?

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

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

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

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

Beliefs About Writing and Writing Development

1.1 Articulate how you think of yourself as a writer.

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

Unlearning Unhelpful Beliefs

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

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

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

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

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

Tools for Inquiry-based Writing: Fastwriting and Journaling

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> *Experts are unsure what the mental fallout will be from the pandemic, but after studying disasters and wars they estimate that about a third of those living through trauma will suffer from mental health problems, especially those who are predisposed to it.*
>
> *I told Karen yesterday that I was feeling depressed, or that I was "edging" toward it. She was surprised. "You seemed happy this morning," she said. I think I was, but as*

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

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

Exercise 1.1

What Is Your Process?

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

STEP ONE: Complete the Self-Evaluation Survey.

Self-Evaluation Survey

1. When you're given a school writing assignment, do you wait until the last minute to finish it?

   Always———Often———Sometimes———Rarely———Never

2. How often have you had the experience of learning something you didn't expect through writing about it?

   Very often———Fairly often———Sometimes———Rarely———Never

3. Do you generally plan out what you're going to write before you write it?

   Always———Often———Sometimes———Rarely———Never

4. *Prewriting* describes activities that some writers engage in before they begin a first draft. Prewriting might include such invention activities as freewriting or fastwriting, making lists, brainstorming or mapping, collecting information, browsing the web, talking to someone about the essay topic, reading up on it, or jotting down ideas in a notebook or journal. How much prewriting do you tend to do for the following types of assignments? Circle the appropriate answer.

   - A personal narrative:

     A great deal———Some———Very little———None———Haven't written one

- A critical essay about a short story, novel, or poem:

  A great deal———Some———Very little———None———Haven't written one

- A research paper:

  A great deal———Some———Very little———None———Haven't written one

- An essay exam:

  A great deal———Some———Very little———None———Haven't written one

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

   ❑ Getting started
   ❑ In the middle
   ❑ Finishing
   ❑ I never/rarely get stuck (go on to question 9)
   ❑ Other: _____

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

   ❑ Deciding on a topic
   ❑ Writing an introduction
   ❑ Finding the time to begin
   ❑ Figuring out exactly what I'm supposed to do for the assignment
   ❑ Finding a purpose or focus for the paper
   ❑ Finding the right tone
   ❑ Other: _____

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

   ❑ Keeping focused on the topic
   ❑ Finding enough information to meet page-length requirements
   ❑ Following my plan for how I want to write the paper
   ❑ Bringing in other research or points of view
   ❑ Organizing all of my information
   ❑ Trying to avoid plagiarism
   ❑ Worrying about whether the paper meets the requirements of the assignment
   ❑ Worrying that the paper just isn't any good

❑ Messing with citations

❑ Other: _____

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

❑ Composing a last paragraph or conclusion

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

❑ Worrying that the paper just isn't any good

❑ Trying to keep focused on the main idea or thesis

❑ Trying to avoid repeating myself

❑ Realizing I don't have enough information

❑ Dealing with the bibliography or citations

❑ Other: _____

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

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

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

____ I try to fill holes by adding more information.

____ I do more research.

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

____ I rarely do any revision.

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

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

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

1.

2.

3.

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

    Belief I think is true: ___

    Belief I think isn't true: ___

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

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

The Beliefs of This Book

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

and fall off, get up, and try again, doing all of those separate things at once. At some point, you don't fall and you pedal off down the street. Berthoff said writing is a process that involves 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. Bruce didn't have it as a writer through most of his school career, because he assumed that being placed in the English class for underachievers meant that writing was simply another thing, like track and math, that he was mediocre at. For a long time, he was a captive to this attitude. But then, in college he wrote a paper he cared about; writing started to matter, because he discovered something he really wanted to say and say well. This was the beginning of a belief that he could become a better writer, despite all those C minuses in high school English. Belief requires motivation, and one powerful motivator is to approach a writing assignment as an opportunity to learn something—that is, to approach it with the spirit of inquiry.

Habits of Mind

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

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

Nicholas Piccillo/Shutterstock

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

relevant, there are certain ways of thinking about writing tasks that *can* be extremely useful in many writing situations. We call these *habits of mind*. Here are some of the most important habits of mind for your college classes that involve writing.

Starting with Questions, Not Answers

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, like in an essay exam. But more often, writing in a university is about discovery, not reporting information, and this always begins with 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*. For example, in the opening writing exercise of this chapter, you were asked to consider the commonplace plastic water bottle and imagine some relationship questions that help you to see it in a new way. What started as simply a water bottle can, with the right question, be transformed into inquiry into the branding claims of a bottler about purity of spring water.

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 for this 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."

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.

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

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 we 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 our 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 because I need to get something down*. 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, we'll show you how to do this.

One way to tame your internal critic so that it's helpful rather than an obstacle to writing is to identify all the ways your Watcher gets in the way. If your critic is anything like ours (yes, we do still struggle with this), he or she is cunning, coming up with all sorts of diversions and tricks to keep us from writing. Make a list of some of your Watcher's tactics.

Expecting Surprise

If, when you sit down to write, you don't expect to learn something, then you probably won't. But when you *expect* surprise, and look forward to what your writing might tell you every time you sit down to do it, then you'll find surprise happens more and more. Writing to learn is far more likely when you practice the habits of mind suggested here: Start with questions, suspend judgment, and tolerate writing that, at first, may seem pretty "bad."

Reflecting Often

When we first learn how to do something—make a TikTok video, dribble a basketball, play the guitar—we naturally spend a lot of time thinking about *how* we're doing it. Later, as we feel more competent, we typically reflect less. We start to trust that we know what we need to know. You've been writing for much of your life, and by now, you've developed a set of routines, or "workflows" to use a current term, that are often automatically triggered whenever you're faced with a writing task. These may include where and when you sit down to write, how you typically start, whether you write with a pen or on a computer, how you imagine what you're supposed to do, and how you feel about certain kinds of writing tasks—maybe you hate writing research papers, or love writing stories; you find rewriting your work frustrating, or you're afraid of sharing your work. We don't usually think much about these routines. We simply live with them.

The thing is, when you stop reflecting on how you do something—even something you've done for a long time—you stop getting better at it. There's all kinds of research that confirms this idea, including recent studies on writing that suggest that frequent reflection—or metacognition (thinking about thinking)—on how you approach writing tasks significantly improves "transfer," or your ability to apply what you know to new writing situations. The instinct to reflect—and reflect often—about what you're doing and how you're doing it is one of the most important habits of mind. We'll prompt you to do this it a lot, beginning with helping you to tell the story of your history as a writer later in this chapter. But first, in the writing exercise that follows, you can practice some of these habits of mind. Pay attention to what feels new or different about this writing experience, and we'll ask you to reflect on that.

Exercise 1.2

A Roomful of Details

STEP ONE: Spend six minutes fastwriting in response to 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? Write in the present tense. (*I am standing in my grandmother's kitchen*,…). Write fast and immerse yourself in the details.

For example, *I am standing in my grandmother's kitchen, and through the window the pear tree is blooming. On the stove, the pasta sauce bubbles and the earthy smell of tomatoes mingles with the smell of my grandfather's cigar*…

STEP TWO: We'll write again for five minutes, but this time think about what you're going to say before you say it in writing, following the new prompt below:

Keeping in mind some of what you wrote in Step One, finish this sentence: *What I understand now that I didn't understand then is*… After you finish that sentence, follow the thought with more writing until you've drafted a fuller paragraph.

Read over your writing in Step One. Did anything surprise you?

STEP THREE: Take a moment to reflect on what happened in the first two steps of the exercise, particularly how they relate to the habits of mind discussed earlier. Think and write about your experience with this exercise. What were your takeaways?

In particular, did anything surprise you? What did you notice about the differences between steps one and two? What were the relationships between each step? Did you find yourself writing differently than you usually do? As a writer, what were your takeaways from this exercise, if any? Draft a full paragraph. When you're done, discuss in class or post your paragraph to the class discussion-board and discuss what happened.

One Student's Response

Bernice's Journal

EXERCISE 1.2

STEP TWO

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 Power of Reflection

1.3 Reflect on your own writing process and apply a problem-solving approach.

In Exercise 1.2, you may have been surprised by how much you could write about the mundane details of a room from your childhood, especially if you allowed the writing to run ahead of you, even if the prose wasn't that great. You may have even come to some new, little understanding about the significance of that room or the things that happened there. That's how writing to learn works—it offers up a feast of little surprises that encourage you to see the possibilities in a blank page.

Why is it then that so many of us are so rarely that motivated to write or even dread it? Part of the answer is we rarely think much about how we do it—a point we made a few pages ago. 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. Here's an example of what we mean.

A Case Study

Chauntain, one of Bruce's students, 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 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.

Telling Your Own Story as a Writer

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?

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

Exercise 1.3

Literacy Narrative Collage

Create a collage of moments, memories, and reflections related to your experience with writing. *For each prompt, write fast for about three 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.
5. Choose one of your stories (or combine several of them) and draft two or three paragraphs to post to the class discussion-board or to discuss in class.

"Dialectical" Writing: Harnessing Your Creative and Critical Thought

1.4 Apply creative and critical thinking to a writing process that will help you generate ideas.

What do we mean when we say that you can think *through* writing? 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 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—we 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:

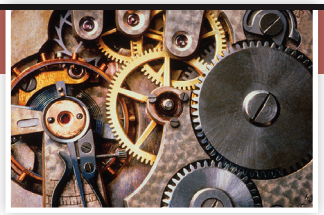
- You have a record of what you've thought that you can return to again and again.
- As you *see* what you've just said, you discover something else to say.
- Because the process of thinking through writing is slower than thinking in your head, you think differently.
- Because externalizing thought takes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

As we'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.

What is "Dialectical" Writing and Reading?

For all the reasons we just mentioned, making your thoughts external by writing them down can be a powerful way to discover what you think. But it's even more effective if you have a system for doing it, one that makes it more likely you'll

Inquiring into the Details



Sandra Baker/Alamy Stock Photo

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. 88.)
- ***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.

generate useful insights. In *The Curious Writer*, we'll encourage you to use a "dialectical" system for writing, including writing about reading, something you'll explore in the next chapter.

"Dialectical" thinking is an attempt to reconcile two opposing thoughts through dialogue. It's an old idea, one that reaches back to Socrates. But our application in

this book is a little different. The opposing thoughts in "dialectical writing" are the *creative* and the *critical*, and the dialogue is the writer talking with herself through writing. Creative and critical are opposed in the following four ways:

1. Creative thinking is freer, more open-ended, and frequently exploratory. Critical thinking is more focused, closed, and evaluative. It helps you to make *choices* about what to use in your writing and what not to use.
2. Creative thinking is closer to fastwriting, or what we sometimes call "bad" writing. Critical thinking is closer to composing, or when you more carefully craft your thoughts to capture what you already think.
3. Creative thinking often feels more expressive and more honest. When we think critically, we are more aware of another audience judging what we say.
4. Creative thinking is generative, often helpful in producing more information. Critical thinking involves judging what seems important in the information we've generated.

If we can harness *both* ways of thinking and seeing through writing, we have a powerful way of getting writing done *and* discovering new ideas about the subject of that writing. *We need both kinds of thinking to work together, shifting our gaze back and forth between them*.

Seeing creatively and critically is like looking through the lenses of a pair of binoculars. Our vision is amplified by looking through both lenses (see Figure 1.1).

So far in this chapter, the focus has been on the creative side, the generating activities 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

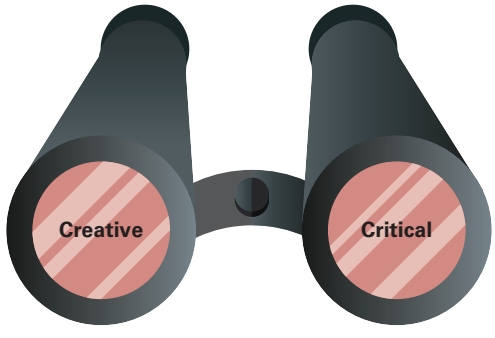


Figure 1.1 When writing and reading "dialectically," you look through both the creative and critical lenses as you try to get the fullest view of your subject. Write creatively to explore the subject and generate information about it. Write critically to evaluate what you've found, looking for what's important.

you'll use throughout *The Curious Writer*. Let's look a little more closely at how to apply creative and critical thinking.

Applying Creative and Critical Thinking Through Writing

How does dialectical writing work in practice? Well, you've already had some experience with it. Remember Exercise 1.2, "A Roomful of Details"? In the first part of the exercise, you explored a room that you spent time in as a child, writing down what you remembered about it by drawing on all of your senses. Many of our students find this fun as the details come rushing back. It's often full of surprises. In the second part, we asked you to look back on this place and time, prompting you with this initial phrase: "What I understand about this time and place now that I didn't understand then is…" Here the writing is more reflective, and often more abstract. Many students start to have insights about what that time in their lives meant to them: "I realized that my grandparents instilled in me that passion for justice that is now a big part of who I am."

The first part of the exercise engaged creative thought and the second critical. When you saw through both, you not only summoned the details of your experience in an open-ended way but then looked at that information more critically to see if there are patterns of meaning you hadn't noticed before.

Another metaphor for this is that in creative thinking we jump into the sea of experience/information, and in critical thinking, we climb out of the water, ascend the mountain of reflection with its higher vantage point, and see what's significant about where we've swum (see Figure 1.2). Creative thinking creates the conditions for discovery by

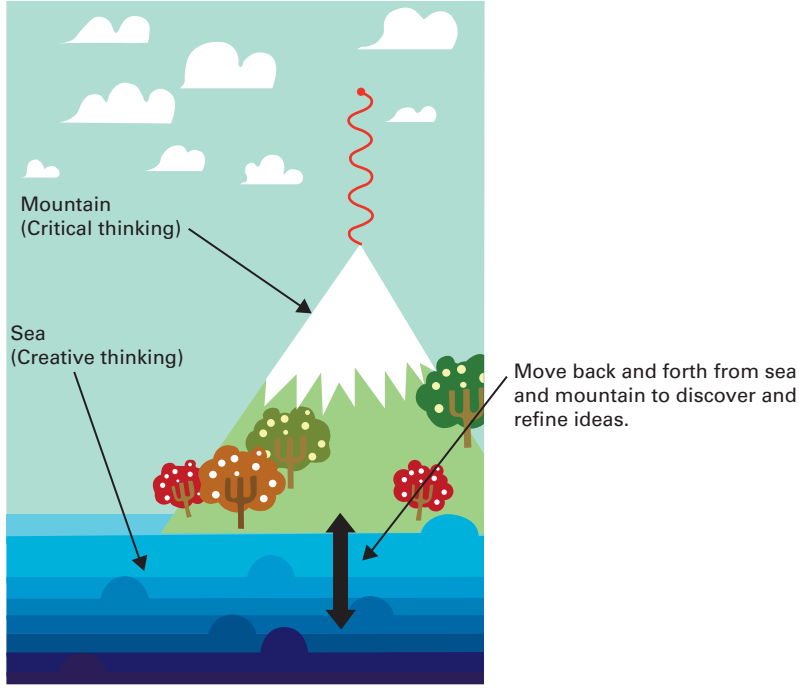


Figure 1.2 Generating insight using critical and creative thinking. Here's another way to understand the dialectical method of writing. Thinking to inquire is like the movement back and forth from the sea of information to the mountain of reflection. In one, you explore and collect, and on the other, you evaluate and analyze. 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.

generating material to analyze, while critical thinking helps writers establish what ideas about the material seem most significant, and why. Behind all of this is the effort to answer a simple question: *So what?* What is the purpose behind our writing on a subject, and why should readers care about what we have to say?

This may be a big break with how you've done academic writing in the past. In "A Roomful of Details," you used creative and critical thinking to write about personal experience. But you can apply dialectical writing to explore and analyze nearly anything—a work of art, a controversial issue, data about a social trend, and so on. In the next chapter, you'll learn how to use it to respond to what you read.

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.

Table 1.1 Common Problems

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 "Tools for Inquiry-based Writing: Fastwriting and Journaling" 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).

Writing Problem	Possible Cause	A Solution
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.

Inquiry Is Driven by Questions

1.5 Describe what kinds of questions will sustain inquiry into any subject.

The inquiry approach is grounded in the idea that the writing process depends, more than anything else, on finding good questions to address. But what are *good* inquiry questions? Obviously, for a question to be good, you have to be interested in it. Furthermore, others must also have a stake in the answer, because you'll be sharing what you learn.

This chapter began with an exercise on a water bottle. We asked you to generate a short list of questions about water bottles (the category of thing) to demonstrate how good questions can make even the most ordinary things potentially interesting. You can do this with anything—a lemon, a rock, a comb. Let's try it again.

Exercise 1.4

Myth of the Boring Topic

Study the lemon picture just to get you thinking. When you're ready, brainstorm as many questions as you can about *lemons*. Don't censor yourself. Anything goes, at least to start. Try listing for five full minutes. For example, "Where do most lemons come from?" and "How are they harvested and who harvests them?" and "How are those workers treated?" You'll find the questions feed off each other until they don't. Then find a new angle.

Andrea Ravasio/Shutterstock

Kinds of Questions

Look over your list.

How many of them are *questions of fact?* These are questions that ask what is known about a topic, things like "Where do lemons come from?" or "What are some household uses of lemons?" (See Table 1.2.) These are the kinds of questions we

almost always ask first about anything we want to learn more about. That's how we get a "working knowledge" of something.

But questions of fact are not particularly good inquiry questions. Good inquiry questions have two qualities:

1. They can sustain an investigation over time.
2. They lead writers to make *judgments* about the thing they're investigating.

Here's a good inquiry question about a lemon: *What do lemons symbolize in Latinx culture?* Here's another: *What are the most environmentally sustainable ways to grow lemons?* Both questions go beyond what is known about lemons—something

Table 1.2 Types of Questions

Type	Question	Example	Writing Genres
Fact	What is known about _____?	How many people watch reality TV in the U.S.? What are the demographics of the viewing audience?	Report
Definition	What is ____ called, and what do key people think that means?	What is "reality" TV?	Definition Argument
Policy	What should be done about _____?	What might be ethical guidelines for how participants are treated in reality TV shows?	Proposal
Hypothesis	What is the best explanation for ____?	Is the popularity of reality TV another sign of the breakdown of community in the U.S.?	Analytic, Factual Argument, Research Essay
Relationship	What is the relationship between ____ and _____? What might be the cause (or consequence) of ____?	Does watching reality crime shows affect viewers' attitudes towards police?	Causal Argument, Research Essay
Interpretation	What might _____ mean?	How might we interpret the politics of race relations on *Survivor?*	Analytic, Personal Essay
Value	How good is _____?	Which reality crime show provides the most realistic portrait of police work?	Review
Claim	What's the problem, where is the disagreement, what's at stake, and what should we do?	Do shows like *Intervention* help viewers develop more sympathetic attitudes towards addiction?	Argument, Proposal, Review

that simply requires the reporting of fact—and challenge the writer to analyze the answers and arrive at conclusions.

Searching for good questions also ties back to creative and critical thinking. In your initial brainstorm, you openly entertained as many questions as you could think of, even if some of them seemed dumb. As you look more critically at that list of lemon questions, you shift into more analytical mode, asking: "Which of these questions are any good?" Without the creative phase, you wouldn't have as many questions to analyze. Without the analysis, it would just be a list of sometimes amusing question about lemons.

Different types of questions lead to different kinds of judgments. And it's landing on the appropriate type of question for your project that will launch you into meaningful inquiry. For example, here's how different types of questions yield different ways of inquiring into the topic of reality television:

A good question not only lights your way into a subject but may also illuminate what form you could use to share your discoveries. Certain kinds of writing—reviews, critical essays, personal essays, and so on—are often associated with certain types of questions, as you can see in Table 1.2. In Part 2 of *The Curious Writer*, which features a range of inquiry projects from the personal essay to the research essay, you'll see how certain questions naturally guide you towards certain kinds of writing.

A Strategy for Inquiry: Open Rather than Direct

1.6 Distinguish between "open" writing situations that invite inquiry and less exploratory "direct" writing.

Starting a writing project with questions rather than answers changes everything. First, it takes you into unknown territory. Instead of seizing on a thesis at the beginning, your thesis is a product of your investigation. Your initial goal is to *find out* rather than to prove something. That's why having a process of using writing to think about your topic is key.

Another way of looking at this is that when we write we often have two different problems to solve:

1. How to explain what you already know.
2. How to discover what you think.

The first problem, typified by a genre like the essay exam, mostly involves questions of arrangement—how to logically present information that makes what you think both clear and convincing. We call this *direct* writing, and most of us do a lot of it in the workplace and in school. In many classes, short writing assignments focus on demonstrating what you already know (or should know). The second problem is a quite different one to solve. First, you have to decide what exactly you want to find out—what are the questions at the heart of your investigation of a writing topic? And then, you have to devote time to learning about your topic and then discovering what you want to say about it. This process

is much more *open*, and it's a process at the heart of academic inquiry. It's also at the heart of this book.

Now that you've got a better idea of how to find these inquiry questions, and a method for using writing to help you both generate material on a question and help you think about it, let's try to apply the techniques in a mini-inquiry project.

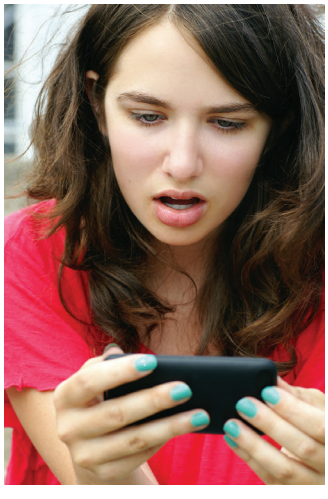
Exercise 1.5

A Mini-Inquiry Project: Cell Phone Culture

More than 95 percent of us now have cell phones, and more than 40% of us say we can't live without them. One study reports that 81% of U.S. adults use them daily, and nearly a third of those use them "almost constantly." None of this may surprise you. Cell phones make us feel safer, and of course, they're an enormous convenience. But they've also introduced new annoyances into modern life, like the "halfalogue," the distracting experience of being subjected to one half of a stranger's conversation with someone on their cell phone. It's a technology that is fundamentally changing our culture—our sense of community and connection, our identities, the way we spend our time. But how? Try exploring that question for yourself to see if you can discover what *you* find interesting about the topic.

Creative

STEP ONE: Let's first take a dip in the sea of information. Recent research on "cell phone addiction" suggests that, as with Internet addiction, "overuse" of the technology can result in anxiety, depression, irritability, and antisocial behavior. This research also suggests that college students are particularly vulnerable to cell phone addiction. One survey to determine whether someone is cell phone addicted asks some of the following questions:



Sylvie Bouchard/Shutterstock

- Do you feel preoccupied about possible calls or messages on your phone, and do you think about it when you can't look at your phone?
- How often do you anticipate your next use of the cell phone?
- How often do you become angry and/or start to shout if someone interrupts you when you're talking on a cell phone or texting?
- Do you use a cell to escape from your problems?

Start by exploring your reaction to this list in a fastwrite in your journal, print or digital. Write for at least three minutes but write longer if you can. What do you make of the whole idea of "cell phone addiction?" What does this make you think about? And then what? And then?