

Robert Rauschenberg's collage invites the viewer to reconsider images from the mid-twentieth century that are juxtaposed against each other. A journal assignment on page 28 asks you to analyze and evaluate the rhetorical elements in this work of art: the artist's purpose, his genre, the intended audience, and the historical and cultural context.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Retroactive I* (1964)

Silkscreen print with oil on canvas  
Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Connecticut (gift of Susan Morse Hilles)

## chapter

# 2 Situations, Purposes, and Processes for Writing

**A** veteran smoker, you have become increasingly irritated at the non-smoking regulations that have appeared in restaurants, businesses, and other public places. And it's not just the laws that are irritating, but the holier-than-thou attitude of people who presume that what's good for them should be good for you. Non-smoking laws seem to give people license to censure your behavior while totally ignoring their own offensive behavior: polluting the atmosphere with hydrocarbons, fouling the aquifers with fertilizers, and generally corrupting the social air with odors of false superiority. So after one particularly memorable experience, you write a letter to the editor of the local paper, intending not only to express your own frustration but also to satirize all those smug dogooders.

**A**s a Chinese-American woman growing up in America, you decide to write about the difficulty of living in two cultures. You recall how, during your childhood, you rebelled against your mother when she insisted that you learn about your Chinese heritage. You remember how much you hated your Chinese school and how embarrassed you were that your mother could not speak English properly. As you grew older, however, you realized the price you paid for your assimilation into American culture. After discussing this conflict with your friends, you decide to describe your experiences to others who share them or who may want to know what you learned. At that point, you write an autobiographical account of your experiences and send it to a metropolitan newspaper.

*“First and foremost I write for myself. Writing has been for a long time my major tool for self-instruction and self-development.”*

TONI CADE  
BAMBARA,  
AUTHOR OF  
THE SALT EATERS

*“How do I know what I think until I see what I say?”*

E. M. FORSTER,  
AUTHOR OF  
A PASSAGE TO INDIA



**T**HE WRITING FOR THIS COURSE (AND THE STRUCTURE OF THIS TEXTBOOK) ASSUMES THAT WRITING IS VALUABLE FOR TWO RELATED REASONS. FIRST, WRITING ENABLES YOU TO LEARN ABOUT SOMETHING, TO HELP YOU OBSERVE your surroundings, to remember important ideas and events, and to record what you see and read. Second, writing is an important means to communicate an idea to your readers, to explain or evaluate an idea, to offer a solution, or to argue for your point of view. These two reasons for writing are usually related. If you want to persuade others to agree with your point of view, you'll be more effective if you reflect on how your personal observations, memories, experiences, and things you've read and heard might help you convince your readers. Whatever you write, however, you are always writing in a particular situation or context. Understanding how your goals as a writer relate to the writing situation and to your own processes for writing is the focus of this chapter.

### WRITE TO LEARN

A write-to-learn activity occurs when writers write for themselves—to record what they think, feel, see, remember, and read. The audience for such activities is the individual writer. The purpose is to help the writer learn, think, discover, and remember. In the classroom, one advantage of a write-to-learn activity is that writing, unlike lecture or discussion, requires active engagement of a topic by every student. Write-to-learn activities include freewriting, clustering, taking double-entry notes, writing two-minute summaries of class discussion, writing questions during class, describing people and behavior, recalling past events, annotating written texts, recording consensus ideas from small groups, and writing plans for essays. This textbook assumes that observing, remembering, and investigating are also write-to-learn strategies, not just rhetorical forms (description, narration, and investigation).



## Rhetorical Situations

As you begin this writing course, you need to consider how you and your writing fit into a larger context. Anytime you write an e-mail response, a letter to your friends, an essay for your English or history class, an application for a job, a letter to the editor, or an entry in your journal, you are in the middle of a rhetorical situation. If rhetoric is the “art of using language effectively or persuasively,” then the rhetorical situation is the overall context in which your writing occurs. The key parts of the rhetorical situation are you, the writer; the immediate occasion that prompts you to write; your intended purpose and audience; your genre or type of writing; and the larger social context in which you are writing. Since these key terms are used repeatedly in this course, you need to know exactly what each term means and how it will help guide your writing.

**THE WRITER** You are the writer. Sometimes you write in response to an assignment, but at other times, you choose to write because of something that happened or something that made you think or react. In college or on the job, you often have

writing assignments, but in your life, you are often the one who decides to write when you need to remember something, plan, remind others, express your feelings, or solve a problem.

**THE OCCASION** The occasion is whatever motivates you to write. Often you are motivated by an assignment that a teacher or a boss gives you. Sometimes, however, a particular event or incident makes you want to write. The cause may be a conversation you had with a friend, an article you read, or something that happened to you recently. The occasion is simply the immediate cause or the pressing need to write, whether assigned to you by someone else or just determined by you to be the reason for your desire to write.

**PURPOSE** Your purpose in writing is the effect you wish to have on your intended audience. Major purposes for writing include **expressing** your feelings; investigating a subject and **reporting** your findings; **explaining** an idea or concept; **evaluating** some object, performance, or image; **proposing a solution** to a problem; and **arguing** for your position and responding to alternative or opposing positions.

**AUDIENCE** Your knowledge about your intended audience should always guide and shape your writing. If you are writing for yourself, you can just list ideas, express your thoughts, or make informal notes. If you are writing to explain an idea or concept, you should think about who needs or wants to know about your idea. To whom do you want to explain this idea? Are they likely to be novices or experts on the topic? Similarly, if you are arguing for your position, you need to consider the thoughts and feelings of readers who may have several different points of view. What do they believe about your topic? Do they agree or disagree with your position, or are they undecided?

**GENRE** The genre you choose is simply the kind, type, or form of writing you select. Everyone is familiar with genres in literature, such as poems, novels, and plays. In nonfiction, typical genres are essays, memoirs, magazine articles, and editorials. In college, you may write in a variety of genres, including e-mail, personal essays, lab reports, summaries, reviews of research, analytical essays, argumentative essays, and even scientific or business reports. Sometimes, you may need to write multigenre or multimedia reports with graphic images or pictures. For community service learning or on the job, you may write reports, analyses, brochures, or flyers. As a citizen of the community, you may write letters to the editor, responses to an online discussion forum, or letters to your representative.

“Every genre positions those who participate in a text of that kind: as interviewer or interviewee, as listener or storyteller, as a reader or a writer, as a person interested in political matters, as someone to be instructed or as someone who instructs; each of these positionings implies different possibilities for response and for action.”

—GUNTHER KRESS,  
AUTHOR OF *LITERACY  
IN THE NEW MEDIA AGE*

“A rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish.”

—CAROLYN MILLER,  
TEACHER AND AUTHOR  
OF GENRE AS SOCIAL  
ACTION

The genre you choose helps create the intellectual, social, or cultural relationship between you and your reader. It helps you communicate your purpose to your reader or makes possible the social action you wish to achieve. If your purpose is to analyze or critique material you are reading in a class, an essay is a genre suitable to your purpose and your intended audience (your teacher and your peers in class). A lab report is a different genre, requiring your notes, observations, and hypothesis about your experiment, presented for members of a scientific community. Finally, the purpose of a one-page brochure for your community crisis center, for example, may be to advertise its services to a wide audience that includes college students and members of the community. The point is to learn what readers expect of each genre and then choose—or modify—a genre that is appropriate for your purpose and audience. Learning which genres are appropriate for each writing situation and learning about the formal features of each genre (such as introduction, presentation of information, paragraphing, and vocabulary) is a key part of each writing task. Remember, however, that genres have rules but are not rule bound. Every text should have recognizable features of a genre but also individual variation appropriate for that particular occasion.

**CONTEXT** As both a reader and a writer, you must consider the rhetorical and social context. When you read an essay or other text, think about the **author**, the **place of publication**, the **ongoing conversation** about this topic, and the larger **social or cultural context**. First, consider who wrote an essay and where it appeared. Was the essay a citizen’s editorial in the *New York Times*, a journalist’s feature article in *Vogue*, a scientist’s research report in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, or a personal essay on an individual’s Web site? Often, who wrote the article, what his or her potential bias or point of view was, and the place of publication can be just as important as what the article says. Next, consider the ongoing conversation to which this essay contributes. What different viewpoints exist on this topic? Which perspectives does this essay address? Finally, the larger sense of culture, politics, and history in which the article appears may be crucial to your understanding.

Similarly, when you write an essay, think about where it might be read or published and what conversation already exists on the topic. What cultural or political points of view are represented in the conversation? How does that ongoing conversation affect what you think? How does your own cultural, political, ethnic, or personal background affect what you believe? Understanding and analyzing the larger rhetorical and social context helps you become a better reader and writer.

## REVIEW OF THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

Now that you've finished reading about these terms, notice how they overlap. They are separate, yet they all function together. Go back and reread each of the definitions for occasion, purpose, audience, genre, context, but this time pay attention to how they are interconnected. It's silly, for example, to talk about purpose or about audience without talking about everything else in the writing situation: the writer, the occasion for writing, the purpose, audience, genre, and overall context.

## WHY THE RHETORICAL SITUATION IS IMPORTANT

So, you understand each of the elements of the rhetorical situation, and you see how they are interconnected. But how does that knowledge help you as a writer? The answer is both easy and difficult. The easy part is that every decision you make as a writer—how to begin, how much evidence you include, how you organize, whether you can use “I” in your writing, what style or tone you should use—depends on the rhetorical situation. The style and organization of a lab report is different from an essay, which is different from a brochure. If you've ever asked your teacher, “Won't you just tell me what you want?” the answer to that question always is, “Well, it depends.” It depends on what is appropriate for the purpose, audience, genre, and context. And that is where the difficult part of writing begins: learning which genres, styles, appeals to your readers, and methods of organization are appropriate for each writing situation. To learn the various approaches to writing and how they are most effectively used is the reason that you continually read and practice writing the major genres taught in your composition class.

### FREEWITING: INVENTORY OF YOUR WRITING

Before you read further in this chapter, take out a pen or open a computer file and make a list of what you have written in the last year or two. Brainstorm a list of all the genres you can think of: shopping lists for a trip, letters to family or friends, applications for jobs, school essays, personal or professional Web sites, science projects, or memos for your boss. Then, for one of your longer writing projects, jot down several sentences describing the situation that called for that piece of writing—what was the occasion, purpose, and audience? What form or genre did

### TEACHING TIP

According to the Writing Program Administrators' Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (available at <http://www.wpacouncil.org>), rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking and reading, writing processes, and knowledge of conventions should be the primary course objectives. Teachers may wish to access these outcome statements and discuss them in class. This chapter establishes the groundwork for rhetorical knowledge and writing processes that are developed in the following chapters of *The Prentice Hall Guide for College Writers*.

your writing take? How did that genre help define a relationship between you and your reader? Where did you write it, and what was your writing process?

“The writer may write to inform, to explain, to entertain, to persuade, but whatever the purpose there should be first of all, the satisfaction of the writer’s own learning.”

DONALD MURRAY,  
TEACHER AND  
PULITZER PRIZE-  
WINNING JOURNALIST

### TEACHING TIP

Class discussions are more effective if students initially write about the subject. Draw on the Freewriting exercise in this chapter: Ask eight or ten students to select one piece of writing inventory and, at the board, briefly describe the subject, the situation, and the main purpose of that particular piece of writing. Their examples will illustrate a variety of purposes for writing.



## Purposes for Writing

Getting a good grade, sharing experiences with a friend, or contributing to society may be among your motives for writing. However, as a writer, you also have more specific rhetorical purposes for writing. These purposes help you make key decisions related to your audience and genre. When your main purpose is to express your feelings, you may write a private entry in your journal. When your main purpose is to explain how your sales promotion increased the number of your company’s customers, you may write a formal sales report to your boss. When your main purpose is to persuade others to see a movie that you like, you may write a review for the local newspaper. In each case, the intended rhetorical purpose—your desire to create a certain effect on your audience—helps determine what you write and how you say it.

### WRITER-BASED PURPOSES

Because writing is, or should be, for yourself first of all, everything you write involves at least some purpose that benefits you. Of course, expressing yourself is a fundamental purpose of all writing. Without the satisfaction of expressing your thoughts, feelings, reactions, knowledge, or questions, you might not make the effort to write in the first place.

A closely related purpose is learning: Writing helps you discover what you think or feel, simply by using language to identify and compose your thoughts. Writing not only helps you form ideas but actually promotes observing and remembering. If you write down what you observe about people, places, or things, you can actually “see” them more clearly. Similarly, if you write down facts, ideas, experiences, or reactions to your readings, you will remember them longer. Writing and rewriting facts, dates, definitions, impressions, or personal experiences will improve your powers of recall on such important occasions as examinations and job interviews.

## SUBJECT- AND AUDIENCE-BASED PURPOSES

Although some writing is intended only for yourself—such as entries in a diary, lists, class notes, reminders—much of your writing will be read by others, by those readers who constitute your “audience.”

- You may write to *inform* others about a particular subject—to tell them about the key facts, data, feelings, people, places, or events.
- You may write to *explain* to your readers what something means, how it works, or why it happens.
- You may write to *persuade* others to believe or do something—to convince others to agree with your judgment about a book, record, or restaurant, or to persuade them to take a certain class, vote for a certain candidate, or buy some product you are advertising.
- You may write to *explore* ideas and “truths,” to examine how your ideas have changed, to ask questions that have no easy answers, and then to share your thoughts and reflections with others.
- You may write to *entertain*—as a primary purpose in itself or as a purpose combined with informing, explaining, persuading, or exploring. Whatever your purposes may be, good writing both teaches and pleases. Remember, too, that your readers will learn more, remember more, or be more convinced when your writing contains humor, wit, or imaginative language.

## COMBINATIONS OF PURPOSES

In many cases, you write with more than one purpose in mind. Purposes may appear in combinations, connected in a sequence, or actually overlapping. Initially, you may take notes about a subject to learn and remember, but later you may want to inform others about what you have discovered. Similarly, you may begin by writing to express your feelings about a movie that you loved or that upset you; later, you may wish to persuade others to see it—or not to see it.

Purposes can also contain each other, like Chinese boxes, or overlap, blurring the distinctions. An explanation of how an automobile works will contain information about that vehicle. An attempt to persuade someone to buy an automobile may contain an explanation of how it handles and information about its body style or engine. Usually, writing to persuade others will contain explanations and basic information,

“*I think writing is really a process of communication. . . . It’s the sense of being in contact with people who are part of a particular audience that really makes a difference to me in writing.*”

—SHERLEY ANN WILLIAMS,  
POET, CRITIC,  
AND NOVELIST

“*Writing, as a rhetorical act, is carried out within a web of purpose.*”

—LINDA FLOWER,  
TEACHER AND  
RESEARCHER IN  
COMPOSITION

but the reverse is not necessarily true; you can write simply to give information, without trying to persuade anyone to do anything.

## SUBJECT, PURPOSE, AND THESIS

The *thesis*, *claim*, or *main idea* in a piece of writing is related to your purpose. As a writer, you usually have a purpose in mind that serves as a guide while you gather information about your subject and think about your audience. However, as you collect and record information, impressions, and ideas you gradually narrow your subject to a specific topic and thus clarify your purpose. You bring your purpose into sharper and sharper focus—as if progressing on a target from the outer circles to the bull’s-eye—until you have narrowed your purpose down to a central thesis. The thesis is the dominant idea, explanation, evaluation, or recommendation that you want to impress upon your readers.

The following examples illustrate how a writer moves from a general subject, guided by purpose, to a specific thesis or claim.

### TEACHING TIP

This textbook uses several terms to describe the main idea of an essay: *dominant idea* is the key term for observing and remembering essays; *thesis* is used for explaining essays; and *claim* is used most frequently for evaluating, problem-solving, and arguing essays. Whatever term the writer or teacher uses, however, the main idea helps both writer and reader: The writer selects or rejects material based on the main idea or the writer discovers the main idea (while selecting material); the reader uses the stated main idea (or guesses about the implied main idea) in constructing meaning.

SUBJECT	PURPOSE	THESIS, CLAIM, OR MAIN IDEA
Childhood experiences	To express your feelings and explain how one childhood experience was important.	The relentless competition between my sisters and me distorted my easygoing personality.
Heart disease	To inform readers about relationships between Type A personalities and heart attacks.	Type A personalities do not necessarily have an abnormally high risk of suffering heart attacks.
The death penalty	To persuade readers that the death penalty should be used.	Despite our belief that killing is wrong, a state-administered death penalty is fair, just, and humane.

## Purpose and Audience

Writing for yourself is relatively easy; after all, you already know your audience and can make spontaneous judgments about what is essential and what is not. However, when your purpose is to communicate to other readers, you need to analyze your

audience. Your writing will be more effective if you can anticipate what your readers know and need to know, what they are interested in, and what their beliefs or attitudes are. As you write for different readers, you will select different kinds of information, organize it in different ways, or write in a more formal or less formal style.

### **FREEWITING: WRITING FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES**

Before you read further, get a pen or pencil and several sheets of paper and do the following exercise:

1. For your eyes only, write about what you did at a recent party. Write for four minutes.
2. On a second sheet of paper, describe for the members of your writing class what you did at this party; you will read it aloud to the class. Stop after four minutes.
3. On a third sheet of paper, write a letter to one of your parents describing what you did at the party. Stop after four minutes.

## **AUDIENCE ANALYSIS**

If you are writing to communicate to other readers, analyzing your probable audience will help you answer some basic questions:

- What genre should I choose? What genre—or combination of genres—would best enable me to communicate with my audience?
- How much information or evidence is enough? What should I assume my audience already knows? What should I not tell them? What do they believe? Will they readily agree with me, or will they be antagonistic?
- How should I organize my writing? How can I get my readers' attention? Can I just describe my subject and tell a story, or should I analyze everything in a logical order? Should I put my best examples or arguments first or last?
- Should I write informally, with simple sentences and easy vocabulary, or should I write in a more elaborate or specialized style, with technical vocabulary?

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### TEACHING TIP

You may wish to collect—or better yet, have your students collect—samples of writing that illustrate a variety of audiences. Magazines and journals are an excellent source of writings aimed at particular audiences. List the titles of fifteen magazines available in the library or at local stores. (See *Writer's Digest* for a brief description of each magazine's audience.) Require each student to bring to class a photocopy of one piece of magazine writing. In small groups, students can then practice analyzing the audiences for articles in magazines ranging from, say, *Prevention* to *The New England Journal of Medicine*.

### RESOURCE NOTES

Writers don't always address particular audiences; sometimes they construct, create, or invoke audiences. Articles by Peter Elbow, Douglas B. Park, and Lisa Ede, and Andrea Lunsford in Tate, Myers, and Corbett, *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook* (4th ed., 2000), discuss the important concept of audience and its role in the writing process.

Analyze your audience by considering the following questions. As you learn more about your audience, the possibilities for your own role as a writer will become clearer.

1. **Audience profile.** How narrow or broad is your audience? Is it a narrow and defined audience—a single person, such as your Aunt Mary, or a group with clear common interests, such as the zoning board in your city or the readers of *Organic Gardening*? Is it a broad and diverse audience: educated readers who wish to be informed on current events, American voters as a whole, or residents of your state? Do your readers have identifiable roles? Can you determine their age, sex, economic status, ethnic background, or occupational category?
2. **Audience—subject relationship.** Consider what your readers know about your subject. If they know very little about it, you'll need to explain the basics; if they already know quite a bit, you can go straight to more difficult or complex issues. Also estimate their probable attitude toward this subject. Are they likely to be sympathetic or hostile?
3. **Audience—writer relationship.** What is your relationship with your readers? Do you know each other personally? Do you have anything in common? Will your audience be likely to trust what you say, or will they be skeptical about your judgments? Are you the expert on this particular subject and the readers the novices? Or are you the novice and your readers the experts?
4. **Writer's role.** To communicate effectively with your audience, you should also consider your own role or perspective. Of the many roles that you could play (friend, big sister or brother, student of psychology, music fan, employee of a fast-food restaurant, and so on), choose one that will be effective for your purpose and audience. If, for example, you are writing to sixth-graders about nutrition, you could choose the perspective of a concerned older brother or sister. Your writing might be more effective, however, if you assume the role of a person who has worked in fast-food restaurants for three years and knows what goes into hamburgers, french fries, and milkshakes.

Writers may write to real audiences, or they may create audiences. Sometimes the relationship between writer and reader is real (sister writing to brother), so the writer starts with a known audience and writes accordingly. Sometimes, however, writers begin and gradually discover or create an audience in the process of writing. Knowing the audience guides the writing, but the writing may construct an audience as well.

## Purpose, Audience, and Genre

In addition to considering your purpose and audience, think also about the possible forms or genres your writing might take. If you are writing to observe or remember something, you may want to write an informal essay, a letter, a memoir, or even an e-mail to reach your audience. If you are writing to inform your readers or explain some idea, you may write an article, essay, letter, report, or pamphlet to best achieve your purpose and address your audience. Argumentative writing—writing to evaluate, persuade, or recommend some position or course of action—takes place in many different genres, from e-mails and letters, to reviews and editorials, to proposals and researched documents. As you select a topic, consider which genre would most effectively accomplish your purpose for your intended audience.

Below are some of the common genres that you will read or write while in college, on the job, or as a member of your community. Each genre has certain organization and style features that readers of this genre expect. Knowing the genre that you are writing or reading helps answer questions about how to write or how to respond to a piece of writing.

GENRE	CONVENTIONS OF ORGANIZATION AND STYLE
Personal essay	Some narrative and descriptive passages Informal, uses first person “I” Applies personal experience to larger social question
Research review	Uses concise, accurate summary May be an annotated bibliography or part of a larger thesis Adheres to MLA, APA, Chicago styles
Argumentative essay	Makes a claim about a controversial topic Responds to alternative or opposing positions Carefully considers audience Supports claims with evidence and examples Uses reasonable tone Has formal paragraphing
Laboratory report	May be informal description of materials, procedures, and results May be formal organization with title, abstract, introduction, method, results, and discussion

Brochure	Mixes graphics, text, visuals Visually arresting and appealing layout Concise information and language
Letter to the editor	Refers to issue or topic States opinion, point of view, or recommendation Usually concise to fit into editorial page
Posting to an electronic forum	Connects to specific thread in discussion May be informal style Flaming and trolling occur, but are often censured
E-mail and text messaging	Usually short Informal and personal style Often without salutation, caps, or punctuation May use emoticons such as :-), :-(, :-.) (Cindy Crawford), or 8(:-) (Mickey Mouse), or acronyms such as BTW, LOL, FYI, or THX

### **FREEWITING: PURPOSE, AUDIENCE, GENRE, AND CONTEXT IN AN IMAGE**

Before you read further in this chapter, analyze the rhetorical elements in the work of art by Robert Rauschenberg that appears at the beginning of this chapter. Who is the artist? What is the purpose of this painting? Who was the intended audience? How would you describe this genre of art? What was the social and cultural context in which this painting appeared? (Use Yahoo!, Google, or your favorite search engine to discover background information.) Overall, how effective is this painting at achieving its rhetorical purpose for its audience and context? Explain.



## The Rhetorical Situation

To review, the rhetorical situation consists of the writer, the occasion, the purpose and audience, the genre and the context. Sometimes several of these are assigned to the writer, but at other times, the writer chooses a purpose, audience, and genre. The key point to remember is that these terms are all interrelated and interconnected. Your overall purpose often depends on your selected audience. Deciding on a particular audience may mean choosing a particular genre. Thinking about the

context and conversation surrounding a particular topic may help you be more persuasive for your selected audience. Writing and revising require reconsidering and revising each of these elements to make them work harmoniously to achieve your rhetorical goal.

The following scenarios illustrate how the writer's purpose, the occasion, the audience, genre, and context work together to define the rhetorical situation. In the following descriptions, identify each of the key parts of the rhetorical situation.

A student majoring in journalism reads accounts by reporters embedded in military units in the Iraq war. After reading several accounts, the student decides that this war was a good test case in the battle between the public's right to receive accurate information and the military's need for security. The advantages of embedded journalists were their on-the-spot reports and film footage; the disadvantages included the journalists' natural bias toward their military unit, their potential violations of privacy and tactical security, and their inability to present a larger picture of the progress of the war. The student decides to write an essay for a conservative online news magazine in which she recommends policy changes for embedded reporters for any future military engagement.

In response to a request by an editor of a college recruiting pamphlet, a student decides to write an essay explaining the advantages of the social and academic life at his university. According to the editor, the account needs to be realistic but should also promote the university. It shouldn't be too academic and stuffy—the college catalog itself contains all the basic information—but it should give high school seniors a flavor of college life. The student decides to write a narrative account of his most interesting experiences during his first week at college.

### **PURPOSE, AUDIENCE, AND CONTEXT IN TWO ESSAYS**

The two short essays that follow appeared as columns in newspapers. Both relate the writers' own experiences. They are similar in genre but have different purposes, they appeal to different readers, and they have different social and cultural contexts. First, read each essay just to understand each writer's point of view. Then reread each essay, thinking particularly about each writer's main purpose, his or her intended audience, and the social and cultural context surrounding each topic.



## PROFESSIONAL WRITING

### THE STRUGGLE TO BE AN ALL-AMERICAN GIRL

Elizabeth Wong

#### CRITICAL READING

Use the essays by Wong and Zoellner to teach critical reading through annotation of texts. Ask students to choose one of these essays and annotate for three features: (1) sentences that illustrate either effective or ineffective writing, (2) sentences that suggest the purpose of the essay, and (3) sentences that suggest the author's intended audience. Students can then meet in groups of three or four and collate their annotations before discussing these essays with the whole class. A group recorder or spokesperson should be prepared to defend and explain each group's choices.

It's still there, the Chinese school on Yale Street where my brother and I used to go. Despite the new coat of paint and the high wire fence, the school I knew 10 years ago remains remarkably, stoically the same.

Every day at 5 P.M., instead of playing with our fourth- and fifth-grade friends or sneaking out to the empty lot to hunt ghosts and animal bones, my brother and I had to go to Chinese school. No amount of kicking, screaming, or pleading could dissuade my mother, who was solidly determined to have us learn the language of our heritage.

Forcibly, she walked us the seven long, hilly blocks from our home to school, depositing our defiant tearful faces before the stern principal. My only memory of him is that he swayed on his heels like a palm tree, and he always clasped his impatient twitching hands behind his back. I recognized him as a repressed maniacal child killer, and knew that if we ever saw his hands we'd be in big trouble.

We all sat in little chairs in an empty auditorium. The room smelled like Chinese medicine, and imported faraway mustiness. Like ancient mothballs or dirty closets. I hated that smell. I favored crisp new scents. Like the soft French perfume that my American teacher wore in public school.

Although the emphasis at the school was mainly language—speaking, reading, writing—the lessons always began with an exercise in politeness. With the entrance of the teacher, the best student would tap a bell and everyone would get up, kowtow, and chant, “sing san ho,” the phonetic for “How are you, teacher?”

Being ten years old, I had better things to learn than ideographs copied painstakingly in lines that ran right to left from the tip of a *mooc but*, a real ink pen that had to be held in an awkward way if blotches were to be avoided. After all, I could do the multiplication tables, name the satellites of Mars, and write reports on “Little Women” and “Black Beauty.” Nancy Drew, my favorite book heroine, never spoke Chinese.

The language was a source of embarrassment. More times than not, I had tried to disassociate myself from the nagging loud voice that followed me

wherever I wandered in the nearby American supermarket outside Chinatown. The voice belonged to my grandmother, a fragile woman in her seventies who could shout the best of the street vendors. Her humor was raunchy, her Chinese rhythmless, patternless. It was quick, it was loud, it was unbeautiful. It was not like the quiet, lilting romance of French or the gentle refinement of the American South. Chinese sounded pedestrian. Public.

In Chinatown, the comings and goings of hundreds of Chinese on their daily tasks sounded chaotic and frenzied. I did not want to be thought of as mad, as talking gibberish. When I spoke English, people nodded at me, smiled sweetly, said encouraging words. Even the people in my culture would cluck and say that I'd do well in life. "My, doesn't she move her lips fast," they would say, meaning that I'd be able to keep up with the world outside Chinatown.

My brother was even more fanatical than I about speaking English. He was especially hard on my mother, criticizing her, often cruelly, for her pidgin speech—smatterings of Chinese scattered like chop suey in her conversation. "It's not 'What it is,' Mom," he'd say in exasperation. "It's 'What is it, what is it, what is it!'" Sometimes Mom might leave out an occasional "the" or "a," or perhaps a verb of being. He would stop her in mid-sentence: "Say it again, Mom. Say it right." When he tripped over his own tongue, he'd blame it on her: "See, Mom, it's all your fault. You set a bad example."

After two years of writing with a *moc but* and reciting words with multiples of meanings, I finally was granted a cultural divorce. I was permitted to stop Chinese school.

I thought of myself as multicultural. I preferred tacos to egg rolls; I enjoyed Cinco de Mayo more than Chinese New Year.

At last, I was one of you; I wasn't one of them.

Sadly, I still am.

### ESL TEACHING TIP

During a discussion of Elizabeth Wong's essay, be sure to include your ESL students' experiences. To what extent are their experiences similar to or different from Wong's? Do they try to balance two or three cultures and languages in their lives, or have they tried to break away from their cultural and language roots?

## PROFESSIONAL WRITING

### I'M O.K., BUT YOU'RE NOT

Robert Zoellner

The American novelist John Barth, in his early novel, *The Floating Opera*, remarks that ordinary, day-to-day life often presents us with embarrassingly obvious, totally unsubtle patterns of symbolism and

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meaning—life in the midst of death, innocence vindicated, youth versus age, etc.

The truth of Barth's insight was brought home to me recently while having breakfast in a lawn-bordered restaurant on College Avenue near the Colorado State University campus. I had asked to be seated in the smoking section of the restaurant—I have happily gone through three or four packs a day for the past 40 years.

As it happened, the hostess seated me—I was by myself—at a little two-person table on the dividing line between the smoking and non-smoking sections. Presently, a well-dressed couple of advanced years, his hair a magisterial white and hers an electric blue, were seated in the non-smoking section five feet away from me.

It was apparent within a minute that my cigarette smoke was bugging them badly, and soon the husband leaned over and asked me if I would please stop smoking. As a chronic smokestack, I normally comply, out of simple courtesy, with such requests. Even an addict such as myself can quit for as long as 20 minutes.

But his manner was so self-righteous and peremptory—he reminded me of Lee Iacocca boasting about Chrysler—that the promptings of original sin, always a problem with me, took over. I quietly pointed out that I was in the smoking section—if only by five feet—and that that fact meant that I had met my social obligation to non-smokers. Besides, the idea of morning coffee without a cigarette was simply inconceivable to me—might as well ask me to vote Republican.

The two of them ate their eggs-over-easy in hurried and sullen silence, while I chain-smoked over my coffee. As well as be hung for a sheep as a lamb, I reasoned. Presently they got up, paid their bill, and stalked out in an ambiance of affronted righteousness and affluent propriety.

And this is where John Barth comes in. They had parked their car—a diesel Mercedes—where it could be seen from my table. And in the car, waiting impatiently, was a splendidly matched pair of pedigreed poodles, male and female.

Both dogs were clearly in extremis, and when the back door of the car was opened, they made for the restaurant lawn in considerable haste. Without ado (no pun intended), the male did a doo-doo that would have done credit to an animal twice his size, and finished off with a leisurely, ruminative wee-wee. The bitch of the pair, as might be expected of any well-brought-up female of Republican proclivities, confined herself to a modest wee-wee, fastidious, diffident, and quickly executed.

Having thus polluted the restaurant lawn, the four of them marshalled their collective dignity and drove off in a dense cloud of blue smoke—that lovely white Mercedes was urgently in need of a valve-and-ring job, its emission sticker an obvious exercise in creative writing.

As I regretfully watched them go—after all, the four of them had made my day—it seemed to me that they were in something of a hurry, and I uncharitably wondered if the husband was not anxious to get home in order to light the first Fall fire in his moss-rock fireplace, or apply the Fall ration of chemical fertilizer to his doubtlessly impeccable lawn, thus adding another half-pound of particulates to the local atmosphere and another 10 pounds of nitrates and other poisons to the regional aquifers. But that, of course, is pure and unkindly speculation.

In any case, the point of this real-life vignette, as John Barth would insist, is obvious. The current controversy over public smoking in Fort Collins is a clear instance of selective virtue at work, coming under the rubric of, what I do is perfectly OK, but what you do is perfectly awful.



### QUESTIONS FOR WRITING AND DISCUSSION

1. Choosing only one adjective to describe your main reaction to each essay, answer the following question: “When I finished the \_\_\_\_ [Wong, Zoellner] essay, I was \_\_\_\_ [intrigued, bored, amused, irritated, curious, confused, or \_\_\_\_] because \_\_\_\_\_. Explain your choice of adjectives in one or two sentences.
2. Referring to specific passages, explain the purpose and state the thesis or main point of each essay.
3. What personality or role does each writer project? Drawing from evidence in the essay, describe what you think both writers would be like if you met them.
4. Both of these essays appeared in newspapers. What kind of reader would find each essay interesting? What kind of reader would not enjoy each essay? For each essay, find examples of specific sentences, word choices, vocabulary, experiences, or references to culture or politics that would appeal to one reader but perhaps irritate another.



### TEACHING TIP

One successful discussion strategy for these questions is to divide the class into five small groups and assign each group one question. Ask each group to select a recorder to write down key ideas or examples. After a short group session, ask each recorder (or group) to report to the class.

5. These two essays are similar in genre—they are both informal essays narrating personal experiences and explaining what each writer discovered or learned. There are differences, however, in structure and style. What differences do you notice in the way each essay begins and concludes, in the order of the paragraphs, and in vocabulary or style of the sentences?
6. Each essay has a particular social, cultural, and political context. Describe this context for both essays. Then identify at least three other viewpoints that exist in the cultural, social, or political conversations that surround each of these topics. (For example, what are different points of view about multicultural or bilingual education? What arguments exist both for and against smoking in privately owned business establishments?) How effective is each writer in responding to the ongoing cultural, social, or political context or conversation?

*“I don’t see writing as communication of something already discovered, as “truths” already known. Rather, I see writing as a job of experiment. It’s like any discovery job; you don’t know what’s going to happen until you try it.”*

—WILLIAM  
STAFFORD,  
TEACHER, POET,  
AND ESSAYIST



Processes for writing vary from one writer to the next and from one writing situation to the next. Most writers, however, can identify four basic stages, or dimensions, of their writing process: collecting, shaping, drafting, and revising. The writing situation may precede these stages—particularly if you are assigned a subject, purpose, audience, and form. Usually, however, you continue to narrow your subject, clarify your purpose, meet the needs of your audience, and modify your form as you work through the dimensions of your writing process.

## COLLECTING

Mark Twain, author of *Huckleberry Finn*, once observed that if you attempt to carry a cat around the block by its tail, you’ll gain a whole lot of information about cats that you’ll never forget. You may collect such firsthand information, or you may rely on the data, experience, or expertise of others. In any case, writers constantly collect facts, impressions, opinions, and ideas that are relevant to their subjects, purposes, and audiences. Collecting involves observing, remembering, imagining, thinking, reading, listening, writing, investigating, talking, taking notes, and experimenting. Collecting also involves thinking about the relationships among the bits of information that you have collected.

## SHAPING

Writers focus and organize the facts, examples, and ideas that they have collected into the recorded, linear form that is written language. When a hurricane hits the Gulf Coast, for example, residents of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida are likely to collect an enormous amount of data in just a few hours. Rain, floods, tree limbs snapping in the wind, unboarded windows shattering, sirens blaring—all of these events occur nearly simultaneously. If you try to write about such devastation, you need to narrow your focus (you can't describe everything that happened) and organize your information (you can't describe all of your experiences at the same time).

The genre of the personal essay, weaving description in a chronological order, is just one of the shapes that a writer may choose to develop and organize experience. Such shaping strategies also help writers collect additional information and ideas. Reconstructing a chronological order, for example, may suggest some additional details—perhaps a wet, miserable-looking dog running through the heavy downpour—that you might not otherwise have remembered.

## DRAFTING

At some point, writers actually write down a rough version of what will evolve into the finished piece of writing. Drafting processes vary widely from one writer to the next. Some writers prefer to reread their collecting and shaping notes, find a starting point, and launch themselves—figuring out what they want to say as they write it. Other writers start with a plan—a mental strategy, a short list, or an outline—of how they wish to proceed. Whatever approach you use in your draft, write down as much as possible: You want to see whether the information is clear, whether your overall shape expresses and clarifies your purpose, and whether your content and organization meet the needs and expectations of your audience.

## REVISING

When writers revise rough drafts, they literally “resee” their subjects—and then modify drafts to fit new visions. Revision is more than just tinkering with a word here and there; revision leads to larger changes—new examples or details, a different organization, or a new perspective. You accomplish these changes by adding, deleting, substituting, or reordering words, sentences, and paragraphs. Although revision

“*The writing process is not linear, moving smoothly in one direction from start to finish. It is messy, recursive, convoluted, and uneven. Writers write, plan, revise, anticipate, and review throughout the writing process.*”

—MAXINE  
HAIRSTON,  
TEACHER AND AUTHOR  
OF ARTICLES  
AND TEXTBOOKS  
ON WRITING

“*We must and do write each our own way.*”

EUDORA WELTY,  
NOVELIST  
AND ESSAYIST

**TEACHING TIP**

Two other frequently used schemes for the writing process are prewriting/writing/rewriting and planning/drafting/revising. This text uses the terms *collecting* and *shaping* rather than *prewriting* (misnamed because writing does occur during invention) or *planning* (not particularly useful because the term is so broad). Remind students that collecting and shaping are not distinct linear operations: Collecting (invention) leads to possible shapes, but shaping (arrangement) also assists with collecting.

**TEACHING TIP**

A note of caution: Teaching the “writing process” is not the goal of a writing class. Writing processes are flexible means to achieve a goal: a piece of writing that meets its purpose for a specific audience or situation. As teachers, we are not “teaching the writing process.” Instead, we use the writing process to teach. Our modeling and response during the writing process should teach writers how to recognize and solve the problems they face during the composing process.

begins the moment you get your first idea, most revisions are based on the reactions—or anticipated reactions—of the audience to your draft. You often play the role of audience yourself by putting the draft aside and rereading it later when you have some distance from your writing. Wherever you feel readers might not get your point, you revise to make it clearer. You may also get feedback from readers in a class workshop, suggesting that you collect more or different information, alter the shape of your draft to improve the flow of ideas, or clarify your terminology. As a result of your rereading and your readers’ suggestions, you may change your thesis or write for an entirely different audience.

Editing—in contrast to revising—focuses on the minor changes that you make to improve the accuracy and readability of your language. You usually edit your essay to improve word choice, grammar, usage, or punctuation. You also use a computer spell-check program and proofread to catch typos and other surface errors.

**THE WHOLE PROCESS**

In practice, a writer’s process rarely follows the simple, consecutive order that these four stages or dimensions suggest. The writing process is actually recursive: It begins at one point, goes on to another, comes back to the first, jumps to the third, and so forth. A stage may last hours or only a second or two. While writing a letter to a friend, you may collect, shape, revise, and edit in one quick draft; a research paper may require repeated shaping over a two-week period. As writers draft, they may correct a few mistakes or typos, but they may not proofread until many days later. In the middle of reorganizing an essay, writers often reread drafts, go back and ask more questions, and collect more data. Even while editing, writers may throw out several paragraphs, collect some additional information, and draft new sections.

In addition to the recursive nature of the writing process, keep in mind that writing often occurs during every stage, not just during drafting and revising. During collecting, you will be recording information and jotting down ideas. During shaping, you will be writing out trial versions that you may use later when you draft or revise. Throughout the writing process, you use your writing to modify your subject, purpose, audience, and form.

The most important point to keep in mind is that the writing process is unique to each writer and to each writing situation. What works for one writer may be absolutely wrong for you. Some writers compose nearly everything in their heads. Others write only after discussing the subject with friends or drawing diagrams and pictures.

During the writing process, you need to experiment with several collecting, shaping, and drafting strategies to see what works best for you and for a particular piece of writing. As long as your process works, however, it's legitimate—no matter how many times you backtrack and repeat stages. When you are struggling with a piece of writing, remember that numerous revisions are a normal part of the writing process—even for most professionals.

Circling back over what you have already written—to sharpen your thesis, improve the organization, tighten up a paragraph, or add specific details to your examples—is likely to be the most time-consuming, yet worthwhile, part of your writing process. Most professional writers testify to the necessity and value of writing numerous drafts. When you are reworking a piece of writing, scrawling revisions over what you had hoped would be your finished product, remember what Nobel laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer once pointed out: “The wastepaper basket is the writer’s best friend.”



Even though you have probably used a computer to help write your essays, you may not have worked in a writing classroom or lab where you have the advantages of a network. Most college writing classes today use many of the advantages of a networked environment, including e-mail, access to a class Web page and class discussion forums, and access to the Internet. In a networked environment, teachers and students can send each other e-mail and can e-mail drafts of their work-in-progress. Students no longer need to be in the same room, building, or city in order to be part of their writing community. They can respond electronically to each other's writing in a discussion forum, chat room, blog, or bulletin board. They can collaboratively conduct research, post results using file sharing, and edit each other's drafts online. In the middle of drafting or revising an essay, they can quickly check the Internet or their library's database for other articles or information that they need. Finally, students often publish their essays online or even create their own Web pages using materials they have written for their writing course. In short, networked computers have totally revolutionized the teaching of writing by allowing discussion and revision to continue even after the class meeting time has finished. Writing in a networked computer environment reinforces the idea that a writing class is a continually supportive, interactive learning community.

## WRITING WITH COMPUTERS

The computer can assist you both as a writing tool and as a networking tool. Listed in the left-hand column are writing activities that a standalone computer provides. Listed in the right-hand column are the additional capabilities of computers tied into a network.

### The Computer as a Writing Tool

- Freewriting
- Brainstorming
- Double-entry reading log
- Answers to “Wh” questions
- Insert/delete sentences
- Move paragraphs
- Style/usage checkers
- Thesaurus
- Spelling checker
- Print preview

### The Computer as a Networking Tool

- Access to bulletin boards
- E-mail messages
- E-mail essays or files
- “Chat” dialogues
- Postings to class forum
- Access to online library catalogs
- Access to the Internet and the World Wide Web



### WARMING UP: JOURNAL EXERCISES

The following exercises will help you review and practice the topics covered in this chapter. In addition, you may discover a subject for your own writing. Choose three of the following entries, and write for ten minutes on each.

1. Reread your “authority” list from Chapter 1. Choose one of those topics and then explain your purpose, identify a possible audience, and select a genre you would use.
2. From the resources available to you at home or on your computer, find examples of four different genres, such as advertisements, pamphlets, letters, articles, letters to the editor, and so forth. For each sample genre, identify the purpose, audience, and context. Bring these samples to class and be prepared to explain the rhetorical situation for each genre and why each sample is or is not effective.
3. If you have already been given a writing assignment in another course, explain the purpose, the intended audience, and the genre for that assignment. Be prepared to explain in class (or in a discussion forum) how you plan to complete that assignment.

4. During the first week of the term, one of your friends, Mark Lindstrom, is in an accident and is hospitalized. While still under the effects of anesthesia, he scribbles the following note for you to mail to his parents.

Dear Mom and Dad,

I arrived here last week. The trip was terrible. Dr. Stevens says that my leg will be better soon. My roommate is very strange. The police say my money is gone forever.

Please send \$1,500 to my new address right away.

Thanks!

Your loving son

Mark

Because you were at the accident and can fill in the details, Mark asks you to explain everything to his parents. Write a short letter to them. Next, write a paragraph to your best friend that describes what happened to Mark.

5. Explore the availability of computers on your campus. Where is the English department computer lab? What services does it offer? What other computer facilities are available? Write up your report and post it on your class bulletin board or forum.
6. Read Neil Petrie's essay and postscript at the end of this chapter. Then find the best paper you've written during the past year or two and write a "postscript" for it. Describe (a) the rhetorical situation, (b) your purpose, and (c) the process you used to write it.

## A Writing Process at Work: Collecting and Shaping



### PROFESSIONAL WRITING

#### ATHLETES AND EDUCATION

Neil H. Petrie

*In the following essay, which appeared in The Chronicle of Higher Education, Neil H. Petrie argues that colleges have a hypocritical attitude toward student athletes. Although most universities claim that their athletes—both male and female—are in college to get a good education, in reality the pressures on athletes compromise their academic careers. The problem, Petrie argues, is not the old cliché that jocks are dumb, but the endless hours devoted to practice or spent on road trips, which drain even the good student-athlete's physical and mental energies. Colleges point with pride to a tiny number of athletes who become professionals, but much more frequently the collegiate system encourages athletes to settle for lower grades and incomplete programs. In far too many cases, athletes never graduate. These are the students whom, as Petrie says, "the system uses and then discards after the final buzzer."*

I have spent all my adult life in academe, first as a student and then as a professor. During that time I have seen many variations in the role of intercollegiate athletics in the university, and I've developed sharply split opinions on the subject. On one hand, I despise the system, clinging as it does to the academic body like a parasite. On the other hand, I feel sympathy and admiration for most of the young athletes struggling to balance the task of getting an education with the need to devote most of their energies to the excessive demands of the gym and the field.

My earliest experiences with the intrusion of athletics into the classroom came while I was still a freshman at the University of Colorado. While

I was in my English professor's office one day, a colleague of hers came by for a chat. Their talk turned to the football coach's efforts to court the favor of the teachers responsible for his gladiators by treating them to dinner and a solicitous discussion of the academic progress of the players. I vividly recall my professor saying, "He can take me out to dinner if he wants, but if he thinks I'll pass his knuckleheads just because of that, he'd better think again."

Later, as a graduate teaching fellow, a lecturer, and then an assistant professor of English, I had ample opportunity to observe a Division I university's athletics program. I soon discovered that the prevailing stereotypes did not always apply. Athletes turned out to be as diverse as any other group of students in their habits, tastes, and abilities, and they showed a wide range of strategies for coping with the stress of their dual roles.

Some of them were poor students. An extreme example was the All-American football player (later a successful pro) who saw college only as a step to a six-figure contract and openly showed his disdain for the educational process. Others did such marginal work in my courses that I got the feeling they were daring me to give them D's or F's. One woman cross-country star, who almost never attended my composition class, used to push nearly illiterate essays under my office door at odd hours.

Yet many athletes were among the brightest students I had. Not so surprising, when you consider that, in addition to physical prowess, success in athletics requires intelligence, competitive drive, and dedication—all qualities that can translate into success in the classroom as well as on the field. The trouble is that the grinding hours of practice and road trips rob student athletes of precious study time and deplete their reserves of mental and physical energy. A few top athletes have earned A's; most are content to settle for B's or C's, even if they are capable of better.

The athletes' educational experience can't help being marred by their numerous absences and divided loyalties. In this respect, they are little different from the students who attempt to go to college while caring for a family or working long hours at an outside job. The athletes, however, get extra help in juggling their responsibilities. Although I have never been bribed or threatened and have never received a dinner invitation from a coach, I am expected to provide extra time and consideration for athletes, far beyond what I give other students.

Take the midterm grade reports, for example. At my university, the athletic department's academic counselor sends progress questionnaires to

every teacher of varsity athletes. While the procedure shows admirable concern for the academic performance of athletes, it also amounts to preferential treatment. It requires teachers to take time from other teaching duties to fill out and return the forms for the athletes. (No other students get such progress reports.) If I were a cynic it would occur to me that the athletic department might actually be more concerned with athletes' eligibility than with their academic work.

Special attendance policies for athletes are another example of preferential treatment. Athletes miss a lot of classes. In fact, I think the road trip is one of the main reasons that athletes receive a deficient education. You simply can't learn as much away from the classroom and the library as on the campus. Nevertheless, professors continue to provide make-up tests, alternative assignments, and special tutoring sessions to accommodate athletes. Any other student would have to have been very sick or the victim of a serious accident to get such dispensations.

It is sad to see bright young athletes knowingly compromise their potential and settle for much less education than they deserve. It is infuriating, though, to see the ones less gifted academically exploited by a system that they do not comprehend and robbed of any possible chance to grow intellectually and to explore other opportunities.

One specific incident illustrates for me the worst aspects of college athletics. It wasn't unusual or extraordinary—just the all-too-ordinary case of an athlete not quite good enough to make a living from athletics and blind to the opportunity afforded by the classroom.

I was sitting in my office near the beginning of a term, talking to a parade of new advisees. I glanced up to see my entire doorway filled with the bulk of a large young man, whom I recognized as one of our basketball stars from several seasons ago who had left for the pros and now apparently come back.

Over the next hour I got an intensive course on what it's like to be a college athlete. In high school, John had never been interested in much outside of basketball, and, like many other indifferent students, he went on to junior college on an athletic scholarship. After graduating, he came to the university, where he played for two more years, finishing out his eligibility. He was picked in a late round of the N.B.A. draft and left college, but in the end he turned out to be a step too slow for the pros. By that time he had a family to support, and when he realized he could never make a career of basketball, he decided to return to college.

We both knew that his previous academic career hadn't been particularly focused, and that because of transferring and taking minimum course

loads during the basketball season, he wouldn't be close to a degree. But I don't think either one of us was prepared for what actually emerged from our examination of his transcripts. It was almost as if he had never gone beyond high school. His junior-college transcript was filled with remedial and nonacademic courses.

Credit for those had not transferred to the university. Over the next two years he had taken a hodgepodge of courses, mostly in physical education. He had never received any advice about putting together a coherent program leading to a degree. In short, the academic side of his college experience had been completely neglected by coaches, advisers, and, of course, John himself.

By the time we had evaluated his transcripts and worked out a tentative course of study, John was in shock and I was angry. It was going to take him at least three years of full-time study to complete a degree. He thanked me politely for my time, picked up the planning sheets, and left. I was ashamed to be a part of the university that day. Why hadn't anyone in the athletic department ever told him what it would take to earn a degree? Or at least been honest enough to say, "Listen, we can keep you eligible and give you a chance to play ball, but don't kid yourself into thinking you'll be getting an education, too."

I saw John several more times during the year. He tried for a while. He took classes, worked, supported his family, and then he left again. I lost track of him after that. I can only hope that he found a satisfying job or completed his education at some other institution. I know people say the situation has improved in the last few years, but when I read about the shockingly low percentages of athletes who graduate, I think of John.

Colleges give student athletes preferential treatment. We let them cut classes. We let them slide through. We protect them from harsh realities. We applaud them for entertaining us and wink when they compromise themselves intellectually. We give them special dorms, special meals, special tutors, and a specially reprehensible form of hypocrisy.

I can live with the thought of the athletes who knowingly use the college-athletics system to get their pro contracts or their devalued degrees. But I have trouble living with the thought of the ones whom the system uses and then discards after the final buzzer.





## PROFESSIONAL WRITING

### ON WRITING “ATHLETES AND EDUCATION”

Neil Petrie

*In the following postscript on his writing process, Neil Petrie describes why he wanted to write the paper, how he collected material to support his argument, and how he shaped and focused his ideas as he wrote. His comments illustrate how his purpose—to expose the hypocrisies of collegiate athletics—guided his writing of the essay. In addition, Petrie explains that other key questions affected the shape of his essay: how he should begin, where he should use his best example, and what words he should choose.*

This essay has its origin, as all persuasive writing should, in a strongly held opinion. I’m always more comfortable if I care deeply about my subject matter. As a teacher, I hold some powerful convictions about the uneasy marriage of big-time athletics and higher education, and so I wanted to write an essay that would expose what I think are the dangers and hypocrisies of that system. 1

At the beginning of my essay, I wanted to establish some authority to lend credibility to my argument. Rather than gather statistics on drop-out rates of student athletes or collect the opinions of experts, I planned to rely on my own experiences as both a student and teacher. I hoped to convince my readers that my opinions were based on the authority of firsthand knowledge. In this introduction I was also aware of the need to avoid turning off readers who might dismiss me as a “jock hater.” I had to project my negative feelings about the athletic system while maintaining my sympathy with the individual student athletes involved in that system. The thesis, then, would emerge gradually as I accumulated the evidence; it would be more implied than explicitly stated. 2

Gathering the material was easy. I selected a series of examples from my personal experiences as a college student and instructor, as well as anecdotes I’d heard from other instructors. Most of these stories were ones that I had shared before, either in private discussions with friends or in classrooms with students. 3

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Shaping the material was a little tougher. As I began thinking about my examples and how to order them, I saw that I really wanted to make two main points. The first was that most colleges give preferential treatment to athletes. The second point was that, despite the extra attention, the success of the athlete's academic career is often ignored by all parties involved. Many of my examples, I realized, illustrated the varieties of pressures put upon both athletes and instructors to make sure that the students at least get by in class and remain eligible. These examples seemed to cluster together because they showed the frustrations of teachers and the reactions of athletes trying to juggle sports and academics. This group would make a good introduction to my general exposé of the system. But I had one more example I wanted to use that seemed to go beyond the cynicism of some athletes or the hypocrisy of the educators. This was the case of John, an athlete who illustrated what I thought were the most exploitative aspects of varsity athletics. I originally planned on devoting the bulk of my essay to this story and decided to place it near the end where it would make my second point with maximum emotional effect.

A two-part structure for the essay now emerged. In the first segment following my introductory paragraph, I gave a series of shorter examples, choosing to order them in roughly chronological order (paragraphs 2–4). I then moved from these specific details to a more general discussion of the demands placed upon both students and teachers, such as lengthy practice time, grade reports, road trips, and special attendance policies. This concluded my description of the way the system operates (paragraphs 5–8).

Then it was time to shift gears, to provide a transition to the next part of my essay, to what I thought was my strongest example. I wanted the story of John to show how the system destroyed human potential. To do this, I needed to increase the seriousness of the tone in order to persuade the reader that I was dealing in more than a little bureaucratic boondoggling. I tried to set the tone by my word choice: I moved from words such as “sad,” “compromise,” and “settle” to words with much stronger emotional connotations such as “infuriating,” “exploited,” and “robbed,” all in a single short transitional paragraph (paragraph 9).

I then introduced my final extended example in equally strong language, identifying it as a worst-case illustration (paragraph 10). I elaborated on John's story, letting the details and my reactions to his situation carry the more intense outrage that I was trying to convey in this second part of the essay (paragraphs 10–16). The first version that I tried was a

rambling narrative that had an overly long recounting of John's high school and college careers. So I tightened this section by eliminating such items as his progress through the ranks of professional basketball and his dreams of million-dollar contracts. I also cut down on a discussion of the various courses of study he was considering as options. The result was a sharper focus on the central issue of John's dilemma: the lack of adequate degree counseling for athletes.

After my extended example, all that was left was the conclusion. As I wrote, I was very conscious of using certain devices, such as the repetition of key words and sentence patterns in paragraph seventeen ("We let them . . . We let them . . . We protect them . . . We applaud them . . . We give them . . .") to maintain the heightened emotional tone. I was also conscious of repeating the two-part structure of the essay in the last two paragraphs. I moved from general preferential treatment (paragraph 17) to the concluding and more disturbing idea of devastating exploitation (paragraph 18).

On the whole, I believe that this essay effectively conveys its point through the force of accumulated detail. My personal experience was the primary source of evidence, and that experience led naturally to the order of the paragraphs and to the argument I wished to make: that while some athletes knowingly use the system, others are used and exploited by it.



### QUESTIONS FOR WRITING AND DISCUSSION

1. In your journal, describe how your extracurricular activities (athletics, jobs, clubs, or family obligations) have or have not interfered with your education. Recall one specific incident that illustrates how these activities affected your classwork—either positively or negatively.
2. Describe Petrie's audience and purpose for this essay. What sentences reveal his intended audience? What sentences reveal his purpose? What sentences contain his thesis, claim, or main idea? Do you agree with that thesis? Why or why not?



3. Reread Petrie's postscript. Based on his comments and on your reading of the essay, how does Petrie describe or label each of the following sections of his essay:  
paragraphs 1–4  
paragraphs 5–8  
paragraph 9  
paragraphs 10–16  
paragraphs 17–18.
4. Who do you think is most to blame for the situation that Petrie describes: The athletes themselves? The colleges for paying their scholarships and then ignoring them when they drop out? The students and alumni who pay to see their teams win?
5. Petrie does not explicitly suggest a solution to the problem that he describes. Assume, however, that he has been asked by the president of his university to propose a solution. Write the letter that you think Petrie would send to the president.



## A Writing Process at Work: Drafting and Revising

While drafting and revising, writers frequently make crucial changes in their ideas and language. The first scribbled sentences, written primarily for ourselves, are often totally different from what we later present to other people in final, polished versions. Take, for example, the final version of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. It begins with the famous lines "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation. . . ." But his first draft might well have begun, "Eighty-seven years ago, several politicians and other powerful men in the American Colonies got together and decided to start a new country. . . ." It is difficult to imagine that language ingrained in our consciousness was once drafted, revised, drafted again, and edited, as the author or authors added, deleted, reordered, and otherwise altered words, sentences, and ideas. In fact, it usually was.

Carl Becker's study of the American Declaration of Independence assembles the early drafts of that famous document and compares them with the final version. Shown below is Thomas Jefferson's first draft, with revisions made by Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and other members of the Committee of Five that was charged with developing the new document.

### Thomas Jefferson's Rough Draft of the Opening Sentences of the Declaration of Independence

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for <sup>one</sup> a people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to ~~advance from that subordination in which they have hitherto remained, & to~~ assume among the powers of the earth the ~~equal & independent~~ <sup>separate and equal</sup> station to which the laws of nature & of nature's god entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to ~~the separation.~~ <sup>the change.</sup>

We hold these truths <sup>self-evident</sup> to be sacred & undeniable; that all men are created equal & independent; that <sup>they are endowed by their creator with</sup> from that equal creation they derive in rights inherent <sup>rights; that</sup> & inalienable <sup>these</sup> among which <sup>are</sup> the preservation of life, & liberty, & the pursuit of happiness. . . .

### The Final Draft of the Opening Sentences of the Declaration of Independence, as Approved on July 4, 1776.

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

### QUESTIONS FOR WRITING AND DISCUSSION



1. Describe your reaction to the “rough draft” of the Declaration of Independence. Where did it seem strange or make you feel uncomfortable?
2. Select one change in a sentence that most improved the final version. Explain how the revised wording is more effective.
3. Find one change in a word or phrase that constitutes an alteration in meaning rather than just a choice of “smoother” or more appropriate language. How does this change affect the meaning?
4. Upon rereading this passage from the Declaration of Independence, one reader wrote, “I was really irritated by that ‘all men are created equal’ remark. The writers were white, free, well-to-do, Anglo-Saxon, mostly Protestant males discussing their own ‘inalienable rights.’ They sure weren’t discussing the ‘inalienable rights’ of female Americans or of a million slaves or of non-white free Americans!” Revise the passage from the Declaration of Independence using this person as your audience.
5. On the Internet, visit the National Archives at <http://www.nara.gov> to see a photograph of the original Declaration of Independence and learn how the Dunlap Broadside of the Declaration was read aloud to troops. What does this historical context add to what you know about the Declaration of Independence? Do the revisions help make the document more revolutionary or propagandistic? In addition, this site has other treasures from the National Archives including the police blotter listing Abraham Lincoln’s assassination, the first report of the *Titanic’s* collision with an iceberg, and Rosa Parks’s arrest records. Do you think these documents are as important to our history and culture as the Declaration itself? Explain.