Toward Purposeful Writing

Chapter 1 lays the groundwork for all the writing that your students will do throughout the course. The chapter introduces and explains the three major issues central to all writing: subject, audience, and purpose.

To most students, successful writing appears to be produced magically by “born” writers. Our job as teachers of writing, Donald Murray tells us, is “to take our students backstage to watch the pigeons being tucked up the magician’s sleeve” (4). *Writing with a Purpose* takes students backstage, lets them watch, and then gives them the opportunity to perform.

Backstage, students meet writers who are willing to show their tricks and who are even willing to discuss their struggles as writers. Ernest Hemingway, for example, tells of a pep talk he uses to get through blocked moments: “You have always written before and you will write now.” And he shares a secret: “I always worked until I had something done and I always stopped when I knew what was going to happen next.”

Using the Hemingway quote to promote class discussion of the writing process, you might ask students to do the following:

1. List popular notions about writing and how writing is produced (for example, “Writers are born, not made”; “I do my best writing at night when I’m under the gun”; and “I never let anyone see drafts of my work”). Do Hemingway’s comments or your own experiences contradict some of these notions? What are some of the contradictions? What does this say about the writing process?
2. Freewrite about a recent or memorable writing episode. In what ways did you procrastinate? What did you do when you got stuck? What kinds of limits did you impose on yourself? What kinds of rewards did you allow yourself? Did you talk to friends to help yourself get started again, or did you use other techniques to get going?
Encourage students early in the course to be honest about their attitudes toward writing. Continue to ask them to talk about their own writing throughout the term. Such talk, recent research suggests, creates a language for discussing writing that can liberate students from debilitating fears about writing and offer them a sense of control as they learn to recognize and consider rhetorical options.

The three pointers highlighted in *Writing with a Purpose* on page 3 are worth discussing:

1. *Develop writing habits that work for you and trust in them.* Asking students to develop writing habits that they trust emphasizes to students that they are in charge of what they produce. You can stress that there are no right and wrong answers for how to write, only options to try in each writing situation.

2. *Understand the stages of the writing process.* Requiring students to understand the stages of the writing process demands that they practice it. They will come to understand it only through direct experience.

3. *Rely on three basic elements—subject, audience, and purpose—to guide you, whatever your writing task.* Subject, audience, and purpose constitute the most important concerns in writing, concerns to which students will return again and again as they begin new writing projects.

**THE WRITER'S ENVIRONMENT AND HABITS**

The discussion of the writer’s environment and habits emphasizes the individuality of writers’ habits. Once students discover that there is no one “correct” way to go about writing, they are usually quite willing, even eager, to reveal their own habits. Talking about writing habits opens alternatives for students, encourages experimentation, and can lead to more productive habits.

**Exercise (p. 4)**

The first two exercises encourage students to think about the kinds of environments and tools they prefer for writing. Most students enjoy this discussion because they come to college writing classes expecting something “academic,” which to students means they cannot say “I,” tell personal stories, or explore personal issues. Talking about where and how they write is a first step in helping students think about how writing is produced. These exercises also allow students to recount past experiences, both positive and negative, before they are asked to write more formally on specific subjects. Talking about their successes and failures as writers helps students
establish themselves as a community of writers. At this early stage, confidence can increase as students share their own experiences. Getting their attitudes about writing out in the open helps clear the way for more productive work later, especially because so many students claim to “hate” writing.

In addition to asking students to identify places and things they need as writers, the exercises also ask students to examine their own commitment to writing. Exercise 5 is broken into three parts, which challenge students to take an active role in their development as writers by asking them what steps they have taken or what steps they could take to create their own ideal writing environment.

You can use these exercises in several ways to promote classroom discussion:

1. Assign the list of exercises to students on the first day of class as a writing sample. Students might choose one from the list and write extensively for you on the exercise they have chosen. Later they might share what they have written in class and talk about the responses.

2. Assign the exercises (ask students to write on three of the five questions, for example) as a take-home writing assignment. This can generate discussion the following day. Students can either prepare a more “formal” essay based on the question, which they could later revise, or they can simply explore the questions more informally in journals.

3. Ask students to work in groups. This can immediately set the stage in your class for collaboration in writing. (See “Additional Suggestions for the Collaborative Classroom” at the end of this chapter.)

4. Ask students to interview someone outside class, perhaps someone in their future profession, using the exercise questions or a list of their own.

5. Tabulate responses to the questions. Ask students to analyze the list to discover which attitudes and practices are most common and then to discuss similarities and differences in the various responses. Did anyone’s responses surprise them? This analysis could lead to an interesting discussion of cultural or gender differences.

The most important awareness to arise from this exercise is an emphasis on the process of writing, which can help students identify their individual needs as writers. The exercise also helps students see that not everyone writes the same way, which allows them to learn new ways to approach writing tasks. They begin to see that successful writing involves both a mental approach and an appropriate physical environment.

Talking about writing and writing together in the classroom will help students experience the social aspect of the writing process, which they often do not
recognize. Students are asked to consider both the solitary and the social acts of writing as they examine themselves as writers and realize that, although they might draft alone in their room, ideas come from interactions with others: everyday casual conversations with friends, classroom settings in which other students comment on their writing, discussions with family members, and public debates on political or social issues. What we think is a reflection of culture, class, and gender.

### THE STAGES OF THE WRITING PROCESS

Students learn in the discussion following the exercises that the three major stages of the writing process are planning, drafting, and revising. The introduction first defines the stages and then explains their recursive, or nonlinear, nature. Although this discussion helps students understand the nature of composing, there is a danger that the processes may become oversimplified in their minds. What makes writing so difficult to teach, and so difficult to learn, is what Ann Berthoff calls the “at-once-ness” of writing—the fact that everything must happen at once for writing to be produced. Helping students break down the steps gives them a conceptual framework for analyzing, managing, and expanding the composing processes. Some writers, for example, enjoy freewriting but get stuck in the planning stage. Likewise, the freedom of getting it out on paper is so compelling that the student may avoid drafting and redrafting because he or she has not experienced much success in these areas. Others, of course, produce only a single draft, truncating both the planning and the revising processes necessary for effective writing. The terms planning, drafting, and revising and the strategies each represents thus become tools for understanding, evaluating, and changing writing practices.

The section of this overview called “Working Within the Process” corrects any mistaken notion that writing is a rigid, linear activity. In actual practice, the stages overlap as the writer produces text, stops to develop or change a section she or he has just written, and begins again, perhaps at a section that eventually will become an introduction, rather than a conclusion, as the text continues to evolve. Furthermore, the activities that make up the process occur differently for individual writers and even occur differently for the same writer as the task changes. The quotations from James Thurber, Virginia Woolf, and Calvin Trillin testify to the complex and varied nature of the process. Thurber approaches a playwriting project serendipitously, believing that “the writer should [not] know too much where he’s going,” whereas his collaborator Elliot Nugent approaches the project deliberately, constructing the play “from back to front.” Woolf finds that her process in writing *The Waves* differs from that used in earlier novels. Trillin confesses, “I worry a lot about structure” when writing investigative reports, but he lets the structure evolve
when writing columns and humorous pieces. Students learn from these writers that writing requires patience, persistence, and adaptability. Even when Woolf scraps a whole day’s worth of writing, she has “examined the possibilities.” In contrast, for most student writers, writing is recording a conclusion.

To use the experiences of these professional writers in the classroom, ask students to respond in their journals to the methods described, and ask which writer they most identify with as they think about their own writing strategies. Also ask students to explore the notion of “possibilities” in their own writing the next time they hit a dead end. To stress the recursiveness of the writing process, you might also try one of these two classroom activities:

1. Ask each student to make a graphic model of his or her own process, using whatever best represents it—diagrams, arrows, pictures, cartoons, flow charts, groups of words, whatever. After about fifteen minutes, ask students to post their models and to examine one another’s. When the class reconvenes, ask students what they discovered by creating their own model and then comparing it to those of others. Are there any general patterns? What do the representations suggest about the act of composing?

2. Pass out three index cards to each class member. Ask students to use the cards to write a mini-essay, following these directions, in fifteen minutes:
   a. Think of a memorable person or significant place from your past, and write the name of the person or place at the top of the first card.
   b. Below the name, list words or phrases associated with that person or place. (Take three or four minutes to do this.)
   c. Stop and review the list, and circle any surprising words or phrases or any that trigger particularly strong memories.
   d. Choose one of the key words or phrases from card 1 and write it on the top of card 2.
   e. Use this word or phrase as a focus, list the ideas suggested by this word or phrase, and then stop and number these ideas to create a sequence. (Take three or four minutes.)
   f. Write a mini-essay on card 3 in the remaining five minutes.

Each of these exercises experientially presents the ideas discussed in this section of the text. You may wish to do the exercise along with your students to share your practices as a writer with them. If you choose exercise 2, ask students to read the mini-essays aloud. They always surprise themselves, one another, and you with what they come up with in such a short time. The exercise shows students that they
can produce writing here and now if they use time well. Students are also given practice in breaking down information in order to write about a situation. This short, enjoyable exercise can give students instant gratification, which they sometimes need as developing writers.

**MAKING DECISIONS IN THE WRITING PROCESS**

As students continue to examine the writing process at its various stages by experiencing the stages in their own writing, it is important that they realize that writing is messy and that it does not always come out the way they hoped it would. Although the steps are neatly presented, as though writers simply finish one step and proceed to the next, the reality is that writers are always circling back to redo what they’ve already done in light of the next text. Writing can always be revised; deadlines determine how much revising can be done. A key concept students must recognize is that of choice. As writers, they are constantly making choices about what they write and how they write it, depending on who their audience is and why they are writing.

**SELECTING YOUR SUBJECT**

“I just don’t know what to write about!” This is a common wail heard among students. You can reassure your students by agreeing that finding a subject is the most difficult task for a writer, but if students are to learn about writing, they have to learn how to choose a subject. Many students prefer that the instructor assign a topic to them. Students who ask this are actually telling you they feel inadequate to the task and need to be encouraged. The advice “Write from what you know or what you care to learn” is difficult for many students to follow. They may not know what they know and are unsure how to go about learning what they wish to know, or they simply do not yet trust their own instincts. Chapter 2 (“Planning”) and Chapter 13 (“Planning the Research Paper”) will address how to go about learning what they want to learn. Chapter 1 stresses to students that they should reformulate assignments in terms of their own experience, which they have not yet learned to value.

To help students recognize what they know, you might ask them to write an “experience vitae.” You can begin by asking these questions:

1. What jobs (paid and unpaid) have you held?
2. What are your hobbies, interests, group affiliations, and favorite pastimes?
3. What special skills do you have?
4. What events in your life have seemed most important to you?
5. Have you traveled or lived in other parts of the United States or abroad?
   Where have you been?

   Additional information might be uncovered through follow-up peer interviews and teacher-student conferences, because most people fail to see the obvious when listing what they know. Sometimes students have interesting family histories or have lived in unusual places and take such personal history for granted. You can help them see that what they think of as ordinary is not ordinary to others and may be worth writing about. Not only do these lists, or vitae, suggest topics for writing and serve as especially useful resources if students select their own topics; these lists also suggest ways for students to make assigned topics their own.

   Once students have selected or been assigned a subject, their next task is to restrict that subject. In part, this means finding an angle on the subject or a way of bringing in their own experience. Practically speaking, a well-focused subject makes the paper both easier for the writer to write and more interesting for the reader to read. As many writing teachers advise, “Say a lot about a little, not a little about a lot.”

   To demonstrate this process and the numerous possible subtopics embedded in any given topic, try the following activity in class:

   1. As a class or in small groups, take each of the subtopics suggested on page 8 and restrict it further, listing as many subsequent restrictions as possible. For example, the first topic—e-mail—might be broken down into topics dealing with addiction (dependence on e-mail), denial (avoiding e-mail), and withdrawal (limiting or disconnecting e-mail usage).

   2. After students have selected topics or have a tentative topic in mind, divide the class into pairs for what Kenneth Bruffee calls “topic interviews” (40–45). In a class with an uneven number of students, one group will have three members. Students take turns telling about their topics and quizzing each other about them: “What do you want to know about my topic?” “Tell me more about that; it sounds interesting.”

   The process of restricting a topic and finding a focus involves rhetorical as well as practical concerns. Not only must a topic be manageable and one about which the writer is knowledgeable; it must also be one that is significant and interesting to readers (guidelines 3 and 4 on page 9). It is important that students learn to internalize the guideline questions because they will be asked to choose and restrict many topics throughout the course, even when a general subject is assigned.
You can stress to them that the topic must be significant and interesting to the writer before it can be significant or interesting to a reader.

Two concepts students might find useful in achieving these goals are foreground and backdrop. Writers create significance and interest by placing a foreground incident, episode, or example in relation to a backdrop of more general issues and ideas. As students work to tell their own stories, they need to be reminded that the incidents in themselves are ways of relating larger issues to the audience. Two simple questions to help students with this are “What’s the larger issue here?” and “Why are you telling this story?” (Why should a reader be interested?)

For example, in “Brandon’s Clown” (p. 21) the foreground incident is Wallace’s first experience of painting for a commission. Unlike many freshman first-experience papers, this one has a set of well-defined backdrops that give the incident significance. One of these backdrops is introduced by Wally’s father: “Son, you have a special talent. Be smart. Use it to make money.” In the first paragraph, this works as an effective gag line and at the same time articulates a question that dominates the whole paper: How willing should we be to use our special talents and callings, perhaps compromising our integrity, to make money? A second backdrop appears in Wallace’s thesis statement: “Creating artwork for a client, I soon discovered, demands much more than talent and a lust for money.” The “much more,” we find out, includes a sensitivity to the audience and an ability to blend its purposes with the artist’s own. This second backdrop is, of course, a special case of the first, so that the whole situation might be seen schematically:

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Everyone’s Problem of Compromising Integrity

The Problem of Art on Commission

Wallace’s Experience

The Reader
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The reader is encouraged to see the significance and interest of Wallace’s experience against these larger backdrops, and the essay becomes an opportunity for the reader to see the problem of compromise from Wallace’s perspective.

You might want to generate discussions to help students see the backdrop and foreground in “Becoming a Writer” (a story about how one child watched her
mother write stories on Saturdays set against a larger backdrop of female roles) or “The Compositions of Mozart’s Mind” (an examination of the famous composer’s creative process).

The distinction between backdrop and foreground can be reinforced in the discussion of every essay in Writing with a Purpose. Teachers sometimes complain that students treat subjects superficially. The backdrop/foreground distinction is a tool students can use to create depth or perspective in their essays.

ANALYZING YOUR AUDIENCE

The Guidelines for Analyzing Your Audience (pp. 12–13) are very helpful for students who have not given previous thought to the role of audience in writing. You can help students analyze their primary audience by asking them to look about the classroom and record answers to the questions supplied in the guidelines. Most of the students will be in the same age bracket but will probably be studying in different fields. As students read and respond to each other’s work, the idea of audience will become more real as they experience the necessity of explaining their ideas. Asking students to write letters to specific audiences is a concrete way to illustrate how audience dictates what a person writes and how. Here are two short exercises you may want to use in the classroom:

1. Write a letter to your parents or guardians in which you explain why you received a “D” in chemistry. Give the same information in a letter to a friend. How has audience changed the way you have presented the situation?
2. Describe a work experience (being a Big Brother or Big Sister) for inclusion on a résumé. Now describe the experience to a friend who is considering volunteering for such a position.

The primary audience for college writing is the teacher. For many students, this means there is no “real” audience because they view the teacher as an “examiner” (a term used by James Britton), not a reader (122–28). School
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writing, therefore, is not “real” communication so much as it is a command performance. To counteract the idea that the teacher is the only audience, and an unreal one at that, remind students that they are writing for multiple audiences—self, peers, and unknown readers as well as the teacher, who is both a “real” reader and an “examiner.”

As students produce writing, respond as a reader to the early drafts. Ask questions about the ideas in the draft, request more information, let students know what interests you, and indicate where you need additional information. Save examiner-like comments for the evaluation of the final draft.

The most accessible audience for students is, of course, other students in the classroom who can respond in writing or orally. Opportunities to offer and receive peer response serve a dual purpose: as writers, students get face-to-face feedback on the impact of their writing on readers or listeners; as readers/listeners, students develop the ability to think as a reader in evaluating their own drafts. Yet another reason to use peer response groups is to increase students’ investment in their writing. Students are less likely to write dull, perfunctory essays when they know they will be asked to read them aloud to a writing group or class of peers.

One way to use audience as a “prompt” or creative force in writing is to identify several audiences for a particular essay assignment. The interests, knowledge, and concerns of the three audiences specified for the essay on music videos—the addict, the critic, the reader unacquainted with the subject—illustrate how audience analysis can generate ideas for writing. As Richard Eastman says, “Different audiences press you to explore your meanings in different terms” (47).

Understanding the varied needs of the audience helps writers identify why they are writing. As students learn to analyze the reader, they also learn to determine their purpose for writing.

DETERMINING YOUR PURPOSE

This section deals thoroughly with the definition and process of finding purpose in writing. Closely tied to audience and subject, purpose is what motivates the writing and guides decisions about form and content.

For teachers of writing, purpose is an especially important concept in getting students to write “real” stuff that actually communicates. Often students produce what Ken Macrorie calls “Engfish” (11), which is typified by sentences like this: “The purpose of this paper is to argue for the prolongment of extracurricular activities in the schools.” To encourage a real sense of purpose, you can provide actual audiences beyond the teacher and allow and encourage the selection of subjects in which the writer has some interest and investment.
Additionally, the concept of purpose works against the purposelessness sometimes evident in student writing. The idea of forming a working purpose, or hypothesis, which the writer then tests by exploring the ideas in a discovery draft, offers a functional definition of purpose that makes purpose an implicit part of the writing process. Some students may not need the step-by-step building blocks offered in the chapter to formulate a strong purpose because some will know right away what they hope to accomplish in their writing. However, others will need more work on shaping their essays.

As the discussion on page 14 illustrates, the initial tentative purpose takes the writer to a clearer, more workable purpose. Sometimes the final choice of a purpose occurs intuitively; at other times, it is a conscious process in which the writer lines up the alternatives and chooses on the basis of personal and practical considerations. It is important that students experience finding their purpose through writing discovery drafts.

The Guidelines for Determining Your Purpose (p. 17) can be used in the classroom to promote discussion, either in small groups or in whole-class settings. Students also might produce written responses to these guidelines at different stages of the essay. This provides them with a written record of how their ideas are changing as they discover through writing what they want to say.

Also helpful is the discussion of purpose and thesis. In this discussion the thesis statement is presented as part of the process of discovering and establishing a purpose, not as an end in itself. Indeed, purpose is not synonymous with thesis. At the same time, students must realize that although many pieces of writing contain an explicit thesis statement (usually somewhere in the opening paragraph), not all pieces of writing state a thesis directly. (An example of this can be found in the selection by Gail Godwin.)

Underlying this focus on purpose is the idea that writing is a multidraft process. Writing is not a formulaic activity with goals and plans set in stone at the outset, with a block-by-block construction of text. Rather, writing is a living, constantly changing practice that is different for every writer and for every writing task. Purpose emerges as writers write, plan, and rewrite. Students learn this only through doing it. They must experience what happens when they write, talk about their writing and share it with others, and then have the opportunity to produce multiple drafts for each assignment.

**COORDINATING DECISIONS IN THE WRITING PROCESS**

In concluding this section, you may wish to remind your students that subject, audience, and purpose serve both as checks that can be used to evaluate a draft for
needed revision and as prompts that can be used to generate initial drafts. Also, it is important to emphasize the fluid relationship among these three elements. The metaphor of a chemical formula (p. 17) captures the interdependence and inseparability of these three elements.

**Exercise (p. 17)**

1. a. The subject of the original hypothesis is that online shopping has changed the way people buy and sell goods and services.
   b. The new decision switches the simple cause-and-effect relationship to a larger cultural context—suggesting that there are other ways for shoppers to make purchases without going into a store: catalogues, 800-numbers, and VAX.
   c. *New hypothesis:* The marketplace has always provided ways for buyers and sellers to avoid face-to-face contact.

2. a. The original hypothesis is presented as a statement of fact—resting on the assumption that visual and audio enhancements sell better than simple text.
   b. Many computers still do not have the capacity to read “enhanced” graphics. By focusing on the audience that owns these older computers, you will have to “sell” them on the necessity of seeing all the new “bells and whistles.”
   c. *New hypothesis:* To appreciate the appeal of web-site business, you must own a computer that can read the full array of new audio and visual enhancements.

3. a. The original hypothesis focuses on the way e-commerce changes our definition of a store—and depends on cyber-catalogues, large warehouses, and extensive delivery systems.
   b. To prove that e-commerce actually increases the cost of doing business, you will have to obtain figures on the cost of maintaining and updating a web site, building and operating a large warehouse, and packaging and shipping goods (e.g., Federal Express, UPS).
   c. *New hypothesis:* When you factor in packaging and mailing, purchasing online is more expensive than purchasing in a store.

**READINGS**
The three essays at the end of Chapter 1 examine the ways in which the creative process is understood by a writer, a musician, and a painter. These stories might be used to ask students to see relationships or make connections between texts. Some additional suggestions for discussion or writing follow.

1. What are the artistic processes discussed in each essay? Describe similarities in the ways each of these media is produced and the tools central to each art form. (Students might list such things as pen and paper; paintbrush and canvas; musical instruments and notation. The processes of writing, painting, and musical composition all require planning and purpose.)

2. What do you see as the unifying thread among these three stories? (Relationships with others, mood and place, and descriptions of processes are important elements.)

3. Identify who speaks in each essay, and describe some of the techniques each author uses. With which essay do you most identify? (Students might see a gender difference in the kinds of details included in each essay, or they might note the difference in age of the three narrators, as well as varieties of experiences. Voice is also an issue: What is unique to each piece that tells us a different person is speaking? In the case of Howard Gardner’s essay, Mozart’s words are included, which opens up the discussion to multivocality and cross-temporal conversations. What does it mean to quote the words of an “other” in your writing? Issues of authority and appropriation might be considered.)

“Becoming a Writer,” Gail Godwin

This short essay not only tells a story but also illustrates that writers are ordinary people trying to write in ordinary circumstances. This essay can be a good jumping-off point for several in-class writing assignments and discussions because it is short enough for students to read quickly and think about such issues as personal research and the importance of memorizing, narrating, describing, analyzing, and identifying specific incidents to tell a story and make a point. It introduces students to the power of telling one’s own story. The major subject is the role of the reader in the production of written work, although another issue is that of women’s roles.

Discussion questions (p. 19). What does this selection suggest about how people choose role models? What makes her mother’s work seem more interesting to Godwin than her grandmother’s work?
The grandmother is more tied to routine than to the imagination. It is more fun for a young girl to witness the creation of a story than it is for her to learn the “thankless” art of arranging meals. Does anyone ever really get to choose role models, or are role models presented by chance? The role models here represent two views of womanhood, one traditional (represented by the stove), the other less traditional (represented by the typewriter). What’s interesting about these two different role models is that they are bridged through the situation of living in a “manless little family.” Both roles are necessary, and the child is part of both roles. The girl could represent a third, new version of womanhood, who might become a blend of the traditional and the less traditional.

You might ask students whether the story presents images that either conflict or agree with their ideas about family structure and women’s work, and what students’ feelings are toward the work these women are doing. Students might make personal connections with the story to examine differences or similarities between their own lives and those represented in the story. How might the story reveal changing roles for women? Students could address gender issues in collaborative groups by sharing their responses with one another and by noting the differences and similarities of responses made by male and female students. In addition, the story reinforces that writing is real work, because Godwin’s mother sent off stories and got paid for them. The notion of the grandmother playing “Martha to my mother’s Mary” could evoke a discussion of cultural assumptions because the reference assumes knowledge of the New Testament (Luke 10:38–42) that some students may not possess.

“The Compositions of Mozart’s Mind,” Howard Gardner

The essay analyzes Mozart’s analysis of his creative process and compares it to the practices of other composers and creative people such as Beethoven, Trollope, and Picasso (you might note that all the examples are of male artists and question why this might be so). The essay provides an obvious analogy to the writing process and the various ways in which it is understood by different writers. Discussion might branch out into students’ analyses of their own writing processes and on the difficulties of writing what you mean so that others can understand. Gardner muses on the difficulties of understanding language that describes one’s perceptions. What does Mozart mean when he claims to have heard an entire composition in a single instant of time? Gardner questions Mozart’s analysis because individual interpretation of terms (such as what it means “to hear” something, or what an “entire composition” actually means to a composer in the process of creating a piece of music) may carry radically different meanings for different individuals.
Discussion questions (pp. 19–20). How does Gardner interpret Mozart’s claim? In what ways does Mozart’s composing process resemble the processes of the other artists Gardner discusses? Why does Gardner question artists’ “introspective accounts” of their creative process?

Gardner interprets Mozart’s claim that he could hear an entire piece of music in his head at one time by categorizing Mozart’s description as “mental representation,” as defined by cognitive scientists. Gardner looks closely at Mozart’s language and asks what, precisely, did Mozart mean. Gardner takes Mozart at his word but rigorously examines his word. Acknowledging that “we will never know the answers” to what Mozart actually “meant,” Gardner links Mozart’s self-description to the larger area of the creative process, which has never been fully explained or understood by cognitive science. What students might note is that Gardner questions individual meaning and models a close reading of Mozart’s text, while at the same time providing a larger context for Mozart’s introspective account, positioning it within other accounts of creative activity.

After establishing that Mozart’s claim is part of a wider body of information about the creative process, Gardner makes several observations about Mozart’s process: Mozart composed quickly, though not hastily, and with great efficiency. Gardner then makes parallel observations about Beethoven’s composing process but notes underlying differences: Beethoven composed with less fluency than Mozart, revising numerous times. The obvious implication for students of writing is the notion of the “internal” writer, who works out sketches in the mind before beginning to draft ideas on paper.

Gardner makes a point that rather than dismiss such introspective accounts as Mozart’s as exaggeration, we might consider “variations in personality, style, or introspective candor, rather than fundamental differences in approach to creation.” His emphasis on individual differences in both methods of work and styles of describing how one works may help students understand themselves in relation to the creative process as they learn to analyze their own needs as writers. Gardner’s final anecdote about the American composer Walter Piston shows how differently the notion of a “complete piece” can be understood and also keeps Mozart’s introspective account of his process within the larger context of the creative process.

“Brandon’s Clown,” Wallace Armstrong

This story is a personal narrative in which a young artist paints his first commissioned painting, learning how to negotiate his way through the difficulties of meeting the requirements of the assignment and remaining true to his own artistic
vision. The analogy between painting and writing is strong, and students will identify readily with Wallace Armstrong’s dilemma because they often feel they must go through a similar process when they write for teachers.

**Discussion questions (p. 21).** In what ways does the process of painting “Brandon’s Clown” resemble the three-stage process of writing? How does Armstrong select the subject, analyze the audience, and determine the purpose of his painting? What is the subject, who is the audience, and what is the purpose of his essay?

Armstrong seems to be a methodical worker. He works in his college studio, does preliminary sketches in a sketchbook to which he can later refer, and seems positively affectionate about the tools of his craft: the “arts” (paints) are “inviting,” and he has a “favorite brush.” Once he begins the project, he goes “every morning” to examine the work he has done the night before. Apparently, he sketches areas in the evening and fills in the detail in the mornings, when he is full of energy. He, like Hemingway, quits for the day only when he knows “what is going to happen next.”

Armstrong’s planning process is delineated in paragraphs 9 and 10. He spends “hours” over the next “several weeks” thinking and dreaming about his assignment and filling pages of his sketchbook with quick drawings of circus subjects. The quick sketches are like the freewriting or informal outlining writers might undertake in pursuit of their focus. The breakthrough occurs when Armstrong comes up with the idea of a clown, a subject that will fulfill the client’s suggestion of a circus theme and Armstrong’s sense of artistic integrity. He characterizes his drafting activity as sketching “areas” that he later “reappraises” and revises, reworking and detailing areas sketched earlier.

The subject of “Brandon’s Clown” is Armstrong’s struggle to reconcile external, commercial impulses with internal, artistic ones: “I took my love to the marketplace.” In paragraphs 1 and 2, Armstrong introduces two general subjects: “words of wisdom that are passed from father to son” and types of painting commissions. These two general topics offer backdrops for Armstrong’s specific subject: his difficulty in following his father’s advice to paint for money.

As with most school writing assignments, there are several audiences for Armstrong’s essay: Armstrong himself, his teacher and classmates, and a “general reader.” The wry self-presentation—“I am proud of the dark maelstroms of anxiety I can create on my canvas”—suggests that Armstrong is recounting this incident in part to define the experience for himself. His reference to a friend in Art History 110 and his informality—“I am known on campus as ‘the guy who paints screaming faces’”—suggest an audience of classmates. And the basic issue addressed—the
conflict between commercial and artistic values—seems directed to a general audience.

Armstrong assumes that his readers have the following characteristics: a sense of humor and a desire to be entertained, a vague interest in how artists work, an awareness that General Hospital and Reader’s Digest are not the finest flowers of American culture, and an interest in the ethical problem of preserving personal integrity while making money. He does not assume that his readers have special knowledge of art or of him and his previous experiences as a painter.

The opening paragraphs catch the reader’s attention partly by establishing the playful tone Armstrong will use as he pursues a serious subject. (“Son, you have a special talent. . . . Use it to make money.”) These paragraphs also introduce the reader to the artist’s quandary and so allow Wallace to follow that ancient bit of narrative advice: Get your protagonist into trouble immediately.

Armstrong’s purpose in the essay is multiple: to recount a personal experience that will amuse and engage readers, to receive a good grade, to inform the reader about the difficulty of creating art on commission, and, perhaps, to rethink an incident in which he overreacted to a challenge to his integrity. Armstrong implies, rather than announces, his thesis. The first sentence of paragraph 2 hints broadly at a thesis: “Creating artwork for a client . . . demands much more than talent and a lust for money.” Illustrating the “much more” is the real purpose of the essay. Had Armstrong written out a more explicit thesis, it might have read “Creating artwork for clients requires a difficult and never wholly satisfactory compromise between the artist’s and the client’s visions of the project.”

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Ten writing assignments follow the readings and focus on particular writing strategies, such as narration, observation, and investigation. See the Introduction of this Instructor’s Resource Manual for a discussion of the reasoning behind these assignments. Students may practice each strategy independently of the others, even though in “real” writing, these strategies overlap. This could lead to a discussion of why one strategy would be employed over another, depending on the purpose of the writing.

Each of the writing assignments could be used as short, in-class exercises, as journal entries, or as major writing assignments that require students to plan, draft, and redraft. The assignments are open-ended and malleable to allow you to interpret them according to the needs of individual students, classrooms, and department writing programs. Like all good writing assignments, they are prompts to help students find ways into texts of their own crafting. Each assignment emphasizes
through practice that students understand the social, personal, and academic contexts in which they are required to write.

1. Narrate: This assignment asks students to use personal research and tell a story, much as Gail Godwin tells her story about early memories. Many instructors prefer narration as a first writing assignment because students are generally eager to tell their stories and enjoy “being creative.” Most important is that students try to focus on a particular, single incident and concentrate on writing the details of what happened. In addition to responding to the narration assignment as it is constructed, students might also write their own narrative assignment based on issues from “Brandon’s Clown.”

2. Observe: Asking students to observe means asking them to look beyond themselves, to see what others are doing by breaking down the various actions into distinct behaviors, or to notice their surroundings in terms of color, shape, texture, sound, and smell. You might ask students to go somewhere with a notebook to record their observations and to concentrate on describing what they see in active, neutral terms, without evaluation. This could lead to a discussion of the implications of word choice after students complete the assignment and bring their findings to class. Also important in this assignment is that students realize where and how real-world writing is used and by whom. This assignment could promote an awareness of active verb forms as powerful writing tools.

3. Investigate: Students generally respond positively when asked to “investigate.” In addition to using the questions on writing habits from the book, you might ask students to come up with questions of their own; this instills in students a sense of their own competence. Talking to each other gives students practice in interviewing, which demands good listening. Compiling their information gives students practice in computing primary data, which they then must organize in their essays.

4. Collaborate: Giving students the opportunity to collaborate with other students, particularly on the subject of their writing habits, helps reinforce the basic principles of writing they are reading about in the textbook. They can experience what writers do by engaging in the social dimensions of writing while at the same time help each other by offering suggestions on how to solve problems. This sets the tone for establishing a community of writers in the classroom.
5. Read: Asking students to remember their own first readers after thinking about the grandmother in Gail Godwin’s story helps students make personal connections to the story. This assignment also reminds students that everything they write will eventually have a “first” reader, who may or may not respond as they had hoped. Students can outline ways to use both positive and negative criticism of their work. This might also lead to a constructive discussion of how to make a good response that a writer can use to revise his or her work. The assignment stresses the interactive nature of reading and writing.

6. Respond: To respond to “Brandon’s Clown” by trying to remember advice from their own parents, students must first understand what Armstrong is trying to accomplish in the personal narrative. You might ask what students think the purpose of the essay is and whether the essay successfully addresses its thesis. As they write their own essays, they might use “Brandon’s Clown” as a model for their own writing. Although this might help some students get ideas for their own writing, the danger in the assignment is that some students may not feel their own experience is significant and may try to identify a “formula” for producing a similar essay. You might warn students against this and encourage them to use the essay only to see how one writer approaches the task of telling his own story.

7. Analyze: Analyzing something means taking things apart and examining how the parts work. This exercise asks students to browse the Web for a particularly interesting web site and then to look at each part of the site—graphics, text, overall design—to see how the sponsors represent their subject, address their audience, and communicate in a way that draws on all the skills of “visual” rhetoric.

8. Evaluate: Students are asked to identify, list, and make judgments about how Gardner interprets Mozart’s claim that he could hear an entire piece of music at one time. The exercise highlights the many-faceted nature of “meaning” and the ways in which language can be variously interpreted. The exercise also pushes students to make independent judgments about Gardner’s explanations. Students might generate a list of questions to help them establish criteria for what they believe makes the most sense. (They might use Gardner’s own questions about Mozart’s analysis to question Gardner himself. For example, what does Gardner mean by the “creative process”?) Additional research into
Gardner’s theory of cognitive themes can help them place Gardner’s method of inquiry in a larger context, just as Gardner places Mozart in a larger context.

9. Argue: This assignment helps students integrate what they have read with what they themselves have experienced as writers. Using classroom data they have gathered from collaborative groups dismantles the hierarchy of published writer (in this case, Gardner) as primary authority. The assignment also helps unpack the mystery of the creative process and the idea that some people are “born” writers, since all students will be sharing their methods of work. Students may have a tendency to either romanticize the creative process (they may buy into the cultural notion that all poets write alone in garrets) or insist cynically that all writers lie. While the assignment asks that they take a stand and argue one way or the other, you might introduce the gray area by pointing out in the directions the use of the words usually and rarely rather than always and never.

10. Argue: This assignment might be a “grand finale” for students as they leave Chapter 1. The assignment requires that students demonstrate what they have learned about the writing process and examine their own writing as one example of many. This requires them to reread and critically examine the writing they have done and to think about how the writing was produced. They can compare the practices of other writers to their own methods. The assignment also requires various other activities listed previously: narration, observation, reading, responding, analyzing, and evaluating. Asking students to use the writing they have done for courses other than English composition can help them see that English-class writing isn’t an isolated form. The exercise can also reinforce the major principles from the chapter: All writing goes through the stages of planning, drafting, and revision; all writing is done for a particular audience for a particular purpose; and subjects are chosen and narrowed depending on the needs of the audience and purpose. The assignment gives students the opportunity to take a second look at the work they have done thus far. One way students might do this is by listing what they feel they have learned and noting any new strategies they may have used that will be useful for them on subsequent assignments.

USING THE WRITING CENTER
Let students know that Writing Center tutors can help them with such matters as finding a topic, restricting the topic, and determining the audience. Students often believe that the only time they can make an appointment to work in the Writing Center is after they have drafted an essay. Let them know that Writing Center tutors can help them during the process of thinking up a topic, interpreting an assignment from a meaningful angle, and analyzing audience needs. If student writers get “stuck” or frustrated, or simply can’t think of anything to say, Writing Center tutors can help them by asking questions specific to their texts and offering a new reader perspective. By making appointments early and often to work with tutors in the Writing Center, students increase the likelihood that they will master the necessary steps in writing papers. The more they can listen to others respond to their writing, the richer their writing can become. Incorporate awareness of the Writing Center into your classroom. Help your students become writers.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR THE COLLABORATIVE CLASSROOM

All the exercises and writing assignments in Chapter 1 can be easily converted into collaborative exercises. However, it is important to follow the guidelines for constructing collaborative activities suggested in the Introduction to this manual. Collaborative assignments should be clearly defined and manageable, and they require concrete results to be reported to the class. Supply a handout with directions, or write instructions on the board.

When you set up collaborative activities, each activity should be given a time limit, which can be expanded when necessary, although not to the extent that the exercise takes up all the class time. Each group should choose a group member to act as a recorder, who takes notes on the group’s decisions and reports those decisions to the class. Ask for volunteers to write responses on the chalkboard so that students can see the results of the work. Help them compare the answers and interpret possible implications. After each group has completed its task (each group may have the same task, or each may have a different task) and has read its writing to the class, ask class members about the process of collaborative writing. What decisions did the group have to make? How did the group make them? Did everyone participate? How is collaborative writing different from individual composing?

• Use the exercise on page 17 as the basis for collaborative activity. Divide the class into three groups, assigning each group one of the items in the exercise and giving each group the following instructions:
1. Analyze the conceptions of subject, audience, and purpose implied in the original hypothesis.

2. Analyze the changes in subject, audience, and purpose implied by the new decision.

3. As a group, compose a new hypothesis that reflects these changes.

• Another kind of collaborative activity that offers yet another angle on the writing process is the collaboratively produced piece of writing. Such tasks should be short, relatively simple, clearly defined, and related to other assignments, topics, or course reading. For example, you might give small groups one of the following tasks based on “Brandon’s Clown.”


2. Brandon’s father, who heretofore has had no part in the commissioning or accepting of the painting for his son’s room, decides that the painting is inappropriate. He writes to Armstrong, arguing that he did not satisfactorily complete his commission and requesting a refund. Compose that letter.

• In addition to the preceding suggestions, you might take any one of the writing assignments at the end of the chapter, or the discussion questions preceding the readings, and use them for collaborative assignments. Break down the assignments into steps, or recast the questions to emphasize the issues you want your students to think about. Ask students to work together in their groups. For example, if you want students to think about role models, gender roles, and influences on learning, have them work together on Gail Godwin’s essay in the following way:

1. In your groups, list three ways you think that role models affect the kinds of decisions children make later in their lives.

2. Who are the role models in your life? How have these role models helped to shape your expectations?

3. Are there differences in male and female role models? What are these differences?

4. Can you relate specific incidents in which you learned about reading or writing because of the influence of a role model?
• To help students further understand the nature of audience and to give them practice analyzing audiences and writing for them, you might use the following exercises:

1. After you have identified the primary audience for your essay, describe the secondary readers for your writing. Who are the readers you want to reach? What do you want them to know?

2. Now list “real” readers who are available to you on and off campus, in the classroom, in the Writing Center, in your dorms, or in clubs. If your family or friends live nearby, ask them to read and respond to your drafts. List them by name, if possible, and write down their characteristics. Visualizing real people as you write can help you determine what to say and how to say it.

3. Write or revise your assignment for an outside audience. Choose from among this list: frame your argument as an editorial for the school or local paper, respond to the essays at the end of the chapter and send your reactions to the author, or write from your personal experience and mail the essay to relatives, friends, or magazine editors.

4. Choose a subject about which you consider yourself an expert. (Consult your experience vitae.) Explain some aspect of this subject to three different audiences: an audience of experts, an audience of elementary school children, and an audience of classmates. Discuss in your small groups how each audience required different information.

5. In small groups, choose a current topic (such as mandatory AIDS testing or public policy on gang wars in cities). Identify three potential reading audiences. Analyze their characteristics. (Use the Guidelines for Analyzing Your Audience.) Draft a letter to each audience. How do the different audiences influence what you say?

**PEER RESPONSE SHEETS**

The use of peer response sheets helps elicit written responses to a draft from a single peer or from several peers. Questions will vary depending on where the student is in the writing process—drafting for discovery, making an intermediate revision, or producing a final draft. A sample response sheet for a discovery draft follows.

*Discovery Draft*
1. What is your overall reaction to this discovery draft?
2. List the strengths you find in this draft.
3. What do you understand the main point to be? Try to summarize the main point in a sentence.
4. How does the writer seem to feel about the advice as a result of the incident?
5. How would you characterize the writer’s voice (formal, preachy, conversational, sarcastic)? Does it change, or is it consistent? What kind of reader does this voice suggest?
6. What questions do you still have about the incident?
7. What can the writer do to make the next draft stronger? Try to offer at least two specific suggestions for the next draft.

This response sheet can also be altered and used as a self-evaluation sheet for writers. Writers can then compare their own answers to the answers of the peer respondent to see, for example, if what they intended as the main point of the essay is what the reader also sees. This can be a valuable aid as students revise.

**SOURCES AND ADDITIONAL REFERENCES**


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