



This is “Preface to Students”, article 4 from the book [Writers' Handbook \(index.html\)](#) (v. 1.0).

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## Preface to Students

It might be tempting to see writing as just one of the many skills in which you'll have to demonstrate proficiency before having your ticket punched on your way to "higher-level" coursework and a college degree. In truth, writing, and the thinking that comes with it, will be at the center of your college experience. Here's a brief tour of how to make the most of what this book has to offer. Please note your professor has the ability to add, delete, and reorder the contents of this book so topics may be arranged differently.

### **Part 1 (Chapter 1 "Writing to Think and Writing to Learn" through Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation"):** **Composing Habits of Mind**

Chapter 1 "Writing to Think and Writing to Learn", Chapter 2 "Becoming a Critical Reader", Chapter 3 "Thinking through the Disciplines", and Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation" comprise the "knowledge handbook" of the *Unnamed Publisher Handbook for Writers*. At times, it won't look or read like the rest of the text because it will seem to be more about thinking than writing or reading. But by the end of Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation", you'll probably come to see that the three activities—thinking, reading, and writing—are really inseparable.

At other times, the focus in Chapter 1 "Writing to Think and Writing to Learn", Chapter 2 "Becoming a Critical Reader", Chapter 3 "Thinking through the Disciplines", and Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation" is on you and your motivations for being in college; the chapters will seem to stray pretty far afield from what you would expect from a writing handbook. But good writing is built on the motivation and energy of an engaged writer who has something important to say to someone in particular.

While the rest of the handbook will give you the tools you need to become a better and more polished writer, Chapter 1 "Writing to Think and Writing to Learn", Chapter 2 "Becoming a Critical Reader", Chapter 3 "Thinking through the Disciplines", and Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation" will help you identify and develop some of the most important attitudes, dispositions, and **habits of mind** you'll need for success in college and life.

**Chapter 1 "Writing to Think and Writing to Learn"** activates the first of these habits of mind: **posing productive questions**. You will be exposed to a variety of strategies to slow down your thinking and withhold your judgment so that you can use exploratory writing as a way of generating further and deeper questions.

**Chapter 2 "Becoming a Critical Reader"** activates the next habit of mind: **reading texts carefully and critically**. You will be exposed to a variety of methods you can use to uncover the biases, assumptions, preconceptions, and implications in the texts you encounter and produce.

**Chapter 3 "Thinking through the Disciplines"** activates the third habit of mind: **seeing and making connections across the disciplines**. You will come to understand that the disciplines you encounter in college, just as the occupations you will someday assume, are always being reconstructed and negotiated by the people engaged in them. The distinct conventions for writing, speaking, and making meaning in each discipline and occupation are constantly being questioned and revised.

Finally, **Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation"** introduces you to the final habit of mind: **developing a rhetorical awareness**. You'll learn that when you "go public" with your low-stakes writing by finding a medium and a genre, your sense of curiosity, metaphor, humor, and wonderment can actually be enhanced in the presence of an audience.

Over the years, you've probably been taught (and retaught) how to write in certain academic genres: describing, narrating, explaining, classifying, comparing and contrasting, analyzing, solving problems, persuading, and so on. This handbook doesn't ignore these genres, but it intentionally avoids structuring its approach around them, for three reasons:

1. Academic writing at the college level, like writing in real life, is rapidly becoming multimodal (using a mix of genres) and multimedia (using a variety of delivery techniques).
2. Your experience in your college writing class will not be (and should not be) standardized and limited to writing exercises in a limited set of forms and formats that you will never use again in their pure form.
3. Your unique writing instructor and unique classmates will be working with you to determine which genres and modes of delivery are needed for which purposes.

When you do make those decisions about the genres and media that are most appropriate for your rhetorical situation, you'll be able to make them with the help of the thinking activities of these first four chapters. You will be able to explore the rhetorical stakes of writing for an instructor, a peer group, an entire class, and an audience outside the confines of the academic setting.

As you enter college, either you've already learned how to write proficiently in the academic genres listed above from the first twelve (or so) times you took language arts and English classes, or you're still having trouble. If you already know how to write in these genres, [Chapter 1 "Writing to Think and Writing to Learn"](#), [Chapter 2 "Becoming a Critical Reader"](#), [Chapter 3 "Thinking through the Disciplines"](#), and [Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation"](#) won't hurt you. Consider it a collection of new strategies for using writing to generate even more productive thinking. If you're still having trouble, [Chapter 1 "Writing to Think and Writing to Learn"](#), [Chapter 2 "Becoming a Critical Reader"](#), [Chapter 3 "Thinking through the Disciplines"](#), and [Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation"](#) open up a different approach from the usual manner in which you've likely been taught writing. Either way, regardless of whether you feel like you're a good writer, college is the time to try something new.

But ironically, the approach of the *Unnamed Publisher Handbook for Writers* may not be so "new" after all. It may in fact be about twenty-five hundred years old. After all, the five "canons" (or main subjects) of classical rhetoric were

1. invention, coming up with topics for your writing;
2. arrangement, ordering your discourse;
3. style, expressing your ideas artfully and well;
4. memory, building your collection of resources and storehouse of knowledge; and
5. delivery, considering your options for how to present your ideas publicly.

You'll find that very little in this handbook will stray far from these basic principles.

## **Part 2 ([Chapter 5 "Planning"](#) through [Chapter 10 "Publishing"](#)): Writing Processes**

While [Chapter 5 "Planning"](#), [Chapter 6 "Drafting"](#), [Chapter 7 "Researching"](#), [Chapter 8 "Revising"](#), [Chapter 9 "Designing"](#), and [Chapter 10 "Publishing"](#) are structured to take you through various steps in the writing process (planning, drafting, researching, revising, designing, and publishing), it's important to

remember that there is no single process to follow. If writing an essay were as simple as following a recipe, there wouldn't be much use for a handbook like this one or for the writing course you're taking right now. In [Chapter 1 "Writing to Think and Writing to Learn"](#), [Chapter 2 "Becoming a Critical Reader"](#), [Chapter 3 "Thinking through the Disciplines"](#), and [Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation"](#), you'll see how an idea can transform itself in the very process of being put into words and written down. In [Chapter 5 "Planning"](#), [Chapter 6 "Drafting"](#), [Chapter 7 "Researching"](#), [Chapter 8 "Revising"](#), [Chapter 9 "Designing"](#), and [Chapter 10 "Publishing"](#), you'll learn that even the sequence of these six steps can vary depending on your rhetorical situation. So even though you can feel free to read the chapters in order, be prepared to think of them as interconnected.

For example, you can **plan** ([Chapter 5 "Planning"](#)) a **draft** ([Chapter 6 "Drafting"](#)) but find that after doing **research** ([Chapter 7 "Researching"](#)), you need to go back to the planning stage. Or you can **revise** ([Chapter 8 "Revising"](#)) an idea so substantially that further research is required. Even the decisions you make about **design** ([Chapter 9 "Designing"](#)) and **publication** ([Chapter 10 "Publishing"](#)) can end up affecting your earliest planning and drafting. The point is, as always, to be flexible in your thinking. Otherwise, a rigidly followed process will lead to a rigidly written essay, and you will have missed an opportunity to use writing and researching to learn something new.

### **Part 3 (Chapter 11 "Academic Writing" through Chapter 14 "Public and Personal Writing"): Types of Writing**

For generations, you could count on spending most of your time in introductory college-level composition courses doing a certain type of writing—the academic essay—using a certain variety of modes, such as description, narration, classification, comparison, evaluation, and analysis. In recent years, the line between academic and nonacademic writing has blurred. Your college writing teachers recognize that the academic essay is still the predominant genre, but they also want to help prepare you to become more versatile writers, fully capable of operating in whatever genres and modes are most appropriate for a given rhetorical situation (audience, purpose, and context). [Chapter 11 "Academic Writing"](#), [Chapter 12 "Professional Writing"](#), [Chapter 13 "Writing on and for the Web"](#), and [Chapter 14 "Public and Personal Writing"](#) explore some of the types of writing that you will encounter both in college and in everyday life.

One thing you'll notice in [Chapter 11 "Academic Writing"](#), [Chapter 12 "Professional Writing"](#), [Chapter 13 "Writing on and for the Web"](#), and [Chapter 14 "Public and Personal Writing"](#) is that you'll be paying an equal amount of attention to the elements of the rhetorical triangle first introduced in [Chapter 1 "Writing to Think](#)

and Writing to Learn", Chapter 2 "Becoming a Critical Reader", Chapter 3 "Thinking through the Disciplines", and Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation", regardless of whether the writing you're doing is academic. That's only appropriate, if you think about it. Classical Greek and Roman rhetoricians didn't think of academic discourse as somehow exceptional or specialized. To them, and to us, academic writing is simply another kind of public, civic, and professional discourse. Writing purposefully in everyday life also involves an awareness of voice, message, audience, attitude, reception, and tone.

## **Part 4 (Chapter 15 "Sentence Building" through Chapter 20 "Grammar"): Quality Writing**

Some of the material in Chapter 15 "Sentence Building", Chapter 16 "Sentence Style", Chapter 17 "Word Choice", Chapter 18 "Punctuation", Chapter 19 "Mechanics", and Chapter 20 "Grammar" may seem basic to you. You've probably internalized many of the "rules and regulations" of good writing on your way to becoming a reasonably proficient writer. Nine times out of ten, when you do make grammatical mistakes (or commit "surface errors"), you probably do so in haste and out of carelessness. So Chapter 15 "Sentence Building", Chapter 16 "Sentence Style", Chapter 17 "Word Choice", Chapter 18 "Punctuation", Chapter 19 "Mechanics", and Chapter 20 "Grammar" are here for you as a resource and as a reminder to slow down your writing process to include proofreading and editing. You may, however, end up pleasantly surprised at how much your writing style improves each time you visit these chapters.

After years of being told what *not* to do, you may have come to think of "grammar and mechanics" as a minefield of potential mistakes and errors, but learning how to use the rules of language and style to your advantage—exploring the "dos" and the "don'ts"—can make you a much more effective communicator. Consider, after all, how an awareness of parallelism (discussed in Chapter 16 "Sentence Style") may well have helped Abraham Lincoln come up with the closing words of the Gettysburg Address—"a government *of the people, by the people, for the people*"—or helped Martin Luther King Jr. phrase his plea that his "four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged *by the color of their skin but by the content of their character*." The more you get to know how language really works, the more you can get language to work for you, as great writers do.

Now, let's get started...