

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

TO THE TEACHER - v

TO THE STUDENT - viii

## **PART 1: WRITING EVERY DAY**

TAKE A NOTE - 2

STUDY NOTES AND OUTLINES - 4

How to Take Notes - 7

Oral Sources - 8

Outlining - 10

PERSONAL LETTERS - 12

Thank-You Notes - 12

Keeping in Touch - 13

The Fan Letter - 15

Letters of Support - 18

Letters of Apology - 19

BUSINESS LETTERS - 21

Letters of Complaint - 22

Requests for Employment - 23

SUMMARIES - 25

How to Write a Summary - 27

BUSINESS REPORTS - 29

## **PART 2: LANGUAGE POWER**

A: PARAGRAPHS - 34

Paragraph Principles: Unity - 34

Paragraph Principles: Coherence - 35

Paragraph Types - 37

Paragraph Organization - 37

B: WRITING TECHNIQUES THAT REALLY WORK! - 41

Use More Verbs - 41

Let's Get Personal - 42

Be Specific - 43

Active over Passive - 43

Show, Don't Tell - 44  
Cut the Verbiage - 44  
Avoid Clichés (Like the Plague) – 46

C: TOWARD A PERSONAL WRITING STYLE - 47

Emphasis - 47  
Making Transitions - 50  
"Loaded" Words and Selective Detail - 53  
The Importance of Being Honest - 55

D: PRACTICE AND REVIEW EXERCISES - 55

**PART 3: THE ESSAY**

Essay Structure - 58  
Where Do Ideas Come From? - 59  
The Topic - 59  
The Thesis Statement - 60

WRITING THE ESSAY, STEP BY STEP - 63

THE DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY - 63

THE NARRATIVE ESSAY - 69  
The Introductory Paragraph - 71

THE EXPOSITORY ESSAY - 75  
Just the Facts - 75  
Information Sources - 76  
Writing the Expository Essay - 79

ABOUT RESEARCH PAPERS - 85

THE CRITICAL ESSAY - 87

THE ART OF PERSUASION - 93  
Elements of Persuasion - 94  
Writing the Persuasive Essay - 97

THE VERSATILE WORDSMITH CRAFTSMAN - 106

APPENDIX - 107

## **PART ONE: WRITING EVERY DAY**

When illiterate cultures are introduced to writing, they often regard it as magic. How can information and ideas be passed on without one person speaking out loud and directly to another? In a sense, they're right: the ability to communicate to individuals near at hand, or far away, or not yet born, is a thing of wonder. Think about it: right now I'm putting ideas in your head, even though I have (probably) never met you and don't even know your name. The capacity for written language is a gift that humans should never take for granted.

Today we stop taking written communication for granted—and the first person you'll communicate with is yourself, through lists, notes and outlines. Learn to do them well, and your life may go just a little easier.

## TAKE A NOTE

Before beginning any task, it's necessary to gather the tools. For a writer, that may start with a pencil and clean paper, but your most important tools are in your head. That is, ideas, information, knowledge, and thoughts. These mental tools don't always spring readily to mind. Have you ever had the experience of staring at a blank piece of paper while the minutes crawled by like snails? Nothing seemed to happen inside your head except one monotonous thought: I can't think of *anything* to write about! Even professionals know what that's like. It's called "writer's block."

This book should help you get over writer's block in a number of ways. The first way is so simple and practical you may never have thought of it as "writing." This is the practice of making notes to yourself, including lists of things to do.

Do you know anyone who makes notes and to-do lists? These people set themselves up for a lot of teasing (good-natured or not) because they are *so organized* they make the rest of us look like slobs. In order to keep from *feeling* like slobs, we may tell ourselves, "Well, she (or he) may get a lot more done, but I'll bet she doesn't have much fun. I like to take advantage of opportunities as they come up, and you can't do that if you're tied to a list. Besides, I don't have the time."

Like it or not, we all have an increasing number of things to do and remember. That is part of becoming an adult. Every successful student learns to organize time to accommodate school assignments, part-time work, chores, club meetings, volunteer service—both the "have-to's" and the "want-to's." It's true that some people are more naturally inclined toward note-jotting and list-making than others. But the discipline is worthwhile for all, no matter what their natural inclinations. Consider—

- 1) Listmakers *do* get more done. Not only that, but a list can save money as well as time.
- 2) Those who are naturally inclined to listmaking may seem less spontaneous (that is, open to changing plans at the last minute) than those who don't make plans. On the other hand, the people who make lists are often the ones who make things happen!
- 3) Making a list doesn't make you a slave. Just the opposite—when you write things down, *you* are the one in charge. If unforeseen circumstances arise, you may consciously decide to skip or postpone an item. You are neither at the mercy of the list (which is *your* creation, after all) nor of your memory (which may fail you).
- 4) To claim that you don't have time to write things down doesn't make sense. Listmakers have *more* time, because they organize it better.

Making notes and to-do lists will help you create free time that's really free—time you can enjoy without the thought of undone responsibilities hanging over your head.

## HOW TO MAKE NOTES AND TO-DO LISTS

STEP ONE. Buy a small memo book, weekly planner, or appointment calendar. This will be your **plan book**. Since you will use it to schedule writing assignments, some sort of calendar works best. If you use a plain lined memo book, take a few minutes to label each page as a separate week: “Sept. 4-10,” “Sept. 11-17,” “Sept. 18- 24,” etc.

STEP TWO. Keep the plan book in a handy place with a pen or pencil nearby.

STEP THREE. Write in your plan book. About what? Commitments you make (“Meet S. at Mall 2 p.m. Sat.”); instructions from your parents (“Clean out garage Fri. a.m.”); thoughts that come to you (“Thank Grandma for book.” “Ask B. about tickets”). Write down long-range commitments and plans as well, such as spring break or the yards you contracted to mow every three weeks. You might even keep a pen or pencil with you at all times, along with a small notebook or scratch pad to jot down thoughts and reminders the moment they occur to you. Regularly transfer these notes to your plan book.

*(But wait!—you may be thinking—I use my phone for that. I put all commitments on my calendar app and it sends me reminders. Okay, but for this course let’s revive the art of pencil and paper. Much research indicates that the very act of forming letters and writing words by hand stimulates brain function in a way that tapping on a keyboard doesn’t. The benefits of taking study notes by hand are even greater, as we will soon see.)*

STEP FOUR. Review your plan book daily. Lists and notes are no good if you forget to look at them! A quick review every morning should be enough to keep in mind what needs to be done. As you complete items, you can cross them off the list (this is the fun part). If something doesn't get done, no problem: move it to the next day, or next convenient time, so it’s not forgotten.

NOTE: Throughout this course I will be referring to your “plan book” and your “notebook.” These are not the same! You will use an ordinary spiral-bound **notebook** for writing exercises, preliminary work, outlines and rough drafts. The **plan book** is for writing down what you need to do and when. Starting now, you will schedule your own writing assignments within a given time frame. When you see a boxed paragraph, it’s an assignment or exercise. It’s also a signal to get out your plan book and write when you’re going to do it.

ASSIGNMENT. If you are using a memo book for your planning, mark a section for each day of the week, with divisions for morning, afternoon, and evening. Write down all the chores, appointments, meetings and fun things you plan to do each day this week. Anticipate any preparations you will need to make, and write them under the appropriate days. For example, if you have a presentation to give during Speech class on Thursday, make a note to yourself to “gather stuff for pres. at Speech” on Tuesday evening.

Follow this procedure at the start of every week for the next six months. By the end of that time, it should be a habit.

The next assignment will require some thought. Complete it within two weeks. Schedule it in your plan book NOW.

ASSIGNMENT. In your notebook (not your plan book), make lists of your goals for the next year, the next five years and the next ten years of your life. One outstanding trait of successful people—no matter how their success is measured—is that they set goals for themselves. Having a goal gives you a direction and a target.

Your goals for this year should be realistic, specific, and not too routine. Eating breakfast every morning does not qualify as a goal! The list should include items that depend mostly on you and require at least a little work. *Get a part time job, learn calligraphy, start saving for a trip to Europe, or research jobs in healthcare field* are all practical goals.

The farther you project into the future, the hazier your goals are likely to be. *Become an artist or Own a business* may be an appropriate direction for you, but it's too early to work out the details. Even a general direction, however, can motivate you to take steps now, such as signing up for watercolor class or opening a savings account.

## STUDY NOTES AND OUTLINES

If you looked up the word “note” in a dictionary, how many definitions might you find? A brief message, a single musical pitch, a reminder to yourself, a jarring instant (as in, “He struck a wrong note with his remark”) are all “notes.” The kind of “note” we will discuss in this section is a piece of information written in short form. It is a reminder of an idea. The to-do notes were reminders from you, to you. Now we will consider notes from sources outside yourself, both written and spoken.

Picture yourself in the middle of a college lecture on Plato during Philosophy 101 class. Your head nods as the instructor drones on:

“The essential question of *The Republic* is, ‘What is justice?’ The Sophists claim that since strength is the ultimate virtue, then justice is whatever serves power. Socrates rejects this without much argument, but goes on to qualify justice as an attribute of groups, not individuals. Therefore, in order to understand what a just *man* is we must define a just *society* . . .”

Sitting at your desk, you appear to have options. You can text a friend to meet for lunch, you can research gaming tips on your phone, you can draw caricatures of your classmates, or you can pay attention. Actually, your options boil down to two: you can use this time well or you can waste it. Assuming you’re in this class for a reason, you may as well try to get something out of it. And besides, this information may be on the test! And one more crazy thought: knowledge is worth having for its own sake.