



# 1

## Strategic Writing

### AIMS OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter introduces a rhetorical approach to college writing. Rhetoric is the study of effective communication in specific situations. A rhetorical approach emphasizes that writing is a way of acting in situations. In college, most of your activity is communicative; you learn by listening and talking, by reading and writing. Becoming more skillful in these activities will help you become more involved and give your efforts more personal meaning. The concepts presented in this and the next chapter should help you develop terms to describe the rhetorical situations in which you find yourself and the goals you may wish to accomplish in those situations.

### KEY POINTS

1. Writing is rhetorical: an action you take when you participate in a specific situation.
2. Rhetoric has its origins in the classical world, but two cultural changes since then affect your current rhetorical situation in college:
  - The rise of schooling and literacy
  - The specialization of knowledge and professions
3. In school and life we learn many strategies of minimizing our own feelings to please others. However, your success as a writer in college and elsewhere depends on your overcoming these strategies of disengagement so that you become more involved in your activities.
4. Involvement comes from finding out what is important to you and then acting on what you have found.

## QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

- How is writing different in different situations? How might college writing differ from the writing you did in high school? How do the goals differ? How do the styles differ?
- When have you felt most involved in learning? When have you felt least involved? Has the chance to discuss and write about what you are learning and thinking made a difference in how involved you feel?
- What do you hope to get out of your education? What does writing have to do with accomplishing those goals?

## A First-Day Assignment

On the first day in writing courses, students are often asked to write some variation of the following assignment. You might take fifteen minutes and try it.

Write a paragraph introducing yourself to your instructor and your classmates. Tell about your previous experience in this subject, what you enjoy doing in school and out, what concerns you, and what your ambitions and goals are.

Although you know many things about yourself, this may not be an easy assignment to write. It raises questions about which you have little information on the first day of the term, perhaps even on your first day of college classes. Who are the people you are writing to? How will these strangers respond to what you write? What will this class be like? What will college be like? What impression will people get from your writing? What impression would you like to give in this class? What role and identity would you like to establish in college? This assignment asks to give a picture of yourself, but until you know more about the situation, you may not feel at all sure about what kind of picture you want to draw. So writing this assignment is not just a matter of simple description but rather a matter of self-presentation in a social situation.

One way to handle this assignment is to take no risks and just remain friendly.

Hi. I'm Bill Stanley, an eighteen-year-old freshman at State University. I graduated last year from Franklin Roosevelt High School, where I most enjoyed my courses in math and science. I also played trombone in band. I have always gotten good grades in English, although I find writing difficult. Teachers tell me I ought to be more descriptive, but I say why waste words once you get your idea across. I hope to major in biology and go on to medical school.

This does what is asked, gives some details, and leaves Bill Stanley's options open. But it does not announce that Bill will be an enthusiastic and memorable participant in this course. In order to take a more emphatic place in the class, another student might take a more challenging stance, but still give no important facts.

Yes, here I am. Writing again. In another English class. Telling you who I am. I love writing, but I sure am tired of this assignment. Sure I came from some high school. Sure I like some subjects, and didn't like others. I got good enough grades to get into college, so I could do the work. But this isn't what is important about me. What is important is that I am looking — looking for new ideas, looking for a style. I listen to music that's at the edge, I read stuff you'll never find in school, I live in cyberia. Will I find what I am looking for here or will this be just one more dull English class?

*Rachel "Razzi" Rasmussen*

Do you think either of these responses gives a full or revealing picture of the students who write them? What kind of response do you think might start someone off well in an unknown situation? Are there any things about the situation that might help you decide how to represent yourself?

There is no right or wrong way to handle this assignment, but any way you choose starts to establish your identity in the conversations, written and spoken, that will take place in the class throughout the term. What makes this assignment difficult and makes any response likely to look a little bit foolish is that the conversation hasn't yet taken place, so you are writing as part of a relationship that is only beginning. This is as tough as introducing yourself to a stranger at a party.

Writing for people you don't know in a situation you don't understand is the hardest writing to do. Every time you learn more about a situation and the people you are writing to, you understand better what you want to accomplish, what you want to say, and what will work. Writing is not an abstract skill that is always the same; it is strategic communication to fit the circumstances. How can you know your strategy until you know the circumstances?

## Writing as Rhetoric

Each of you making it to a college classroom has succeeded in many situations where you have needed to write. You wrote well enough to complete the tasks required of you. Even more, you expressed yourself, your knowledge, and your ideas in ways that helped you develop and interact with others. You wrote in high school for your teachers, in letters to your friends, on shopping lists to take with you to the store, or in diaries to yourself. You found ways of getting by, meeting your needs in each of those situations — sometimes spectacularly, sometimes just adequately. But you did find a way.

Why then must you study writing one more time? Why does learning to write never end? Why isn't it enough to say, "Now I know how to write, and I'm done with it"?

Learning to write never ends because you keep encountering new kinds of situations. Whereas in high school you may have used materials from your American history textbook to write an exam question about Lincoln's actions in the Civil War, in college you may be asked to argue, using evidence from personal letters, that Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation for political motives rather than as an act of moral leadership. If you then become a publishing historian, you may argue in a book that Lincoln was more a politician than a statesman. These examples are all just within one field of history. Legal briefs or management reports or chemistry research articles will be done for totally different situations requiring different skills, resources, and motives. As situations change, so must writing; in other words, writing is rhetorical. Writing must speak to each situation, to the particular local circumstances, to be successful.

Abraham Lincoln's 1858 debates with Stephen Douglas spoke to the politically and morally charged atmosphere in the United States just before the Civil War.

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## Writing for Reflection



This is the first of a series of Writing for Reflection assignments that appear throughout the textbook. These assignments are intended as informal ways to think through your own experience of writing and learning in relation to the ideas presented in this book. They need not be formal essays. Here is the first assignment:

To gain a clearer picture of your writing experiences before coming to college, describe in a few paragraphs the various kinds of writing you have had to do in school and out. In each case describe the situation you wrote for (for example, at the end of a term in a world history class, for a community newspaper, or as part of a political campaign), the kind of writing you did (for example, a biography of a writer, a sports news story, or a sales brochure), and how that kind of writing fulfilled the needs, demands, or opportunities of the circumstances.

## Rhetorical Situations

As the preceding discussion has made clear, rhetoric is the practical art of making successful statements in specific situations. If the purpose of communication is to interact with others — to influence, to cooperate with, to oppose, to control, to comply with, to negotiate — then you have a greater chance of success if you think about the following points:

- What the situation is
- Who you are communicating with
- What you want to happen
- What ways you might achieve that end

How can we use language in purposeful, practical ways to achieve our goals? That question is the heart of rhetoric.

Successful communication varies from person to person and situation to situation. There is no simple, single “good rhetoric,” no one way to write. You must always think about the specifics of the situation: what you want to accomplish, with whom, and through what available means.

In college you will find yourself writing in a variety of new situations, and you will need to think through how you want to respond to them. That is, you will need to develop a “rhetoric for college” — a way of thinking about your writing for the next few years that will help you get what you want out of college and also satisfy the writing demands college places upon you. At other points in your life you may need to develop a rhetoric for your profession, a rhetoric for sales, a rhetoric for managing people, a rhetoric for city politics, a rhetoric for talking to your children, or a rhetoric for talking to your loved one. Right now, however, your most pressing need is likely to be a rhetoric for college writing.

## Writing for Reflection



Make a list of the kinds of situations where people have to speak or write to carry out their part in an activity, such as chatting as part of a pleasant dinner with friends, making a statement at a public meeting, filling out a form to apply for a job, or writing a letter to publicize the work of your organization. Then in a few phrases for each, characterize how people might use language in each situation and what strategies might be successful. For example, at a dinner people might try to be pleasant and humorous while sharing stories about themselves and mutual friends.

## The Origins of Rhetoric

Many societies around the world have recognized that how people use language is related to who they become, how they are viewed, and what they accomplish. Traditional sayings in many cultures offer advice about how to speak in public and private. Hindi traditional lore, for example, counsels, “Write like the learned; speak like the masses.” Thai wisdom advises, “To speak well one must reflect, and to hit the mark one must aim.” Turkish lore, however, warns that people are not always happy when you tell them the truth: “He that speaks the truth must have his foot in the stirrup.”

As literacy developed in various cultures, treatises on education often included language education as an important part of the training of leaders. For example, the Chinese scholar Liu Xie wrote “The Cultivating of the Mind and the Carving of the Dragon” (*Wen Xin Diao Long* — literally, “pattern mind carve dragon”) around 500 A.D. To become a dragon — that is, a wise and powerful leader — one needs to carve out a patterned mind by learning how to use the written language. (For more information, see H. Zhao, “Rhetorical Invention in *Wen Xin Diao Long*,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 24 (1994), pp. 1–15.)

Ancient Greece and Rome developed an extensive and organized body of thought about how to communicate successfully and how to help people represent their interests within the new political institutions of democracy and republic. Since reading and writing were not widespread in this period, even among the elite class of citizens, rhetoric first developed in relation to public speaking.

In public speeches, people accused of crimes needed to defend themselves; members of the consul needed to persuade others of their proposed policies and laws; and people needed to be brought together with common beliefs and values. These three forms of talk, all having their origins in the *agora* — or marketplace where citizens came to meet and talk — were tasks of argument and persuasion. Most of classical rhetoric’s concepts and guidelines are especially applicable to the forums of democratic government. Today, our courts, legislatures, and politics are similar to, and even patterned after, classical models. It is no accident that courthouses, legislatures, and governor’s mansions look like Greek and Roman buildings.

The speeches of Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.) were a powerful influence on the Roman Senate and public.

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To highlight some of the most useful concepts that have developed in the rhetorical tradition, throughout this book there will appear definitions and explanations of key rhetorical terms in places where they are most relevant to the topic or activity being discussed (see the list below). The last chapter in the book on argument will draw together many of these concepts.



## USEFUL CONCEPTS FROM RHETORIC

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## USEFUL CONCEPTS FROM RHETORIC

### The Types of Rhetoric

**C**lassical rhetoric was developed to help in three kinds of public speech situations common in the classical world, all of which still continue in the modern world.

*Courtroom or forensic rhetoric* — the strategic use of language to accuse or defend a person concerning misdeeds or crimes. It is practiced today in court cases.

*Legislative or deliberative rhetoric* — the strategic use of language to persuade people to take particular actions or adopt particular laws. It is practiced today in legislatures, editorials, and debates.

*Political or epideictic rhetoric* — the strategic use of language to praise and blame people in order to encourage and discourage behaviors and beliefs or to reinforce values in the community. It is practiced today in sermons and political rallies.

### Writing for Reflection

To explore how well the three traditional categories of rhetoric — forensic, deliberative, and epideictic — cover the range of public and personal speaking and writing today, identify one place where people communicate frequently (such as a classroom, a coffee shop, a church or temple, an office, a newspaper, or a talk radio channel). Either from memory or by revisiting the location, make a list of the different kinds of messages people present. Then develop categories for the different kinds of language used. Do the three categories of traditional rhetoric fit, or do you need to develop other categories? Describe your findings in a few paragraphs. Then in a class discussion compare your findings and thoughts about the location you examined to the findings and thoughts of other class members who examined different locations.





Courtroom lawyers engage in forensic rhetoric as they argue for the guilt or innocence of the accused. Here Johnny Cochran argues for the innocence of O.J. Simpson.

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## Rhetoric in a Changing World: Literacy, Specialization, and Technology

Although aspects of modern American life are deeply influenced by Greek and Roman models, life today has also changed from classical times. Thus although we may find that many concepts of traditional rhetoric help us understand contemporary situations, we also need new concepts to fit our new ways of communicating. One major change especially relevant to college is the rise of literacy. Reading and writing have joined listening and speaking as major forms of communication. Today, although talk certainly takes place at all levels of education, much of schooling is defined by the books you read and the papers and tests you write.

Whereas the spoken word tends to be more personal, the written word can travel through time and space and can be multiplied in many copies, influencing more people over a greater distance in a more enduring way. For these reasons, the written language has become central to major institutions of society. Religions are based on holy books, and legal systems are based on written codes, contracts, and records. Governments rely on regulations, orders, and information. Sciences formulate in writing knowledge about the world we live in. Journalism records news and trends. Literature offers books for entertainment and enlightenment.

The development of printing five hundred years ago has made books and other printed material cheap and readily available. In turn, literacy — the ability to read and write — has become more necessary for all aspects of

life. Schooling developed to meet that need for literacy. Reading and writing became not only subjects of instruction but central activities in all courses of instruction. The basic 3Rs — reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic — are all fundamentally literate practices — paper and ink operations. All school courses are structured through written syllabi, plans, guidelines, and catalogues. Even classes that emphasize physical skills such as flight training or laboratory technique have lesson plans, textbooks, manuals, and written exams. So doing well and getting what you want from college is very much a matter of reading and writing.

Although electronic communication technologies, starting with the telegraph and telephone over a century ago, have changed our life, they have not displaced literacy. In fact, the latest tools of the electronic revolution, computers and computer networks, seem to have led to a proliferation of the written word, as word processing has made composing and revision easier, electronic databases have increased access to written information, and on-line networks have increased the rapid exchange of text. Written communication flows across the Internet, from the most informal e-mail jottings to the complete texts of literary masterpieces and scholarly essays. The most recent developments in computer technology are supporting the combination of written word, sound, and picture. Reading and writing are becoming seamlessly integrated with other modes of communication. Even the programs that direct electronic representation are written, in the specialized languages of programming.

A second change has been the development of specialized professions and disciplines (that is, specific areas of study such as biology, sociology, and history of art), especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Each of these communities has developed specialized ways of using the written language to carry out its work. A medical doctor writing a patient's case record writes differently than a literary critic evaluating a novel. A lawyer writing a contract writes differently than an engineer writing a technical report. Whatever your chosen career, you will notice that people in that field have special ways of communicating with each other using particular styles and vocabularies. At college your education is likely to be organized by disciplines, in which you learn the information and the ways of communicating appropriate to each. Most probably you will have to declare a major, identifying a specific discipline that you will study more intensively and adopt more fully as a mode of communication.

These two changes, the rise of literacy as a school-taught skill and increasing specialization, influence the kind of rhetoric that you will need to develop for college — a rhetoric for written language as used in schools of higher education, organized along disciplinary lines. Your reading and writing, influenced by the disciplines of the courses, are framed within the structure and practices of a classroom. Although you may read about biology and may even read articles from biology journals, much of what you read is in textbooks, much of what you write is for assigned papers and examinations, and usually your goal is to demonstrate your knowledge and share your developing thoughts with your instructors. Thus a rhetoric for college is as

much attuned to the work of the classroom as it is to the work of the professions and disciplines.

## Writing for Reflection



Write several informal paragraphs on the various technologies you use for communication (from speech and pencil and paper through the latest electronic tool), on what occasions you use them, and how you use them. Be as specific as possible. For what kinds of communications do you use the telephone? What kinds of documents do you write on word processors? What interactions do you carry out only by face-to-face talk? Have you ever made a video, or do you just watch commercially produced television? Then, in class discussion, compare your observations with those of your classmates.

## Rhetoric and Decorum in Daily Life

All of us already know a great deal about rhetoric because we learn and use language to interact with each other. From earliest childhood we assess the effect our words and actions have on others. We learn who answers our requests by doing something for us, who tells us to do it for ourselves, who ignores us, and who gets angry. We adjust our behavior accordingly, learning how to talk to different people. We also learn at what times our parents will listen to us, when we will be told to hush up, or when we will be put off with an absent-minded nod. On the basis of this knowledge, we often consciously judge what to say. We learn what kind of comments may meet with approval, rejection, and irritation. Thus we start to learn about audience, timing, and goals within various situations.

We also have learned about forms and styles appropriate to different situations — when to say “please” and when telling a joke fits the situation, when to be precise, and when to be informal. We learn how to talk in the

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classroom, or the schoolyard, how to write a history exam, or a literature essay, and how to write a letter to our aunt. Communication and behavior appropriate to a situation is known as *decorum* (for more on decorum, see below).

For each of these situations you have developed a strategy for maximizing the results for yourself. Sometimes it may have been to keep a low profile, to stay out of trouble, and to not upset anyone. You may even have been rewarded for passivity with praise for seeming cooperative. In other situations you may have found the most pleasure from fitting in, trying to talk or write like everyone else around you so you feel accepted. Sometimes your strategy may have been to follow the explicit instructions of an authority and even to anticipate the authority's desires, saying or writing whatever you think will please the authority. All these are strategies of going along on a path laid out by others.

On the other hand, sometimes you may have created your own path and have sought strategies that defined your individuality. You may have taken risks to define your own point of view, reveal your own observations, question something others believe, request something you really want, or oppose something that you dislike. In doing so, you have brought a difference into the situation that sets your statement apart. This is known as saying something.



## USEFUL CONCEPTS FROM RHETORIC

### Decorum

**D***ecorum*, or the use of language and behavior that fits a situation, is a much richer concept in rhetoric than the usual use of the word. Today we usually associate decorum with polite, serious, respectful behavior, such as authorities would like to maintain in classrooms or courtrooms. Sometimes we associate decorum with etiquette, which is a formal set of rules for polite behavior in formal social circumstances. However, in rhetoric decorum can be any behavior that fits the circumstances, so one can also speak of the decorum appropriate to a loud dance party, a football game, or a raucous political argument.

Decorum is attuning yourself to the circumstances. It can include everything from learning to write a history paper that sounds like it comes from a skilled history student to learning how to write a script that sounds like it belongs on the evening news. Decorum doesn't limit what you can say or do, but just helps you find a tone, style, and vocabulary that will be recognized, acceptable, and effective as part of the unfolding situation.

## The Strategy of Growth

Every student who has gotten as far as college has developed automatic ways of adjusting to the decorum of the classroom, of getting through each school day without too much risk and with a moderate amount of success. For many students, this strategy of getting by may have become so habitual that it no longer seems like a strategy — it just seems a natural response to the situation.

It is worth thinking through this position within each college classroom. Paying attention to spelling, grammar, and well-organized paragraphs will keep you from losing points for making a mistake, but if that is all you are paying attention to, you have not yet begun to communicate. If you listen carefully to the teacher's statements only to repeat them, you may be marked correct, but you have not yet begun to grapple with the ideas and information. If you give the teacher exactly what you think the teacher wants, the teacher may be pleased with what you say, but there is no dialogue. The teacher cannot respond to what you are really thinking and cannot speak to your real questions, concerns, and differences of opinion.

As you grow older and have more experiences, your understanding of yourself becomes richer, your skills and knowledge increase, and your interests become deeper. At this point superficial cooperation becomes less satisfying. You naturally want something more involving and challenging.

In your relations with your friends and classmates you are all discovering new facts, encountering new ideas, confronting new problems, and finding new directions. Although you may want to be accepted in a crowd where you can relax, tell jokes, and go to the movies, you may also want to develop relationships where you can share the changes in your life. Sharing what you are going through demands a greater involvement and investment of yourself and your own concerns than just telling jokes and making pleasant comments. With certain close friends you may develop a more honest and involving kind of communication based on a trust that they will respect what you say, no matter how different and personal.

Just as you are demanding more from your life, teachers look for more from you. Their expectations are higher. Although college teachers may continue to pass students who follow orders and do little else, such students do not catch their personal attention or get the best grades. Teachers start asking you for original thinking, novel problem solving, and honest engagement, asking you to go beyond the safe minimum. They will be starting to prepare you for professional life, where you will have to make confident, personal judgments on difficult cases, judgments that must hold their own before other professionals.

Because of this, both your own needs and the demands of the situation suggest that you put more of yourself on the line, but in a way appropriate to each situation. Putting yourself on the line does not always mean being conflictual or oppositional but rather identifying where you stand, elaborating your position, and offering reasons. At times learning the power of the concepts and approaches offered by a discipline and instructor may provide the

greatest growth and excitement, with you feeling you have little to add; even then, however, you still need to identify how you are perceiving the material and what you are getting from it.

To get the most out of college, you need to set your own directions. After all, although you were required to attend high school, you have chosen to be at college, and you have chosen the particular college you are in, and that college has chosen you. You choose your classes (often there are options even within course requirements), and you choose your major. So lying low no longer makes sense. What makes sense is taking the risk to become who you are becoming, to become personally involved in your learning.

## Writing for Reflection



To help you identify the kinds of independent stances you have created through language, describe one or more incidents where you took a stand contrary to what other people in the group expressed or approved. This could be with parents, peers, community groups, or teachers; in classes or clubs; or in any other situation where you used language to identify where you stood apart. Describe the particular tactics you used to express your individual position and the reaction others had to your statement.

## ❧ Becoming Involved Through Writing

Research indicates that student success in college is directly correlated with involvement. According to these researchers, involvement includes such activities as talking to teachers, spending time in the library and on your courses, discussing your work with other students, thinking about what you are hearing and reading, developing your own opinions and positions, and asserting your ideas and goals in talk and writing. Involvement is a much higher predictor of success in college than high school grades, achievement and aptitude tests, IQ scores, or any other indicator researchers have found. As we have already discussed, in a very basic way the strategy for success in college is involvement — being high profile and not low profile.

However, involvement is not just a general impulse; it must be made real through specific actions. Every time you find a more successful way to communicate about what you are learning and what you are thinking, you become more involved in your learning and classes. Nothing is more involving than writing a paper you believe in, that is well received by your teacher, and that leads to further discussions among you, your teacher, and your classmates.

However, finding involving directions for our work, discovering areas we are interested in exploring, identifying what we have to say — these things often do not come easily. We don't always know ourselves and who we are becoming well enough to make simple choices about what we want to

do. Our memory of our past is limited and changeable from moment to moment. Our vision of who we are is influenced by every event in which we take part. The present has far too many possibilities for us to notice as we pass through it, and the future . . . well, who knows. The best we can do is follow what vague hunches we have about what might engage us and maybe interesting things may develop.

Precisely because so much is unknown, learning to write means trying something new. If an assignment seems to ask for more than you are used to, excites new ideas that you don't quite know how to put together, or suggests some research you think may be too hard, you will not learn if you depend on an old strategy that worked for less challenging situations. It is important to see what you can do in a new way, what ideas you can present for the teacher to respond to. See what kinds of claims you can justify, once you put yourself on the line.

As you take risks, what seemed dull and unrewarding may hold far more than you imagined. The best way to discover what the real value of an idea or a subject is, is to challenge it and to ask what it means. Even the act of defining those subjects or approaches or courses that seem empty will help you identify other areas that fit better with what you want to explore and learn. When you find something that excites you, follow it. Conversely, when you find something that holds nothing for you, no matter how much and energetically you explore it, then move past it as rapidly as you can to get into something that will involve you. Don't try to cover your lack of interest by inflating the subject, pretending an enthusiasm where you have none, or making up empty phrases to cover a lack of things to say. Decide to get through the dull work or uninteresting topic as efficiently and directly as possible so you can spend more time on what interests you.

What has just been described is a strategy to increase your involvement and concentration. In sports, concentration and involvement are also necessary to notice and respond to moment-by-moment opportunities. Coaches advise, "Keep your eye on the ball." "Watch the position." "Bear down, concentrate." Learning is also being responsive to moment-by-moment circumstances. Your learning is in all the problems you have to solve, all the information you need to absorb, all the ideas you puzzle over, all the skills you have to develop, and all the statements you make in order to become part of those situations which you pass through.

The analogy with sports, however, is limited in at least one very important sense. In sports you are driven to outdo an opponent; a tough opponent may drive you harder, improve your skill, and get you more involved. Competition is a driving force in most sports. Education, however, is driven only by your desire to extend yourself and learn new things. Tough material and rewarding projects may lend new challenges, exciting teachers and classmates may increase your attention, but your own sense of growth is the only thing that will carry you through every day. Whereas it is easy to be challenged by a tough opponent, your own personal growth is a more elusive target, a challenge that can get lost in discouragement or vagueness. If you are lucky, teachers and others will notice your growth, point out directions

for you, and reflect your development back to you. But ultimately you have to pull the picture together to locate your own motivation to face continued challenge and growth.

One of the ways to keep an eye on yourself and your own growth is to watch your writing. If you keep a file of your papers as you go from year to year and course to course, you can get a sense of where you have been, where you are going, and how far you have come. By seeing who you are becoming as a writer, you can reflect on who you are becoming through your education.

## Writing for Reflection

1. Describe one occasion when you got caught up in a writing assignment for a course. What was the assignment? What specifically did you choose to write about? What did you say in the paper? What made the assignment so engaging? What did you think about as you wrote the paper? What did you learn from writing it? What were you proudest about in the paper? Who read the paper? How did they respond?
2. Interview several friends about one time they became involved in their writing for school. Ask them about the assignments, what they wrote, what made their work interesting for them, and what they felt they accomplished. Then write a paragraph about each of the engaging assignments to share and discuss with your classmates.



## NEWS FROM THE FIELD

### What Difference Does College Make?

Most students hope that college will make a difference — not only in income, but in the kind of life they lead. Is this just a hope, or does research confirm that college does make a difference?

Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini's book *How College Affects Students* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991) presents a comprehensive survey of the extensive research on this subject. It reviews hundreds of studies of students in colleges of all sizes and kinds and in all regions of the country — making comparisons among them and with students who have not attended college. The authors report that college indeed has a marked effect.

1. Seniors usually have better verbal and quantitative skills than freshmen. Moreover, seniors reason better abstractly, solve problems bet-



ter, use evidence more effectively to reason through issues that have no certain answers, are more flexible in seeing multiple sides to issues, and can organize and manipulate more complex ideas. In short, college tends to make you smarter.

2. Most seniors have greater self-understanding, self-definition, and personal commitment than freshmen. They also have a better self-image and more self-esteem, as well as more independence from their parents. In short, college helps you become a reflective, confident, self-directed adult.
3. Seniors tend to have an increased openness to and tolerance of diversity. Moreover, they tend to reason about moral issues in principled ways more than freshmen. In short, college can help make you a more tolerant and reasonable person.
4. Seniors have more interest in art, culture, and ideas than freshmen. They tend to believe more in the value of a liberal education and less in college as a form of vocational training. In short, college helps you value education and culture.
5. Completing college has strong socioeconomic benefits over one's whole career, but when you complete college you tend to care less about money and more about the intrinsic value of education than when you entered. Moreover, upon completing college you are more likely to enter challenging careers and engage in lifelong learning. In short, you are likely to earn more money if you finish college, but the money won't seem as important.

Of course, statistics never tell you what will happen in any particular case. There are no guarantees that upon graduation you will play the violin, be on your way to a Nobel Peace Prize, earn a six-figure salary, or not care whether you earn a six-figure salary. Your personal situation, motivation, and activity affect how you are influenced by your college experience. But research does confirm that the changes are almost always positive.

As you engage in the college activities that lead to these personal changes, you often need to think about what you should say, what you should write. By learning to articulate your thoughts, experiences, and learning through writing, you are learning to articulate yourself as a person. That is a theme that runs throughout this book.

## Writing Reflection



Write a few paragraphs looking forward to the next few years. How do you think or hope that college will affect you? In what ways would you like to grow or change? What parts of yourself do you hope or expect will not change? What do you think you will be most involved in; and what not?

**Getting  
Involved  
Electronically**



Find the procedures for getting an e-mail account at your school, and establish an account. Learn the procedures for writing, editing, and sending a message. Send a short message to your instructor. Send another to a classmate introducing yourself.