

**Textbook review for *inReview***  
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**Ramage, John D. and John C. Bean *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing* 2nd edition, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000.**

*The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing* takes a rhetoric-based, writing across the curriculum approach to the teaching of college writing. Focusing on “real” purposes for writing, the text is a thorough and appropriate rhetoric to be used as an introduction to college composition for most beginning writers. While students would need supplemental texts for style/grammar instruction, especially the developmental and English as a second language student populations, and while the examples may be too adolescent for non-traditional populations, as a rhetoric, *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing* offers most students the strategies necessary to write successfully in college, in the workplace, and in their lives generally.

The text is divided into five sections. “Part One: A Rhetoric for College Writers” introduces students to college-level writing and thinking and sets a tone of critical inquiry for the course. “Part Two: Writing Projects” familiarizes students with some purposes for writing: writing to learn, express, explore, inform, analyze, and persuade; this section is where most of the writing assignments are found. “Part Three: A Guide to Composing and Revising” outlines processes through which students can prewrite, draft, and revise their writing. “Part Four: A Guide to Research” reviews the research process. “Part Five: A Guide to Special Writing Occasions” exposes students to two common college writing situations—the essay exam and the reflective essay. In all, the text is a comprehensive introduction to many of the writing tasks students will be expected to perform in their professional and personal lives.

**The Theory**

In “Part One: A Rhetoric for College Writers,” the authors begin by addressing common student concerns, such as “why take a writing course.” Instead of conceding to student complaints about the universal requirement of first-year composition, the authors take this opportunity to encourage students to think about writing (and the writing course) as something empowering: writing as a means of forming identity, writing as a means of academic success, and writing as a means of occupational advancement. By approaching the instruction of writing as a method of empowerment instead of a burden, the authors help set a positive tone for the rest of the semester.

Another common student concern addressed is “what does the professor want.” In response, the authors present writers as “problematizers” and encourage students to pose problematic and significant questions about issues important to them. Rather than attempting to tackle topics to which they will have a hard time contributing (abortion, capital punishment, gun control, and euthanasia) just because students *think* these are academic topics, the authors explain that professors want students to think, to be engaged in the material, and to contribute to the discussion—once again empowering students and raising expectations for course outcomes. The authors privilege thinking as a means to effective writing. Where other texts may skip this imperative step of the writing process, *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing* places thinking in the forefront of the writing process and offers strategies from which students can work in order to improve their performance in a given writing situation.

In addition to problematizing a writing topic, what the authors call “subject-matter problems,” Part One also introduces students to “rhetorical problems,” questions involving external components of writing situations. The authors explain that effective writers understand

they are *always* writing to an audience, for a purpose, in an appropriate style, and that these writers make *choices* according to their situations.

The section reviews the difference between open- and closed-form prose, revealing that most college professors prefer students write closed-form, thesis-driven essays. In explaining this approach to the essay, the authors stress this importance of *risk taking*. Citing Peter Elbow, the authors say that the most effective thesis must “stick its neck out” or surprise a reader. They offer two strategies for devising such a thesis: trying to change the readers’ view and creating tension.

Part One can be reviewed within the first two week of class. Doing so will arm the students and instructor with common terminology with which to discuss writing and writing processes as well as set the standards for writing and learning for the rest of the semester.

### **Practical Applications**

In “Part Two: Writing Projects,” each section focuses on a specific purpose for writing: writing to learn (seeing and reading rhetorically), to express (the autobiographical narrative), to explore, to inform, to analyze (images, numerical data, short stories, causes/effects), and to persuade (the classical argument, making evaluations, proposals). Within each section, students are walked through the particular purpose for writing—exploring its uses within and outside the academy, reviewing examples of it, and practicing their own skills.

In the “About” section of each chapter, the authors discuss the particular kind of writing, what situations that kind of writing could be used for, and what writers typically hope to accomplish through it. In “Exploring,” the authors relate this kind of writing to students’ lives with “have you ever” situations and give brief “out-of-context” examples of its use. In

“Understanding,” the authors break down the major components of and theories behind the kind of writing (the causal chain in analyses, strategies for observing in rhetorical analyses, the classical appeals in an argument). These three sections work together as a means of introduction and instruction.

In “Writing Project,” the authors offer assignments for executing each purpose. The assignments are broad enough to allow for equal participation from all student populations. In addition, these assignments are flexible enough to allow for modification. They can be tailored to specific programs needs: thematic issues, learning community foci, and technical institution specializations. Another modification may be to narrow the assignment by focusing on a specific field or community. For example, the assignment for “Chapter 9: Writing to Inform” asks students to write an informative essay with a surprising thesis reversing a common misconception. This assignment has been narrowed by some programs to writing about misconceptions about a certain job or hobby. Within same program, the same assignment was modified further to fit a non-native speaking section of composition: reverse a common misconception about your culture. Modifying the assignments in this way could help not only to focus classroom discussion and examples, but also to reduce the number of “recycled” or plagiarized essays.

In “Readings,” the authors provide sample essays for the writing purposes. Both student and professional samples are presented, and they cover a wide range of disciplinary fields. The professional samples are current and many cover topics that relate directly to students’ lives.

In “Composing Your Essay,” the authors work through writing processes with students. Each chapter offers invention strategies directly related to the assignment tasks, organizational

techniques, style considerations, and guidelines for revision and editing. Much of what is reviewed in these sections is discussed at length in Part Three of the text.

In “Guidelines for Peer Reviewers,” the authors list questions to be used for analyzing student drafts. These questions cover both global and sentence-level issues. The instruction needed to perform many of the skills in this section is offered in Part Three of the text, as well.

### Analysis of Specific Chapters and Assignments

“Chapter 5: Seeing Rhetorically” teaches students how to approach concerns about audience and style. Instruction from this chapter is an essential component to any writing classroom. Through it, the authors explain that writers make choices depending on who they are writing to and what they want to accomplish. Students learn that the way they present their subjects to their readers—the choices they make as writers in terms of language, example, organization, and style—directly influence the way their readers will feel about their subjects. The authors lay out strategies for students to use in their composing: state meaning or intentions directly, select/omit details, choose words specifically, use figurative language, and devise sentence structure to reflect intent. The assignment has three components which reinforce the analytical skills students learn in this chapter. In Part A, students are asked to compose two opposing descriptions of a scene they observed—one which presents a positive image of the scene; the other which presents a negative one—without changing any of the factual information. In doing so, students are compelled to practice the strategies the authors discuss in the chapter. In Part B, students are instructed to rhetorically analyze their descriptions. In other words, they should explain what choices they made, why they made those choices, and how those choices affected the audiences’ impressions of the scene. In addition, they are asked to end their analysis

by answering the question “So what?” in a reflective conclusion which explains what they’ve learned by completing the assignment. While students may be confused by the layout (three components in two parts) and focus more of their attention on the descriptions than the reflection, setting guidelines informing them of the number of words expected to be written for each component should make the goals for the assignment clearer. Dividing the assignment into Parts A, B, and C may clarify the goals even further.

“Chapter 10: Analyzing Images” offers students practice with another method of rhetorical analysis. Many of the skills and theories learned in Chapter 5 transfer to the assignment in this chapter. However, while the instruction on analysis is thorough and clear, the assignment for this chapter could perhaps be clearer in terms of focus and organization. The assignment asks for students to choose two different advertisements for the same type of product (two shoe ads, two electronics ads) but geared toward different audiences. Students are asked to analyze how each ad works to communicate with its target audience. While the chapter reinforces previous notions of purpose, audience, and style in the *analysis*, it leaves students unsure of how to do this in their *writing*. They may find it difficult to unify their two analyses under one comprehensive thesis. However, once again, the text is flexible enough to allow for reworking the assignment into one that is clearer to students. For example, an instructor could ask students to choose only one ad and discuss how the ad works to either subvert or reinforce dominant cultural ideology. By doing so, students can find it easier to devise an explicit thesis and focus on supporting that thesis. Granted, readings on cultural materialism and criticism would be needed to supplement the text for the new assignment, but the instruction in the text lends to the practical applications of the analysis. The authors sufficiently inform students about the composition of advertisements and how different parts relate to each other and the whole,

strategies necessary for conducting analysis. Therefore, students have the tools they need in order to write a focused, significant analysis of not only advertisements, but also dominant cultural ideologies.

“Chapter 13: Investigating Questions about Cause and Consequence” introduces students to causal analysis. The chapter works well to place this type of writing in a context outside of the academy—explaining this method of analysis (and writing) dominates business and private life—and offers the three most common uses for this analysis: one-time events, repeatable events or recurring phenomena, and trends. The authors explain this type of analysis is most often the way major decisions are made (How will cutting our workforce by 20% effect our profit margin?) and the way most happenings are explained (What has caused of the decline in American student performance compared to other nations’ students?), again, stressing “real world” applications of this kind of writing. Three methods of showing causal relationships—explaining the causal mechanism directly, explaining the causal link through inductive methods, and citing precedents or analogies—help students with organization. However, the glossary of causal terms may confuse students at times. Here, the authors try to gloss terminology often used in this type of analysis (post hoc, ergo propter hoc; precipitating vs. contributing causes; immediate vs. remote causes), but students still struggle with the terms. It may be that it is too much information for students to digest for one project, or that the illustration of these terms (Ken failed an exam because Barbie broke up with him the night before) is too simplistic for students to make a connection between the term and the event. However, in the past this difficulty with terms has not inhibited students from producing effective papers.

### **Resources for Writing Situations**

In “Part Three: A Guide to Composing and Revising,” the authors review writing processes. They encourage students to adopt the practices of experienced writers: expressively writing for invention, talking to others about ideas, using research, scheduling time well, exchanging drafts with others, revising, and proofreading. Careful attention is paid to revision in this section, probably because it is this step that students typically skip or have the most difficulty with. While students may confuse revision with editing, the authors lay-out some of the purposes for which experienced writers use revision: to overcome limits of short-term memory, to accommodate shifts in ideas, to clarify rhetorical issues, to clarify organization, and to improve style and mechanics. These strategies are further discussed in “Chapter 18: Nine Lessons in Composing and Revising Closed-Form Prose.” The authors present critical considerations for writers: understanding reader expectations, converting loose structures into thesis/support structures, planning and visualizing structure, learning expert patterns for organization and development, placing points before particulars, signaling relationships with transitions, binding sentences with the old/new contract, writing effective titles and introductions, and writing effective conclusions. Through this chapter, students gain an understanding of the conventions of closed-form writing.

Sections analyzing peer interaction are particularly helpful in classes that require “group work,” collaborative writing, and peer reviewing. The authors pose the writing group as a team, but they are realistic when describing the situations involved with group interaction. They begin by discussing some basic principles of successful group interaction: listening emphatically, recognizing/playing assigned roles, being sensitive to body language, and investing time in group maintenance. However, the authors admit that even when group work is approached with the

best intentions and with effective strategies, at times conflicts still arise. To help students understand these conflicts, the authors discuss two common sources of tension—cultural differences and the “impossible group member”—and offer strategies to resolve issues effectively within groups.

In “Part Four: A Guide to Research,” the authors approach “the research paper” in much of the same way they do other writing situations and relate the writing strategies they have already presented to this kind of writing. They explain that research papers also call for the writer to pose interesting, significant, and problematic questions, which will develop into a thesis. Once again, the authors highlight thinking and reading as the beginning steps for conducting research. They suggest students read current information on their chosen topics from a range of sources—encyclopedias, books, scholarly journals, and popular magazines—as well as discussing the topic with friends.

Most comprehensive, though, is “Chapter 22: Using and Citing Sources.” In this section, the authors review how to take notes effectively so that the student can have useful information and avoid plagiarism. They discuss evaluating sources for credibility. Most of the chapter, though, covers documentation guidelines set by MLA and APA. The authors first review how to incorporate outside research into the students’ texts, offering clear and detailed explanations of how and when to summarize, paraphrase, and quote. Next, students learn how to properly cite information they use with parenthetical citations and a citation page, and they can compare their texts to the sample research papers for each documentation style. The section ends by with a careful discussion of how to use on-line research tools effectively—reviewing e-mail, discussion groups, e-lists, electronic libraries, and the World Wide Web—and presents ideas about intellectual property and plagiarism.

Depending on the design of a particular writing program, this section can be introduced at the beginning of the semester or reviewed for the final project. The section could be used earlier in a semester for programs that require students to incorporate research into their writings throughout the course. However, if the course only requires students use research in conjunction with certain projects, the section can be taught along with those projects.

In “Part Five: A Guide to Special Writing Situations,” the authors review two common academic writing tasks: the essay examination and the reflective essay. For essay exams, the authors relate the skills involved in performing successfully in this situation (writing under pressure and subject knowledge) to “real-world” situations (writing under a deadline). They also explain how the skills discussed previously in the text (subject matter and rhetorical problems) can be transferred to essay exam writing (understanding the material and the instructor’s expectations). Most helpful for students, though, is the section on analyzing test questions. Here, the authors offer strategies for understanding what an exam is asking students to do. After they review common exam question components (outside quotations and key terms), the authors provide a table with common question verbs (analyze, critique, illustrate, summarize) and discuss what task each verb calls for the student to perform.

For the reflective essay, the authors first make students aware of the kinds of reflection they perform daily (reviewing game tapes in sports to improve performance on the field, analyzing conversations they’ve had in order to see what they could have said differently to change the outcomes). They then show how this kind of thinking is beneficial to the students and how they can transfer the skills they already exercise to this writing task. Finally, the authors review two common types of reflective assignments and their major components: single-reflection assignments (with process, subject-related, rhetoric-related, and self-assessment

questions) and comprehensive reflection assignments (with self-, content, rhetorical, and critical knowledge).

Depending on the requirements of a particular writing program, this section can be used as a tool for instruction or simply mentioned as a resource for students to use in future classes. If a program requires exit examinations or works with portfolio-type evaluation, this last section will be especially helpful to students. However, if a program does not have such exit requirements, simply making students aware of what the section offers will suffice for the semester.

All in all, *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing* is a comprehensive rhetoric that is both instructor- and student-friendly. It offers concise, understandable explanations of strategies for writing; relevant, interesting examples; and extensive, smart guidelines for composition. In essence, it could be possible for students to teach *themselves* to write effectively with this text, even with the few areas that may be confusing to them. This rhetoric could be adopted without reservation for programs with rhetoric-based, writing across the curriculum goals.