

Textbook review for *inReview*
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Ramage, John D, John C. Bean, and June Johnson *The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing*, 3rd edition New York: Allyn & Bacon/Longman, 2003 880 pages

In 1998 when the CCCCs was held in Chicago, I left the conference hotel and rode the subway to 800 South Halsted Street, the site of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. The museum stands on the site of the settlement house Addams and other progressive women established in an immigrant neighborhood to provide an educational and social center in the 1880s. Nearby, at the University of Chicago, John Dewey was developing his educational philosophy at the Laboratory School. In today's educational climate of standardized testing and accountability, progressives like Addams and Dewey might be seen as unrealistic do-gooders. Yet, in June 2003, the eminent journalist Bill Moyers spoke in Washington, D.C. at the Take Back America conference sponsored by the Campaign for America's Future, and his speech was titled "This Is Your Story—The Progressive Story of America. Pass It On." He spoke about Jane Addams and John Dewey as social activists and educators who had made a difference in the lives of all Americans, and he called on people today to follow their example with a return to the tenets of progressivism. The year after my subway ride, Chris W. Gallagher won the CCCCs James Berlin Outstanding Dissertation Award for 1999 with the work that became *Radical Departures: Composition and Progressive Pedagogy*. It traces the decisive role of progressive politics in the ways writing has been taught and studied in U.S. secondary and postsecondary schools.

According to the *Bedford Bibliography of Writing*, the progressive view of education challenged the view that higher education's goal should be empowerment of an elite.

Progressives focused on integrating a diverse population into a community of productive citizens—like the immigrants who flocked to Hull House in 1880s Chicago: Italians, Irish, Germans, Greeks, Bohemians, Russian and Polish Jews, and in the 1920s Mexicans and African-Americans. They came to Hull House for its day care, employment bureau, art gallery, library, English and citizenship classes, and labor clubs. At the University of Chicago, John Dewey became chair in 1894 of the Department of Philosophy, Psychology, and Pedagogy at the University of Chicago, and his *School and Society* was published in 1899. A key educational goal espoused in this work was societal harmony and unity.

In terms of composition history, canonical literary study had been the focus of writing, while progressive education attempted to separate writing and literary study. Instead, it sought to use writing to integrate diverse groups into mainstream society. During the 1930s and 1940s, the social agenda of progressive education diminished, but the movement remained steadfast to its goal of developing adolescents into mature citizens. Progressive education also renewed the links between the social sciences and English studies that had begun with rhetoric in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, using scientific methods to study the abilities and needs of students and then redesign curricula. However, writing instruction changed very little as a result of progressive education and continued to focus on literary study and style issues such as correctness.

The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing, 3rd edition, authored by John Ramage, John Bean, and June Johnson, is organized around the position of progressive pedagogy. It employs social science explanations of student intellectual development in the interest of creating assignments that fit the abilities of first-year college students. However, it also confronts students with tasks and support for those tasks that help them to change their positionality from receivers of knowledge

to interrogators of knowledge and those who create it, perhaps even themselves. Those familiar with the field of writing-across-the-curriculum will recognize John Bean as the author of *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (Jossey-Bass, 2001). This book is a favorite with faculty development practitioners (both consultants and those who coordinate faculty learning communities) who use it to help teachers from any discipline teach the conventions of writing with the side benefit of creating a community of active learners.

The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing provides instructors with focus, flexibility, and tight organization. Section One, which includes the Introduction and Chapters 1-4, provides a focus on writing as purposeful, practical, and real-world. It presents a framework of ideas about rhetorical principles that instructors can address in their classrooms in a structured yet flexible way. Writing is portrayed as a problem-posing activity that can be addressed by using rhetorical thinking about purpose, audience, and genre. Writing is also seen as socially-situated with interaction a necessity between reader and writer. Section Two, which includes Chapter 5-17, provides thirteen carefully-constructed writing assignments in separate chapters arranged according to writing purposes, including to learn, to express, to explore, to inform, to analyze and synthesize, and to persuade. The variety of assignments allows instructors to choose the four or five they want to adopt during the semester and try out the others as they wish. Section Three, which includes Chapters 18-20, provides a guide to composing and revising with an emphasis on writing as problem-solving and a description of the differences between closed-form and open-form prose. Section Four, Chapters 21-24, offer a rhetorical guide to research with a focus on finding, evaluating, and citing sources. Section Five, Chapters 25-27, provide a guide to special writing and speaking occasions, including oral communication, essay examinations, and

assembling the portfolio and/or reflective self-evaluation. Section 6 is a handbook with a guide to editing.

My favorite chapter is Chapter 8: Writing an Exploratory Essay. It provides a practical assignment with a reflective component to challenge the rote approach students often take in performing research. The exploratory essay requires them to document their process as they explore a question, problem, or issue that perplexes them. The goal is to examine the question, problem, or issue from a variety of perspectives and then report on the process of exploring it. This assignment short-circuits the impetus of students to go right to the thesis and instead requires them to dwell on the question, problem, or issue. It's usually the first lengthy writing assignment in my first-year class; and it provides an effective challenge to the perception of students that a first-year writing class is not valuable to them in their journey through college. I believe that starting with an exploratory essay is highly appropriate for this audience because it forces them to examine how they approach the writing process instead of trying to write the perfect, one-draft essay that will earn them an A.

For students, the strengths of this textbook are (1) the accessible writing that presents rhetorical principles in a common-sense manner, so students can develop a practical understanding of audience, purpose, and genre; (2) the thorough, practical guidance through each writing assignment with appropriate support and challenge. Each assignment is described in a separate chapter with a highlighted one or two paragraph description of the "Writing Project." Then the authors describe concepts relating to the type of writing required, such as exploratory. The "For Writing and Discussion" section provides some individual and/or group activities for active learning of the concepts, which students can do in class or outside of class. Sample student essays are included for analysis and modeling. The composing process for each essay is

presented in stages. For example, the exploratory essay chapter describes keeping a research log, exploring possible problems for your essay, continuing research, shaping and drafting, and revising. Each chapter also includes specific guidelines for peer review. The visual design and layout are integrated with the aims of the text. Each chapter uses color to mark the writing assignment student readings , three levels of sub-headings, and lists to guide students