When I learned that *The Sundance Writer* would be coming out in a new edition this fall, I was happy to have the opportunity to re-consider the new edition. As the English coordinator at Lee University, I coordinate the adoption and implementation of texts in our composition program. About three years ago we were among the initial groups to test the newly published first edition of *The Sundance Writer*. At Lee we have a three-tiered composition program, and the textbook was used for all three levels of composition. I personally used the text in my ENG 110 Rhetoric & Research course, the advanced composition class, which focuses on analytical essays and the research process. In addition, I received feedback from the ENG 105 College Writing Workshop and ENG 106 College Writing instructors. Following two years of using this book as the standard adopted text for all composition classes, we changed our policy to allow more leeway for the individual instructor. All instructors continued to use the same handbook, with the prerogative of individually choosing a secondary text, be it a reader or a rhetorical guidebook. A few instructors continued to use *The Sundance Writer*; two instructors have adopted it again for fall 2003. After using it for four semesters, however, I decided in the spring of 2002 to look for another text. The following summer I was invited to review the first edition and make recommendations for a second edition. I am pleased to see that several of the concerns I expressed at that time have been addressed in the new edition.

The new edition offers some features that make it very useful for the composition classroom. The layout of the text is clear and user-friendly with eye appeal for teachers and students. A consistent layout design for each chapter makes it easy to locate important
information, such as the sections on Strategies for Analyzing, Reading, and Writing that offer helpful suggestions in each chapter. Although consistency is a positive quality generally and was one of the features that initially attracted me to the text, I found the format became monotonous after several chapters, and the checklists begin to seem repetitious at times. Some of the features I particularly like, however, are the *Writers at Work, Blending the Modes*, and *Writing Beyond the Classroom* segments provided for each of the modes.

*The Sundance Writer* has retained many of the features of the original edition, including its emphasis on writing as process and its modal approach to teaching composition. In fact, nine chapters in Part I: The Rhetoric, or about 200 of the 800+ pages in the text, are devoted to a discussion of the processes of prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. Additional chapters focus on the reasons why we write, the writing context, and critical thinking. This opening section of the book is well written and thorough, offering helpful suggestions for beginning writers, a nice variety of invention activities, and a concise but practical unit on critical thinking. In addition, it offers chapters on developing and supporting a thesis and organizing the essay. The chapter on organizing the body of the essay also offers advice on some of the most challenging aspects of the writing task: titles, introductions, and conclusions.

The emphasis on the writing process is helpful, and I am philosophically committed to this approach. However, I found the degree of detail provided in the opening chapters somewhat cumbersome. Of course, an instructor may choose not to assign everything that is offered in a text; however, I find over the past few years that most of my students arrive on campus already fairly well indoctrinated with the process approach, and they do not need this extensive introduction to the various stages and techniques. Information on the writing process can be presented in one class period or so and reinforced as the students are working on actual papers.
To spend several weeks of class time working through nine chapters on the writing process would leave very little time for actually writing, which is the purpose of the course. I would have found the text more usable if the information on the writing process had been collapsed into one chapter, for example.

The organizational structure of Part Two is based on the standard modes of composition with separate chapters on each of these: description, narration, example, definition, comparison and contrast, process, division and classification, cause and effect, and argument and persuasion. For me this structure does not work particularly well; I find the approach of teaching composition according to the modes of narration feels contrived and fairly remote from the types of writing assignments my students will encounter in their academic courses. Seldom will they be asked to write a narrative or descriptive paper, for example. Furthermore, I found the explanatory material provided in the chapters on each of the modes to be rudimentary. Since the text is organized this way, one would expect to find more thorough explanations. These are the primary reasons that I no longer use *The Sundance Writer*.

On the other hand, for the teacher who chooses to organize a composition course around the traditional modes of writing, the text offers an attractive, student-friendly presentation, though brief, of each of these, accompanied by a plethora of challenging and diverse models for discussion and evaluation. The Reader, as this section of the text is titled, begins with two introductory chapters on how to read critically, exploring feminist issues in an essay entitled “Our Barbies, Ourselves,” and how to be a critical viewer of the barrage of images that daily assault the senses as part of one’s daily existence. This newly added chapter entitled “Analyzing Visuals: Seeing with a ‘Writer’s Eye’” is one of the changes I really like in the new edition. Given the considerable effect and the greater relative impact of media and the internet on the
lives and opinions of our students, it makes sense to teach them how to analyze non-print as well as print media. The text employs hard-hitting visual images like a photograph of Lee Harvey Oswald under arrest (Dallas, 1963) and a political poster that substitutes the face of Osama bin Laden for Uncle Sam and proclaims, “I want YOU to invade Iraq,” inviting students to examine how visual images may alter one’s perception of reality.

Furthermore, the variety of professional and student essays available in this text is truly remarkable. For each of the rhetorical modes, the new edition offers a model student essay, three or four professional essays, and a selection of three or four online essays accessible to the students through the new Info-Trac College Edition E-Readings feature (new to this edition). Each section also offers a sample essay that blends other modes of writing with the one under consideration, along with an example of what the authors describes as “Writing Beyond the Classroom.” These examples, ranging from a reconstructed log of the Titanic to a mental health clinic brochure about depression, show writing as more than an academic exercise but as an essential tool for effective communication in everyday society.

The selection of readings is impressive not only for its sheer volume, but for the variety it represents, ranging from such timely articles as Jonathan Schell’s “Letter from Ground Zero,” which appeared in the Nation a month after the terrorist attack on September 11, to classic pieces like E. B. White’s “Once More to the Lake” or Bruce Catton’s “Grant and Lee.” Essays also present a variety of perspectives on many timely issues with little perceived bias. Chapter 24, the chapter on argument and persuasion, includes a group of “Opposing Viewpoints” essays which present opposite perspectives on issues such as cultural assimilation, the abuse excuse, and reparations for slavery.
An additional feature that I find inviting about the essays included in this text is their brevity: most of the essays range from three to five pages with a high-interest content that renders them very accessible to students. While I would certainly not suggest assigning ten to twelve essays from any of these chapters, the text offers great variety for individual instructors to choose according to their preference or the perceived interests of their classes.

Another strength of this reader is the section entitled Special Writing Situations, that comprises Part IV. This portion of the text deals with some writing situations often overlooked in composition textbooks and classrooms: writing essay examinations, writing about literature, and business and professional writing. Each of these chapters includes models and practice activities for writing tasks students will encounter in their classes and in their professional lives. The section on Writing About Literature includes a brief overview of literary terms for the genres of fiction, poetry, and drama; a short reading selection from each genre; and sample student essays on a poem and a short story. The chapter on Business and Professional Writing offers strategies for writing the resume and various types letters and reports, along with student and professional models for these.

Part Four offers a thorough explanation of the research process with particular attention to the wealth of information now available to students through the internet and computer databases. From selecting a topic to reading a periodical index, the text provides clear explanations and illustrations. For example, page 667 not only provides an explanation of material available through online indices, databases, and abstracts, but it provides a sample abstract to show students the format in which this information will appear. Pages 670 and 671 contain samples of an internet search screen and a web site. One of the strong points of the research section is the use of visual examples to support the explanations, and these abound
throughout Part IV. The section on documentation provides examples of format for bibliography and citations in both MLA and APA style. While no text contains an exhaustive list of examples, the examples given here cover most of the types of sources students will encounter, including non-print and electronic sources. One interesting feature of the research section is that the sample research paper in MLA format is a literary research paper while the APA-style example is based on a historic legal case.

The final section of the text is Part V: Grammar and Handbook. While it is by no means exhaustive, the handbook covers many of the types of errors an instructor will encounter in student papers. At times the explanations suffer from a lack of sufficient examples; however, generally the handbook is useful and the layout is helpful.

In the end The Sundance Writer is undoubtedly a valuable tool for the composition class. Built on the process approach, each chapter leads students through the process of writing with strategies and checklists that will be useful as they move from prewriting through the drafting, revising, and editing stages. The section on research is particularly useful and up-to-date with clear visual examples of online sources. The grammar handbook, while an abbreviated one, provides instruction in the conventions of standard edited English. The textbook will work better for instructors who structure their courses around the traditional modes of writing; however, the diverse, high-interest readings and model essays would be valuable resources in any course.