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INTRODUCTION

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Quick: think about a piece of academic writing that really mattered for your own intellectual growth. For Amanda, it's Allyson Booth's *Postcards from the Trenches*. For Keith, it's Judith Shklar's "The Liberalism of Fear."¹ Why is it important to you? Did it change the way you think about a question you're invested in? Did you begin the piece as a skeptic, but ultimately find yourself persuaded by its counterintuitive claim? Did it model for you how you want your own writing to look or sound or feel? Why *does* it succeed in the way it does? Now, having considered why it's good, ask yourself how it got to be that way. How *did* the author(s) produce it? How can *we* learn to produce writing of that quality? How can we *teach* it to others?

The potentially unpleasant truth of such works is that they took a lot more effort than is evident on the page. Strong writing may have an air of deceptive ease as it places itself in conversation with both future readers and past authors, offering nuanced explorations of challenging ideas and complex evidence—and ultimately new ways of looking at the world. Its finished clarity and elegance hide the labor that went into its production.

In teaching academic writing to undergraduates, we often appeal to the familiar iceberg metaphor. What looms above the waterline, the salient argument that has the potential to make such a lasting impression on those who encounter it, is supported by a much larger volume of intellectual engagement—researching, reading, brainstorming, drafting, revising—that lurks below, unseen by the readers of the finished piece. The 10 percent of an iceberg that's above water would seem to be wildly out of balance with the 90 percent underwater. Yet that is the usual ratio for an iceberg in a state of isostasy—floating in perfect equilibrium.

Novice writers usually focus on the visible part. We often hear students say on the first day of class that they're hoping to become "faster" and "more efficient" writers, for example. But successful writing instruction entails convincing them to properly attend to the hidden 90 percent. When they do, they experience their own fabulously dangerous icebergs emerging from the depths. When they don't, their arguments sink below the waves, unsupported by the necessary invisible work that constitutes the vast majority of successful scholarship. The books

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students check out of the library but never cite in the end, the data collection that doesn't go the way they anticipate, the pages that get cut from the draft, the troubling counterargument from a skeptical reader, the false starts and wrong turns all *feel* like stalled progress. It can be cold and frustrating to navigate underwater. But the work and time students may fear is wasted never really is.

To teach academic writing is to teach thinking—that is to say, every step that goes into creating an insightful, rigorously argued essay. Success lies in teaching students not simply to answer questions but to ask their own, to follow their curiosity and question their assumptions. It lies in helping them cultivate a tolerance for suspense and uncertainty—for not knowing in advance where their research will lead them, what evidence they will uncover, what discoveries they will make, or what their argument will be. That intellectual openness extends to engaging with texts that are curated for them, sources they might at first find opaque, boring, or irrelevant, but upon further analysis speak to them in a way they did not anticipate and come to be valued for providing just that surprise. And finally, success lies in convincing students to take their time, to decouple fast writing from good writing and harness the power of radical revision. We teach our students to “Be the Tortoise,” reminding them of that ancient race in Aesop’s fable: the tortoise took it slow and steady and won, while the hare napped and sprinted and lost.

The Pocket Instructor: Writing offers fifty exercises for the college classroom to help student tortoises embrace the structured chaos of argument-driven writing, persevering through the iterative process that will yield their best work. Like its predecessor, *The Pocket Instructor: Literature*, edited by Diana Fuss and William A. Gleason, this is a practical book for instructors that transforms the abstract principles of active learning into concrete classroom activities.² We hope it will help answer perennial questions like, “How can I teach my students to build beyond summary and do their own analysis?” or more simply, “When I get into the classroom, what do I *do*?” In collecting these exercises, our goal is to share what we’ve inherited from the loud mob of teaching geniuses who came before us, and what we’re learning from the brilliant new generation of instructors coming up with us now.

Contributors come from a range of institutions: small and large, public and private, in the United States and abroad. Many teach in dedicated writing programs while others regularly integrate writing exercises into their disciplinary (and cross-disciplinary) teaching. Some emerged from the extended pedagogical family tree of which the Princeton Writing Program is a part, while others provide exciting and innovative contributions wholly independent of it. This volume is for anyone, in any field, department, or discipline, who cares about the teaching of writing or writing as a mode of thinking. While the volume’s focus on argument in a college context naturally privileges the academic essay, many of the exercises could nevertheless be adapted for writing in other contexts, including journalistic, creative, or technical, even though they are not featured here.

The exercises in *The Pocket Instructor: Writing* focus on “The Big Things”—thesis and motive, evidence and analysis, method and structure, and so on—as opposed

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to the construction of grammatically sound sentences and other matters of linguistic proficiency, for which there is already a superabundance of resources. Mechanics do matter, of course, and we find that inviting students to participate in real, evolving, meaningful debates creates a useful incentive: they learn the details when they realize that's the price of admission to play with the big ideas—and have theirs taken seriously. Teaching this way involves treating students as junior scholars, which in turn means embracing two principles that are in clear but productive tension: 1) meeting students where they are, and 2) asking them to do ambitious things that they've never been asked to do before. Navigating this tension means encouraging students to stretch as far as they can in the context of a supportive classroom community; your own active instruction should model the target they're aiming for.

Some of the exercises in this book were originally developed for the writing or composition classroom. We are particularly indebted to our colleagues in rhetoric and composition for the practitioner research, rhetorical awareness, and teaching expertise that underwrites much of the pedagogy of the writing-centered classroom. But *Pocket Instructor: Writing* is not the product of any one discipline. Many of its exercises are sourced from faculty across the humanities, social sciences, and STEM using writing to teach their field. Here's why you shouldn't hesitate to browse omnivorously within this diversity: academic writing both is and is not the same across the disciplines. There is common ground (a good argument needs a good question) alongside variation (what counts as a good question in literary studies will differ from what counts as a good question in physics or sociology). Within a discipline, too, there is usually both common ground and notable variation. We see this particularly in fields that employ multidisciplinary methods, such as American studies, or cross the divisional boundaries between the humanities and social sciences (like history), or between the social and natural sciences (like psychology). Just as we push our students to transfer what they learn in one context and apply it in another, we ourselves learn from practicing that work of transfer as teachers. So we hope, for example, that you'll take the "Stages of Historical Analysis" on a fieldtrip from its obvious disciplinary home and apply it to, say, philosophy or economics or, perhaps, civil engineering. Likewise, we hope you'll experiment with "Charting Your Contribution" beyond the mathematical and scientific context for which it was originally developed and give it a try in your literature or anthropology or sociology class. For our colleagues in rhetoric and composition, for whom writing and its practice are themselves the objects of study, we hope the genre and disciplinary range on offer here provide fertile ground.

THE WRITING CLASSROOM

Here's the secret: every classroom can be a writing classroom, and it's possible to travel light to get there. If nothing else, pack 1) a shared set of terms for talking about writing, and 2) the draft workshop as a core practice. You'll find both in

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The Pocket Instructor: Writing as foundations to start from and as undergirding for the fifty exercises.

Teaching writing works best when you start with a shared vocabulary, so we open the volume by sharing ours: “A Writing Lexicon.” “Ours” is an especially complicated term when it comes to this particular list. “A Writing Lexicon” traces a clear genealogical line from Gordon Harvey’s “The Elements of the Academic Essay,” a writing pedagogy classic by virtue of encouraging teachers to do a simple, necessary, revolutionary thing: name what we’re trying to teach. By isolating and labeling individual components of successful academic writing, Harvey made it far easier to see for ourselves, and therefore teach our students, how these parts can merge into a clear and persuasive whole. His list of terms, which has gone through substantial revision and some replacement, was introduced to Princeton by Kerry Walk in 2001 and has been influenced by the insights of myriad students and colleagues since. In particular, Judy Swan brought the perspective of scientific writing, Kristin Dombek inspired the inclusion of “ethos,” and Raphael Allison came up with the nickname to capture its adaptability: the “Flexicon.”

It’s in the “Flexicon” spirit that the volume’s first section introduces its core set of terms: motive, thesis, analysis, evidence, sources, key terms, method, structure, conventions, orienting, mechanics, style, ethos. Though calibrated for scholarly, thesis-driven writing, the Lexicon’s terms are not just adaptable across academic disciplines but valuable for other contexts and genres where the motive of a given project or its audience is quite different. We illustrate some examples of its versatility in the volume’s final section on “Transferring.”

Along with “A Writing Lexicon,” the second essential document to carry forward through the semester is “The Draft Workshop.” At the heart of the draft workshop is a radical belief in readers and in revision. All too often, the assigning, writing, reading, and grading of a paper unfolds as a silent transaction between student and teacher. At best, any discussion of a draft happens privately outside the classroom. The instructor is the only reader, the writing process itself isn’t a topic of conversation in class, and frequently there is just one deadline that is also the final deadline. Draft workshops undo all of that. Student writers gain the opportunity to hear feedback from multiple readers, discuss revision strategies as an integral part of their classroom work, and then rethink their arguments in time for a second deadline. Not only do they learn how to benefit from extensive—and sometimes conflicting—feedback on their own writing, but they also learn to be careful and considerate readers as they offer feedback to others.

The essence of the draft workshop technique—identify and discuss strengths, identify and discuss weaknesses, chart a plan for revision—is almost infinitely versatile. It can be used at almost any stage of the process, from early pre-draft materials to finished drafts, and it can be used for anything from fully developed arguments to paper titles, openers, introductions, conclusions, body paragraphs, figures, charts, works cited lists, transition sentences, or thesis statements. You’ll find a thorough guide to draft workshop basics to start off the section on “Revising.” Also included are fifteen brief variations on the traditional draft

workshop, as well as two more extended variations in the form of exercises: “Speedback” and “The Editorial Board.”

THE CLASSROOM EXERCISES

The Pocket Instructor: Writing is organized into six sections. After “A Writing Lexicon,” the next three sections follow the arc of the writing process: “Starting,” “Drafting,” and “Revising.” The “Transferring” section then offers a sampling of exercises that empower students to take what they’ve learned about writing in one context and make the challenging but all-important move of applying it in another context. The volume concludes with two brief bonus sections, “Preventing Plagiarism” and “Lightning Strikes.” The former addresses the issue of plagiarism by spinning a topic that typically relies on scare tactics as an invitation to scholarship, and the latter offers instructors quick interventions in the writing classroom when they only have fifteen minutes or less to spare.

The exercises themselves consist of step-by-step directions followed by reflections, in which the author provides a peek inside the classroom—glimpses of how their own students have engaged with the activity, more detail on what you might expect if you try it yourself, and suggestions for troubleshooting. Reflections frequently include variations on the exercise steps that can help you adjust for time constraints, disciplinary focus, or follow-up activities.

At the very beginning of each exercise, just under the title, you’ll find a tagline that succinctly signals the primary goal of each exercise. For example: “Students jumpstart the writing process by using voice recordings to brainstorm new ideas” (from “Copy That!”). Or “Students appreciate the value of key terms by losing track of them first” (from “Losing Your Keys”).

Following the tagline are a handful of navigational keys to help you quickly gauge whether the exercise is right for the purpose and circumstances you have in mind:

Writing Focus: *motive, thesis, analysis, evidence, sources, key terms, method, structure, conventions, orienting, mechanics, style, ethos*

Teacher Preparation: *low, medium, high*

Student Preparation: *none, low, medium, high*

Estimated Time: *number of minutes*

General Disciplines: *humanities, social sciences, sciences*

The first three keys identify the main lexicon elements the exercise emphasizes, along with a sense of how much preparation is necessary on both the teacher and student side for the exercise to work, making it easier to plan ahead. An exercise with low teacher prep (or zero student prep) could be taught on the same day you first encounter it—we happily field-tested this scenario. (For science.) Conversely, students should get significant advance warning about the work they’ll need to do for an exercise with high student prep.

The estimated time key does not include time students might spend on homework (reading, note-taking, researching, outlining, writing) but instead

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designates classroom time only. Class size, course level, even semester timing can influence how long it takes to execute an exercise successfully. Still, when first trying an exercise, it can be helpful to have a sense of how long it might take. You'll likely notice that most of the exercises in this volume congregate around the fifty-minute or eighty-minute range, reasonably common class periods for college writing courses. All of the exercises may easily be accorded up or down, and many of them include explicit options for doing so.

Before you get to the step-by-step classroom directions, you will also find a more detailed account of the prep work specifying the materials—physical or electronic—that you and your students need to have on hand. For example, many exercises launch with students reading a short text the instructor has carefully curated for that purpose. Often, another text may substitute perfectly well, and contributors offer alternative suggestions or the logic for selecting a text oneself. Since time is at a premium, the ideal text multitasks: it shows off something we want students to do (or not do!), it injects new ideas or arguments into discussion that matter for the course, and it may serve as a primary text for students to analyze in their own writing. But don't overthink it. As instructors, it's possible to overvalue the selection of a text that cleanly falls into our course's substantive playground, when the most important thing is that the text exemplifies the intellectual moves being modeled—for better or for worse. As you'll see in exercises to come, we have a certain pedagogical appreciation for the Declaration of Independence because it shows the rhetorical limits of a listing structure, the dangers of claiming a principle is self-evident, and a number of other things that remain true in a class that has nothing to do with American political thought.

Because timing and pacing can be among the harder skills for any teacher to manage, we have included, at the end of the volume, five cross-indexes to help instructors plan ahead. The cross-indexes will help you quickly locate writing exercises that work particularly well early in the term, others that are suitable for the end of term, and still others that can be repeated throughout. You will also find cross-indexes for exercises that require writing before class, reading before class, or both. Finally, the volume's general index, which includes related key terms or concepts not highlighted in the lexicon or in the opening keys but that are nonetheless critical features of writing—such as brainstorming, researching, or formulating a question—will provide an additional resource for navigating your way through the volume.

Though originally designed for small or medium-sized classes, most of the exercises are flexible enough to be adapted to larger scales if needed. In fact, integrating collaborative group activities and draft workshops offers valuable practical advantages if you are teaching writing to a big class. Modeling tasks, circulating among small groups to answer questions, and reconvening to help students stick the landing allows you to leverage their engagement productively. And the opportunities for iterative feedback increase dramatically beyond what you would be able to provide on your own.

The exercises in this volume were designed for in-person teaching, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced an extended experiment in their application to a

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remote environment. We were glad to find that they translated quite well. We also learned we had to allow extra time for each exercise, since establishing the active learning paradigm on which they rely goes more slowly online. As a general guide, convert a fifty-minute exercise into an eighty-minute exercise, and plan an eighty-minute exercise to require two hours—and therefore probably two class sessions—unless you proactively trim the exercise or keep general discussions short. The technology for online teaching will continue to evolve, but as of this writing, there are myriad ways to get everyone on the same page even when they aren't in the same place for draft workshops and brainstorming sessions. Virtual breakout rooms have the virtue of providing quiet space for small group activities, even if you miss the energizing buzz generated by having all the students working in the same physical classroom. The chat feature works nicely for the distribution of handouts, as well as being a substitute blackboard for running notes on key discussion insights. It also invites contributions from students who may be hesitant to participate in other ways.

In short, the active learning pedagogy that makes such a difference for student engagement in three dimensions still works in two, but it takes a little more work to establish. If you find yourself teaching writing remotely, we think you'll find it possible, and worth the investment, to adjust the following exercises to the virtual environment. For specialized guidance in doing so with thoughtfulness and intention, we highly recommend *Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science in Online Classes* (2019), by Flower Darby with James M. Lang.³

WHY THIS BOOK?

Given the quantity and quality of guides on writing and teaching writing that are currently available, you may reasonably ask what justifies one more. We view *The Pocket Instructor: Writing* as complementing rather than superseding these works, precisely because of how much we have learned from them and the extent to which they have shaped our classrooms and helped our students. That said: *The Pocket Instructor: Writing* is teacher-facing (a user-friendly guide for instructors) and not student-facing (a writing resource for undergraduates), which already distinguishes it from a broad swath of print and online resources about writing.

Among our perennial go-to resources for students, *The Craft of Research* (4th edition, 2016), by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, and William T. Fitzgerald and *The Imaginative Argument: A Practical Manifesto for Writers* (2nd edition, 2017) by Frank Cioffi are both incisive guides to argument formation and the research process. Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein's *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (2021), now in its 7th edition, lucidly articulates common ground across the disciplines and empowers students to practice the work of scholarship through a series of short templates.⁴

We often assign snippets from Peter Elbow, whose classic books *Writing with Power* (2nd edition, 1998) and *Writing Without Teachers* (2nd edition, 1998) have

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encouraged generations of students to engage writing as a process that helps them find their voice and be heard. More recently, Richard E. Miller and Ann Jurecic's invaluable *Habits of the Creative Mind: A Guide to Reading, Writing, and Thinking* (2nd edition, 2019) helps students discover and practice the curiosity that makes it meaningful to write. Perhaps our all-time favorite is Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (2nd edition, 2019). Lamott's book isn't specific to academic argument, but the relief on students' faces when we read together her "Shitty First Drafts" as they're trying to get started on a paper is priceless.⁵

John C. Bean and Dan Melzer's *Engaging Ideas* (3rd edition, 2021) is one of the most comprehensive guides available when it comes to teaching writing as thinking. The latest edition is an essential resource for everything from assignment design to grading and offering feedback, and its guidance on tasks that promote active learning provides a useful complement to the detailed exercises offered in this volume. Another valuable complement can be found in *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* (2nd edition, 2021), by James M. Lang (who also cowrote *Small Teaching Online*, mentioned above). This handy book identifies targeted interventions that make a big difference in the classroom, no matter what kind of course you teach.⁶ One fabulous article that we've used over the years to teach students and faculty about scholarly motive is Mark Gaipa's "Breaking into the Conversation: How Students Can Acquire Authority for Their Writing."⁷

Finally, books on teaching writing designed for high school instructors abound, and frequently include creative, detailed lesson plans. Those for an advanced high school writing curriculum can be very valuable for college instructors, in some cases because the same techniques may transfer well to your classroom and in other cases because simply understanding more about what your students may have experienced as high school writers provides you with crucial context. As two excellent examples in this category, we recommend *Lesson Plans for Teaching Writing* (2007), edited by Chris Jennings Dixon, and *Teaching Arguments: Rhetorical Comprehension, Critique, and Response* (2015), by Jennifer Fletcher.⁸

Within college and university writing programs, many instructors enthusiastically exchange plans on an ad hoc basis. It's rare, though, to find writing exercises formalized and made broadly accessible, either for writing program instructors or indeed for faculty elsewhere in the university who may be new to using writing as a tool for teaching their discipline. We hope you'll find *The Pocket Instructor: Writing* a useful addition to your library as you embark with students on their iceberg adventures.

NOTES

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2. Diana Fuss and William A. Gleason, *The Pocket Instructor: Literature; 101 Exercises for the College Classroom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).
3. Flower Darby, *Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science in Online Classes*, with James M. Lang (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2019).
4. Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Columb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, and William T. Fitzgerald, *The Craft of Research*, 4th ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016); Frank L. Cioffi, *The Imaginative Argument: A Practical Manifesto for Writers*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, 7th ed. (New York: Norton, 2021).
5. Peter Elbow, *Writing With Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Peter Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers*, 2nd ed. (New York, Oxford University Press, 1998); Richard E. Miller and Ann Jurecic, *Habits of the Creative Mind: A Guide to Reading, Writing, and Thinking*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford, 2020); Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Anchor Books, 2019).
6. John C. Bean and Dan Melzer, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2021); James M. Lang, *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2021).
7. Mark Gaipa, "Breaking into the Conversation: How Students Can Acquire Authority for Their Writing," in *Pedagogy*, Volume 4, Issue 3, Fall 2004, 419–437.
8. Chris Jennings Dixon, ed., *Lesson Plans for Teaching Writing* (Champaign, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2007); Jennifer Fletcher, *Teaching Arguments: Rhetorical Comprehension, Critique, and Response* (Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2015).

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