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Overview of *Steps to Writing Well*

Part One—The Basics of the Short Essay provides fundamental instruction for college-level writing expectations, addressing all aspects of the writing process from prewriting through final draft, with discussion and practice sessions that employ strategies for drafting and revision. In addition, introductions to creative and critical thinking, effective sentence construction, word logic, and connections between reading and writing link students to essential details in the writing process while giving them the language to talk about writing. Equipped with these tools, students can begin to effectively negotiate the more detailed instruction and advice that Part Two—Purposes, Modes, and Strategies illustrates, while putting to use new skills and knowledge gained from Part One.

Part Two emphasizes strategies for developing ideas and text, organizing text, analyzing text, and assessing and revising text. The major focus in this section involves developing text based upon audience needs and purposes for writing. While this section covers four basic strategies—exposition, argumentation, description, and narration—Wyrick clarifies that most writing does not exist in “any one mode in a pure form.”

Rather, most writing reflects a writer’s primary goal or purpose, i.e., an argument or a story, but entails a combination of writing types/strategies throughout. Once students begin to recognize the structural elements of each type, they can begin to employ the elements logically at all stages of the writing process—prewriting (discovery of topics, theses, audiences, purposes, and content), drafting, and revision. Chapter 13 ends this section with a discussion of combining elements, analysis of an essay using multiple strategies, and as in all other chapters, practice and suggestions for writing.

Part Three—Special Assignments focuses on writing scenarios that students will encounter in college and beyond, familiarizing them more fully with 1) college-level writing and research methods, strategies, and formats, including using library and online sources; 2) practical advice on how to respond effectively to timed writing prompts, with special emphasis on the “Response” essay; 3) basic ways to read, analyze, and write about short stories and poetry; 4) additional perspectives on ways to assess and write about film and film reviews; 5) the do’s and don’ts of business writing, covering such elements as memos, letters, e-mail, and résumés; and 6) a chapter that explains ways to write about the visual arts of painting, sculpture, and photography. Students have an opportunity to apply this chapter’s advice to the many visuals within *Steps*. Likewise, instructors hoping to cover each of the major concerns in this section can easily develop units using the topics here as themes—text-response, research, literature, work—incorporating chapters from other sections as appropriate. For instance, Chapters 8 (The Reading-Writing Connection), 9 (Exposition), 23 (Development by Example), and 25 (Comparison/Contrast) could comprise a unit on text-response or timed writing. Add Chapters 16 and 33 (both of which focus on poems and short stories) and a unit on literature is born. Chapters 10 (Argumentation), 13 (Writing Essays Using Multiple Strategies), 26, 27, 28, and 29 will build a strong scaffold for both analyzing and creating arguments. Finally, teachers wanting to incorporate work themes into their classrooms can begin or end a term with Chapter 19, asking students to create real résumés.

Part Four—A Concise Handbook offers support for those students needing to sharpen their grammar and punctuation skills.

Part Five—Additional Readings includes eleven chapters of added readings, illustrating exposition, argumentation, description, narration, multiple strategies, and literature. These chapters can be used in conjunction with Part Two reading assignments, either through themes suggested within the essays or through organizational considerations, as Wyrick’s text seems to suggest. In addition, should instructors choose to create units based on suggestions here about Part Three—Special Assignments, the additional readings will provide a variety of examples for further in-depth analysis and discussion. Wyrick has chosen challenging texts that offer not only clear examples of writing strategies and processes, but interesting, timely, and perhaps timeless topics for discussion.

Suggested Teaching Tools to Use with *Steps to Writing Well*

The composition maxim “The only way to learn to write is by writing and rewriting” is underscored in *Steps* as emphasis is placed on writing and revision through creative and critical thinking (Chapter 5). Keeping journals (Chapter 1) and participating in collaborative activities (Chapter 5) are two ways instructors might encourage students to examine their own writing process and analyze the writing of others, enabling them to bring new insights to their own work.

■ The Journal

Chapter 1 of *Steps to Writing Well* discusses the benefits of keeping a journal and offers students suggested uses for the journal. Jean Wyrick notes that there are numerous advantages in requiring a journal:

Benefits for the student:

- encourages thinking, learning, discovery
- helps sequence the student’s writing processes—provides practice of skills
- improves the quality of the written product—reduces writing anxiety
- improves class participation

Benefits for the teacher:

- provides opportunities to intervene in the students’ composing stages
- ensures better “products” to evaluate
- may replace traditional assignments
- may reduce grading time and pressure
- discourages “passive” reading of assigned material
- allows the monitoring of class progress, understanding of material

For journals to be an effective part of a college composition course, expectations for journal assignments should be clearly communicated to the students. The journal provides them with a chance to write informally, perhaps experimenting with their writing and taking more risks than they would in a traditional, formal essay assignment. This is not to say, however, that journals are not to be taken seriously by student writers: if journals are to be a success, with assignments that are rewarding for the instructor as well as the students, there should be accountability. When students are thoroughly invested in their journals, a great deal of learning can take place, but if the journal is not incorporated into class discussion and reviewed periodically by the instructor, the journal’s effectiveness is likely to be diminished. Here is a sample description of a journal from one composition teacher’s course guide:

In much the same way that an artist uses a sketchbook to record ideas and preliminary sketches for larger works, your journal is a tool for you to document your ideas and progress in the writing field over the course of the semester. Assignments for the journal will be varied and will take place both in and out of class. A couple of notes: be sure to title and date each assignment, doing them in the order they are assigned. In addition to written assignments, class notes should also be recorded in the journal. In short, your journal should be a complete record of your preliminary writings for each