

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a pen, poised to write on a lined notebook. The lighting is soft and focused on the hand and pen, with the background being a blurred, light-colored surface.

# Teaching Writing

Craft, Art, Genre

F R A N C L A G G E T T

with Joan Brown, Nancy Patterson, and Louann Reid

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# I Setting Purpose, Finding Form

*Each writer finds a new entrance  
into the mystery,  
and it is difficult to explain.*

*Nonetheless, I have set down my thinking  
as clearly as I can.*

*The Art of Writing: Lu Chi's Wen Fu*

## **About This Book . . .**

This book is designed to contain, in Wallace Stevens's words, "pages of possibilities." It is intended to be a writing teacher's resource, a book to help you sort through and make sense of some things we have learned about the teaching of writing: about making choices; about rethinking the use of genres; about reenvisioning the role of craft; about teaching not only the craft but also the art of writing. Ultimately, it is about setting purpose and finding form.

Our goal is students who are confident and effective writers, especially but not only in these times of high-stakes testing and legislative mandates that threaten to narrow the curriculum. Enormous industries have been built up around the testing industry, encompassing not only the tests but also the expensive scoring of tests, the promotion of textbooks and Web sites designed to accompany the books, and consultants hired by districts to provide inservice to teachers on preparing students for the bombardment of multiple tests and measurements. Districts that use the professional expertise of the teacher to empower students honor that expertise by providing time and resources for teachers to help students learn the craft of writing through sound instruction. We believe that teachers who teach from a sound philosophical base will not only be more effective classroom teachers but will also be able to

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work more productively in the larger political/professional sphere to accommodate thoughtfully constructed standards and resist the testing of minutiae. Tests that demand compliance regardless of educational validity suck hours out of every school year, reducing the actual learning time of students and giving priority to false values.

We look at how writing is used in the workplace today and know that what we teach must help students survive not only in the current test-driven political climate but also in the marketplace, where students will need to write effective office memos or notes from meetings or projects that need careful attention to detail. They will be writing personal e-mail notes that have become a way of staying in touch for great numbers of people. They will be posting notes to friends and colleagues on the Internet. While many districts are buying and mandating scripted programs that claim validation from scientific research, others are looking for approaches that honor the essential purpose of writing—communication, in all its diverse forms.

We see too many people, even within the field, who are either resigned to or comfortable with teaching to the test. In such classrooms, students are more likely to be taught *about* writing—rules of grammar and usage, spelling and punctuation—than they are to have opportunities to write for their own purposes, to write for audiences beyond the classroom, to write because they have something to say to someone specific.

Yet we have also seen classrooms where teachers are *not* telling the students what to do. These are classrooms where the question is not “How do I prepare my students for these tests?” but “How do I help students know what writing options are available to them and know how to make decisions about which options to use at a particular time?” This question implies a rethinking of how to incorporate the understanding of genres into our writing program. Some of our best teaching, measured by student learning, occurs when we support students in their endeavors to find the best way to express *their* ideas, to take ownership for what they write. While we affirm that the act of writing promotes students’ discovery and knowledge about their own writing, it is our premise that there is a fine but critical line between having students “just write” and giving them the guidance that will help them make appropriate choices in their own writing.

### **Writing as a Craft**

Central to the ideas and approaches in this book is the idea that writing is a craft that can be taught, can be learned, can be improved with

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guided instruction. Inherent in this idea is the recognition that writing involves decision making. At every turn writers make choices—about purpose, subject, audience, language, form, and details. Decision making, with its built-in correlative of questioning, emerges as a fundamental strategy to help students move from novice to experienced writers. Since we know from metacognitive research that being aware of choices and their effects helps make writers independent, we should place decision making at the forefront of our teaching, even as we incorporate all the other aspects of writing instruction.

### **Writing as an Art**

Since we are teachers of English, it is almost axiomatic that we love literature. We understand not only the craft of writing but also the art. We look with dismay at student textbooks that present writing as a hierarchy of skills that must be mastered in order to produce a perfect formulaic series of paragraphs. We seek out those books and programs that are true to our knowledge: that writing is an art we can help our students aspire to. In the best writing classrooms, writing is treated as both a craft and an art. Louise Rosenblatt's explanation of efferent and aesthetic reading and writing demonstrates how purpose is central to both the craft and the art of writing.

### **Teaching Writing, Too, Is Both a Craft and an Art**

Just as writing is both a craft and an art—complex, often nonlinear in its process—so is the teaching of writing. We must be teachers who are constantly examining what good writing is and who can help students get involved in the exploration. At the same time, we must not depend on artificial structures that ultimately reduce the act of composition to formulaic practices. We must be teachers who value reading as a way of internalizing options in writing, who help students read as writers. We must be teachers who hone our own craft as teachers—and as readers and writers—as we guide students in the art and craft of writing.

### **And You, the Reader of This Book**

Because audience is so important to writers, we have spent some time envisioning you, the audience for this book. We envision you as concerned writing teachers. We believe some of you are teachers new to the profession, drawing on your teacher training as you encounter the realities of classrooms today, filled with students who come with widely

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disparate needs and preparation. We think some of you are experienced teachers of literature who want to know more about using literature to teach composition. And some of you are experienced teachers of composition who want to know more about how to incorporate literature into your writing programs. All of you are looking for a book that has been framed not only by sound theory and research but also by many productive years in the classroom. We hope that this book is for you.

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# 1 Teaching Writing: An Integrated Approach

*Ordering thoughts and ideas,  
we begin to choose our words.*

*The Art of Writing: Lu Chi's Wen Fu*

When we titled this opening chapter “Teaching Writing,” we were well aware of the distinctions between teaching and learning. Many leaders in the profession are now focusing on the “learning” rather than the “teaching,” and we certainly subscribe to the truism that no matter what we attempt to “teach,” the only “learning” that transpires belongs to the learner, whether that is student or teacher. Still, we are *teachers*, and the way we interpret that word has everything to do with how and how much learning takes place in our classrooms. That said, we will continue to write about the teaching of writing and hope that our readers will remember that we are always engaged in helping students learn.

Much has been written about different modes of learning since Gabriele Lusser Rico and Fran Claggett first published *Balancing the Hemispheres: Brain Research and the Teaching of Writing*. Howard Gardner’s work, beginning with *Frames of Mind*, has provided many researchers and teachers with specific ideas of how to translate his theory of multiple intelligences into practices in education. There is still much to be learned, but we know enough now to design balanced writing programs, ensuring our students opportunities to approach writing from different mental sets.

It is easy to assume that our students process a task the same way we do, but we may be making a false assumption. In order to provide a balanced approach to the teaching of writing, we try to allow for at least two primary modes of processing: on one hand, we provide experiences in clustering, use of color, image making, metaphoric thinking, design. On the other hand, we provide exercises involving sequential thought, precision, step-by-step progression of ideas. We provide opportunities for all students to experience the full range of writing activities, asking them to note which come more naturally, which need to be developed;

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which are most appropriate during the initial planning stages, which in the final, editing phases.

One way to think about an integrated approach to the teaching of writing is to adapt James Britton's terminology to discuss modes of writing. Britton uses the terms "expressive, transactional, and poetic" to describe writing that serves different purposes. Expressive writing is informal or casual, usually written for the self, and is typical of letters, journal writing, or freewriting. Transactional writing is writing used to inform, to instruct, or to persuade. Poetic writing, as Britton uses the term, moves into the realm of art, including story, drama, and poem. In an integrated curriculum, we begin with this schema before moving to a range of genres, from persuasion to interpretation to reflection to poetry. By specifically teaching the salient features of many different genres, we teach students not only how to write effective persuasive letters, for instance, but how to adapt and blend genres to suit their specific purposes. We encourage students to find which kind of activity helps them get started, which they need when they step back to revision their work, which to use to bring it into form suitable for publishing.

### **Writing as Decision Making**

For most accomplished writers, the decisions basic to the act of writing have become so completely internalized that they are scarcely aware they are making them. Purpose, audience, point of view, genre or form, length—all are part of the brain's internal decision-making activity before these writers even sit down at the computer. As teachers, we need to help students become aware of what decisions they must make, and how they can learn to make them. As mentioned earlier, research on metacognition shows that being aware of choices and their effects helps in making writers independent. Learning to make choices should be at the forefront of our teaching as we make use of all of the other aspects of writing instruction.

The following chart presents the role of purpose as it affects decisions regarding genre or form. All the other questions—audience, form, point of view, length, and so on, emerge from this central question to form a web of interrelated decisions that guide students in their writing.

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## The Role of Purpose as It Leads to Various Genres in Writing

Purpose: Personal Exploration (Focus on Writer): to identify, reveal, or clarify ideas or experiences for self or others	Leads to: journal entry, diary, letter, autobiography, poem (Genre focus on, e.g., narrative, memoir)
Purpose: Persuasion (Focus on Reader): to influence or convince another of one's ideas or judgment	Leads to: evaluation, interpretation, critique, editorial, review (Genre focus on, e.g., response to literature, persuasion)
Purpose: Information (Focus on Subject): to convey information; to explain ideas, facts, or processes	Leads to: observation, report, I-Search, field notes, exposition, summary (Genre focus on, e.g., report)
Purpose: Aesthetic Experience (Focus on Craft, Art): to give shape to an experience, observation, or idea	Leads to: story, poem, reflective essay, or any kind of writing elevated to high degree of craft, art (Genre focus on, e.g., reflection, narrative, drama, poetry)

### Learning from the Masters: The Interrelationship between Reading and Writing

One of the six great principles of Asian brush painting is “emulating the masters.” Students spend hours copying the great ink drawings. Only when they have internalized the feel of the brush on paper and succeeded in a painting that appears spontaneous and free do they begin to work on their own. Writers, too, have long acknowledged the powerful effect that emulation, conscious or not, has on their own writing. We know that reading is closely tied to writing. As writing teachers, we can build on this correlation in two ways: encouraging our students to read widely and well, and explicitly teaching them to emulate ways practicing writers achieve their effects. Although the interrelationship between reading and writing is often unstated and subtle, it may, in the classroom, take many forms, such as analyzing what writers do, modeling grammatical structures, transforming texts through exercises

in recasting, and conducting extensive style studies, all practices we describe in this book. Part III of this book provides a rationale and practices for modeling. By providing opportunities for writing and instruction in what master writers do, teachers can enhance the time that apprentice writers spend in the act of composing.

### **Distinguishing between the Terms *Form*, *Formula*, and *Format***

Throughout this book, we present guidelines for writing that depend on an understanding of the terms *form*, *formula*, and *format*. The table below offers a brief overview of these key terms.

Form	intrinsic order	movement of ideas in response to writer's impetus	what emerges from writer's attention to purpose, subject, audience, craft
Formula	externally imposed order	writing in response to given organization	what results from writer's following a prescriptive organization (includes modeling and given poetic forms)
Format	visual or graphic order	attention to setup: spacing, fonts, graphics	what emerges from writer's attention to visual presentation of ideas and information: how the words appear on the page or screen (includes mapping and other kinds of graphic constructions)

The concept of *form* is one that underlies every major discipline; it is the essential structure that enables us to discern the essence of any given element—tree, flower, poem, animal, rock, symphony. Some artists believe that form is innate, in marble, for example, and that the artist releases that essential form by the act of sculpting. In writing, the artist alters and cuts and adds in the ongoing process of revisioning in an effort to come to an artistic rendition of the poem, essay, story that expresses its essential form. In school, we rarely have the opportunity to work on the grand scale of artistic vision, but the writers of this book believe that every person can approach the idea of form with understanding. As teachers, we provide opportunities to discover form, whether by working from the outside in or the inside out.

While generally we caution against formulaic patterns for generating writing assignments, we do support specific strategies that involve the use of *formula*. We have seen too many charts in classrooms around the country that depict “The Writing Process” with bold arrows showing a linear movement from *drafting* to *revising* to *editing*, a formula that denies the recursive aspect of writing. We understand the urge to teach genre structures in a formulaic way, but teaching persuasion, for instance, from the starting point of purpose, and coming to form through making decisions based on an understanding of a potential audience, is quite different from teaching students to fill in the outline of “the” persuasive essay. Examples of how to teach persuasion in an organic way are given in Chapter 4.

On the other hand, we propose that modeling, recasting, and transforming teach the concept of form through assignments that are to some degree formulaic. In working with writing at the sentence and paragraph levels, as elucidated in Chapter 10, “Teaching Grammar in Contexts *for* Writing,” you will see some exercises that use formulaic exercises to generate original work that leads to understanding of grammatical forms. In Chapter 8, too, we note that when students write poems such as haiku, sonnets, villanelles, and sestinas, they work within the formulaic strictures of given forms. As contemporary poets demonstrate, however, even the traditional form of the sonnet is open to many degrees of variation.

The concept of *format* as we use it in this book is a way of presenting ideas graphically. Format may refer to mapping or metaphoric graphics (see, for example, the lesson on writing memoir, Chapter 7). It may also mean simply paying attention to fonts and font sizes or just the white space on the page. We all know that the format of a book makes a lot of difference in how inviting it is to pick up and read. By teaching students the importance of format in presenting their ideas, we are helping them develop their spatial intelligence, a quality in ever greater demand in the workplace. One of our students recently reported that she has carved a very lucrative position for herself by mapping and graphing business meetings and seminars as they are going on. Her experience with mapping in high school led her directly to seeing how this ability could provide a service in the business world. Nancy Patterson’s chapter, “Join the E-Generation: Integrating Computers into the Writing Classroom,” demonstrates clearly how the process of formatting for the Web helps students understand and present their ideas.

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## Understanding Style and Voice

The idea of *voice* in writing is subject to a lot of discussion among teachers. If you examine a bookshelf filled with books on writing or the teaching of writing, however, you may see a book that deals exclusively with voice and others that do not mention voice in the entire book. Certainly teachers know what they mean by the concept of *voice*. We remember saying to our students, “We should be able to identify your papers by the voice in the writing whether your names appear on them or not.” The concept of *voice* appears in most rubrics, from the Six Traits rubric to the New Standards rubrics<sup>1</sup> to many state rubrics. Some researchers, however, refuse to use the word because it is vague, difficult to define. But if we, as teachers, understand what we mean by *voice*, then we must be able to talk about how to teach it.

We propose that *voice* is inextricably linked to *style*. We posit that it emerges from a writer’s particular way of constructing sentences, of using clusters of words that point to a way of perceiving the world. Style has been described in some rubrics as comprising diction and sentence structure. Rise Axelrod and Charles Cooper, in the *St. Martin’s Guide to Writing*, have no index reference to *voice*, but devote fifteen pages to “Editing for Style.” Loosely, they refer to style as “the way you say something,” and then go on to say that “good style [. . .] is an art. As such, it cannot be taught through the study of rules. Writers develop a style by caring about the way they express themselves, by paying attention to the style of other writers, and by being willing to experiment with different possibilities for putting a thought into words” (633). They then discuss many of the elements of style that can, in fact, be identified in a piece of writing, offering substantive suggestions for ways to recast stylistically inept sentences.

“Our habits make our style,” Josephine Miles once wrote about the composing process. Believing that to be true, in writing as well as in life, we feel responsible for helping our students cultivate writing habits that will help them develop their own styles, be evident in the voices we hear when we read their work. An integrated approach to teaching writing involves more than lip service to the expression that reading and writing are flip sides of the same coin. It goes much deeper. In a truly integrated approach, we view writing as an act of composing and interpreting, and reading as an act of interpreting and composing. As teachers of writing, we must be both composers and interpreters of our own work.

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**Note**

1. New Standards is a joint project of the National Center of Education and the Economy and the University of Pittsburgh, underway since 1991.

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In today's educational climate, it is more important than ever that we prepare our students to be effective and competent writers who can write for a variety of purposes. How can we teach our students the skills they need to be successful while also fostering an appreciation for the process, craft, and art of writing?

Drawing from sound theory and research as well as on many years of experience in the English classroom, Fran Claggett and colleagues have created a writing teacher's resource to help both new and experienced teachers sort through the often complex issues in the teaching of writing. With innovative, teacher-tested strategies for creating a classroom in which students thrive as writers, *Teaching Writing: Craft, Art, Genre* is a must-have addition to every writing teacher's library.

In this volume, you'll discover:

- ▶ Research-based discussions on key issues
- ▶ Classroom-ready lessons for teaching genre
- ▶ Methods for incorporating poetry into the writing program
- ▶ Rationale and lessons for using modeling to teach writing
- ▶ Ideas for integrating technology in the English classroom
- ▶ Strategies for teaching grammar in contexts for writing
- ▶ Examples of student work that illustrate teaching concepts
- ▶ Sample rubrics for assessment and student self-assessment
- ▶ An extensive bibliography of resources



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