

# 1

## What Is Writing and Why Do It?

Somehow, writing should be easier than it is, and more fun. In trying to make it so, somehow we all—teachers, students, beginning writers—got off the track and made it, I think, more difficult instead. We started talking about errors and how to stay away from them; about the “rules” of the game—watching for comma faults, making sure we had an “introduction,” a “body,” a “conclusion,” devising “outlines,” living in fear we would violate the rules of “unity” and “coherence.” Rules are necessary, of course, but we focused so much on the rules we forgot to talk about what the game is: what it is for, how it changes lives and minds, how it works, and even what *it* is. We paid so much attention to avoiding mistakes we forgot the joys that come from saying something new. We talked about “having a thesis statement,” but rarely about how one gets one. An idea *is* a thesis statement, and we have not talked much about that at all. Somehow, even those of us who can write pretty well, who have written fine and interesting essays on personal subjects, have felt first puzzled and then betrayed when we discovered that our writing fell apart if we were asked to produce analytical essays for a college course or to subdue lots of data into a readable form. How does one organize all there is to say on a subject like altruism and selfishness—especially when one is trying to fit what one thinks in with what two or three philosophers have to say on the subject? Suddenly, warnings and advice about making sure there is an introduction, body, and conclusion do not seem like much help at all.

That is what this book is for, and it may be thought of as a “Back to Basics” book. But I am talking about the real basics.

Not grammar, but basics like what writing is and is for, how you get an idea, and how and why each idea demands its own kind of organization, how ideas turn into essays, and, even more basic, about how your mind forms ideas in the first place. You can use this book with or without a teacher in front of you. It is designed not to *tell* you what to do or how to write so much as to set things up so that you can discover for yourself how writing works (yours and everybody else's), and, in the process, how your mind works as well. It is a kind of "watch yourself think" book. There are not many answers in it, but there are lots of questions: lots of things to try and explore and discover and play with. Even more than that, this is a book that tries to teach you not just how to answer questions, but how to find questions to ask. As Michel Foucault says in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and as Susanne Langer says in *Philosophy in a New Key*, it is our questions—the questions we ask of the world and that are asked of us—that determine what we can see and what we cannot. And for Foucault, the most important part of thinking is learning even to question our questions. ("What made me ask that question," you might ask yourself as a thinking writer.) All of this may sound like a long ways from writing with ease, but in this case, the longest road is the shortest way home—and the most fun.

In the next chapter we will talk about the most basic thing of all: what an essay is. But what is "writing"? Simply, writing is how minds think. Just as you can add  $2 + 3$  in your head, but cannot add  $1,827 + 9,369$  without paper and pencil, so you can think "What should I have for dinner?" in your head, but not "What is the relationship between American child-raising practices and adolescent rebellion?" or "What conceptions of the world was I given as a child that determine how I think and act now?" or "What factors combined to create the conditions for the onset of World War II?" To think about complex issues and to answer complex questions, we need paper. We push the pen, and the pen pushes us—to harder, more complex ideas than we could ever reach without pen and paper acting as a kind of storage-and-retrieval mechanism for us. (That only means that writing stores ideas for us.) Writing—putting things down on paper—is what allows you to hold onto one idea while you go off and explore some idea that some small, nagging voice in the back of your

mind tells you might be related to it. In and because of writing, you can discover how certain things you thought were different might turn out to have things in common; how certain things you thought were alike really turn out to be different. Writing is the mind's way of *thinking beyond* what it can think without an aid like paper and pen. It is also, of course, a way of reaching beyond yourself to other minds, whose only access to yours is provided by those traces of your mind you leave behind, in your writings.

Several things follow from what I have just said. One is that it does no good to think you can "just write the way you talk." An essay—and we will talk about this more in the next chapter—is not just talk written down. It is the product of a special and specialized kind of language and thinking. This book will help you see why and how this is so, and what that means to you as a writer. It also does no good to think you should not start writing until you are quite sure what you have to say. Because essays convey ideas usually too complex to be held in the mind all at once, it makes sense that you can only get to those ideas through and by way of writing. You approach those ideas by steps, on paper. You circle around them, you push toward them. I seriously doubt that anyone ever writes anything really good in one try. Those finished, polished essays you read in books are rarely if ever the product of one try. The words you are reading now are the product of a fifth draft, and were you with me here you could see the scraps and crumpled heaps of earlier tries piled around my desk. I confess this because I am distressed to think about how many beginning writers try to write, find their first drafts unsatisfying, watch themselves begin, stop, and begin again, and conclude they just are not "meant" to be writers.

In the pages that follow, I want to get you to capitalize on what is a very basic human drive, and to see how this drive can be harnessed to produce essays. The smallest baby has a strong drive to know what something is: to name things and, shortly thereafter, to find out where those things came from, what they are for, where they fit into his world. Watch a baby study a toy, a spoon, put it in his mouth, turn it 'round and 'round looking at it from all angles. Watch a toddler ask repeatedly, "What's that?" "What's that?" He wants a name so that he can categorize what he encounters. Adults do the same thing. Scientists, phi-

losophers, thinkers, writers, you, me. To compose is to take seriously this basic tendency of mind. To read is to comprehend someone else's answer to "What's that?" To write an essay is to communicate your "What's that?" process and conclusions to others.

Of course, to name what is there, we first have to *see* it; and this is also a book in exercising the eye: the face's eye and the mind's eye. Getting used to looking closely at "what's there": on the page in front of you, in the textbook you are studying, in the world through which you walk.

It is probably clear by now that this is not a usual kind of writing book, and this is so not only in what it says, but in what it does not say. I do not believe, for instance, that there is any point in spending one paragraph or one page on things like punctuation and spelling. If you are old enough to read this book, you are old enough to take responsibility for those things yourself. Surely you had at least one, and more likely a dozen, teachers who corrected your commas and your spelling and told you the difference between *their* and *there* (not to mention *they're*), and between *affect* and *effect*. If you do not know those distinctions by now, one more person going through them one more time will not help you. The only thing that will is your taking yourself seriously enough, right now, to learn them for yourself. I say this to put the responsibility where it belongs by this point in your life, and to spare us the illusion that good writing has to do primarily with these things. It does not. It has to do with those things I have already begun to talk about: paying close attention as you read, so that when you write about what you have read, you do so with an accurate assessment of what was on the page. This is the "looking closely" I just talked about. Good writing has to do with putting together what is there in a plausible, interesting, and persuasive way.

What this means is that writing well has more to do with attitudes and understanding—understanding what game you are playing and wanting to play it well—than with following rules or just not making mistakes. I may be able to teach you to drive a car by telling you to get in, turn the key, and put in the clutch, shift, push the gas pedal, and steer. But if you want to make the car work better (and not just drive it), you should want to know how a combustion engine works. If you want to make your writing work better—maybe so that you can let it take you on longer and

more interesting trips—then you will want to know how writing works. To do this, you will need to become your own paper mechanic, because unfortunately you cannot drive a bad essay into the repair shop and let someone else fix it. And the kind of things that need fixing in a paper are as numerous as those things that need fixing in a car. This book will help you find out just which things in your "machine" need to be tightened up, thrown out, replaced, or repaired. You will carry out the diagnosis and repair work. The problem may be *inspiration* ("I don't have anything to say, and I've read lots of material already"), *intuition* ("I know there's a connection here, but I don't know what it is"), or *articulation* ("I know what I want to say, but I can't get it to come out right"). And then there is always the harder problem ("I have lots of things to say, and I know they are all related, but I can't figure out exactly how yet, and so I can't figure out how to organize my essay").

No one can tell you how to solve these problems—every essay is a whole new challenge anyway—but I can help you to see what kind of problem you have in each instance, and feel in control of the writing process enough so that you will not panic and so that you can come to see your raw materials, your hunches, and your assignments as challenges, or as problems to be solved rather than as dilemmas.

This is part of what I mean by saying that writing is a matter more of attitude than of skill; a matter of defining a problem as finding things to say and getting rid of the common pseudo-problem ("I have to fill up ten pages somehow").

Part of the attitude of the good writer is a willingness to take chances saying something new. It is also a willingness to struggle and wrestle ideas into shape. But writing well also involves getting used to having your antennae out all the time, watching for material you might use in an essay. That material might be hiding anywhere: on the subway, in some book far outside your major field, in some comment your father always made in times of stress. We will practice using metaphors from other worlds—the worlds of machines and of nature, for instance—to force resemblances and to clarify things to ourselves and our readers. I just compared writing an essay with learning the inside of your car. That is an analogy. And pointing to it is thinking about thinking and writing about writing. We will do that too.

We will use materials from lots of different fields: the natural

sciences, sociology, history, politics, mathematics. Whenever such material is used, or whenever other people's notions of how the thinking and writing process works are cited, you will find an author's name and page number in parentheses immediately following. If the statement or excerpt or ideas intrigue you, go to the bibliography at the back of this book for a full reference to the source, find the book, and read more of it. As a writer, you should be reading lots of things in lots of different places. People who read a lot may not necessarily be writers, but writers are always people who read a lot. Having a well-stocked mind ensures that you will always have a fund of ideas to write about, and that you will be able to recognize the answer to a question or problem when it crosses your path. As Jerome Bruner tells us in his book *On Knowing*, discovery always favors the well-prepared mind. You should get used to having that well-prepared mind.

In all its particularity, and in the ways it thinks—not only in *what* it thinks but also in the *ways* it thinks—that well-prepared, well-stocked mind of yours works exactly like no other on earth. Sitting with two friends and talking about how we teach writing, I was astounded to notice that each of us were using completely different hand gestures to describe what we do and say in classes. Eileen held her two hands pressed together as if she were praying and then pushed those praying hands in a straight line in front of her: “I just tell students to get on the track and keep on until they get to the end,” she said. Neal held his two hands far apart, in a “there's *this*, and then *that*” gesture. My hands seemed to be holding a ball, turning it 'round and 'round to look at all its surfaces. I kept talking about going around behind an idea, to see what it looks like from another angle. Eileen's thinking was linear. Neal's binary. Mine, three-dimensional. Different minds think in different ways, and part of what I hope you will learn by doing the exercises in this book is what kind of mind you have.

That mind you have also needs different things in order to work, and I hope this book gets you in touch with what you need to work and write. Samuel Johnson needed a “purring cat, orange peel and plenty of tea,” or nothing would come. Balzac could only write at night and needed plenty of black coffee to do it. Emile Zola needed the opposite: he worked in the daytime, but he pulled all the blinds because he needed artificial light or he could not think or write. Carlyle tried to create a soundproof

room. Schiller could not write unless he had a drawer full of rotting apples he could pull out and catch whiffs of to inspire him. Poincaré the mathematician needed black coffee. Stephen Spender needed tea and lots of note slips. W. H. Auden, coffee and tobacco. Kipling could only write with black ink. (You will find these stories in Peter McKellar's *Imagination and Thinking*.) Hart Crane could not write a poem unless he was in a room full of music and noise and people, but he would suddenly rush out of the room, go off and scribble furiously, race back into the room and shout, “Isn't this the *greatest* poem you ever heard?” He knew it was not, of course, and he went off alone later to revise and revise and get it right. But he knew he needed that noise to chase the poem out of its hole, just as a hunter flushes a rabbit out of its hole with water. My favorite story is about the novelist Malcolm Lowry, and I read it in an account written by his doctor, C. G. McNeill, in *American Review* 17. Lowry came to the doctor with huge callouses on the backs of his knuckles, “like an ape,” his doctor said, and with varicose veins in his legs. It turned out that Lowry had a severe block against holding a pen in his hands, and could only write standing up (thus the varicose veins), dictating to his wife, and leaning with his knuckles against a lectern (thus the callouses). The doctor's suggestion was that he dictate lying down, or have surgery to correct the veins. Lowry chose the surgery. He knew he could write no way but standing up, with his knuckles pressed against the lectern, dictating to his wife.

The point of all these stories is that no one can tell you exactly what you need to create except you. No one can tell you what kind of mind you have—linear, binary, three-dimensional—except you. But this book will try to make it possible for you to find out what you do need in order to create, and what works best for you. In the pages that follow, you will find almost a hundred questions and exercises designed to get you to discover how writing works and how you work. This book will also allow you to see how other minds think and write, and, in the process, learn something about the moves one can make (theoreticians call them *tropes*) when composing discourse.

It would help if you would keep a writer's journal as you go through the exercises in this book. This should not be anything like a diary of “How I feel today,” but instead might be constructed in four parts, according to the description that follows:

1. *A log.* In this log, you should keep track of how much time you spend in each phase of each writing exercise. How long (and where) did you do your best thinking, reading, and idea gathering? Where and for how long did you do your first brainstorming? How much time did it take you to read the primary materials you needed to read in order to write the essay? How much time passed between the reading phase and the writing phase? Was that enough time? Too much? How much time did you spend on the first draft? On the second? The third? How much time did you spend just sitting? Composing an opening sentence? What did you learn that works best for you? What place is best for you to write in? What should you not repeat the next time? Where do you suspect you wasted or lost time? If some time or place or tactic seemed to be a breakthrough for you, record and remember that in the log. What really got you writing best: Sheer grit? Deadlines? Some people (like Einstein) think better in bed. Try sneaking up on a problem first thing in the morning before you are fully awake. Browse through Arthur Koestler's *The Act of Creation* for accounts of how and why such tactics have worked for other people, and consider if they might work for you.
2. *An idea fund.* Keep a fund of images that intrigue you, and of ideas that strike you at odd moments—about the relationship between one thing and another; about the causes for something you had not thought of before. About all kinds of connections you make. All kinds of statements you make to yourself that begin “Have you ever noticed that/how. . . .” Collect material for analogies: “This is like that.”
3. *A clipping bank.* Cut out of newspapers, or type copies of, paragraphs that intrigue you either because of their subject matter, their style, or their tone. You may find them helpful as raw material, as models, or as pump primers (do you know what a pump primer is?) when you write.
4. *A self-study.* Keep a record of the personal strengths, propensities, fears, or suspicions you have about your own relation to your writing. What is there that might work

against your being a good writer? A clear writer? Some people are afraid of being clear because they are afraid they will discover what they really think or believe. Some are afraid they will discover they are not sure what they think or believe. Some are deliberately fuzzy when they write so that they can cover their tracks if their readers disagree with them. If you are subconsciously sabotaging your own efforts, you should find out now how you do that, and why. Some people grew up rewarded for *not* speaking out, and they find that old habit getting in the way of their progress as writers. Think about your relation to the whole enterprise of speaking clearly and speaking out. Some people are stubborn and capable of “worrying” (see the dictionary for the right definition of that word here) an idea forever. Are you one of those people? If so, it would help if you were aware of it. Do you have a fear of coming to conclusions? A fear of being wrong? What are your strengths outside of writing, that may become strengths in writing as well?

If you will keep this journal, if you will read the pages that follow, do the exercises, and listen—especially if you will listen to yourself, you will have a strong sense of what an essay is and how it works; about how your mind works and puts ideas together; about how minds in general take things apart and put them together (that is called *analysis* and *synthesis* in some circles); about how thinking and writing are themselves matters of taking things apart and putting them together in new ways; about how you can do that more efficiently and with results you like. As the book progresses, you will find more and more lists of things: points about writing, lists of strategies to use when you are trying to read difficult material, lists of suggestions for things to do when you are trying to get or shape an idea, lists of procedures to follow when you are writing an essay, and then questions to ask yourself as you edit what you write.

There almost a hundred suggestions for writing in the book as well, and you are invited to try as many of them as you have time for, or as many as catch your fancy. They are really one hundred different ways into the same thing. My assumption is that at the point of illumination—the point at which you really

see what discourse is and how it works—you will not need the book any longer. You will understand the game and its rules and, consequently, be able to play the game well. Or, to put things another way, you might consider these practice exercises and suggestions that follow as one-hundred jump starts to get your motor running on cold mornings. I hope you will be able to get into your car on the 101st morning, drive off with ease, and reach whatever destination you choose.

Below is a series of suggestions for writing exercises designed to get you started on that journey and to let you watch how writing and thinking work for you.



1. To discover for yourself the extent to which good writers lean on their prose to hold onto ideas too complex for them to hold in their minds without writing, try this experiment: get a ballpoint pen that no longer writes. On a sheet of paper that has a sheet of carbon paper and another sheet of paper beneath that, write out a description of any process with which you are very familiar, using the worn-out pen. Notice how easy it is to lose your train of thought when you cannot see what you have written. Notice how easy it is for your sentences to become awkward, and maybe even to disintegrate altogether. Notice how difficult it is to write when you cannot see what you've already written. Think about how much truer this is when you are discussing something more complex than a process you know well. Notice, finally, how important it is for you as a writer, whenever you are "stuck," to pause and reread what you have written so far as a prod and an inspiration to discover what ought to come next.
2. Again, try writing up a process you know well. This time use a working pen, but try to write as rapidly as you can. This time, notice the extent to which no matter how fast you write, your mind is moving faster. Notice how it is that things you did not think you were going to say suddenly begin to enter your consciousness as you are writing. That phenomenon is what I am talking about when I said you push the pen and the pen pushes you.
3. Read carefully the excerpt below, written by the scientist Francis Galton: "When I pronounce one sentence, where is the following one. Certainly not in the field of my consciousness, which is occupied by sentence number one; and nevertheless, I do think of it, and it is ready to appear the next instant, which cannot occur if I do not think of it unconsciously" (in Hadamard, p. 24). In response to these musings of Galton's, Jacques Hadamard the mathematician says:

It seems to me that we can identify this with what Francis Galton calls the "ante-chamber" of consciousness: "When I am engaged in trying to think anything out, the process of doing so appears to me to be this: The ideas that lie at any moment within my full consciousness seem to attract of their own accord the most appropriate out of a number of other ideas that are lying close at hand, but imperfectly within the range of my consciousness. There seems to be a presence-chamber in my mind where full consciousness holds court, and where two or three ideas are at the same time in audience, and an ante-chamber full of more or less allied ideas, which is situated just beyond the full ken of consciousness. Out of this ante-chamber the ideas most nearly allied to those in the presence-chamber appear to be summoned in a mechanically logical way, and to have their turn of audience" (Hadamard, pp. 24–25).

This description sounds much like the kind of dialectic between the writer and what he or she has written that makes essay writing exciting. This is the process by which we find out how and what we think *in the act of writing*. What we can tap in this way is what William James calls the "fringe-consciousness," what Edward deBono calls "lateral thinking," and Arthur Koestler calls "thinking aside." Simply, we keep ourselves busy so that new ideas can creep up on us. As you watch yourself write, see if this happens to you. In the log section of your writer's journal, consider what you might remember in order to ensure that you will always be alert enough to catch those ideas as they fly by the corner of your mind and consciousness.

## 2

## What Is an Essay, Anyway?

If writing itself is a kind of pushing of the mind, and a kind of storage-and-retrieval mechanism, what is the particular kind of writing we call an *essay*? In college courses people take essay exams. What features do those things have? If we write papers for courses, what must those pieces of writing look like? It is not surprising that people often have misconceptions about what they are to write when they are asked to write an essay. The world is full of writing that resembles, on the surface, an essay. I am convinced much of the writing people do in college that is not well received is not well received because it was written by someone who *thought* he or she was writing an essay, but was really imitating a very different kind of writing: textbook writing, “theme” writing, or newspaper writing, for instance. It makes sense for us to look closely at a sample of each kind to discover what features distinguish an essay from other kinds of writing.

Beginning on page 25, you will find four excerpts of writing. The subject of each one is anthropology, if we assume that anthropology is the study of a culture or cultures, and the study of the relationship of a culture to its artifacts. Read through all four excerpts and, as you do, see if you can answer the following questions. You could use your writer’s log as a place in which you compose answers to the questions.

1. For what audience does each piece of writing seem intended?
2. How much does the writer of each piece assume his or her audience knows about the subject, and how much attention

does the writer pay to leading the reader from one point to the next?

3. Which piece or pieces of writing seem broad and relatively superficial, and which seem narrower in scope, but to have more depth?
4. Can you detect traces of that “struggle into consciousness” that we talked about in the last chapter in any or all of these four pieces? Do you see these writers “thinking beyond” to new and more complex ideas than those we carry around in our heads? Where do you see those traces: in which pieces, and in which places in which pieces?
5. Which piece would you call an “essay,” and what would you call the other pieces that you would not classify as essays?

The first writing sample you just read is from a textbook, as I am sure you could tell. This kind of writing should never be mistaken for essay writing, and should never be imitated when you are asked to or want to write an essay. Its differences from an essay can be summarized easily:

1. Each of its sentences is a *generalization*: a very large statement that sweeps together a great deal of separate “facts.” A sentence such as “Every culture and subculture provides several sets of concepts or categories for perceiving and understanding phenomena” would be called a generalization.
2. Beyond this, you might note that each of the generalizations in the first piece, if they were found in an essay rather than in a textbook, would require support, defense, exemplification. But the textbook writer is assumed to be an authority giving an overview of a field, and thus he or she is allowed to make a general point (“World War II was caused by . . .,” “The main reason for the downfall of the King was . . .”) without supporting those points. The essayist is not given that license and is expected to support and defend each generalization, except for the very safe,

obvious, shared assumption. Even at those points, as we shall see, at times the great essayist is the one who challenges exactly those "safe" shared assumptions.

3. The audience for the textbook is assumed to have little or no knowledge of the subject being discussed and is assumed to want only a brief and relatively superficial survey or introduction to a field.
4. This assumption on the part of the textbook writer that his or her audience wants a superficial survey often leads to prose in which every sentence literally brings up a new topic. If the essays you have written are returned to you with comments in the margins like "Develop this point," "How do you know?" "You haven't explained your position," or "Explain," consider whether you might be taking textbook prose as your model rather than essay writing.
5. The style of this prose is fairly clear, using mostly the active voice rather than the passive. ("Observers and researchers invariably use comparison" is active; "The comparison is invariably used by observers and researchers" is passive.) But often textbook prose tends to have elaborate syntax that makes reading it difficult. One of my favorite textbook sentences is this: "That Henry VIII would be the cause of all the trouble was hardly a fact of which people were unaware." Try paraphrasing (writing another and simpler version of) this sentence just to see how simple the point being made here really is and how clearly it could have been written. In his *Philosophy of Composition*, E. D. Hirsch notices that textbook writers are often the worst offenders of what he calls the "readability principle." That principle is that "the sequence for economizing the reader's attention is the sequence that leaves the reader in uncertainty for the shortest period of time" (p. 80). The sentence above certainly fails to do that. Usually, if you want to write an essay that is clear and readable, you would prefer the simple subject/verb ordering of most sentences, and you would prefer active voice to passive. You can write long, Byzantine sentences in your essays if you wish. You should remember, however, that such sentences make your reader work harder and may even make your reader down-

right impatient with you. A reader who gets impatient just stops reading, and when your reader stops reading, you have lost your audience: lost your chance to be heard.

6. This last point is particularly important. Sadly, I think many beginning writers believe just the opposite: that it is elaborate prose that *earns* them the right to be read. But as a writer, you should want to write as simply as possible, so that the complexity of your ideas can shine through. The harshest judgment on pompous padded prose comes, I think, from Rudolf Flesch in *The Art of Readable Writing*:

"Great formality seems to be the hallmark of the still-insecure, the not-quite-arrived, the semi-accepted. The social sciences have a more pompous language than the natural sciences, psychology has a more luxuriant lingo than medicine, public administration is more unreadable than law. Among our social groups, the most formalistic style is that of labor. . . . John L. Lewis loved to express himself like this: "No action has been taken by this writer or the United Mine Workers of America, as such, which would fall within the purview of the oppressive statute under which you seek to function. Without indulging in analysis, it is a logical assumption that the cavilings of the bar and bench in their attempts to explicate this infamous enactment will consume a tedious time." Flesch concludes his observations by saying that "those who are secure in their position . . . usually know they don't need such verbal trappings. They know they can forget about false dignity and use language that suits their personality and the purpose in hand" (p. 221).

This seems a fair judgment. The only other reason why a writer would want to sound pompous, obscure, or like a textbook, I think, is that he or she is not quite sure what he or she wants to say and is trying to hide that doubt. We will talk later about what the writer can do when that point comes.

The second writing sample is from Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, which is a study of adolescence in a primitive culture and an analysis of the differences between young people



in Samoa and in Western countries. I would call this a true essay. What are its characteristics?

1. It is addressed to its readers in a matter-of-fact, straightforward voice, tone, and style. Sentences such as the one that begins "We have been comparing point for point . . ." make it very clear that this writer is much more interested in being clear and being understood than in being thought to be writing something "weighty."
2. This style and tone, however, do not signal a casual or haphazard attitude toward the material discussed. Instead, if you look closely, you will see that Mead is carefully building an analysis—point by point, sentence by sentence. In contrast to textbook sentences, each of her sentences leads into the following one, as well as supports, refutes, elaborates, or makes a connection with the preceding one. The unmistakable signs of a building analysis are there in the words: "If . . . then. . . . But . . . however, because . . . therefore. . . ." Much of this book will lead you through the steps necessary to produce analysis, but for now you might simply notice that her analysis is made up of *propositions* ("If adolescents are only plunged into difficulties and distress because of conditions in their social environment, then by all means let us so modify that environment so as to reduce this stress and eliminate this strain and anguish of adjustment"). Her analysis is made up of *qualifiers* made upon those propositions ("But unfortunately the conditions which vex our adolescents are the flesh and bone of our society, no more subject to straightforward manipulation upon our part than is the language which we speak"). It is also made up of statements *asserting a relationship* between separate propositions ("The principal causes of our adolescents' difficulty are the presence of conflicting standards and the belief that every individual should make his or her own choices, coupled with a feeling that choice is an important matter"). The essay is also full of statements *demonstrating the truth of* those propositions Mead makes. All of these kinds of statements—propositions, qualifications, exemplifications, and demonstrations—make up the essay form.

3. Because the material Mead is discussing is inherently complex, the writing is characterized by a fierce attempt to be simple and clear. Unlike "creative" writing, which strives to be richly ambiguous, her writing strives to be as unambiguous as possible. This is not to say that the prose is not colorful and full of images and analogies or comparisons: "At first blush," "Conditions . . . vex our adolescents," "are the flesh and bone of society," "conditions . . . are no more subject to straightforward manipulation . . . than is the language which we speak." But those images and comparisons are used to clarify her points, not to make the prose rich in ambiguities.
4. What this last point suggests is that the writing of an essay takes as much imagination as the writing of a poem: the essay writer needs imagination to choose exactly the right metaphor, the absolutely best word, the best order in which to convey ideas and findings most clearly. The essay writer uses his or her imagination to be as flexible as possible in order to see how best to arrange the parts of the discourse. The "imaginative" or "creative" writer simply uses his or her imagination for different purposes.
5. You will notice that Mead does not assume her audience "knows what she means" about anything. She takes great pains to lead the reader through her essay. In this instance, she begins by summarizing what she has been doing. She explains why she has done it. She announces that she is going to take up a new subject ("If we now turn from the Samoan picture . . ."). That kind of careful leading of the reader by the hand is absolutely essential in good essay writing, in which you might take as a rule of thumb the principle that your reader is a stranger, who is intelligent but does not know much about your subject. In this respect, college classes, I fear, often mislead us. The atmosphere in the class is that we are "all friends," who share a classroom, a set of beliefs, certain sets of assumptions, and a certain body of knowledge. This assumption leads to the writing of essays that are far too elliptical, too brief, too sketchy. When a reader responds to your essays by saying, "You haven't told me enough," your response

is often, “But *you* know what I mean.” In theoretical terms, there is confusion here about whether the writer is in a “restricted code situation” (in which writers and readers all know each other and agree on everything and therefore do not have to explain and defend everything), or an “elaborated code situation” (in which we as writers need to be more explicit, more public, and assume our readers are strangers to our ideas). These are Basil Bernstein’s conclusions about different “codes” that operate for writers (pp. 165–66).

6. One of the most dramatic and interesting features of a true essay, however, is not its tone or grammatical features or the sentences one finds in it, but its status in quite a different sense. You will notice that Mead’s essay is completely composed of a challenge to the old, accepted truism “Adolescence is a painful time, caused mostly by physiological changes that are inevitable.” This points up one of what I take to be the most exciting and challenging parts of essay writing: essays not only explain, solve, or explore problems; as often as not, *they create a problem or generate and then answer a question where none existed before*. They point out to us how some of those things we thought were obviously and unexceptionably true are not so unexceptionably true at all. Writing essays is engaging in *discourse*. That word is very popular these days. It means writing about topics such as human nature, culture, society, or history: writing about anything in which there is room and need for fresh ways of seeing and thinking. As Hayden White reminds us in *Tropics of Discourse*, the word *discourse* comes from the Latin *discurrere*, which means to move back and forth, or to run to and fro. What is it that we run back and forth between when we write essays; when we compose “discourse”? The answer is twofold: we run back and forth from facts in the world to speculations about what those facts may mean. We run back and forth between what White calls “conceptualization[s] of a given area of experience which have become hardened into a hypostasis that blocks fresh perceptions or denies, in the interest of formalization, what our will or emotions tells us ought not to be the case in a given department of life” (pp. 3–4).

What that means is that we move back and forth between set, long-held notions and ways of looking at something in the world, and some new way of seeing that our hunches, our observations, or our heart tells us is more accurate. This is exactly what Mead does in her essay. Discourse is the way the mind wrestles with what surrounds it. Discourse is a kind of midpoint between the desire to understand some part of experience, and full comprehension of that part of experience (White, p. 22). It is, in other words, what we talked about in the last chapter. It is the way we think beyond what we know.

7. When you write an essay, compose discourse, move back and forth between those old ways of seeing and new ways of seeing, the skill and clarity with which you do those things, according to White, is what *earns* you the right to be heard; *earns* you the right to change other people’s way of seeing. The strong and coherent essay, in other words, is your ticket into the world of ideas and into the marketplace where ideas are exchanged. Mead died not so long ago, but her ideas are still alive in the world. The essay makes way for, and finds a place for, our ideas in the world.

The third piece of writing is a newspaper article. It is included here because it shows both what a newspaper article can be and how a newspaper article may transcend that form and become something very much like an essay. It is really, in smaller compass than Mead’s essay, an essay itself. It was written by William Henry, who recently and quite deservedly won a Pulitzer Prize for his journalism. The article demonstrates what we have just said about the essay:

1. Most significantly, it points a connection where we had not seen one before. In this case, Henry pinpoints the nature and source of Donald Duck’s appeal, as well as the function he serves for his readers and for those who watch him on television. You should note that words like *nature* (what is it?), *source* (where does it come from?), and *function* (what does it do?) are often central in essay writing and, as you surely have noticed, in essay exams as well.
2. Just as does Mead, Henry finds something new to say where

we had thought we knew it all. Adolescence is *not* necessarily a time of pain and turmoil. Donald Duck is *not* just another cartoon character. The essay reevaluates what we all thought was settled forever. It looks at something old in a new way, or reexamines something that is an old problem, but in a new way. In *On Knowing*, Jerome Bruner calls the essay “the literary counterpart of the ‘possible world’ of the logical or like the ‘thought experiment’ of the scientist. . . . It begins with a set of connected familiars and seeks by rearranging them to leap to the higher ground of novelty, a novelty rooted in what was previously familiar” (p. vii).

3. One of the features of a good essay, according to Bruner, is that it produces in the reader something he calls “effective surprise” and describes in this way: “Surprise is the unexpected that strikes one with wonder or astonishment. What is curious about effective surprise is that it need not be rare or infrequent or bizarre and is often none of these things. Effective surprises . . . rather seem to have the quality of obviousness about them when they occur, producing a shock of recognition following which there is no longer astonishment” (p. 18).
4. You should notice to do that—to produce surprise in your reader—the essayist chooses a subject about which he or she can say something in depth. Henry did not choose as his subject “Comic Strips in America.” That subject would be far too broad for him to say anything but the most superficial things. Instead, he focuses closely on one small area and discovers a new way of seeing that area. It is a wise decision.
5. The *kinds* of surprise a good essay can provide and the kinds of value an essay provides can be specified. An essay can have *predictive* value. It can, that is, devise a formula that will always work. Mead does this: “Wherever choice is a virtue in a society, and young people are forced to make many choices fast, there will be adolescent turmoil.” An essay can have *formal* value. It can order facts in such a way that readers will be able to see a relationship between those facts that was obscured before. (You might read what

Poincaré has to say about this kind of thinking and writing in his study of mathematical invention.) An essay can have *metaphoric* value. It can connect very different experiences by the use of symbol or metaphor or image. We will practice doing this in Chapter 8, but it is possible here to show you what this value can do. Suppose I want to talk about what the self is. Is the self something that may best be described as something like a peach? Does it consist of a soft exterior, with a hard pit or core at the center? Or is the self more like an onion: if you peel away the layers of skins, nothing remains, because the self itself *is* that layering of skins? The metaphor or image in the essay clarifies a way of seeing something.

6. Here in this last point, you can see in a different way how large a part the imagination plays in essay writing. In *The Act of Creation*, Arthur Koestler says that “artists tend to treat facts as stimuli for imagination, whereas scientists use imagination to coordinate facts” (p. 200). I think the essay writer rests somewhere in the middle of those two points. The essayist uses facts, and uses imagination both to coordinate those facts and to venture metaphors that clarify the relationship between those facts. It may seem reasonable to conclude, then, that there is both something of the artist and something of the scientist in the essay writer. If, as Karl Popper contends in *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, any kind of problem solving or new thinking is “science-making,” then Bill Henry is a scientist. And so also are all essay writers; they are part scientist and part artist.

The fourth writing sample is a representative sample of a university writing proficiency exam, and I include it because it is a sample not of a news article, or of an essay, or of textbook writing, but of a specialized creature that seems to exist only in college classes. It is a *theme*, and its features are worth noting, mostly so that they can be avoided by the serious essay writer.

1. The theme resembles textbook writing in that it is built up of a series of assertions, none of which are demonstrated, defended, explained, or proven. To look at its first paragraph is to recognize that it is not a paragraph at all, but

simply two sentences, each of which is a separate proposition that is offered and then dropped.

2. Unlike an essay's paragraphs, those in a theme are short, undeveloped, dropped and left for a new point. The signs that would tell you that an analysis was developing are absent. There are few or no words like "if . . . then", "but . . . however, on the other hand"; "all the same . . . in spite of this . . . because of . . . , as a result"—words or phrases that are a part of any analysis.
3. The theme is often characterized by a large number of what S. I. Hayakawa called *buzz words*, or highly charged words calculated to get some emotional response from a reader. These words change from year to year or from decade to decade, but characteristically they are never defined or defended. In this particular piece of theme writing, *depersonalize* and *dehumanize* seem to be the chosen buzz words. This is not to say, of course, that computers may *not* depersonalize or dehumanize. But it is to say that the writer has not thought much about what those things might mean, precisely, or about how a computer will bring those things to pass. In what ways might a computer lead to greater freedom? Exactly how—in what event and by what mechanisms—would computers ensure that "thoughts and feelings and sentiments" have "little or no control over life"? How will computer-assisted diagnoses by doctors "wipe out" the doctor-patient relationship?
4. Although the theme writer is unclear about or fails to explain why or how this depersonalization will take place, he or she is even more unclear about the relationships between the separate concepts in his or her essay. When the theme writer says, for instance, that "technology must work with society," that phrase suggests that "technology" is a volitional, live creature with the capacity to "work with" people. But what relationship does technology have to society? Is not technology itself a creation of society and run by people in society? So society would have to do something with technology, and not the reverse. The theme writer has not clarified relationships; he or she is barely aware that such things exist.

5. We could go on, but the point is clear already. The theme is different from the essay in that it fails to grapple in an honest and serious way with a serious issue. It fails to develop or to analyze. It is an infinitely expandable series of buzz words and stock phrases, such as "one giant step," which no one, least of all the writer, takes seriously. Technically, its paragraphs are modular; that is, they could be shifted around almost at will, with no appreciable effect on the whole piece. Its sentences, for the most part, could also be moved almost anywhere without damaging the piece. It is, in short, more a ritual exercise in not-making-mistakes-in-grammar than a serious attempt to struggle with anything of substance.

Now that we have distinguished the essay from other forms of writing that it resembles in some ways, it may also help to distinguish the different kinds of essays it is possible to write. The ancients classified the essay by the nature of its appeal. *Pathos* was an appeal to the audience's emotions. *Ethos* was an appeal based on the speaker or writer's own moral character. *Logos* was an appeal based in logic. The modern essayist is more likely to decide what and how to write on the basis of some purpose rather than some *appeal*, and the purposes for which you might write are many:

1. An essay may inform.
2. An essay may instruct.
3. An essay may try to persuade.
4. An essay may try to solve a problem.
5. An essay may speculate about a particular issue or a particular phenomenon.
6. An essay may theorize: (a) "what happened"—about historical events or events in your own history or in that of your family, class, group, or sex; (b) "what happens"—it may, that is, generalize about recurring phenomena; (c) about "what will or may happen" in the future if this or that policy, habit, tendency, or belief persists.

7. An essay may be a retrieval of relevant information already known. We would call it, then, a **summary**.
8. An essay may be an analysis of problematic or puzzling data. What would explain or account for these facts?
9. An essay may be a **discovering of some new concepts or ways to order separate facts**.

When you are at a loss for a topic and want to write an essay, you might consider going over this list as a means of finding what it is you might want to write. Deciding whether you want to argue or to analyze, to talk about past habits or potential dangers, is a start in the right direction. Deciding whether you want to talk to everyone, or just to a very select audience, is also a start in the right direction.

Below are more exercises, which are designed to get you to think about what an essay is, and about how its language differs from other kinds of writing.



4. If you are taking college courses, gather together whatever you can of the assignments you will have in them. Inventory the skills you will need to do this writing well. What is being asked of you? Analyses? Summaries? Research reports? Notice how often those words we talked about, words like *nature*, *source*, and *function*, appear in essay exams, paper topics, and lecture notes. Remember what those words refer to.
5. Gather together some of your most frustrating-to-read textbooks and try rewriting a paragraph or two of one of them. What are the major differences you see between your paraphrase and the original? What do you learn by rewriting?
6. Be alert to any good writing you see anywhere in the next week and classify it by type. Which of the categories of purpose we talked about does each example fit into? Consider which types appeal to you most, and what kinds of things you would like to write.
7. In his *Philosophy of Composition*, E. D. Hirsch says that it is wrong to equate clear thinking and clear writing. "The word *clear* means something different in the two phrases. Clear thinking means drawing correct inferences from the given premises. Clear writing means an unambiguous and readable

expression of one's meaning. . . . Muddy writing can express clear thinking, and clear writing can express muddy thinking" (p. 142). Do you agree with Hirsch? Take an old bit of an essay you may have lying around, preferably one you believe never really came together clearly. See if you can rewrite some portion of it clearly. Did you find that the *thinking* became more clear as the prose became more clear?

The four excerpts discussed in this chapter follow. The first is by Charles Frantz. The second is by Margaret Mead. The third is by William A. Henry 3rd; he wrote this column while he was television critic for the *Boston Globe*. A student wrote the last excerpt for a university writing proficiency exam.

#### Charles Frantz.

##### From *The Student Anthropologist's Handbook*

The early Greeks generated the birth of anthropology on a modest scale, since their genius was directed basically toward speculation and the search for ideal social forms. In many ways, better understanding of actual human forms derived from Chinese and Vedic Indian observers and philosophers. These diverse intellectual streams had, however, minimal contact with one another for centuries. It was Alexandrian and Arabic scholars who for almost a millennium principally contributed to the slight advances made toward a mature anthropology, although the extent of their descriptive work has yet to be fully determined. Reformation in Europe stimulated the growth of a kind of individualism, and the Renaissance gave rise to nationalism in the modern sense. An era of great social and economic changes dissolved the hierarchically-based and comparative cultural unity of medieval Europe. The period of Great Discoveries, beginning in the fifteenth century, brought to inquisitive Europeans both correct and fantastically distorted reports about previously unknown races, cultures, languages, plants, and animals. The "glory" of ancient Greece and Rome was discovered about the same time. The invention of the printing press encouraged the wider spread of information from many parts of the globe than history had known before. Compendia and encyclopedia were inaugurated which aimed to delineate human variations very completely. Museums and private cabinets of curios began to ap-

pear. The public was increasingly flooded with new explanations of human diversity and commonality. The striking commercial and political success of European nations added support for doctrines about divine guidance working through white men. Christianity provided concepts by which Europeans explained and rationalized their growing economic and political power throughout the world.

By the eighteenth century, rationalism and secularism extensively pervaded intellectual life in Europe. Philosophers and budding social scientists sought "laws of nature" to explain human differences, similarities and regularities. Some invested their explanations with the concept of progress, attributing it either to nature or to divine ordination. Others like Montesquieu wisely noted how little *was* known of the social world, and called for more observation and study, realizing many puzzles could be solved only through more patient study and the accumulation of more reliable data.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, hundreds of associations and academies dedicated to the pursuit of general knowledge, or the advancement of specialized studies, were established in Europe and North America. Most of these were initiated locally, but national and international associations and congresses were quick to follow. At the same time, an expansion of learned journals and universities occurred.

Many scholars were thoroughly imbued with the ideals of humanism and idealism, believing optimistically that scientific discoveries would help reduce war, halt disease, eradicate poor labor conditions, and end illiteracy and primitivism by "uplifting natives" through Christianity and governance superimposed directly. It was in the midst of these ambitions that a number of questions gained importance for what was taking shape as a distinctive field of anthropology. A resurgence of anatomical and medical studies, the discovery of common roots between the languages of Europe and India, and the opening of prehistoric research by advances in geology all contributed data or posed new problems concerning the nature of *Homo sapiens* and his social and cultural forms, through all time and space. The mid-nineteenth century brought forth such hallmarks of the future as the evolutionary theories of Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin, Thomas H. Huxley, and

Alfred Wallace. Lewis Henry Morgan sent out the first worldwide questionnaire to procure information about systems of descent and affinity. Others began to make specific inquiries into the beliefs, languages, and practices of non-European peoples. Meanwhile accounts, sometimes exceptionally reliable, increasingly poured in from missionaries, colonial administrators, travellers, and expeditions charged with surveying lands and people with whom economic and political relations might be established.

In Europe, North America, and Australia associations for the advancement of science generally provided the organizational context for anthropological reports and speculations. Later, more specialized societies arose, both in the parts listed and elsewhere. The first specifically anthropological society, founded in Paris in 1839, was soon emulated in many countries. Later in the chapter, more will be said about these societies when the social organization of anthropology is discussed.

For now, suffice it to say that by the beginning of the twentieth century a narrower discipline of anthropology had begun to appear in several universities in the world. From that time, an increasing number of specialized problems about man, although still covering the Earth through all time, came to characterize the work of scholars who labelled themselves anthropologists (pp. 2-4).

**Margaret Mead.**

**"Education for Choice."**

**From *Coming of Age in Samoa*** (1928)

We have been comparing point for point, our civilisation and the simpler civilisation of Samoa, in order to illuminate our own methods of education. If now we turn from the Samoan picture and take away only the main lesson which we learned there, that adolescence is not necessarily a time of stress and strain, but that cultural conditions make it so, can we draw any conclusions which might bear fruit in the training of our adolescents?

At first blush the answer seems simple enough. If adolescents are only plunged into difficulties and distress because of conditions in their social environment, then by all means let us so modify that environment as to reduce this stress and eliminate this strain and anguish of adjustment. But, unfortunately, the conditions which vex our adolescents are the flesh and bone of our society, no more subject to straightforward manipulation upon our part than is the language which we speak. We can alter a syllable here, a construction there; but the great and far-reaching changes in linguistic structure (as in all parts of culture) are the work of time, a work in which each individual plays an unconscious and inconsiderable part. The principal causes of our adolescents' difficulty are the presence of conflicting standards and the belief that every individual should make his or her own choices, coupled with a feeling that choice is an important matter. Given these cultural attitudes, adolescence, regarded now not as a period of physiological change, for we know that physiological puberty need not produce conflict, but as the beginning of mental and emotional maturity, is bound to be filled with conflicts and difficulties. A society which is clamouring for choice, which is filled with many articulate groups, each urging its own brand of salvation, its own variety of economic philosophy, will give each new generation no peace until all have chosen or gone under, unable to bear the conditions of choice. The stress is in our civilisation, not in the physical changes through which our children pass, but it is none the less real nor less inevitable in twentieth-century America.

And if we look at the particular forms which this need for choice takes, the difficulty of the adolescent's position is only documented further. Because the discussion is principally concerned with girls, I shall discuss the problem from the girls' point of view, but in many respects the plight of the adolescent boy is very similar. Between fourteen and eighteen, the average American boy and girl finish school. They are now ready to go to work and must choose what type of work they wish to do. It might be argued that they often have remarkably little choice. Their education, the part of the country in which they live, their skill with their hands, will combine to dictate

choice perhaps between the job of cash girl in a department store or of telephone operator, or of clerk or miner. But small as is the number of choices open to them in actuality, the significance of this narrow field of opportunity is blurred by our American theory of endless possibilities. Moving picture, magazine, newspaper, all reiterate the Cinderella story in one form or another, and often the interest lies as much in the way cash girl 456 becomes head buyer as in her subsequent nuptials with the owner of the store. Our occupational classes are not fixed. So many children are better educated and hold more skilled positions than their parents that even the ever-present discrepancy between opportunities open to men and opportunities open to women, although present in a girl's competition with her brother, is often absent as between her unskilled father and herself. It is needless to argue that these attitudes are products of conditions which no longer exist, particularly the presence of a frontier and a large amount of free land which provided a perpetual alternative of occupational choice. A set which was given to our thinking in pioneer days is preserved in other terms. As long as we have immigrants from non-English-speaking countries, the gap in opportunities between non-English-speaking parents and English-speaking children will be vivid and dramatic. Until our standard of education becomes far more stable than it is at present, the continual raising of the age and grade until which schooling is compulsory ensures a wide educational gap between many parents and their children. And occupational shifts like the present movements of farmers and farm workers into urban occupations, give the same picture. When the agricultural worker pictures urban work as a step up in the social scale, and the introduction of scientific farming is so radically reducing the numbers needed in agriculture, the movement of young people born on the farm to city jobs is bound to dazzle the imagination of our farming states during the next generation at least. The substitution of machines for unskilled workers and the absorption of many of the workers and their children into positions where they manipulate machines affords another instance of the kind of historical change which keeps our myth of endless opportunity alive. Add to these

*Economic factor*

special features, like the effect upon the prospects of Negro children of the tremendous exodus from the southern corn fields, or upon the children of New England mill-hands who are deprived of an opportunity to follow dully in their parents' footsteps and must at least seek new fields if not better ones.

Careful students of the facts may tell us that class lines are becoming fixed; that while the children of immigrants make advances beyond their parents, they move up in step; that there are fewer spectacular successes among them than there used to be; that it is much more possible to predict the future status of the child from the present status of the parent. But this measured comment of the statistician has not filtered into our literature, nor our moving pictures, nor in any way served to minimize the vividness of the improvement in the children's condition as compared with the condition of their parents. Especially in cities, there is no such obvious demonstration of the fact that improvement is the rule for the children of a given class or district, and not merely a case of John Riley's making twenty dollars a week as a crossing man while Mary, his daughter, who has gone to business school, makes twenty-five dollars a week, working shorter hours. The lure of correspondence school advertising, the efflorescence of a doctrine of short-cuts to fame, all contrive to make an American boy or girl's choice of a job different from that of English children, born into a society where stratification is so old, so institutionalised, that the dullest cannot doubt it. So economic conditions force them to go to work and everything combines to make that choice a difficult one, whether in terms of abandoning a carefree existence for a confining, uncongenial one, or in terms of bitter rebellion against the choice which they must make in contrast to the opportunities which they are told are open to all Americans.

And taking a job introduces other factors of difficulty into the adolescent girl's home situation. Her dependence has always been demonstrated in terms of limits and curbs set upon her spontaneous activity in every field from spending money to standards of dress and behaviour. Because of the essentially pecuniary nature of our society, the relationship of limitation in terms of allowance to limitation of behaviour are more far-

reaching than in earlier times. Parental disapproval of extreme styles of clothing would formerly have expressed itself in a mother's making her daughter's dresses high in the neck and long in the sleeve. Now it expresses itself in control through money. If Mary doesn't stop purchasing chiffon stockings, Mary shall have no money to buy stockings. Similarly, a taste for cigarettes and liquor can only be gratified through money; going to the movies, buying books and magazines of which her parents disapprove, are all dependent upon a girl's having the money, as well as upon her eluding more direct forms of control. And the importance of a supply of money in gratifying all of a girl's desires for clothes and for amusement makes money the easiest channel through which to exert parental authority. So easy is it, that the threat of cutting off an allowance, taking away the money for the one movie a week or the coveted hat, has taken the place of the whippings and bread-and-water exiles which were favourite disciplinary methods in the last century. The daughters come to see all censoring of their behaviour, moral, religious or social, the ethical code and the slightest sumptuary provisions in terms of an economic threat. And then at sixteen or seventeen the daughter gets a job. No matter how conscientiously she may contribute her share to the expenses of the household, it is probably only in homes where a European tradition still lingers that the wage-earning daughter gives all of her earning to her parents. (This, of course, excludes the cases where the daughter supports her parents, where the vesting of the economic responsibility in her hands changes the picture of parental control in another fashion.) For the first time in her life, she has an income of her own, with no strings of morals or of manners attached to its use. Her parents' chief instrument of discipline is shattered at one blow, but not their desire to direct their daughters' lives. They have not pictured their exercise of control as the right of those who provide, to control those for whom they provide. They have pictured it in far more traditional terms, the right of parents to control their children, an attitude reinforced by years of practising such control.

But the daughter is in the position of one who has yielded

*Does this still stand now - how are children controlled.*





unwillingly to some one who held a whip in his hand, and now sees the whip broken. Her unwillingness to obey, her chafing under special parental restrictions which children accept as inevitable in simpler cultures, is again a feature of our conglomerate civilisation. When all the children in the community go to bed at curfew, one child is not as likely to rail against her parents for enforcing the rule. But when the little girl next door is allowed to stay up until eleven o'clock, why must Mary go to bed at eight? If all of her companions at school are allowed to smoke, why can't she? And conversely, for it is a question of the absence of a common standard far more than of the nature of the standards, if all the other little girls are given lovely fussy dresses and hats with flowers and ribbons, why must she be dressed in sensible, straight linen dresses and simple round hats? Barring an excessive and passionate devotion of the children to their parents, a devotion of a type which brings other more serious difficulties in its wake, children in a heterogeneous civilisation will not accept unquestioningly their parents' judgment, and the most obedient will temper present compliance with the hope of future emancipation.

In a primitive, homogenous community, disciplinary measures of parents are expended upon securing small concessions from children, in correcting the slight deviations which occur within one pattern of behaviour. But in our society, home discipline is used to establish one set of standards as over against other sets of standards, each family group is fighting some kind of battle, bearing the onus of those who follow a middle course, stoutly defending a cause already lost in the community at large, or valiantly attempting to plant a new standard far in advance of their neighbours. This propagandist aspect greatly increases the importance of home discipline in the development of a girl's personality. So we have the picture of parents, shorn of their economic authority, trying to coerce the girl who still lives beneath their roof into an acceptance of standards against which she is rebelling. In this attempt they often find themselves powerless and as a result the control of the home breaks down suddenly, and breaks down just at the point where the girl, faced with other important choices, needs a steadying home environment.

It is at about this time that sex begins to play a rôle in the girl's life, and here also conflicting choices are presented to her. If she chooses the freer standards of her own generation, she comes in conflict with her parents, and perhaps more importantly with the ideals which her parents have instilled. The present problem of the sex experimentation of young people would be greatly simplified if it were conceived of as experimentation instead of as rebellion, if no Puritan self-accusations vexed their consciences. The introduction of an experimentation so much wider and more dangerous presents sufficient problems in our lack of social canons for such behaviour. For a new departure in the field of personal relations is always accompanied by the failure of those who are not strong enough to face an unpatterned situation. Canons of honour, of personal obligation, of the limits of responsibilities, grow up only slowly. And, of first experimenters, many perish in uncharted seas. But when there is added to the pitfalls of experiment, the suspicion that the experiment is wrong and the need for secrecy, lying, fear, the strain is so great that frequent downfall is inevitable.

And if the girl chooses the other course, decides to remain true to the tradition of the last generation, she wins the sympathy and support of her parents at the expense of the comradeship of her contemporaries. Whichever way the die falls, the choice is attended by mental anguish. Only occasional children escape by various sorts of luck, a large enough group who have the same standards so that they are supported either against their parents or against the majority of their age mates, or by absorption in some other interest. But, with the exception of students for whom the problem of personal relations is sometimes mercifully deferred for a later settlement, those who find some other interest so satisfying that they take no interest in the other sex, often find themselves old maids without any opportunity to recoup their positions. The fear of spinsterhood is a fear which shadows the life of no primitive woman; it is another item of maladjustment which our civilisation has produced.

To the problem of present conduct are added all the perplexities introduced by varying concepts of marriage, the conflict between deferring marriage until a competence is assured,

sex factors

?

is this really true?  
still true?  
part of reason for  
worship of family?  
danger of family?

because  
woman is  
a spinster?  
because  
there is  
no onus  
if one  
is?

or marrying and sharing the expenses of the home with a struggling young husband. The knowledge of birth control, while greatly dignifying human life by introducing the element of choice at the point where human beings have before been most abjectly subject to nature, introduces further perplexities. It complicates the issue from a straight marriage-home-and-children plan of life versus independent spinsterhood by permitting marriages without children, earlier marriages, marriages and careers, sex relations without marriage and the responsibility of a home. And because the majority of girls still wish to marry and regard their occupations as stop-gaps, these problems not only influence their attitude towards men, but also their attitude towards their work, and prevent them from having a sustained interest in the work which they are forced to do.

Then we must add to the difficulties inherent in a new economic status and the necessity of adopting some standard of sex relations, ethical and religious issues to be solved. Here again the home is a powerful factor; the parents use every ounce of emotional pressure to enlist their children in one of the dozen armies of salvation. The stress of the revival meeting, the pressure of pastor and parent gives them no peace. And the basic difficulties of reconciling the teachings of authority with the practices of society and the findings of science, all trouble and perplex children already harassed beyond endurance.

Granting that society presents too many problems to her adolescents, demands too many momentous decisions on a few months' notice, what is to be done about it? One panacea suggested would be to postpone at least some of the decisions, keep the child economically dependent, or segregate her from all contact with the other sex, present her with only one set of religious ideas until she is older, more poised, better able to deal critically with the problems which will confront her. In a less articulate fashion, such an idea is back of various schemes for the prolongation of youth, through raising the working age, raising the school age, shielding school children from a knowledge of controversies like evolution versus fundamentalism, or any knowledge of sex hygiene or birth con-

trol. Even if such measures, specially initiated and legislatively enforced, could accomplish the end which they seek and postpone the period of choice, it is doubtful whether such a development would be desirable. [It is unfair that very young children should be the battleground for conflicting standards, that their development should be hampered by propagandist attempts to enlist and condition them too young. It is probably equally unfair to culturally defer the decisions too late.] Loss of one's fundamental religious faith is more of a wrench at thirty than at fifteen simply in terms of the number of years of acceptance which have accompanied the belief. A sudden knowledge of hitherto unsuspected aspects of sex, or a shattering of all the old conventions concerning sex behaviour, is more difficult just in terms of the strength of the old attitudes. Furthermore, in practical terms, such schemes would be as they are now, merely local, one state legislating against evolution, another against birth control, or one religious group segregating its unmarried girls. And these special local movements would simply unfit groups of young people for competing happily with children who had been permitted to make their choices earlier. Such an educational scheme, in addition to being almost impossible of execution, would be a step backward and would only beg the question.

Instead, we must turn all of our educational efforts to training our children for the choices which will confront them. Education, in the home even more than at school, instead of being a special pleading for one régime, a desperate attempt to form one particular habit of mind which will withstand all outside influences, must be a preparation for those very influences. Such an education must give far more attention to mental and physical hygiene than it has given hitherto. The child who is to choose wisely must be healthy in mind and body, handicapped in no preventable fashion. And even more importantly, this child of the future must have an open mind. The home must cease to plead an ethical cause or a religious belief with smiles or frowns, caresses or threats. The children must be taught how to think, not what to think. And because old errors die slowly, they must be taught tolerance, just as to-day they are taught intolerance. They must be taught that

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many ways are open to them, no one sanctioned above its alternative, and that upon them and upon them alone lies the burden of choice. Unhampered by prejudices, unvexed by too early conditioning to any one standard, they must come clear-eyed to the choices which lie before them.

For it must be realised by any student of civilisation that we pay heavily for our heterogeneous, rapidly changing civilisation; we pay in high proportions of crime and delinquency, we pay in the conflicts of youth, we pay in an ever-increasing number of neuroses, we pay in the lack of a coherent tradition without which the development of art is sadly handicapped. In such a list of prices, we must count our gains carefully, not to be discouraged. And chief among our gains must be reckoned this possibility of choice, the recognition of many possible ways of life, where other civilisations have recognized only one. Where other civilisations give a satisfactory outlet to only one temperamental type, be he mystic or soldier, business man or artist, a civilisation in which there are many standards offers a possibility of satisfactory adjustment to individuals of many different temperamental types, of diverse gifts and varying interests.

At the present time we live in a period of transition. We have many standards but we still believe that only one standard can be the right one. We present to our children the picture of a battle-field where each group is fully armoured in a conviction of the righteousness of its cause. And each of these groups makes forays among the next generation. But it is unthinkable that a final recognition of the great number of ways in which man, during the course of history and at the present time, is solving the problems of life, should not bring with it in turn the downfall of our belief in a single standard. And when no one group claims ethical sanction for its customs, and each group welcomes to its midst only those who are temperamentally fitted for membership, then we shall have realised the high point of individual choice and universal toleration which a heterogeneous culture and a heterogeneous culture alone can attain. Samoa knows but one way of life and teaches it to her children. Will we, who have the knowledge of many ways, leave our children free to choose among them? (pp. 130-38).

William A. Henry 3rd.  
 "Still Quacking after All These Years" (1980)

Life gives him reasons enough to be exasperated—a rich and stingy uncle, three fractious nephews, a comely but finally unattainable girl friend, and distant relatives noteworthy mostly for impractical invention or outright stupidity.

But from his first harsh quack Donald Duck has raged without reason, though not always without rhyme. Just as his ontological cousin Mickey Mouse normally embodies sweet placidity, so Donald Duck embodies excitable resentment. For as long as we have known him he has been mad as hell and he wasn't going to take it anymore. And, of course, like those of us watching, he recognized his anger was impotent and took it time and again.

His outrage, like ours, never entirely extinguished optimism. Those eyes could open wide, that bill could curve in a smile, his sailor suit and cap could seem to bounce as he set off, lighthearted, on some new—and likely doomed—adventure.

Nor did frustration ever entirely efface his grudgingly expressed family duty. If he spanked his nephews they knew it was due. If he gulled his uncle it was to finance a family gathering or at worst to court the fair Daisy.

He was forgiving even with the beasts of the field (although ducky he always saw himself as more than animal). A bird or squirrel might taunt him as he bicycled or strolled through a park or read on a bench. He might, in pursuit, bisect himself or smash his brainpan against a tree. But in the best cartoon tradition he did not long show his wounds and he never wrought lasting violence in his revenge.

These redeeming decencies allowed us to love him without guilt. They scarcely diminished his quick, quick anger, his explosive quack, his headlong retaliatory waddle. As peevish children, then as careworn adults, we have heard him shriek when we would only mutter, and have admired his ardor in his lover's quarrel with the world.

Tonight the National Broadcasting Company repeats its loving tribute, "This is Your Life, Donald Duck," at 8 on Channel 5. Little will be said about what his career has meant,

wonderful dream  
 way ahead of its time  
 in this recognition  
 (1928)  
 yeah!

ref to source  
 "betwixt"

about what weaknesses in our character made us love him. Little will be said even about the species to which he belongs, the humanized animal, created to explain to children (and perhaps adults) the perplexing behavior of beasts who don't act like us: Donald and Mickey and Felix and Rocky and Bullwinkle and all the rest of the penman's peaceable kingdom help us feel we know what to expect from animals. They help us believe animals understand our words when we weepingly apologize for having stepped on their tails.

NBC thinks of Donald the way television thinks of all its stars, beloved for mere familiarity, indistinguishable from every other familiar face, made a star by uniqueness, then stripped of individuality by enduring stardom. For the public, too, Donald has become Dan Rather, Charo, the Fonz, an icon occasioning general adulation rather than particular prayers.

Donald's friends and relatives and victims will talk tonight, even his venerable grandmother (she conceals her age, but Donald is pushing fifty). Their words can evoke memories so intense we see them anew, in caricature and technicolor. Yet they can give us only glimpses, for Donald did not command our attention as an epic hero. He was always a character turn, always a figure of two dimensions and one reel. We saw him in Latin America. We saw him in love. But to remain a figure of childhood fantasy or adult escape, he had to forgo marriage and children and a recognizable, steady job. He was only an emotion and a circumstance, apoplexy looking for a place to happen.

Of all Walt Disney's visions he was the most widely imitated. Any clever child could approximate the squishy squawk of his voice and, more important, comprehend the instant upsurge of his anger. He never became a mere term of derision about inconsequentiality, as "mickey mouse" did. He never symbolized brute incomprehension, as Goofy did. He had a sort of dignity.

Hollywood has told us for four generations that it doesn't want to send us a message, it wants only to make us cry or laugh. That has been its chief technique of sending us a message. Donald told us our anger was out of proportion to trivial annoyances in a bright and lively world. He told us equally that anger needed an outlet, that any personality less calm than Mickey's should let it all wing out.

Some scholar might connect all that to endorsing Freud and rebuking Marx. He might argue that the most cunning message is to tell us what we already believe and want once more to hear.

Perhaps. Whatever he said, Donald spoke to us as one of our own. He never took to the sea or sky. He was earth-bound, frustrated, without the release of flight. He looked like a duck, he walked like a duck, he quacked like a duck. But he ducked life's missiles like a man.



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### “Will Computers Free Mankind?”

The increasing dependence on computer usage will not lead to greater freedom and individuality but will depersonalize and dehumanize life as we know it. All thoughts, feelings, and sentiments will have little or no control over life.

The computer-assisted manufacturing techniques are a great step forward for industry but a giant step back for mankind. There will be unlimited gains in productivity but limited jobs! People would lose their sense of security and personal dignity.

The idea of having instant polls in the home deciding on controversial issues is just another way computers depersonalize life. The public does not always consider all sides of the issue at hand. In our past history it is pointed out that the majority is not always right.

Computers are now taking over the educational program. These new computers will be able to tell whether the student is happy, nervous, sad, or angry. Then the computer will judge your I.Q. and put you into a program which it 'feels' you belong in. Can you imagine a computer telling you what courses are right for you.

Computers are now diagnosing and advising doctors what drugs should be given to patients. The idea of the doctor-

patient relationship will be totally wiped out. This is a perfect example of dehumanization.

Technology must not bring about bewilderment, dehumanization, depersonalization. And it does not have to. Technology must work with society if we are to survive.

### 3

## What Is a Concept, and What Do Concepts Have to Do with Writing?

We have talked about what writing is, and what it does for us, and about what an essay is. We have looked at a few bits of essays and talked about what makes them essays. We have said that writing essays makes possible, and produces, a certain kind of thinking. But what kind of thinking produces essays? Obviously, it is a rather specialized kind of thinking—we do not usually use words like *nature*, *function*, or *source* in our everyday conversations with friends, and it is a rare occasion on which we challenge or explore in more than a very casual way the assumptions of our culture, in writing or in talking. But this specialized kind of thinking is certainly not foreign to you, and in this chapter we begin the first of many thinking and writing exercises designed to allow you to watch how it works. Understanding what you read is made much easier if you understand that other writers are thinking in this same way. Writing essays becomes easier once you see that this kind of thinking is largely a natural extension of what you already do. Writing compositions is something people want to do, and can do, in part because people *are* compositions. Below is what I used to call my “Composition Manifesto.” It is as concise a statement as I can muster of the way I think thinking works, and of what I see as your own relationship to that thinking process. I have tried to condense the entire world of thinking into a few pages, thus you should expect that you may not understand all that is said in these pages. But you might regard them as a