

# Preface

Teachers of first-year composition courses do essential work, as do those who teach writing in every discipline. We teach argumentation and conventions of university-level writing; we demystify citation and punctuation; we promote reading comprehension and analysis. Yet such skills, as important as they are, do not reflect the full impact of writing instruction. Every year we shepherd a flock of new college students through their initial semesters of higher education as they acquire a host of *hard* and *soft* skills essential to college and professional careers. This book is an examination of life lessons that students and instructors learn from writing courses.

Some of the most meaningful outcomes of writing coursework relate to students' growth as successful individuals able to live and write in a complex world. Writing instructors demand civil discourse and respect for diversity. We coach students in time management and the creative process. We build up confidence, break down learning obstacles, and promote self-examination. The lessons about human experience students learn in English 101 can be hard to explain, but these lessons are no less important than teaching students about academic discourse. In a challenging economic climate, all stakeholders—students, their families, university administrators, faculty members—want good reasons to invest in higher education. Students need writing, rhetoric, and language instruction for future college courses and professional careers. However, real success also demands a range of subtle abilities like tolerance, self-discipline, intellectual complexity, ability to connect, and emotional intelligence.

Writing instructors have a remarkable opportunity to shape the attitudes and behaviors that guide students to success, but that opportunity can be tricky. On one hand, writing faculty often have the clearest perspective on students' lifestyles and habits of thought—many students are astoundingly candid in their written work—and thus these writing faculty have the best chance of promoting healthy academic and personal behaviors. Our students may need help understanding their roles in the classroom before they can achieve academic goals. When they are in crisis, we are often the first to know. Yet, generally speaking, we are neither students' parents nor trained therapists; we are blatantly unqualified to solve many of our students' problems. We also have a rich body of core material that students must master, so we have little time to spare. If we are to address extra-disciplinary issues of growth and behavior in the classroom, we must do so ethically and mindfully of our core task to teach good writing.

This book gathers diverse perspectives on three questions: Why We Write, How We Write, and What We Write. The first section, Why We Write, offers perspectives on the importance of rhetoric and self-expression for students' ability to thrive in and after college. These chapters look at the academic, professional,

and social value that the study of writing creates for students. The second, *How We Write*, reflects on how we might incorporate practices from other disciplines into writing pedagogy, including practices from studio art, theatre, and dance; further, writing teachers discuss how incorporating a holistic, affective pedagogy and team teaching and mentoring practices can benefit both students and teachers. The third, *What We Write*, explores specific writing topics and writing-instruction techniques that promote broad-based student learning. These chapters include consideration of how and whether to depend on technology through examination of high- and low-tech writing assignments, as well as some other writing projects that create important learning for the professional and personal lives of students. Throughout, the collection embraces traditional and current themes in the scholarship of composition and rhetoric; we strived to find a Janus-faced approach, blending pedagogical practices with philosophical questions that may lead us to new paths.

In putting this collection together, we have been grateful for the professionalism and inspiration of our contributors. They draw on their expertise as teachers and scholars in a wide range of higher education settings, from community colleges to liberal arts institutions to historically black colleges to flagship universities. Their diversity of perspectives enriches the collection by illuminating the myriad pathways that writing creates to student success. This manuscript has benefited from the careful attention of three undergraduate editors from the English, education, and political science majors at Lander University: Brittany Faulkner, Joel Kurtz, and Ettele Toole. We are also grateful for the feedback of peer reviewers and the leadership of WAC Clearinghouse staff, particularly Dr. Mike Palmquist.

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