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THE
LITTLE SEAGULL
HANDBOOK

WRITE

RESEARCH

EDIT

Richard Bullock * Michal Brody
Francine Weinberg

The Little Seagull Handbook

THIRD EDITION

The Little Seagull Handbook

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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

WRITE

Michal Brody

SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Francine Weinberg

RESEARCH

EDIT



W. W. Norton & Company
New York • London

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Composition: Jouve
Manufacturing: TransContinental

ISBN: 978-0-393-60263-0

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 15 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BS

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Preface

This book began as an attempt to create a small handbook that would provide help with the specific kinds of writing college students are assigned to do, and to make it as user-friendly as possible. It's been more successful than we ever imagined possible, and much to our surprise, it's been adopted by many instructors who had been using much larger handbooks. These teachers tell us they like it because it's got “just enough detail,” it's easy to use, and it costs less than half what their former books cost.

From our own experience as teachers, we've seen how much students prefer smaller books, and so, to paraphrase Elmore Leonard, we've tried to give the information college writers need—and to leave out the details they skip. We've also seen how important it is that a handbook be easy to use. To that end, the book is organized around the familiar categories of *writing*, *researching*, and *editing*, and it includes menus, directories, a glossary / index, and more to help students find the help they need.

We're pleased now to offer a third edition, with a new section on “Editing the Errors That Matter,” an updated MLA chapter that covers the new style introduced in 2016, two new genre chapters, and new coverage of the use of “singular they.”

Highlights

Help with the kinds of writing students are assigned—arguments, analyses, reports, narratives, and more. Brief chapters cover nine common genres, with models demonstrating each genre on the companion website.

Easy to use. Menus, directories, a glossary / index, and color-coded parts help students find the information they need. And a simple three-part organization—Write, Research, Edit—makes it easy for them to know where to look. Even the cover flaps are useful, with an Index of guidelines for Editing the Errors That Matter on the front flap and a Checklist for Revising and Editing on the back.

Just enough detail, but with color-coded links that refer students to the glossary / index for more information if they need it.

User-friendly documentation guidelines for MLA, APA, *Chicago*, and CSE styles. Documentation directories lead students to the examples they need, color-coded templates show what information to include, and documentation maps show where to find the required detail. Model papers demonstrate each style, with a complete MLA paper and brief examples of the other three styles in the book and complete papers on the companion website.

A full chapter on paragraphs, a subject that other pocket handbooks cover in much less detail. But students write in paragraphs—and they’ll find the help they need in this handbook. [W-4]

Customizable. We’ve created templates to make it easy for you to add your own materials to the book—course outcomes statements, syllabi, school policies, student writing, and so on. And you can even customize the title and cover to replace our little seagull with your school mascot. We’ve already published a *Little Duck Handbook*, a *Little Bobcat*, *Little Eagle*, *Little Aztec*, and three *Little Tigers*—and we’ll be happy to do one for your school.

A full chapter on Englishes, from standard edited English to the varieties spoken in specific regions, communities, and academic contexts. [L-10]

Uniquely helpful guidance for students whose first language isn’t English, including chapters on idioms [L-3] and prepositions [L-5] and additional detail on articles, phrasal verbs, and modal verbs. The companion website and mobile version include links to glossaries of idioms and phrasal verbs, and the Coursepack includes exercises and handouts.

What’s New?

A new section on “Editing the Errors That Matter.” Covering 14 errors that teachers identified as ones that undermine a writer’s

authority and weaken an argument, these chapters explain why each of these errors matters, describe how to spot them in a draft, and walk students through some ways of editing them out [E-1 to E-6].

New MLA style. The MLA chapter has been updated to explain the new core principles introduced in 2016 and to provide color-coded templates and models for documenting the kinds of sources college students most often cite [MLA-a to MLA-d].

Two new genre chapters. We've added new chapters on "Proposals" and "Reflections," two genres that students are often assigned or expected to write [W-12 and W-13].

New guidance on the use of "singular they." We've tried to help students navigate the use of pronouns in academic writing in light of evolving conventions and notions of gender. You'll find this new material in the chapter on "Pronouns" [S-6], of course, as well as in the chapters on "Words That Build Common Ground" [L-9] and "Editing Pronouns" [E-2].

What's Online?

The entire handbook is available as an ebook—and is free when packaged with the print book (and comes with four years of access). Allows students to highlight, bookmark, and take notes—and includes exercises and links to full glossaries of idioms and phrasal verbs. Access it at digital.wwnorton.com/littleseagull3.

A companion website includes model papers, exercises and quizzes, links to glossaries of idioms and phrasal verbs, and more. Access the site at digital.wwnorton.com/littleseagull3.

InQuizitive for Writers, an adaptive learning tool that provides students with personalized practice editing out common errors—comma splices, pronoun reference, mixed constructions, and more, including all the topics found in the new handbook chapters on "Editing the Errors That Matter." Personalized feedback and links to

the *Little Seagull* ebook help students learn to edit what they write, and gamelike elements even make working with grammar fun. *InQuizitive* can be used to diagnose issues students need to practice or assigned to provide practice with particular issues you identify in your students' writing.

A Norton Coursepack is available for most learning management systems, including *Blackboard*, *Canvas*, *Moodle*, *Sakai*, and *D2L*, providing diagnostic quizzes; exercises; handouts for students whose primary language isn't English; documentation guidelines; and more. Because it all works within your existing LMS, there's no new system to learn. And it's yours to customize and edit—you choose the content you want to use, for your course. No extra costs, no registration codes. Access the coursepack at wwnorton.com/instructors.

norton/write. A free-and-open site with plagiarism tutorials, writing tips, model student writing, documentation guidelines, exercises—and more. Access the site at digital.wwnorton.com/littleseagull3.

Acknowledgments

It takes a big team to publish even a small handbook. We have benefitted from the astute comments and suggestions by a number of reviewers: Gillian Andersen, Eastern New Mexico University; Evan Balkan, Community College of Baltimore County–Catonsville; Jason Barr, Blue Ridge Community College; Josh M. Beach, University of Texas at San Antonio; Carole Chapman, Ivy Tech Community College–Southwest; Thomas Chester, Ivy Tech Community College–Marion; Jesseca Cornelson, Alabama State University; Michael Cripps, University of New England; Syble Davis, Houston Community College; Laura Ann Dearing, Jefferson Community and Technical College; Darren DeFrain, Wichita State University; Joann K. Deiudicibus, State University of New York at New Paltz; Christie Diep, Cypress College; Allison Dieppa, Florida Gulf Coast University; Clark Draney, College of Southern Idaho; Brenna Dugan, Owens Community College; Megan Egbert, Utah State University; Megan Fulwiler, The College of Saint

Rose; Jonathan C. Glance, Mercer University; Carey Goyette, Clinton Community College; Opal Greer, Eastern New Mexico University; Kendra Griffin, Aims Community College; Clinton Hale, Blinn College; Ann C. Hall, Ohio Dominican University; Joel B. Henderson, Chattanooga State Community College; Robert Hurd, Anne Arundel Community College; Geri (Geraldine) Jacobs, Jackson College; Anne Marie Johnson, Utah State University; Jo Johnson, Ivy Tech Community College—Fort Wayne; Debra S. Knutson, Shawnee State University; Brian Leingang, Edison State Community College; Joseph Lemak, Elmira College; Matthew Masucci, State College of Florida—Venice; L. Adam Mekler, Morgan State University; Lora Meredith, Western Wyoming Community College; Tracy Ann Morse, East Carolina University; Amy Nawrocki, University of Bridgeport; Eden Pearson, Des Moines Area Community College; Heather Pristash, Western Wyoming Community College; Glenda Pritchett, Quinnipiac University; Jonathan Purkiss, Pulaski Technical College; Paula Rash, Caldwell Community College; Louis Riggs, Hannibal-LaGrange University; Tony Russell, Central Oregon Community College; David Salomon, The Sage Colleges; Anthony Sams, Ivy Tech Community College; Karen Schwarze, Utah State University; Dixie A Shaw-Tillmon, The University of Texas at San Antonio; Carol Singletary, Eastern New Mexico University; Linda Strahan, University of California, Riverside; Hannah Sykes, Rockingham Community College; Jarrod Waetjen, Northern Virginia Community College—Alexandria; Christy Wenger, Shepherd University; Jenny Williams, Spartanburg Community College.

We are especially grateful to the following reviewers for their very helpful feedback on the new materials on “Editing the Errors That Matter”: Jason Barr, Blue Ridge Community College; Jessec Cornelson, Alabama State University; Michael Cripps, University of New England; Syble Davis, Houston Community College; Laura Ann Dearing, Jefferson Community and Technical College; Darren DeFrain, Wichita State University; Allison Dieppa, Florida Gulf Coast University; Brenna Dugan, Owens Community College; Shonette Grant, Northern Virginia Community College; Kendra Griffin, Aims Community College; Anne Marie Johnson, Utah State University; Brian

Leingang, Edison State Community College; Matthew Masucci, State College of Florida–Venice; L. Adam Mekler, Morgan State University; Lora Meredith, Western Wyoming Community College; Eden Pearson, Des Moines Area Community College; Glenda Pritchett, Quinnipiac University; Jonathan Purkiss, Pulaski Technical College; Paula Rash, Caldwell Community College; Tony Russell, Central Oregon Community College; Dixie A. Shaw-Tillmon, The University of Texas at San Antonio; Hannah Sykes, Rockingham Community College; Jarrod Waetjen, Northern Virginia Community College–Alexandria.

We owe a big thank you to all our friends at Norton, starting with Claire Wallace for her excellent editorial work on both the new chapters in the book and the editing exercises in *InQuizitive for Writers*. We are grateful as well to Tenyia Lee for her incredibly detailed work on all the documentation chapters. A deep bow goes to Erica Wnek for all her work on *InQuizitive*, the companion website, the coursepack, and the ebook—and to Ava Bramson as well. We are once again grateful to Carin Berger and Debra Morton Hoyt for yet another charming cover design. And we thank Megan DeBono Zwilling and Maureen Connelly for their work getting the word out about this book.

Little books are always more complex than they look, and we are especially grateful to Christine D’Antonio and Ashley Horna for their expertise managing and producing *The Little Seagull Handbook*. Finally, we thank Marilyn Moller, the guiding intelligence behind all our textbooks.

Rich thanks his students and colleagues at Wright State for all they’ve taught him about teaching and writing over the years, and the many writing teachers using the *Little Seagull* who have offered suggestions or invited him to campus: Kelly Ritter, Kristi McDuffie, and their graduate teaching assistants at the University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign; Collie Fulford, Kathryn Wymer, and their students in ENG 3040 at North Carolina Central University; Kevin Moore at SUNY Cobleskill; and Mary S. Tuley at Fayetteville Technical Community College. Finally, he thanks his wife, Barb, for her unwavering and good-humored support. Michal thanks her families and students

in the United States and Mexico for always keeping her thinking. Fran thanks Marilyn for trading places with her so many years ago and her husband, Larry Strauss, for his confidence in her at all times.

Hats off to you all.

Richard Bullock
Michal Brody
Francine Weinberg

How to Use This Book

Write. Research. Edit. Perhaps you've been assigned to write a paper that makes a case for why parking on campus should be free. Maybe you need to find sources for a report on organic farming in your state. Or you may just want to make sure that the punctuation in your cover letter is perfect before you apply for a new job. Whether you need to write, research, edit—or all three—this little handbook can help.

Ways of Using the Book

Menus. If you are looking for a specific chapter, start with the Brief Menu on the inside front cover; if you are looking for a specific section in a chapter, start with the Detailed Menu on the inside back cover.

Glossary / index. If you're looking for definitions of key terms and concepts, turn to the combined glossary and index at the back of the book. Be aware also that words highlighted in **TAN** throughout the book are defined in the glossary/index. Check the glossary/index when you aren't sure which chapter covers a topic you're looking for—for instance, guidance on when to use *a* and when to use *the*.

Color-coded organization. The parts of this book are color-coded for easy reference: red for **WRITE**, blue for **RESEARCH**, and yellow for **EDITING**.

Guidelines for common writing assignments. Chapters W-7 to W-15, cover nine kinds of writing you'll likely be expected to do in many college classes. And you'll find model papers demonstrating each of these kinds of writing on the companion website: digital.wwnorton.com/littleseagull3.

Checklist for revising and editing. On the back flap is a list of prompts to guide you as you revise and edit a draft—and that lead you to pages in the book where you'll find help.

Help editing common errors that matter. We all make mistakes and need to learn how to edit them out. The front flap lists some of the ones that really matter and leads you to places in the book where you'll find help spotting them in your writing and strategies for editing them out.

MLA, APA, Chicago, and CSE guidelines. Color-coded chapters cover each style, with directories in the back of the book that lead to the specific examples you need. Color-coded templates show what information to include, and documentation maps show you where to find the information required. You'll find a full MLA paper on pages 161–69 and model papers demonstrating each of the other styles on the companion website: digital.wwnorton.com/littleseagull3.

Scanning for information. Sometimes you may simply turn to a part of the book where you know that information you're looking for is located. You could scan the red headings to find where the topic is explained. Or if you just want to find an example showing you what to do, you'll find that examples are all marked by little red pointers (▶) to make them easy to spot.

Write

I think I did pretty well, considering
I started out with nothing but a bunch
of blank paper.

—STEVE MARTIN

W-1 Writing Contexts

Whenever we write, whether it's an email to a friend, a toast at a wedding, or an essay, we do so within some kind of context—a rhetorical situation that helps shape our choices as writers. Whatever our topic, we have a purpose, a certain audience, a particular stance, a genre, and a medium to consider—and often as not, a design. This chapter discusses each of these elements and provides some questions that can help you think about some of the choices you have to make as you write.

W-1a Purpose

All writing has a purpose. We write to explore our thoughts, express ourselves, and entertain; to record words and events; to communicate with others; to persuade others to think or behave in certain ways. Here are some questions to help you think about your purpose(s) as you write:

- What is the primary purpose of the writing task—to entertain? inform? persuade? demonstrate knowledge? something else?
- What are your own goals?
- What do you want your **AUDIENCE** to do, think, or feel? How will they use what you tell them?
- What does this writing task call on you to do? Do you have an assignment that specifies a certain **GENRE** or strategy—to argue a position? report on an event? compare two texts?
- What are the best ways to achieve your purpose? Should you take a particular **STANCE**? write in a particular **MEDIUM**? use certain **DESIGN** elements?

W-1b Audience

What you write, how much you write, and how you phrase it are all influenced by the audience you envision. For example, as a student

writing an essay for an instructor, you will be expected to produce a text with few or no errors, something you may worry less about in an email to a friend.

- What audience do you want to reach? What expectations do they have from you? What's your relationship with them, and how does it affect your **TONE**?
- What is your audience's background — their education and life experiences?
- What are their interests? What motivates them? Do they have any political attitudes or interests that may affect the way they read your piece?
- Is there any demographic information that you should keep in mind, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, or economic status?
- What does your audience already know—or believe—about your topic? What do you need to tell them?
- What kind of response do you want from your audience? Do you want them to do or believe something? accept what you say? Something else?
- How can you best appeal to your audience? What kind of information will they find interesting or persuasive? Are there any design elements that will appeal to them?

W-1c Genre

Genres are kinds of writing. Reports, position papers, poems, letters, instructions—even jokes—are genres. Each one has certain features and follows particular conventions of style and presentation. Academic assignments generally specify the genre, but if it isn't clear, ask your instructor. Then consider these issues:

- What are the key elements and conventions of your genre? How do they affect the type of content you should include?

- Does your genre require a certain organization or **MEDIUM**? Does it have any **DESIGN** requirements?
- How does your genre affect your **TONE**, if at all?
- Does the genre require formal (or informal) language?

W-1d Topic

An important part of any writing context is the topic—what you are writing about. As you choose a topic, keep in mind your rhetorical situation and any requirements specified by your assignments.

- If your topic is assigned, what do the verbs in the assignment ask you to do: **ANALYZE**? **COMPARE**? **SUMMARIZE**? Something else?
- Does the assignment offer a broad subject area (such as the environment) that allows you to choose a limited topic within it (such as a particular environmental issue)?
- What do you need to do to complete the assignment? Do you need to do research? find illustrations?
- If you can choose a topic, think about what you are interested in. What do you want to learn more about? What topics from your courses have you found intriguing? What local, national, or global issues do you care about?
- Do you need to limit your topic to fit a specified time or length?

W-1e Stance and Tone

Whenever you write, you have a certain stance, an attitude toward your topic. For example, you might be objective, critical, passionate, or indifferent. You express (or downplay) that stance through your tone—the words you use and the other ways your text conveys an attitude toward your subject and audience. Just as you likely alter what you say depending on whether you're speaking to a boss or a good friend, so you need to make similar adjustments as a writer. Ask yourself these questions:

- What is your stance, and how can you best present it to achieve your purpose?
- How should your stance be reflected in your tone? Do you want to be seen as reasonable? angry? thoughtful? ironic? Something else? Be sure that your language—and even your font—convey that tone.
- How is your stance likely to be received by your **AUDIENCE**? Should you openly reveal it, or would it be better to tone it down?

W-1f Media / Design

We communicate through many media, both verbal and nonverbal: our bodies (we wave), our voices (we shout), and various technologies (we write with a pencil, send email, tweet). No matter what the medium, a text's design affects the way it is received and understood. Consider these questions:

- Does your assignment call for a certain medium or media—a printed essay? an oral report with visual aids? a blog?
- How does your medium affect the way you write and organize your text? For example, long paragraphs may be fine on paper, but bulleted phrases work better on slides.
- How does your medium affect your language? Do you need to be more **FORMAL** or **INFORMAL**?
- What's the appropriate look for your writing situation? Should it look serious? whimsical? personal? Something else?
- What fonts and other design elements suit your writing context? Is there anything you should highlight by putting it in a box or italics?
- Would headings help you organize your material and help readers follow the text? Does your genre or medium require them?
- Will your audience expect or need any illustrations? Is there any information that would be easier to understand as a chart?

W-2 Academic Contexts

An **ARGUMENT** on a psychology exam debating whether genes or environment do more to determine people's intelligence, a **REPORT** for a science course on the environmental effects of electricity-generating windmills on wildlife, a **PROPOSAL** for a multimedia sales campaign in a marketing course—all of these are kinds of writing that you might be assigned to do in college classes. This chapter describes some of the elements expected in academic writing.

W-2a Key Elements of Academic Writing

Evidence that you've carefully considered the subject. You can use a variety of ways to show that you've thought seriously about the subject and done any necessary research, from citing authoritative sources to incorporating information you learned in class to pointing out connections among ideas.

A clear, appropriately qualified thesis. In academic writing, you're expected to state your main point explicitly, often in a **THESIS** statement, as MIT student Joanna MacKay does in an essay about selling human organs: "Governments should not ban the sale of human organs; they should regulate it."

Often you'll need to qualify your thesis statement to acknowledge exceptions or other perspectives. Here's a qualified thesis from an essay by Michaela Cullington, a student at Marywood University: "Although some believe that texting has either a positive or negative effect on writing, it in fact seems likely that texting has no significant effect on student writing." By adding **QUALIFYING WORDS** like *seems likely* and *significant*, the writer indicates that she's not making a definitive claim about texting's influence on student writing.

A response to what others have said. Whatever your topic, it's likely that others have written or spoken about it. It's almost

always best to present your ideas as a response to what others have said—**QUOTING**, **PARAPHRASING**, or **SUMMARIZING** their ideas and then agreeing, disagreeing, or both.

For example, in an essay arguing that the American Dream is alive and well, University of Cincinnati student Brandon King presents the views of two economists who say that because wealth is concentrated in the hands “of a rich minority,” “the American Dream is no longer possible for most Americans.” He then responds by disagreeing, arguing that “the American Dream . . . is based on perception, on the way someone *imagines* how to be successful.”

Good reasons supported by evidence. You need to provide good **REASONS** for your thesis and **EVIDENCE** to support those reasons. Joanna MacKay offers several reasons that sales of human kidneys should be legalized: a surplus exists; the risk to the donor is not great; and legalization would enable the trade in kidneys to be regulated, thereby helping many patients and donors. For that third reason, her evidence includes statistics about death from renal failure.

Acknowledgment of multiple perspectives. In any academic writing, you need to investigate and represent fairly the range of perspectives on your topic—to avoid considering issues in an overly simple “pro/con” way and, instead, to explore multiple positions as you research and write. Brandon King, for instance, looks at the American Dream from several angles: the ways it is defined, the effects of government policies on achieving it, the role of education, and so on.

Carefully documented sources. Clearly acknowledging sources and **DOCUMENTING** them correctly both in your text and in a **WORKS CITED** or **REFERENCES** list at the end is a basic requirement of academic writing. If your text will appear online, you can direct readers to online sources by using hyperlinks, but your instructor may want you to document them formally as well.

A confident and authoritative STANCE. Your **TONE** should convey confidence and establish your authority to write about your topic.

To do so, use active verbs (“X claims,” “Y and Z have found”), avoid such phrases as “I think,” and write in a direct style. Michaela Cullington establishes an authoritative stance in her essay on texting this way: “On the basis of my own research, expert research, and personal observations, I can confidently state that texting is not interfering with students’ use of standard written English and has no effect on their writing abilities in general.” Her simple, declarative sentences and strong, unequivocal language (“I can confidently state,” “has no effect”) send the message that she knows what she’s talking about.

An indication of why your topic matters. Help your readers understand why your topic is worth exploring—and why your writing is worth reading. In an essay called “Throwing Like a Girl,” James Fallows explains why that topic matters, noting that his title reflects attitudes about gender that have potentially serious consequences.

Careful attention to correctness. You should almost always write in complete sentences, use appropriate capitalization and punctuation, check that your spelling is correct—and avoid any abbreviations used in texting.

W-2b Thinking about the Writing Context

- What **GENRE** does the assignment suggest—or require?
- What is your instructor’s **PURPOSE** for this assignment? What is your purpose, apart from fulfilling those expectations?
- Who is your **AUDIENCE**?
- How can you convey a confident, authoritative **STANCE**?
- What **MEDIA** are available, permitted, and appropriate? Are any required?
- What **DESIGN** issues need to be considered?

» To read the student essays cited in this chapter, go to digital.wwnorton.com/littleseagull3.

W-3 Writing Processes

To create anything, we generally break the work down into a series of steps. We follow a recipe (or the directions on a box) to bake a cake; we divide a piece of music into various singing parts to arrange it for a choir. So it is when we write. We rely on various processes to get from a blank page to a finished product. This chapter offers advice on some of these processes—from generating ideas to drafting to revising and editing.

W-3a Generating Ideas

The activities that follow can help you explore a topic—what you already know about it or how you might look at it in new ways.

- **Brainstorming.** Jot down everything that comes to mind about your topic, working either alone or with others. Look over your list, and try to identify connections or patterns.
- **Freewriting.** Write as quickly as you can without stopping for 5 to 10 minutes. Then underline interesting passages. Write more, using an underlined passage as your new topic.
- **Looping.** Write for 5 to 10 minutes, jotting down whatever you know about your subject. Then write a one-sentence summary of the most important idea. Use this summary to start another loop. Keep looping until you have a tentative focus.
- **Clustering.** Clustering is a way of connecting ideas visually. Write your topic in the middle of a page, and write subtopics and other ideas around it. Circle each item, and draw lines to connect related ideas.
- **Questioning.** You might start by asking *What? Who? When? Where? How? and Why?* You could also ask questions as if the topic were a play: *What happens? Who are the participants? When does the action take place? How? Where? Why does this happen?*