THIRD EDITION

HOW TO WRITE ANYTHING

A Guide and Reference

with Readings

John J. Ruszkiewicz

Jay T. Dolmage

Available with Macmillan Education LaunchPad

How to Write Anything

guide

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A Guide and Reference with Readings

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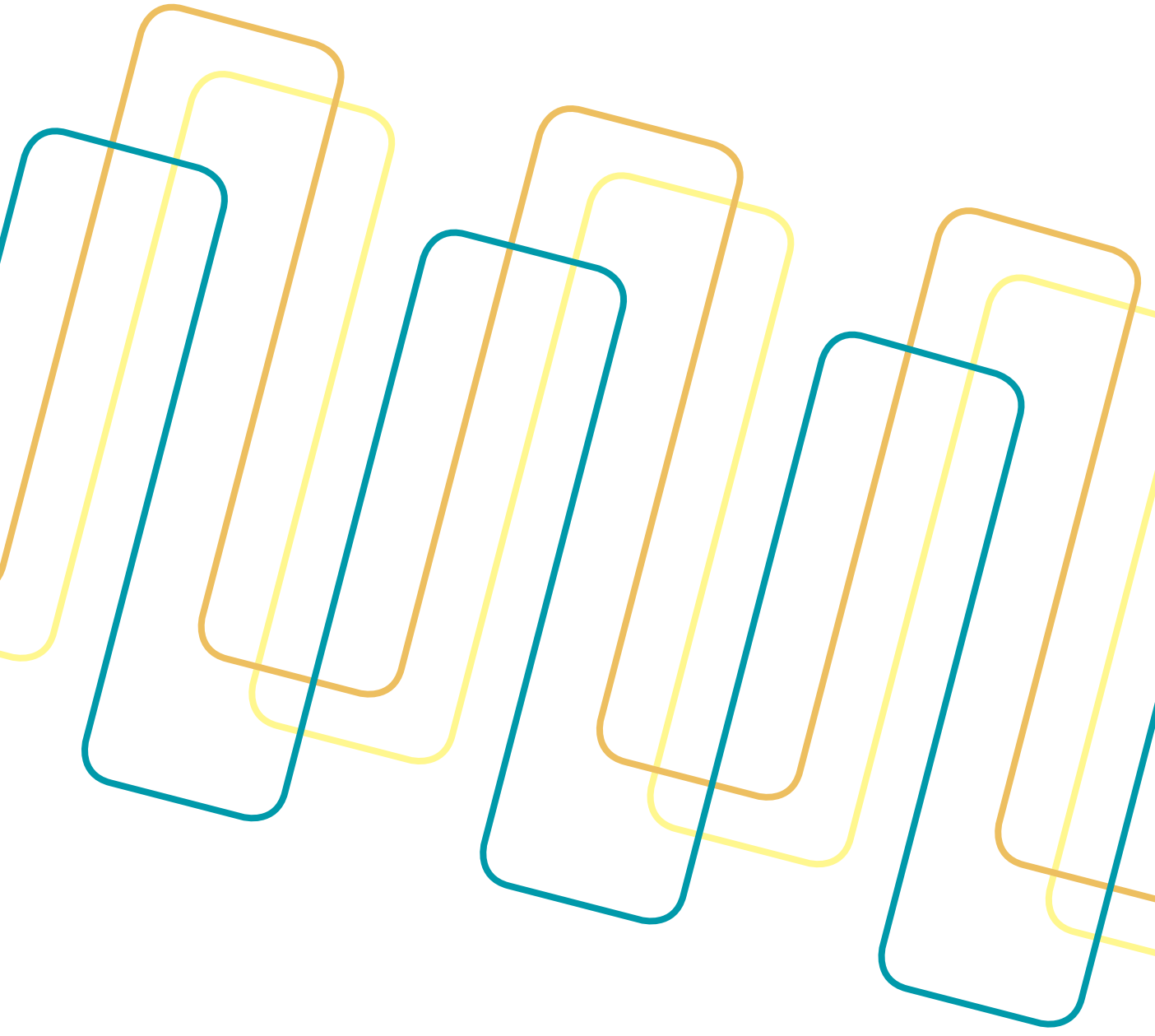

THIRD EDITION

HOW TO WRITE ANYTHING

A Guide and Reference with Readings

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Preface

Through its first two editions, readers of *How to Write Anything: A Guide and Reference* have been intrigued—and perhaps attracted—by its title, admittedly not a humble one. Should any book, especially one designed expressly as a guide for college writers, promise so much? The simple answer is *no*; the more intriguing one is *maybe*.

What, after all, do experienced writers do when they face an assignment? As the new Introduction to this edition explains in detail, they size up a project to figure out what *genre* of writing best meets their needs and those of readers. They locate and examine specific examples of that genre, imitating some features and modifying or rejecting others. Then they shape a work within that genre themselves, bringing appropriate rhetorical, organizational, research, and language skills to bear on their writing. It is the goal of *How to Write Anything* to guide college writers through these complex choices for their most common academic and professional assignments. In doing so, it lays out key strategies to follow in any situation that requires purposeful writing.

But rarely do different writers work in the same order, and the same writer is likely to follow different paths for different projects. So *How to Write Anything* doesn't define a single process of writing or imagine that all students using it will have the same skills and interests. Instead, a modular chapter organization and an innovative system of cross-references enables writers to find exactly the information they want at the level of specificity they need—which pretty much sums up the rationale for the book. *How to Write Anything* is both focused and flexible, marrying the resources of a full rhetoric to the efficiency of a compact handbook. That commitment to clarity and efficiency is even more evident in this latest edition.

A Guide, Reference, and Reader

Parts 1 and 2 of *How to Write Anything* make up the Guide, which covers genres of writing that instructors assign in composition classes or that students encounter in other college courses. For each genre, writers are offered a framework presented as a flexible series of rhetorical choices—Exploring purpose and topic; Understanding your audience; Finding and developing materials; Creating a structure; and Choosing a style and design. The explanations here are direct, practical, and economical, encouraging students to explore a range of options within genres. If writers do need more help with a particular topic, targeted cross-references make it easy to find in the Reference section.

The Reference section (Parts 3 through 9) covers key aspects of the writing process—with separate parts devoted to Ideas; Shaping & Drafting; Style; Revising & Editing; Research & Sources; Media & Design; and Common Errors. Points mentioned in the Guide section get expanded treatment here for students who need it. For instance, writers might turn to these sections to find techniques for generating arguments, improving their sentences, or overcoming writer's block. The organization of *How to Write Anything* lets students find precisely what they need without getting bogged down in other material.

Part 10, the Reader, is an anthology of forty additional contemporary selections organized by genres covered in the Guide. Drawn from a variety of sources such as print and online journals, books, scholarly and popular magazines, blogs, and graphic novels, the readings offer both solid models for writing as well as compelling topics for students to respond to. Some examples include Jane McGonigal on how an hour a day of video games can enrich our lives, Neil deGrasse Tyson on the "cosmic perspective," and evaluations of everything from cooking shows to Jay-Z to Domino's pizza. The Reader includes fresh content from established authors such as Zadie Smith, Patton Oswalt, and Sasha Frere-Jones, as well as from newer voices such as Kamakshi Ayyar and Ross Perlin. Headnotes provide context for all readings in the text, and selections in the Reader are followed by analysis questions and writing assignments, which feature cross-references from the questions back to the Guide and Reference sections of the book. These readings, and the questions that follow them, are intended to help students more deeply consider and use the major genres in *How to Write Anything*.

Key Features

A Flexible Writing Process and Design that Works

How to Write Anything works hard to make its materials accessible and attractive to writers accustomed to intuitive design. For instance, "How to Start" questions at the opening of each chapter in the Guide anticipate where writers get stuck and direct them to exactly what they need: One writer might seek advice about finding a topic for a report, while another with a topic already in hand wants prompts for developing that idea.

Similarly, frequent cross-references between the Guide and Reference sections target the topics that students are likely to want to know more about. The simple language and unobtrusive design of the cross-references make it easy for students to stay focused on their own writing while finding related material—no explanations necessary and minimal clutter on the page. Readings and images throughout the book are similarly highlighted and variously annotated so that readers, once again, find information they need precisely when and where they require it.

Media-savvy students know that learning occurs in more than just words, so this edition preserves one of the favorite design features of *How To Write Anything:* its context-rich "How To" Visual Tutorials. Through drawings, photographs, and screenshots, these items offer step-by-step instructions for topics, ranging from how to use a writing center productively to how to cite selected materials in both MLA and APA formats.

Writing Worth Reading—From Professionals and Students

How to Write Anything: A Guide and Reference contains an ample selection of readings, more than thirty in the Guide chapters alone, representing a wide range of genres. Selections illustrate key principles and show how genres change in response to different contexts, audiences, and—increasingly important—media. Every chapter in the Guide includes many complete examples of the genres under discussion, most of these texts annotated to show how they meet criteria set down in *How to Write Anything*. The assignments at the end of the Part 1 chapters are closely tied to the chapter readings, so students can use the sample texts both as models and as springboards for discussion and exploration.

Just as important, the models in *How to Write Anything* are approachable. The readings—some by published professionals and others by student writers—reveal the diversity of contemporary writing being done in these genres. The student samples are especially inventive—chosen to motivate undergraduates to take comparable risks with their own writing. Together, the readings and exercises suggest to writers the many creative possibilities of working in these genres.

New to This Edition

How to Write Anything was designed from the outset to be a practical, highly readable guide to writing for a generation not fond of long books. The third edition doubles down on that commitment. It's smarter, more efficient, and shorter.

- **Vibrant new Introduction.** Designed as a starting point for a course, a new Introduction explains the structure and rationale of *How to Write Anything* in practical terms students will appreciate. Concepts that play a key role in the book such as *genre*, *subgenres*, *writing processes*, and even *audiences* are defined and discussed.
- **New chapter on writing portfolios.** Because more and more courses and college programs ask students to assemble writing portfolios, *How to Write Anything* introduces a new chapter (Chapter 17) explaining exactly how to compose, select, edit, and present materials for this assignment. The chapter gives special attention to composing student reflections on their coursework.
- **New "Reading the Genre" prompts.** All major readings in Part 1 are now preceded by a brief exercise or query designed to make readers think about the reading's genre or genre strategies.
- **Improved chapter organization.** Each chapter in the Guide sections has been reviewed to enhance the clarity of its presentations. Chapter 8, Rhetorical Analyses, for example, now offers a chart to summarize key questions for such a paper. And every chapter in Part 2, Special Assignments, has a new structure that makes the discussion of the genre clearer and, in most cases, simpler.

- **Focused writing throughout the book.** *How to Write Anything* has been fine-tuned to acknowledge students' preference for brevity and clarity. Chapters get to the point quicker, examples have been tightened, and some chapters have been combined to eliminate overlap.
- **Fresh readings and images.** New readings and images throughout the book keep *How to Write Anything* topical and challenging. New materials include a literacy narrative by Allegra Goodman, a movie review of *The Hunger Games*, a student's research report on women running marathons, a Jen Sorensen editorial cartoon on student debt, and Bert and Ernie on the cover of *The New Yorker*.
- **New "Genre Moves" prompts in the Reader section.** All chapters in the Reader section now begin with a brief excerpt by a well-known writer, followed by a prompt designed to get readers thinking about the genre presented.

Get the Most Out of Your Course with *How to Write Anything*

Bedford/St. Martin's offers resources and format choices that help you and your students get even more out of your book and course. To learn more about or to order any of the following products, contact your Bedford/St. Martin's sales representative, e-mail sales support (**sales_support@bfwpub.com**), or visit the Web site at **macmillanhighered.com/howtowrite3e/catalog.**

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You have a lot to do in your course. Bedford/St. Martin's wants to make it easy for you to find the support you need—and to get it quickly.

***Teaching with* How to Write Anything: A Guide and Reference with Readings** is available in print and as a PDF that can be downloaded from the Bedford/St. Martin's online catalog at the URL above. In addition to chapter overviews and teaching tips, the instructor's manual includes sample syllabi, classroom activities, and teaching goals.

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All textbooks are collaborations, but we have never before worked on a project that more creatively drew upon the resources of an editorial team and publisher. *How to Write Anything* began with the confidence of Joan Feinberg, Director of Digital Composition, that we could develop a groundbreaking brief rhetoric. She had the patience to allow the idea to develop at its own pace and then assembled an incredible team to support it. We are grateful for the contributions of Edwin Hill, Vice President; Karen Henry, Editorial Director; and Leasa Burton, Publisher. We are also indebted to Anna Palchik, Senior Art Director and designer of the text, and Deb Baker, Senior Production Editor. Special thanks to Peter Arkle and Anna Veltfort for their drawings, Christian Wise for his photographs, and to Kate Mayhew for her help with art research. They all deserve credit for the distinctive and accessible visual style of *How to Write Anything*.

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Our greatest debt is to Ellen Darion, who was our original editor on this lengthy project and saw this edition through to the completion of its first draft: always confident about what we could accomplish, patient when chapters went off-track, and perpetually good-humored. If *How to Write Anything* works, it is because Ellen never wavered from our high aspirations for the book. Her hand is in every chapter, every choice of reading, and every assignment.

Succeeding Ellen as editor on this latest version, Sarah Macomber joined a project she was well familiar with—having conceived *How to Write Anything*'s much admired visual tutorials. Sarah has given thoughtful attention to every corner of the book, helping to assure that this edition is tight, lively, and imaginative. It has been a pleasure to work with her.

Finally, we are extraordinarily grateful to our former students whose papers or paragraphs appear in *How to Write Anything*. Their writing speaks for itself, but we have been inspired, too, by their personal dedication and character. These are the sort of students who motivate teachers, and so we are very proud to see their work published in *How to Write Anything*: Alysha Behn, Jordyn Brown, Stefan Casso, Marissa Dahlstrom, Manasi Deshpande, Micah T. Eades, Wade Lamb, Desiree Lopez, Cheryl Lovelady, Shane McNamee, Matthew Nance, Lily Parish, Miles Pequeno, Heidi Rogers, Kanaka Sathasivan, J. Reagan Tankersley, Katelyn Vincent, and Susan Wilcox.

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Correlation to the Council of Writing Program Administrators' (WPA) Outcomes Statement

How to Write Anything helps students build proficiency in the five categories of learning that writing programs across the country use to assess their work: rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing; writing processes; knowledge of conventions; and composing in electronic environments. A detailed correlation follows.

Features of *How to Write Anything: A Guide and Reference with Readings,* Third Edition, Correlated to the WPA Outcomes Statement

Note: This chart aligns with the latest WPA Outcomes Statement, ratified in July 2014.

WPA Outcomes	Relevant Features of *How to Write Anything*
Rhetorical Knowledge	
Learn and use key rhetorical concepts through analyzing and composing a variety of texts.	Each assignment chapter in the Guide includes three texts in a wide variety of genres. Questions, headnotes, and "Reading the Genre" prompts encourage students to examine and understand the key rhetorical concepts behind each genre of writing. Writing activities and prompts guide students through composing a range of texts. In addition, the Reader includes more than 40 more texts for student analysis.
Gain experience reading and composing in several genres to understand how genre conventions shape and are shaped by readers' and writers' practices and purposes.	The Introduction provides a foundation for thinking about genre, while each assignment chapter in the Guide offers a thorough look at each genre's conventions and how those conventions have developed and changed, as well as how to apply them to students' own writing situations. Each chapter in the Reader includes a "Genre Moves" feature, which analyzes a classic model to highlight a specific genre convention and suggest ways students might make use of it.
Develop facility in responding to a variety of situations and contexts, calling for purposeful shifts in voice, tone, level of formality, design, medium, and/or structure.	Each assignment chapter in the Guide offers detailed advice on responding to a particular rhetorical situation, from arguing a claim and proposing a solution to writing an e-mail or a résumé. See "Choosing a Style and Design" sections in Part 1 chapters, and the "Getting the Details Right" sections in Part 2 chapters for advice on situation-specific style and design. Part 5 features chapters on "High, Middle, and Low Style" (32); "Inclusive and Culturally Sensitive Style" (33); and "Vigorous, Clear, Economical Style" (34).
Understand and use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences.	Chapter 48 covers digital media, including blogs, social networks, Web sites, wikis, podcasts, maps, and videos. Chapter 49 covers creating and using visuals to present data and ideas. Each assignment chapter includes at least one visual example of the genre that the chapter focuses on, and several of the reference chapters include Visual Tutorials featuring photographs and illustrations that provide students with step-by-step instructions for challenging topics, such as using the Web to browse for ideas. This emphasis on visuals, media, and design helps students develop visual and technological literacy they can use in their own work. Chapter 13 covers e-mail; Chapters 17 and 18 address portfolio and presentation software; and Chapters 38 and 40 cover finding, evaluating, and using print and electronic resources for research.

WPA Outcomes	Relevant Features of *How to Write Anything*
Rhetorical Knowledge (*continued*)	
Match the capacities of different environments (e.g., print and electronic) to varying rhetorical situations.	The text and LaunchPad include a wide range of print and multimodal genres from essays and scholarly articles to photographs, infographics, Web sites, and audio and video presentations. Rhetorical choices that students make in each genre are covered in the Guide chapters and appear in discussions of the writing context and in abundant models in the book.
Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing	
Use composing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating in various rhetorical contexts.	The assignment chapters in the Guide emphasize the connection between reading and writing a particular genre: Each chapter includes model readings with annotations that address the key features of the genre. Each Part 1 chapter shows students the rhetorical choices they need to consider when writing their own papers in these genres and offers assignments to actively engage them in these choices. Chapter 21, "Critical Thinking," explains rhetorical appeals and logical fallacies. Reference chapters in Parts 3 through 8 cover invention, reading, writing, research, and design strategies that work across all genres.
Read a diverse range of texts, attending especially to relationships between assertion and evidence, to patterns of organization, to interplay between verbal and nonverbal elements, and how these features function for different audiences and situations.	Each assignment chapter in the Guide includes three texts in a wide variety of genres. In addition, the Reader includes more than 40 more texts for student analysis. Each of the Guide chapters also includes sections on understanding audience, creating a structure, finding and developing material (including evidence), and choosing a style and design that best reflect the genre of writing. Chapter 20, "Smart Reading," helps students read deeply and "against the grain," while in Chapter 21, "Critical Thinking," students learn about claims, assumptions, and evidence. Chapter 26, "Organization," gives advice on devising a structure for a piece of writing.
Locate and evaluate primary and secondary research materials, including journal articles, essays, books, databases, and informal Internet sources.	Part 7 covers research and sources in depth, with chapters on beginning your research, finding print and online sources, doing field research, evaluating and annotating sources, and documenting sources.

WPA Outcomes	Relevant Features of *How to Write Anything*
Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing (*continued*)	
Use strategies — such as interpretation, synthesis, response, critique, and design/redesign — to compose texts that integrate the writer's ideas with those from appropriate sources.	Chapters 41 ("Annotating Sources"), 42 ("Paraphrasing Sources"), and 44 ("Incorporating Sources into Your Work") explore a variety of strategies for integrating the writer's ideas with ideas and information from sources. Chapter 12, "Synthesis Papers," shows students how to summarize, compare, and assess the views offered by different sources.
Processes	
Develop a writing project through multiple drafts.	Chapter 35, "Revising Your Own Work," discusses the importance of revising and gives detailed advice on how to approach different types of revision. Targeted cross-references throughout the text help students get the revision help they need when they need it.
Develop flexible strategies for reading, drafting, reviewing, collaboration, revising, rewriting, rereading, and editing.	The Reference's brief, targeted chapters and cross-references lend themselves to a flexible approach to writing process, with an array of strategies for students to choose from whether they're crafting an introduction or preparing to revise a first draft. Genre-specific advice in the Guide chapters helps students tailor each step of the writing process to their writing situation, while process-based chapters in the Reference offer guidance that can be applied to any type of writing.
Use composing processes and tools as a means to discover and reconsider ideas.	Each Part 1 chapter includes two sections that encourage students to use the composing process as a means of discovery. "Deciding to write . . . " covers the reasons a writer might choose a specific form of writing, while "Exploring purpose and topic" prompts students to challenge their own ideas about a subject and write to discover what they think when they look more deeply at it.
Experience the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes.	Several chapters in the Reference send students out into their worlds for advice, information, and feedback. Chapter 22, "Experts," talks about the kinds of experts — such as librarians, instructors, peers, and writing center tutors — that students can call on for help. Chapter 39, "Doing Field Research," discusses the whys and hows of interviewing and observing people as part of the research process. Chapter 36, "Peer Editing," offers advice for helping peers improve their work.
Learn to give and act on productive feedback to works in progress.	Chapter 36, "Peer Editing," encourages students to give specific, helpful advice to peers and think about peer editing in the same way they revise their own work.

WPA Outcomes	Relevant Features of *How to Write Anything*
Processes (*continued*)	
Adapt composing processes for a variety of technologies and modalities.	Chapter 48 focuses on digital media, including blogs, Web sites, wikis, podcasts, maps, and videos. Chapter 13 covers e-mail; Chapters 17 and 18 address portfolio and presentation software; and Chapters 38 and 40 cover finding, evaluating, and using print and electronic resources for research.
Reflect on the development of composing practices and how those practices influence their work.	The new Introduction invites students to consider their writing practices and how the choices they make during invention, drafting, research, and revision shape their process and their work.
Knowledge of Conventions	
Develop knowledge of linguistic structures, including grammar, punctuation, and spelling, through practice in composing and revising.	Part 9 (Common Errors) includes chapters on grammar, punctuation, and mechanics, while Chapters 35 and 36 provide editing and proofreading advice. Targeted cross-references throughout the text send students to these chapters as needed.
Understand why genre conventions for structure, paragraphing, tone, and mechanics vary.	Each Part 1 chapter includes a section on choosing style and design to help students understand how their choice of style, structure, tone, and mechanics is shaped by the genre in which they're writing.
Gain experience negotiating variations in genre conventions.	Models of work from several subgenres within the book's main genres show students the variations that exist within the confines of a given genre. In addition, "Reading the Genre" prompts help students identify and understand the genre conventions at work in each selection.
Learn common formats and/or design features for different kinds of texts.	Each assignment chapter in the Guide covers a format specific to the genre covered there; see "Choosing a Style and Design" in the Part 1 chapters and "Getting the Details Right" in the Part 2 chapters.
Explore the concepts of intellectual property (such as fair use and copyright) that motivate documentation conventions.	Chapter 45, "Documenting Sources," helps students understand why documentation is important and what's at stake in properly identifying and citing material used from sources.
Practice applying citation conventions systematically in their own work.	Chapters 46, "MLA Documentation and Format," and 47, "APA Documentation and Format," include detailed guidance for citing sources according to each style's conventions. Visual Tutorials in each chapter help students identify and find the information they need in order to create accurate citations.

Introduction

If a blank page or empty screen scares you, join the club. Even professional writers freeze up when facing new and unfamiliar assignments or intimidating audiences. It's only natural for you to wonder how you'll handle all the tasks you face in school or on the job—the reports, evaluations, personal statements, opinion pieces, reviews, and more. Much more. Even writing you do for pleasure has a learning curve.

So how do you get rolling? Exactly the way experienced authors do, by examining the strategies other writers have used to achieve similar goals for demanding audiences. That's not very creative, you might object. But in fact, it's the way inventive people in many fields operate. They get a feel for the shape and features, structures and strategies, materials and styles of whatever they hope to construct themselves, and then they work from that knowledge to fashion new ideas. They become masters of their *genre*. This book will introduce you to writing by taking exactly the same approach.

Understand Genres of Writing

So what is a *genre*? An old-school definition might describe it as a variety of writing we recognize by its distinctive purpose and features. For instance, a work that fits into the genre of *narrative* usually tells a story and emphasizes characterization, dialogue, and descriptions; a *report* presents reliable facts and information and relies on research and documentation; an *argument* defends a claim with reasons and evidence and uses lots of powerful language and even, sometimes, pulls at your heartstrings. *How To Write Anything* introduces you to these three familiar genres, along with five others you'll run up against throughout your academic and professional life: *evaluations*, *causal analyses*, *proposals*, *literary analyses*, and *rhetorical analyses*.

But if you are expecting simple formulas, templates, and step-by-step instructions for each category, guess again. No one learns to write by filling in blanks because the processes are too complicated. So this book treats genres far more dynamically—as real-life responses to ever-changing writing situations. You'll find that genres aren't arbitrary, inflexible, predictable, or dull. Instead, they change constantly—maybe the better term is *evolve*—to serve the needs of writers *and* readers. (Consider how just in the past few years personal and professional letters have metamorphosed into e-mails, text messages, and tweets.)

Though it still makes sense to draw upon patterns and models that work reliably, that's only half the process of learning to write. First you study what existing genres can teach you (and that's a lot). Then you bend the genres to fit actual assignments you get and, just as important, the kind of work you'd like to do on your own. You figure out what to say within a genre, tailor those concepts to the people you hope to influence, organize your ideas strategically, and state them powerfully in appropriate media—including visual, oral, and online formats. That's what Part 1 of *How to Write Anything* is about. It walks you through the full range of choices you face in making genres work for you—and not the other way around.

It might help to think of genres as shortcuts to success. When you learn a new genre, you don't necessarily acquire a hard-and-fast set of rules for writing; instead, you gain control over that genre's *possibilities*. Who knows where those insights might take you?

Connect Purpose to Subgenres

But let's step back a moment and think about the "specific assignments" you'll be facing, especially in school. One of the first matters to settle is always the aim or purpose of a given paper, and it is rarely just *to write* or even to compose open-ended narratives, reports, or arguments. Instead, you'll be asked or required to compose projects so narrowly focused that they actually turn broad *genres* into *subgenres*. A subgenre is simply a specialized version of a genre, one that adapts its general principles to immediate purposes: For example, you need to tell a good story to talk yourself out of an expensive parking ticket or into an honors program.

To put it more formally, you won't ordinarily compose a nonspecific report; you'll write a history term paper detailing some aspect of the Cuban Missile Crisis or a newspaper column explaining NCAA recruitment policies. You won't do a causal analysis for the exercise; you'll write a topic proposal to determine the feasibility of a thesis idea. You won't argue just for the fun of it; you'll dash off an editorial to persuade student government to fix its election code. In effect, you are encouraged to modify a genre to fit your more immediate needs. And that's a good thing.

Why? Because you can base your work in subgenres on very specific models readily available in print and online—they're materials you read and work with every day. In *How to Write Anything*, for instance, the chapter on "Evaluations" presents basic strategies for making smart judgments about people and things, explaining in detail how to establish and apply criteria of evaluation and how to present the evidence you collect. Fair enough.

But your purpose in preparing (or even reading) evaluations will often be much more focused. You'll want to know whether a restaurant is worth your dollar, a book is smart and challenging, a school program up-to-snuff academically. So you'll likely consult book, restaurant, or program reviews you've come to regard as trustworthy, probably because of how well they handle criteria of evaluation and evidence. Once you know how a genre works, you'll appreciate how its subgenres refine those moves. Suddenly, your task as a writer is easier because knowing a genre gives you a method and vocabulary for dealing with all its subgenres—and appreciating how they operate.

Subgenres, then, work the same way as genres, presenting an array of specific features and strategies for you to emulate and modify. You'll find connections between genre and subgenres throughout *How to Write Anything*. Each of the major readings in Part 1 is identified by a subgenre, and all the major writing assignments suggest that you take one of the items as a pattern to help you with a project of your own. Part 2 "Special Assignments" is entirely about subgenres crucial to people in school or entering the job market—items such as essay examinations, résumés, personal statements, and oral reports. In this section, you'll clearly see how practical and action-oriented subgenres can be. At the end of this introduction, you'll find a list of the genres and subgenres covered in *How to Write Anything*.

Choose Audiences

Remember the claim that genres serve the needs of writers *and* demanding audiences? It's very important. As an analogy, just consider how much you rely on genres to select what movies you will see: *sci-fi films, westerns, action/adventure films, romances* (a.k.a. "chick flicks"), *horror movies,* and so on. You bring expectations to films in these categories based upon your past experiences. You may be satisfied when a movie meets or exceeds your expectations, angry when a work fails to live up to genre standards, and *really* excited when a flick manages to do something new—stretches a genre the way *The Dark Knight* or *Marvel's The Avengers* did.

Readers of *your* work will react the same way, which is why you'll find sections on "Understanding Your Audience" in each of the genre chapters of *How to Write Anything*. Audiences you target with a particular genre will bring specific expectations to your work, based on their understanding of your project. For example, a highly academic genre such as a "literary analysis" usually has a narrower and more demanding readership than, let's say, a movie review you post on a blog. You've got to learn how to make genres work for their typical readers—which means understanding them or at least being aware of what they bring to the table when they read.

But as a writer working in genres, you'll also discover you have the power sometimes to define or summon audiences for your work. You might, for example, decide to write a report on bullying aimed at middle-school students; it would differ significantly from a report on the same topic aimed at parents, wouldn't it? Or you might consider how academic readers might be convinced to take a topic such as zombies in films seriously: What features in your text would signal your serious intentions to them? Your analysis of such choices is exactly what makes writing within genres exciting and challenging.

Manage Structure and Style

How to Write Anything gives as much attention to structure and style as to audience in each of the genre chapters—and for good reason. Like the treatment of audience, these elements can make genres seem familiar and comfortable, or they can stretch their boundaries to breaking, depending entirely on choices you make.

Many subgenres, for example, are rigid in their organization: You wouldn't want to experiment with the structure of a lab report or grant application. Nor would you take chances with the formal style expected in these documents. Get a little funky and you've flunked chemistry or lost your funding. Common sense, you say, and you'd be right.

But other genres have lots of give, and so chapters on these genres suggest how that flexibility creates opportunities for innovation and experimentation. For instance, not all narratives have to move in lockstep from beginning to middle to end, but if you are going to tell a story out of sequence or via flashbacks, there are consequences: You might befuddle some readers and push them away. Or think about the range of style you have in narratives—from descriptions that are elegant and formal to dialogue that tells it like it is. You might even use these choices of style to attract readers you want—that is, people who share your values or taste. Even a genre as sober as evaluation has room for enormous range in structure and style—which we signal in this edition by featuring a satire as one of the models.

Develop Writing Processes

For more than a generation now, writing has been taught in schools as a sequential process. You probably learned it that way, working steadily from finding ideas, developing them, writing a first draft, and proofreading a final one. There's nothing wrong with the model, especially the parts that encourage revision. But in working with genres, you'll discover that writing behaviors grow more complicated. Simply put, there are many processes and pathways to successful composing.

Each chapter in Part 1 of *How to Write Anything* outlines a process for creating a particular genre. Some kinds of writing require intense personal reflection, others send reporters into the field for interviews or into libraries for research, and still others may push you deep inside texts for experiences in close reading. Some genres will develop your skills with media or make you examine the clarity of charts and graphs. Others will have you playing with and repeatedly refining your choice of words.

Because of these individual demands, you'll discover that all the genre chapters in the Guide section of *How to Write Anything* (Parts 1–2) are

strategically cross-referenced to supplemental materials in what's called the "Reference" section (Parts 3–9). The reference chapters are designed to support your specific needs as a writer, whatever the genre you might be exploring. If you have a problem with writer's block, you will find detailed advice to get you moving. If a genre assignment pushes you to a library catalog, a reference chapter will explain the tools and resources you'll find there and offer sensible strategies. If you have to document a paper or you've forgotten how to get pronouns to agree with fussy antecedents, you have a place to go. It's worth noting that the reference chapters are, for the most part, written in the same informal style as the rest of the book. So don't ignore them. You might even find stuff there to write about.

Invitation to Write

How to Write Anything was designed and edited to be compact and efficient. But you'll find that it has a personal voice, frank and occasionally humorous. Why? Because yet another textbook lacking style or character probably won't convince you that your own prose should speak to real audiences. And if some chapters operate like reference materials, they still aren't written coldly or dispassionately—not even the section on Common Errors.

If *How to Write Anything* seems like an oddly ambitious title, maybe it's because learning to write should be a heady enterprise, undertaken with confidence and optimism. Give it a try.

Genres and Subgenres in *How to Write Anything*

Narratives

- Literacy narrative
- Memoir/reflection
- Graphic narrative
- Personal statement

Reports

- Research report
- Feature story
- Infographic
- Essay examination
- Annotated bibliography
- Synthesis paper
- E-mail
- Business letter
- Résumé
- Oral report

Arguments

- Support of a thesis
- Refutation
- Visual argument
- Position paper

Evaluations

- Arts review
- Satire
- Product review
- Parody
- Portfolio review
- Peer review

Causal Analyses

- Causal argument
- Research analysis
- Cultural analysis

Proposals

- Trial balloon
- Manifesto
- Visual proposal
- Topic proposal

Literary Analysis

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- Close reading
- Photographs as literary texts

Rhetorical Analysis

- Rhetorical analysis
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- Need to choose the right **details**? See page 13.
- Need to **organize the events** in your story? See page 15.

1 Narratives

chronicle events in people's lives

Chances are you've shared bits and pieces of your life story in writing many times. In doing so, you've written personal narratives. *Personal* does not mean that writers of personal narratives are always baring their souls. Instead, it suggests that they are telling stories from an individual perspective, providing details only they could know and insights only they could have.

LITERACY NARRATIVE

To work at the campus writing center, you need to submit a *literacy narrative* detailing your own experiences with writing and language.

MEMOIR/ REFLECTION

You direct your grandparents to a community group that is collecting *memoirs* from local citizens who entered the United States as immigrants.

GRAPHIC NARRATIVE

You want more people to think about bicycling to work, so you create a *visual narrative* about your experiences as an urban cyclist, posting both photographs and videos on a blog.

DECIDING TO WRITE A NARRATIVE. Narratives describe events that people want to share with readers in words or through other media, including photographs, film, songs, cartoons, and more (see the Introduction for more on choosing a genre). These stories may be about family or work experiences, growing up, personal tragedies, relationships, and so on. Expect a narrative you compose to do the following.

Tell a story. In a narrative, something usually happens. Maybe all you do is reflect on a moment when something peculiar caught your attention. Or your story could recount a series of events — the classic road-trip script. Or you might spin a tale complicated enough to resemble a movie plot, with a connected beginning, middle, and end. But your job is always to focus on some action. Otherwise you are rambling.

Introduce characters. They may be people or animals or animate objects, but a story usually needs someone or something for readers to care about. You

Telling stories — sometimes competitively — in clubs and restaurants has become a form of entertainment in cities across the United States. Marvin Joseph/ The Washington Post via Getty Images.

needn't pile on physical descriptions or build elaborate backstories. But you ordinarily need characters with names and interesting relationships who speak believable dialogue. Sometimes that fascinating person is you.

Make a point — usually. There's usually a reason for writing a narrative. When an insurance agent asks about your recent fender bender, she expects you to explain what happened and how you are involved. Most narratives, however, will be less clinical and more reflective, enabling you to connect with readers creatively — to amuse, enlighten, and, perhaps, even to change them. Some narratives are therapeutic too, helping you confront personal issues or get a weight off your chest.

Report details. What brings a narrative to life are its details — the colors, shapes, sounds, textures, and other physical impressions that convince people a story is credible and authentic. They prove that you were close enough to an experience to have an insider's perspective and that the story really belongs to you. Don't fall back on clichés.

develop a statement
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Literacy Narrative

A noteworthy subgenre of narratives explores the processes by which people learn to read or write or acquire other life-changing intellectual skills. In the following selection from a slightly longer piece originally published in the *New York Times* "Writers on Writing" series, contemporary novelist Allegra Goodman reflects on how she learned to overcome the doubts that plague many writers. Her most recent work is *The Cookbook Collector* (2010).

Reading the Genre As you read the selection, pay attention to the way Goodman uses pronouns, especially *I/me* and *you/your*. To whom is the essay directed? Are there places where Goodman seems to be talking as much to herself as to readers? How does that move add interest to the story?

O.K., You're Not Shakespeare. Now Get Back to Work

ALLEGRA GOODMAN

Details in the opening paragraphs introduce the general theme of the narrative: a writer's self-doubts.

They say writing is lonely work. But that's an exaggeration. Even alone at their desks, writers entertain visitors: characters of a novel, famous and not so famous figures from the past. On good days, all these come to the table. On bad days, however, only unwelcome visitors appear: The specter of the third-grade teacher who despaired of your penmanship. The ghost of the first person who told you that spelling counts. The voice of reason pointing out that what you are about to attempt has already been done — and done far better than you might even hope.

So why bother? Why even begin? It is, after all, abundantly clear that you are not Henry James. Your themes are hackneyed, your style imitative. As for your emotions, memories, insights, and invented characters, what makes you think anyone will care? These are the perfectly logical questions of the famous, petty, and implacable inner critic.

What should a writer do when the inner critic comes to call? How to silence these disparaging whispers? I have no magic cure, but here, from my own experience, is a modest proposal to combat the fiend.

Forget the past. Nothing stops the creative juices like thoughts of the literary tradition. "You'll never be John Donne!" your inner critic shrieks. Or: "*Middlemarch*! Now that was a book!" These thoughts used to fill me with gloom. Then I went to graduate school at Stanford, and I steeped myself in Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Defoe. The experience set me free.

The story turns personal and its setting is specific.

It happened like this. I was sitting in Green Library trying to write a story, and I looked at all the shelves of books around me, and suddenly the obvious occurred to me. All the great Romantic poets and Elizabethan playwrights and Victorian novelists that tower over me — they're dead! Oh, they still cast their shadow, but I'm alive, and they are irrefutably dead. Their language is exquisite, their scenes divine, but what have these writers done lately? Not a damn thing. Think about it. The idea should give you hope. Past masters are done. Their achievements are finite, known, measurable. Present writers, on the other hand, live in possibility. Your masterpiece could be just around the corner. Genius could befall you at any moment.

"Well," your inner critic counters gloomily, "just remember that when you're gone, your books will suffer the same fate as all the rest. They'll be relics at best. More likely, they'll just languish in obscurity." To which I have to say: So what? I won't be around to care.

Goodman offers glimpses into her thinking as a writer.

Carpe diem. Know your literary tradition, savor it, steal from it, but when you sit down to write, forget about worshiping greatness and fetishizing masterpieces. If your inner critic continues to plague you with invidious comparisons, scream, "Ancestor worship!" and leave the building.

Treat writing as a sacred act. Just as the inner critic loves to dwell on the past, she delights in worrying about the future. "Who would want to read this?" she demands. "Nobody is going to publish a book like that!" Such nagging can incapacitate unpublished writers. Published writers, on the other hand, know that terrible books come out all the time. They anguish: "The reviewers are going to crucify me, and nobody will want to publish me after that."

But take a step back. What are you really afraid of here? When you come down to it, this is just a case of the inner critic masquerading as public opinion, and playing on your vanity.

I know only one way out of this trap, which is to concentrate on your writing itself, for itself. Figuring out what the public wants, or even what

the public is: That's the job of pollsters and publicists and advertisers. All those people study the marketplace. But the creative artist can change the world. A true writer opens people's ears and eyes, not merely playing to the public, but changing minds and lives. This is sacred work. . . .

Goodman's personal reflections lead to advice for would-be writers.

Ultimately every writer must choose between safety and invention; between life as a literary couch potato and imaginative exercise. You must decide which you like better, the perfectionist within or the flawed pages at hand.

Perhaps you'd rather hold yourself to the impossibly high standards of writers long dead. Or perhaps you'd rather not waste time writing something that will go unpublished, unnoticed, and unread. You have received no encouragement from anyone else, and so you would never think of encouraging yourself. Or you choose to be a realist. You're smart enough to see your talent is limited, your gift too small to pursue. You can convince yourself of all this, or you can listen to your imagination instead. You can fire yourself up with words and voices. You can look out into the world teeming with stories and cast your net.