

Introduction

What is the purpose of a Freshman Composition class?

This may be THE big question of all time for composition instructors. Should it be a course in literary criticism? Should it include speech? Should it be focused on discussions of the “big issues” of the day (whatever the “big issues” of the day happen to be at the time—or whatever the professor thinks they are)? Should it be a self-contained rhetoric course that has no relevance to other college course work, or should it be seen as a class that prepares students for our old favorite, “writing across the curriculum”? Should it have any relevance to the students’ lives post-college? Or maybe should it be seen as a job-preparation class, focused on resume writing, cover letters, reports, and proposals?

In our view, a Freshman Composition class has two purposes:

1. To help students start to understand and practice the concepts of academic thinking and argumentation
2. To get students comfortable with the types of essays they will likely be required to write in future college courses, so they can write these with confidence and skill

That’s it. For us, those are the purposes of freshmen composition. How many times do teachers of other disciplines complain because their students are lousy writers (looking askance at the freshman composition faculty)?

This book aims to meet those two purposes. We want to show students how an argument is put together, how it can be made effectively, and how to apply those skills to most writing situations.

And this must be stated: words matter.

Good, effective writing matters.

Words can lift up and knock down. Inform. Persuade. Inspire. Challenge. Make a person laugh or cry. Think. Some words are ugly, while others are beautiful.

As much as some people believe writing sucks and are terrified when they see a blank page or an empty computer screen, good, concise writing matters. Words are the highway to building futures and relationships.

And unfortunately, most college textbooks provide an amazing example of the kind of writing that puts people to sleep.

Composition classes are different from history or psychology or humanities classes, which are information intensive. Textbooks for these classes should be 500+ pages in length, because there is so much information that needs to be shared with students.

But writing classes are *skills* classes. They work best when class time is spent working on writing skills. And students don’t need 500-page textbooks for this.

And here’s a secret: students don’t *read* 500-page composition textbooks, either. (I’m a college writing professor, and I didn’t even crack my composition textbook back when I took Freshman Composition.)

Most composition textbooks simply contain far too much information, explained in far too much detail, for a one-semester writing course. What is not covered in the student edition of this book is the material that the students should be working on in class. There is no reason for 30 pages of information on the thesis statement in a textbook. That is guaranteed to put students to sleep, and worse, it won't help them understand thesis statements any better. In fact, it could very well make things worse, as students come to believe that thesis statements are far more complicated than they really are.

What students need is maybe two to three pages of basic understanding of thesis statements, their purpose, how they work, why we need them, and how they relate to the rest of the essay. After that, what students need is **in-class** practice on the topic, led by the teacher. When it comes to essay writing, instructor-led classroom activities are far more useful than page after page of additional information on the subject.

(FYI: the instructor edition of this textbook contains all the exercises and in-class activities needed to supplement this guide, and will allow teachers to take the basics presented here and bring the concepts to life in the classroom.)

Our point is, much of what teachers assign composition students to read is more effectively done in class through lecture and, even better, classroom activities. And not only that, much that can be found in most modern college textbooks—such as grammar, citation rules, and readings from professional authors—can be found all over the Internet for FREE, saving pages in a textbook—and trees!—and dollars out of the students' pockets.

College students, surprisingly to some, are pretty smart. And with the cost of modern textbooks skyrocketing, students are making adjustments. Some simply don't buy the book. Why pay \$60 or \$70 for a textbook that you don't even plan to read?

Some students simply do a Google search for the topics covered in class. Others photocopy or scan versions of the text from other students, or download them from pirate websites.

What is needed is a textbook that covers just those things that need to be covered in a college writing textbook—nothing more and nothing less. On top of that, the book needs to be easy to read and easy to understand and much shorter than 500 pages.

That is why we wrote *The Super Compact, Totally Readable, and Non-boring Writing Guide*. This text provides students with the tools they need to develop academic writing skills that will help them survive Freshman Composition and are transferable to life after class—whether in other college courses or in their careers—without any fluff, and we do it in under 150 pages and at an affordable price. We wanted a book so easy to read and so inexpensive that students would actually buy and read it.

Part 1 opens with the keys to good writing. It provides practical tips and the tools for how to do think academically and write effectively, and shows the students the different pieces that make up a college essay and demonstrate a process that takes much of the pain out of writing.

Part 2, called "Now Let's Write!," builds on the basic writing skills discussed in Part One of the textbook. In this section, we provide specific instructions for specific essay types. For example, in Part One, we talk about essay organization. In Part Two, we talk about how specific essays use, or might vary from, that organization. So between the two

sections, the student gets both the basic writing skills and the specific application of those skills.

Schools and instructors will be able to customize their courses by choosing which essays they want to include in their curriculum. *The Super Compact, Totally Readable, and Non-boring Writing Guide* provides a customizable roadmap.

Included in each essay chapter is a sample essay. This will strengthen students' critical eye by evaluating other people's writing. Constructive criticism makes everyone a better writer. An assignment specific to each essay type is also provided for instructors to use and students to practice with and self critique.

And for this first time, these chapters will uniquely study essays on the same topic—gun control from the lenses of each essay type to clearly highlight the differences and distinctions.

At the end students will be empowered with the skills they need to confidentially write in any situation—inside and outside of the classroom.

