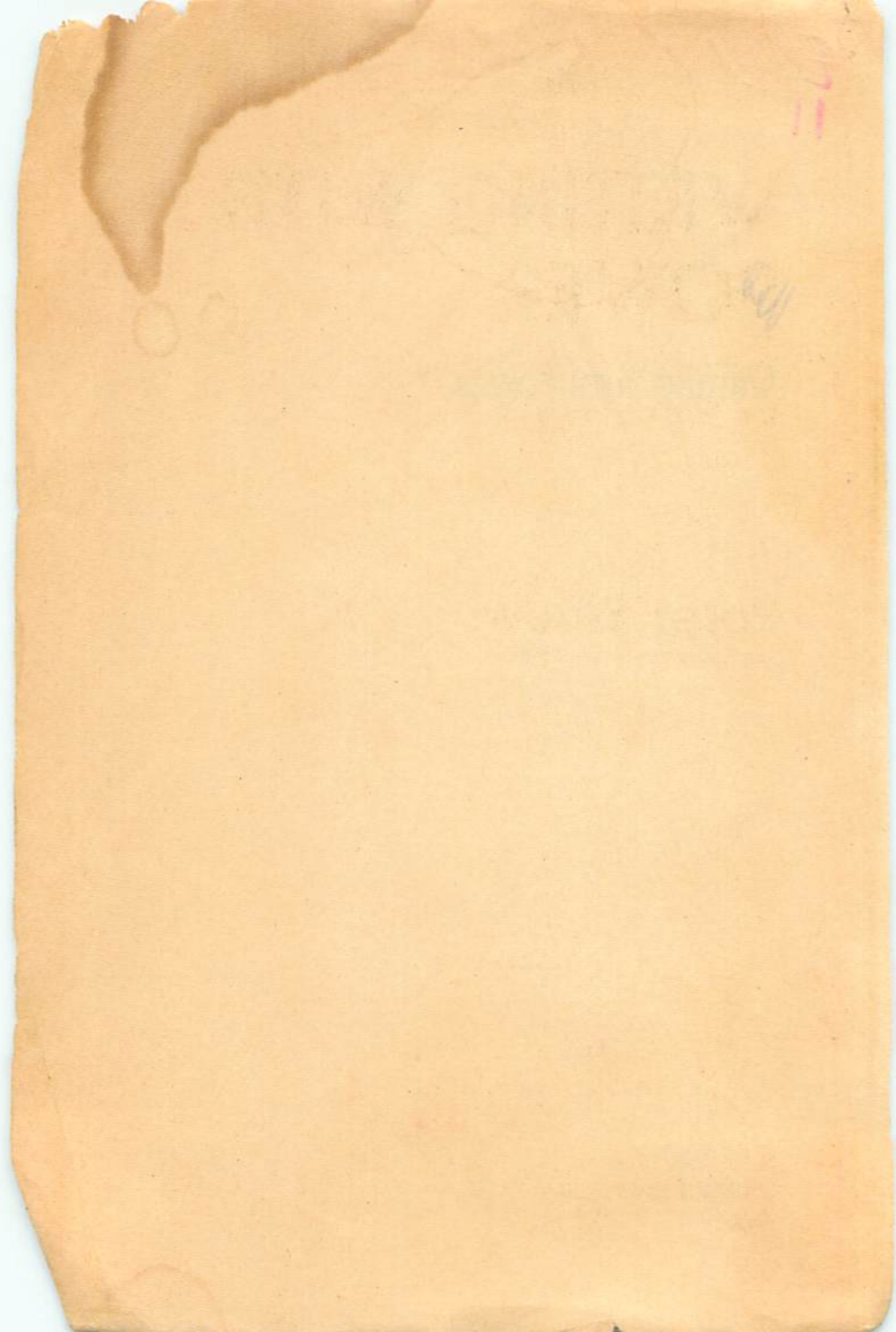


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WRITING WITH POWER



I dedicate this book  
to Cami  
with my love

## **NOTE TO THE READER**

Writing with power means getting power over words and readers; writing clearly and correctly; writing what is true or real or interesting; and writing persuasively or making some kind of contact with your readers so that they actually experience your meaning or vision. In this book I am trying to help you write in all these ways.

But writing with power also means getting power over yourself and over the writing process; knowing what you are doing as you write; being in charge; having control; not feeling stuck or helpless or intimidated. I am particularly interested in this second kind of power in writing and I have found that without it you seldom achieve the first kind.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the long process of writing this book, I have learned much about writing from many people: fellow teachers, fellow thinkers about writing, readers, students, and kin. I am grateful to the following people for what a writer needs most, honest helpful reactions to parts of the manuscript at various stages: Gloria Campbell, Thad Curtz, Joy and Don Dybeck, Anne Enquist, Lee Graham, Gerald Grant, Burt Hatlen, Susan Hubbuch, Criseyde Jones, Cecile Kalkwarf, Ellen Nold, Margaret Proctor, Eugene Smith, Joanne Turpin, Mary Wake-man, and Bernice Youtz.

I hope that the students I have worked with over these last years here at The Evergreen State College, and the teachers here and elsewhere, know how much I have learned from them and will accept my thanks. I am grateful to the students whose writing I quote here for their permission to do so.

I did some of my final revising during a trip, and due to the kind hospitality of the following people I found myself working in a succession of particularly gracious rooms, each with a lovely prospect: Jean and Joan Cordier, Rex and Celia Frayling, Malcolm and Gay Harper, Helena Knapp.

Deep thanks to my editor at Oxford, John Wright, who helped sustain me in countless ways through many unmet deadlines. Also to Curtis Church, copy editor. I was fortunate to have Janis Maddox as typist.

My greatest debt in writing this book is to my wife Cami for the love and support that made it possible and the incisive editorial comment that made it better.

P.E.

Olympia, Washington  
September 1980

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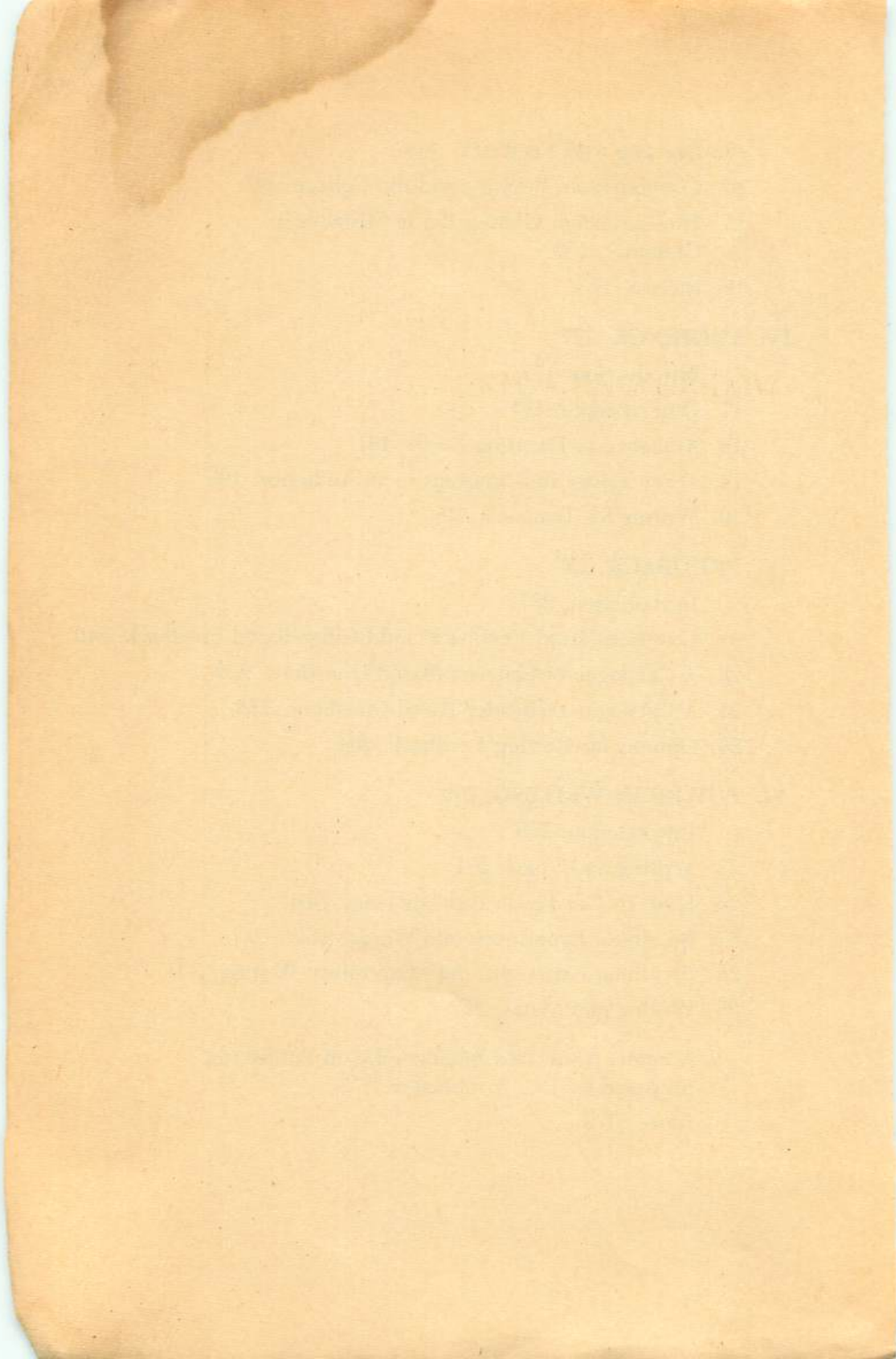
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**WRITING WITH POWER**

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# SOME ESSENTIALS

## INTRODUCTION: A MAP OF THE BOOK

I have designed this book so you can either read it straight through or else skip around. That is, I have arranged it in what seems to me the most logical order; you will find some cumulative benefits from reading it in the normal sequence. But I have also made each section and chapter fairly complete in itself so you can thread your own path and find the chapters you need for your particular writing tasks or for your own particular temperament or skills. By reading Section I and the short introductions to the remaining five sections, you will get a good sense of how the whole book works. In addition, almost every chapter ends with a short summary or section of advice which you can consult for more information about what the chapter treats.

• • •

There is no hiding the fact that writing well is a complex, difficult, and time-consuming process. Indeed I fear I may even heighten that impression by writing a book so full of analysis and advice. In this first section, therefore, I want to emphasize that the essential activities underlying good writing and the essential exercises promoting it are not difficult at all.

In addition this first section serves as a kind of introduction to the whole book. Chapter 1 explains the approach to writing that I take. Chapters 2 and 3, "Freewriting" and "Sharing," present two ways of working on your writing that are at once simpler and more

powerful than any other ways I know. Chapters 4 and 5, "The Direct Writing Process" and "Quick Revising," comprise together a simple and practical method for getting something written—a method particularly suitable if you are working under a tight deadline. I call Chapter 6 "The Dangerous Method" because I discuss there that common and tempting practice of trying to write something right the first time.

Sections II and III, "More Ways To Get Words on Paper" and "More Ways To Revise," could together be entitled "Getting Power over the Writing Process" since they focus on the actual steps used in writing something. These two practical, step-by-step sections constitute what is probably the core of the book.

Section IV, "Audience," could be called "Getting Power over Others," yet one of the main themes is the power others have over us as we try to write to them. I suggest ways to use the power of an audience to your benefit instead of letting it get in your way. I also analyze the difficulties of some particular audiences or writing situations and suggest ways to overcome these difficulties.

Section V, "Feedback," could be called "Getting Power through the Help of Others" because I show you how to figure out what kind of feedback you need for your particular writing situation and then how to get readers actually to give it to you.

Section VI, finally, is about a mystery, power in writing: not correctness in usage or clarity in language or validity in thinking or truth in conclusions, but that extra something—or that inner something—that makes readers *experience* what you are talking about, not just understand it. When this mysterious power is absent your writing makes no dent on most readers, however correct, clear, valid, or true it may be. Needless to say, this section is more speculative and theoretical than the others—and longer—but it also contains specific practical advice. It contains the ideas about writing that are most exciting to me as I write. If you love theory, you might wish to start with this section. If you are in a hurry just to get things written competently, and that's all, you can skip this final section.

A note on gender. In some chapters I call people "he" and in others I call them "she." I do so because I believe that "he" refers to men more than it does to women, despite the convention that says it can refer equally to both sexes. Of course the ideal pro-

noun arrangement would not distract any of a reader's attention away from the main message of the sentence—as I fear mine sometimes does. But I can't imagine a really ideal arrangement until we finish the process of relinquishing cultural habits of male primacy.

---

## An Approach to Writing

I direct this book to a very broad audience. I'm not trying to tailor my words to beginning or advanced writers in particular, or to students, novelists, professional people, pleasure writers, or poets. Perhaps I shouldn't try to talk to so many different kinds of people, yet in truth I feel my audience is very specific. I am talking to that person inside everyone who has ever written or tried to write: that someone who has wrestled with words, who seeks power in words, who has often gotten discouraged, but who also senses the possibility of achieving real writing power.

I've learned how to take more control over my writing while still giving it free rein. . . . I've learned the value of not expecting a twelve year old child to come out when you're giving birth to a baby; that any writing needs time after its birth so it can change and grow and eventually reach its potential. I've come to realize that you most probably won't find a pearl if you only pick up oysters once a year. So I will try to write a lot—a whole lot—and not expect that every piece emerge a gem. I'll learn to put up with (maybe even enjoy) the bad stuff, remembering that the more I do of it, the closer I get to coming out with something good. When I feel that a good idea has emerged, but I don't know where to follow it, I won't feel that it's a lost cause—that its moment has passed. I'll let it sit for a while and then go back to it with renewed energy until I can make something whole out of it, or decide that I've gone as far as I can with it.

JOANNE PILGRIM

This is part of a self-evaluation written by a student at the end of a course I recently taught. It says what I hope readers will be able to