

1 Writing Projects

Practical lessons
based on classical methods

Brian Moon

chalkface

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PO Box 23
Cottesloe WA 6011
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Writing Projects I: Practical lessons based on classical methods.

For secondary school students.

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Contents

Project 1: Write an epigram

Skills you will learn from this project:

- writing with *concise diction*
- forming *generalisations*
- writing balanced sentences: *parallel, contrast, crossover*

Project 2: Write a fable

Skills you will learn from this project:

- creating a story through *allegory* and *dramatisation*
- controlling diction through *word choice*
- using simple mathematics to check your style
- adding variety to sentences through *opening phrases*
- writing suitable *dialogue*

Project 3: Write a story

Skills you will learn from this project:

- matching *character* with *setting* in a story
- developing *realistic detail*
- using detached, third-person *narration*
- using *transitions, flashback* and *contrast*
- using *simple, compound, and complex* sentences

Project 4: Write a review

Skills you will learn from this project:

- conveying facts and opinions through *exposition, criticism* and *argument*
- constructing arguments using *assertion* and *proof*
- arranging your review using common *divisions*
- expanding your critical *vocabulary*
- using *objective* and *subjective* statements
- improving your sentences through *expansion*

To the teacher

Writing Projects offers a radical approach to writing instruction. Drawing on the techniques of classical rhetoric, the series teaches writing through a collection of practical projects, from single-sentence proverbs to complex descriptions, stories, essays and more.

This first volume teaches the basics of stylish writing. It introduces sentences and diction; elements of narrative and theme; and critical uses of assertion, proof and argument. These important skills are taught through epigram, fable, short story and review writing.

Each project offers comprehensive, step-by-step instructions for a complete writing task, leading students from reading and analysis to composition. The chapters incorporate a range of specialised strategies, including dictation, imitations, extensions, and practice exercises.

The content of each project includes:

- models of effective writing by established authors
- discussions of use and purpose that put the writing in context
- practice exercises to teach skills of diction, sentencing and figurative style
- marking guides to assist assessment and self-assessment
- quizzes and tests to build knowledge about writers, terms and styles

The learning is entirely activity-based, with suggested answers for each task supplied at the end of the project. The individual chapters can therefore serve as fully planned lessons for the classroom, or as independent study packages.

A word about the method

Writing Projects applies the techniques of a classical training system for teaching writing. All the methods used in the projects have been derived from research into the system of *rhetoric* – a discipline first codified by scholars around 500 BC. Along with grammar and logic, rhetoric has been a cornerstone of classical education for over two thousand years. It has produced some of the greatest writers and orators in Western literature, including Shakespeare, whose plays and poems reveal the rhetorical skills he acquired as a schoolboy.

Like the training systems on which it is modelled, *Writing Projects* makes careful use of imitative writing and copying tasks. The approach may seem alien to modern teachers, who fear that imitation will stifle students' creativity. Yet copying and imitation are powerful forms of learning. Classical scholars used imitation to teach their students concentration and correctness, laying a foundation of technical skill in preparation for subsequent invention.

More so than their counterparts in earlier times, modern students may have limited exposure to formal and literary uses of language. In daily life they use the abbreviated forms associated with modern technology. Imitating the styles and techniques of accomplished writers helps students learn the patterns and rhythms of literary language through conscious attention to structure, sentence forms, word choice, and punctuation. That learning will serve them well as they go on to develop their own personal styles.

Brian Moon is a senior lecturer in the School of Education at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. He is the author of *Viewing Terms: A Practical Glossary for Film and TV Study*; *Literary Terms: A Practical Glossary*; *Studying Poetry*; *Studying Literature* and is co-author of *Writing Critical Essays: A Practical Guide*, all published by Chalkface Press.

To the student

The art of rhetoric: writing with style

Around 500BC, the Ancient Greeks developed a set of rules for successful writing and public speaking. They studied the techniques of the best writers and speakers, and discovered the most effective ways to argue a point, or stir an emotion, or paint a picture, using nothing but words and voice. Their findings became the foundation for the great art of *rhetoric* – the art of effective communication.

Many of the early Greek experts in rhetoric became famous for their skill with words. Calling themselves *sophists* (wise men), they travelled the country demonstrating their skills at public gatherings. They would speak without rehearsal on any topic the audience threw at them, and they defeated their opponents with clever arguments and flashes of style. After their demonstrations they would offer lessons to anyone prepared to pay. Because public speaking was so important in Greek society, they had no shortage of students. One of the sophists, a man named Gorgias, became so wealthy from the fees paid by his students that he had a gold statue of himself erected at a temple in his home city.

Later, around 350BC, the philosopher Aristotle expanded the principles of rhetoric and wrote them down in a single book, which he called *The Art of Rhetoric*. Aristotle frowned on the early sophists like Gorgias, who he believed were more interested in making money than seeking the truth. But he recognised and built upon their discoveries. The proper use of rhetoric, Aristotle said, was to help improve humanity by improving the quality of public discussion and communication. His book not only taught readers how to win arguments through persuasive writing and speech; it also included advice on clear expression, logical thinking, and ethics. *The Art of Rhetoric* became one of the most influential books ever written. For nearly two thousand years it served as a blueprint for training students in the skills of public speaking and writing.

For many centuries the study of rhetoric was considered essential to a good education. Anyone involved in government, the law, education, or public service, was trained in Aristotle's rules. From classical times, through the Middle Ages, and into the early modern period, the study of rhetoric flourished. Many of the greatest English writers, including Shakespeare, learned their craft from Aristotle's famous book, or from new books written especially for the schools that began to spring up in the 16th century. In our modern schools, however, the study of rhetoric has largely disappeared, and the ancient knowledge has been all but lost.

This book revives some of the ancient principles of rhetorical training. Its aim is to restore some of the lost knowledge and provide a solid foundation for the study of writing techniques and styles.

How does it work?

Nowadays we tend to think of writing as a mysterious and magical creative process, something that cannot easily be taught – but that is a new and rather odd idea. For many centuries writing was looked upon as a practical skill that could be taught and learned, just as we now teach skills like playing tennis or driving a car.

The ancient teachers of rhetoric had a straightforward system for teaching writing. There were two main methods: *reading and imitating the work of experts*, and *learning the rules and skills* for specific tasks. It was a practical system. Just as we might learn to play tennis by watching top players and copying their action, so the students of rhetoric copied the styles of successful writers. Just as we might work on our racquet skills, so the students of rhetoric worked on their word skills. After acquiring different techniques from each writer they studied, the students would soon develop styles of their own.

Like the ancient schoolbooks, this text is based on imitation, rules, and skills. Each project in the book starts with an example by a successful writer. Your task is to write an imitation of that original piece. The examples have been chosen to highlight particular designs and features of style. As you work through the different projects, you will learn the rules to follow and the skills to use in your writing. Eventually, you will develop a style of your own.

Although the method is simple to describe, you will soon discover that copying what the experts can do isn't easy. Imitation is a powerful form of learning; but it requires attention to detail, accuracy, and practice. The rules and skills need careful study, too. You wouldn't expect to excel in your favourite sport without training, and learning to write well is no different.

There are five main steps in each project. You will need to follow the steps closely and complete the activities in each one. Everything you need to complete each project is included. That includes ideas, plans and starting points for your writing. The instructions for each task are very detailed. You will never be left staring at a blank page wondering what to do. Provided you put in the effort and follow the steps, you will learn and succeed.