

OER Review: *OER Matters: A Guide to First Year Success*

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<https://www.oercommons.org/courses/rhetoric-matters-a-guide-to-success-in-the-first-year-writing-class>

Review

New students in higher education may come to their university with the expectation that they are already trained to write academically. Their instructors may also have this expectation, but that is often not the case. The authors of Rhetoric Matters have put together a comprehensive textbook for these students which encompasses the entire research and scholarship process, from reading effectively to sources and research to accurately using multiple citations styles. This textbook is published by the OER Commons, a digital public library and collaboration platform. OER Commons offers “a comprehensive infrastructure for curriculum experts and instructors at all levels to identify high-quality” open educational resources “and collaborate around their adaptation, evaluation, and use to address the needs of teachers and learners” (OER Commons, (n.d)). This book is licensed under Creative Commons as CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0, which means that anyone can copy and redistribute it in any medium or format, including remixing, transforming, and building upon the material with the same license as the original. The materials must be given appropriate credit and may not be used for commercial purposes.

First year writing instructors would benefit from assigning this book as a primary or supplementary resource for their novice students. The depth, breadth, and granularity of this source allows instructors to choose subsections to pinpoint their students’ weaknesses. Instructors in other subjects can also make use of this text for their students who need some extra help in writing for scholarship. The authors have structured the textbook into twelve helpful chapters.

Throughout the book, the authors include practice exercises, scenarios, outside readings, videos, and samples so that students can absorb the information in multiple modalities. After the introduction chapter, the authors discuss why reading is essential to the writing process and how students can read

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more effectively. Next, the authors challenge readers to think and analyze rhetorically, starting with a definition of rhetoric in context and how to perform a rhetorical analysis. The authors extend these ideas with a discussion of the three rhetorical appeals: logos, pathos, and ethos. The section on logical fallacies shows how arguments can be weak and unsound by using these appeals.

The next chapter includes instructions on writing a summary and synthesizing information. Students can use these skills when preparing a quote for paraphrasing in a citation, bringing together multiple ideas. After covering summaries, including organization, introductions, body, and conclusion, the authors branch out to synthesizing in writing (types of synthesis, and synthesis in literature reviews).

Chapter Five contains tips on the writing process. This chapter has the most sections at thirteen and includes a diagram with each step of the process clarified in text. The next section is writing for your audience, which is followed by a section about understanding the assignment. Creating the thesis comes next, with samples to draw from throughout the chapter. The two following sections help students connect their thesis with their argument and their purpose with their claims. The former includes diagrams of the writing process as well as samples of good connections, bad connections, and the different types of connections. This section also includes additional resources such as writing centers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Hamilton College, and Purdue University. Practice exercises include building a thesis from fact to implication and beyond the specific argument. The latter section includes samples of different types of arguments and additional practice exercises.

Definition and evaluation arguments and causal and proposal arguments are included in the next two sections. The benefits and strategies for shaping a definition (with sample strategies) are included in this section, too. Additionally, the authors include the steps to create an outline of an evaluation argument and exercises that allow students to practice. Causal and proposal arguments are covered in the next section and include identifying possible causes, causation versus correlation, and common elements and methods. The argumentative reasoning section discusses the weight of different reasons for arguments. The authors discuss evidence in the following two sections: “Supporting Evidence” includes types of support, context, and strong and weak support, and “Explaining Evidence” contains forms of explanation. The ways that writers fail to support their theses are examined in the next section, and the final section includes counterarguments, why and how a writer would use them, and where to find them.

Chapter Six examines the structure of a paper, from topic sentences to transitions to voice. The first section gives an overview of the basic structure of an essay, and the development of the body is examined in the next section. Creating effective topic sentences is covered next. Using paragraphs to enhance the flow within a student’s paper is subsequently examined, followed by how and why to use transitions, with examples and practice exercises. The next section examines introductions and conclusions (what to use, what to avoid, and how to make both effective). This section also contains examples, additional resources and a practice exercise. The authors then discuss tone and point of view and include a link to the Purdue OWL website for sentence variety strategies. The last two sections of Chapter Six examine the standard essay and how to move beyond it. Examples in the final section show multiple formats and techniques that a writer could use to organize their writing with non-standard organization.

Revising and refining a draft paper is covered in Chapter Seven. The first section of the chapter offers questions that the writer should ask themselves about their paper to ascertain its strengths and weaknesses. Peer review is covered after that, with questions that the reviewer may use to assess the work. Strategies for editing one's own paper are reviewed next, and this section includes multiple strategies for the writer to see their own paper in different ways. Precision and clarity in writing is examined in the following section with examples of imprecision and obscurity which can help the reader see the contrast between good and bad writing. The authors include exercises to help students practice transitioning from obscurity to clarity in their own work. The final section reviews grammar, including multiple links to extended versions of the current text.

Chapter Eight, "Multimodal Reading and Visual Rhetoric," covers non-standard types of media and how to handle them. The first section in this chapter covers both traditional and new media. Then, the authors discuss multimodal resources that can include elements such as infographics, blogs, videos, posters, images, graphs, audio, or texts and how to use them. Accessibility for these resources is also addressed. The final section, "Visual Rhetoric," or how images and symbols can communicate specific concepts, provides examples and outside links to illustrate the concept, in addition to practice exercises.

The next chapter guides the reader through the research process, starting with the research question. This section helps the reader choose a topic and translate the topic into a question by providing research strategies that help the reader create a plan to answer their research question. This section offers questions the writer can ask themselves about their topic to consider where to get the answers. Research using academic databases comes next, with tips about using databases effectively. The authors provide an overview of using effective keywords in the next section. The final section recommends ways to organize citations for a reference page.

"Sources and Research" are the topics for the next chapter. The first section examines primary, secondary, and tertiary sources, their differences and their uses. Popular sources are considered in the next section, including a definition of what makes a popular source; authority, accuracy, currency, and relevance are also considered for these sources. Academic sources are reviewed in the next two sections. What makes an academic source, and the evaluation of these sources, is explored in the first of the two sections. The second section lays out what an academic source will look like and what each section should contain. The last section gives an overview of how to conduct primary research with examples of qualitative and quantitative research.

Chapter 11 explores source integration and in-text citations. The first section discusses using sources ethically without skewing them for a student's own purpose. Quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing are reviewed in the next two sections. The first of these two sections contains when to directly quote, how to do so, and doing so smoothly. Templates for adding quotes into a paper are noted. The second of these two sections cover paraphrasing and summarizing citations and how to tell the difference between the two. Next, the use of signal phrases, to help blend quotes into a paper, is explored. Finally, plagiarism is examined, with multiple outside links for further information.

The final chapter covers MLA and APA styles, including formatting, in-text citations, and works cited for both styles. Examples, exercises, or both for each category are provided, including outside sources.

This OER is a broad, all-inclusive resource for instructors of first year writing classes though the quality of the chapters varies throughout the resource. While most of the chapters are comprehensive, some chapters indicate methods of writing without much detail or use of samples to show preferred outcomes. Several chapters contain notes for graphics that are not present. The chapters are uneven regarding the number of supplementary and practice materials, samples, and other media.

Despite the listed deficits, this OER is a comprehensive resource for instructors of first year writing classes. Instructors can select chapters or sections to bolster their students' skills during their first year of academic writing. The book provides granular information for students attempting to write academically. Each chapter section offers one element of the main subject, allowing readers to digest the full idea incrementally. This resource can be used as a supplement to any general education class for students new to college writing.

References

ISKME. (n.d.). OER about. OER Commons. <https://oercommons.org/about>



JOERHE OER Textbook Rubric¹

Title of OER material: Rhetoric matters: A guide to success in first year writing.

Author of content: Falik, A., Larue, D., Piano, D., Watts, T. & White, J.

URL to OER content:

<https://www.oercommons.org/courses/rhetoric-matters-a-guide-to-success-in-the-first-year-writing-class>

Criterion	Strong	Limited	Weak	Not Applicable
Resource meets the 5 Rs of OER.	X			
Content is useful, thoroughly explained, and easily understood.	X			
Content is appropriate for the learning level of the intended audience and suggests ways to use the material with diverse learners.		X		

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All components and elements are present and well developed (i.e., directions for course activities are included and clear).	X			
Resource includes valuable instructional exercises to assist in deeper learning, engagement, practice of knowledge, and/or mastery of skills.	X			
Resource is functional, well designed, operates as intended, and is easy to use by both instructor and student.	X			
Content is presented with no or minimal bias or slant.	X			
Content is up-to-date and appropriately current.	X			
Resource and its content comply with ADA accessibility standards.		X		
Resource reflects diversity and inclusion regarding culture, gender, ethnicity, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, education, or religion.			X	