



**BACK**

**TO THE**

**LAKE**

A READER FOR WRITERS

**THOMAS COOLEY**

I have something to say to the world,  
and I have taken English 12 in order  
to say it well.—W. E. B. Du Bois



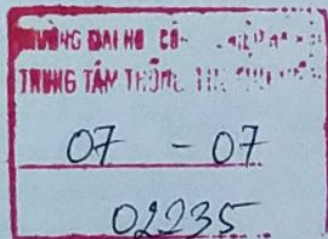
# BACK TO THE LAKE



A READER  
FOR WRITERS

Thomas  
Cooley

SECOND EDITION





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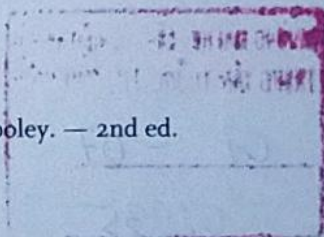
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## Preface

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I first read E. B. White's classic essay "Once More to the Lake" with awe and wonder as a freshman in a college writing course. Only years later did I realize that White worked his magic with common rhetorical techniques—narration, description, comparison, and the other modes of writing discussed in this book—that good writers use every day in all kinds of texts and contexts. Far from magic, these standard techniques could be applied to my own writing, whether to structure a paragraph or an entire essay, or, even more essentially, to generate ideas and organize my thoughts throughout the writing process.

We now take it for granted that the process of writing is one we can learn—and teach. This was not the case in White's day, however, as I discovered when, as a young assistant professor of English, I rashly fired off a letter asking him to explain how he composed "Once More to the Lake." To my astonishment, White not only responded to my letter, he said he didn't really know how he wrote anything. "The 'process,'" White confided, "is probably every bit as mysterious to me as it is to some of your students—if that will make them feel any better."

Fortunately for today's students and teachers, the scene has changed; we now know a lot more than we once did about how the writing process works and how to teach it. *Back to the Lake*—which takes its title from White's essay—applies this understanding of the process to show students how to make the basic moves that seasoned writers make, whether consciously or otherwise, in their writing.



## An Overview of the Book

As its subtitle announces, *Back to the Lake* is a reader for writers. It contains more than 85 readings, from the most classic (“Grant and Lee”) to the most current (a blog post from a veteran of the war in Iraq) to the best-selling (*The Checklist Manifesto*)—all demonstrating that the rhetorical methods taught in this book are ones that all good writers depend on. Each mode is accompanied by 6 or 7 readings, including at least one annotated student example and one story or poem.

**Chapter 1** introduces students to the principles of analytical reading, taking them through the basic steps of reading with a critical eye.

**Chapter 2** gives an overview of the writing process, preparing students to analyze assignments; come up with topics and generate ideas; draft and revise an essay with a particular audience and purpose in mind; and edit and proofread.

**Chapter 3** covers the basic moves of academic writing, helping students research a topic, synthesize ideas, respond with ideas of their own, consider counterarguments, and explain why their ideas matter.

**Chapters 4 through 12** each focus on one of the rhetorical modes as a basic method of discovery and development. Practical guidelines lead students through the process of composing a text using that mode: generating ideas, organizing and drafting, getting feedback, and revising and editing a final draft.

**Chapter 13** demonstrates how much real-world writing combines those methods.

An **appendix on using sources** offers guidance in finding, incorporating, and documenting sources MLA-style—and includes an annotated student research paper.

A **glossary / index** completes the book, providing definitions of all the key terms along with a list of the pages where they are covered in detail.

## Highlights

**An engaging, teachable collection of readings**, from classic (“I Have a Dream”) to current (“Happy Meals and Old Spice Guy”) to humorous (“All Seven Deadly Sins Committed at Church Bake Sale”)—all demonstrating the patterns taught in this book. Each chapter includes a student essay (annotated) and a poem or story.

**Everyday examples**, showing that the methods taught in this book are familiar ones—and that they are not used just in first-year writing; that a recipe, for example, relies on process analysis and that a T-shirt can make an argument.



**Templates to help students get started drafting**, providing language to help them make the moves needed to describe, compare, define, and so on.

**Practical editing tips**, to help students check for the kinds of errors that frequently occur with each of the rhetorical methods taught in this book—for instance, to check that verb tenses accurately reflect when actions occur in a narrative.

**Help for students whose primary language is not English**, with glosses for unfamiliar terms and cultural allusions, templates for getting started, and tips for dealing with predictable stumbling points, such as adjective order or the use of the present perfect.

**User friendly**, with exceptionally well written pedagogy that makes the subject matter interesting, relevant, and easy to understand. The two-color design, with all instruction printed on green pages, makes the book easy to use. A combined glossary / index provides full definitions of all key terms, along with references to pages where students can find more detail.

## What's New

**34 new readings:** Including Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's "Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History," Lynda Barry's "Sanctuary of School," Steven Pinker's "Mind Over Mass Media." Of the new readings, 20 are appearing in a composition reader for the first time.

**Navigation features that make the book easier to use than ever.** Notes in the margins explicitly link the readings with the writing instruction, leading students from the instruction to specific examples in the readings, and the reverse. A quick-reference guide inside the front cover helps students know when to use each of the rhetorical methods covered in the book, and a menu of readings inside the back cover makes specific readings easy to find.

**Expanded coverage of academic writing**, including a new chapter teaching the basic moves of academic argument; five student essays that use MLA or APA style; and an MLA-style citation for each of the readings, showing students how to cite them properly.

**A free and open student website ([wwnorton.com/write](http://wwnorton.com/write))** includes exercises on editing common errors, downloadable templates for drafting, downloadable worksheets for reading with a critical eye, biographical notes on each author in the book, and tutorials on research writing and avoiding plagiarism.



# Contents

---

Preface v

Thematic Guide to the Readings xxii

## 1 Good Writers Are Good Readers 1

Reading Closely—and Critically 1

The Reading Process 2

Reading Visual Texts 5

ANNA QUINDLEN, *How Reading Changed My Life* 7

“There are only two ways, really, to become a writer. One is to write. The other is to read.”

Reading the Essays in This Book 8

## 2 The Writing Process 12

Planning 12

Generating Ideas 16

Organizing and Drafting 22

Revising 36

*Student Example: ZOE SHEWER, Ready, Willing, and Able* 38

Editing and Proofreading 45

## 3 Putting in Your Oar: Learning the Basic Moves of Academic Writing 48

Finding Out What’s Been Said about Your Topic 49

Synthesizing Ideas 50

Presenting Your Ideas as a Response to the Ideas of Others 50

Considering Other Views 53

Saying Why Your Ideas Matter 54

Using the Methods Taught in This Book 54

*Student Example: CAROLYN STONEHILL, Modern Dating, Prehistoric Style* 55



## 4 Narration 62

Defining Narrative 63

Why Do We Write Narratives? 63

Composing a Narrative 65

*Purpose and Audience / Generating Ideas / Organizing and Drafting / Templates*

Reading a Narrative with a Critical Eye 74

Editing for Common Errors in Narrative Writing 75

*Student Example: JEFF GREMMELS, The Clinic 77*

EVERYDAY NARRATION / A Vanity License Plate 82

**LYNDA BARRY, *The Sanctuary of School* 84**

"I was with my teacher, and in a while I was going to sit at my desk, with my crayons and pencils and books and classmates all around me. . . . It was a world I absolutely relied on. Without it, I don't know where I would have gone that morning."

**ANNIE DILLARD, *An American Childhood* 90**

"If . . . the driver of the black Buick had cut off our heads, . . . I would have died happy, for nothing has required so much of me since as being chased all over Pittsburgh . . . by this sainted, skinny furious red-headed man who wished to have a word with us."

**PHIL HOLLAND, *Render Unto Larry's* 95**

"Not only had I confessed and made some amends to the flesh and blood of the man I had wronged two generations before, I had been forgiven by someone with a generous heart before I had repaid a penny."

**SAIRA SHAH, *Longing to Belong* 99**

"What? Do you support this lewd conduct? Are we living in an American movie? Since when have young people of mixed sexes been permitted to speak to each other on the telephone?"

**ANNE BERNAYS, *Warrior Day* 104**

"Someone asked Dave why his dog tag was on the tongue of his boot, under the laces. He said, 'You don't want to know.'"

**TONI MORRISON, *Strangers* 108**

"Isn't that the kind of thing we fear strangers will do? Disturb. Betray. Prove they are not like us?"

**RICHARD RUSSO, *Dog* 113**

"Her idea was to make the dog conditional. The conditions to be imposed would be numerous and severe, and I would be incapable of fulfilling them, so when I didn't get the dog it'd be my own fault. This was her logic, and the fact that she thought such a plan might work illustrates that some people should never be parents."



## 5 Description 121

Defining Description 122

Why Do We Describe? 122

Composing a Description 122

*Purpose and Audience / Generating Ideas / Organizing and Drafting / Templates*

Reading a Description with a Critical Eye 133

Editing for Common Errors in Descriptive Writing 134

*Student Example: JIM MILLER, The Natural Order in a Small Town 135*

EVERYDAY DESCRIPTION / A Nike Sneaker 140

ZAINAB SALBI, *Little House in the War Zone* 142

"The house I grew up in was nestled in a grove of eucalyptus trees at the end of a Baghdad cul-de-sac. . . . It was in this cul-de-sac, long after I went to bed, that Saddam Hussein used to park his car."

JOHN BRANCH, *Perfection in the Horseshoe Pit* 146

"Get a ringer 70 percent of the time, and you are in a shrinking class of world-class pitchers. Get one 80 percent of the time, and you are probably in the top two. Get one 90 percent of the time, and you are Alan Francis."

JUDITH ORTIZ COFER, *More Room* 152

"Though the room was dominated by the mahogany four-poster, it also contained all of Mama's symbols of power."

ZORA NEALE HURSTON, *How It Feels to Be Colored Me* 157

"I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background."

E. B. WHITE, *Once More to the Lake* 163

"I felt the same damp moss covering the worms in the bait can, and saw the dragonfly alight on the tip of my rod as it hovered a few inches from the surface of the water. It was the arrival of this fly that convinced me beyond any doubt that everything was as it always had been, that the years were a mirage and that there had been no years."

RITA DOVE, *American Smooth* 170

"We were dancing—it must have / been a foxtrot or a waltz, / something romantic but / requiring restraint"



**6 Example 173**

Defining Exemplification 173

Why Do We Cite Examples? 174

Composing an Exemplification Essay 175

*Purpose and Audience / Generating Ideas / Organizing and Drafting / Templates*

Reading an Exemplification Essay with a Critical Eye 181

Editing for Common Errors in Examples 182

*Student Example: MONICA WUNDERLICH, Technologically Challenged 182*

EVERYDAY EXAMPLE / A Car Talk T-Shirt 188

**THE ONION, *All Seven Deadly Sins Committed at Church Bake Sale* 190**

“In total, 347 individual acts of sin were committed at the bake sale, with nearly every attendee committing at least one of the seven deadly sins as outlined by Gregory the Great in the fifth century.”

**DAVID BARBOZA, *Piling on the Cookies* 194**

“Finding old-fashioned Oreo sandwich cookies on supermarket shelves is no easy task these days.”

**MICHAEL DIRDA, *Commencement Advice* 199**

“Literature offers various aesthetic pleasures, but it has also traditionally provided instruction and counsel on how to live, confront adversity, and find solace.”

**JOANNA WEISS, *Happy Meals and Old Spice Guy* 207**

“He might be the most beloved man in America, even though we know he’s trying to sell us body wash.”

**LAUREL THATCHER ULRICH, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History* 211**

“My runaway sentence now keeps company with anarchists, hedonists, would-be witches, political activists of many descriptions, and quite a few well-behaved women.”

**ADRIENNE RICH, *Ritual Acts vi* 221**

“We would like to show but to not be obvious”



## 7 Process Analysis 223

Defining Process Analysis 223

Why Do We Analyze Processes? 224

Composing a Process Analysis 224

*Purpose and Audience / Generating Ideas / Organizing and Drafting / Templates*

Reading a Process Analysis with a Critical Eye 233

Editing for Common Errors in a Process Analysis 234

*Student Example: DEBRA HOUCHINS, Nesquik and Nilla Wafers:*

*How to Make Tiramisu on a Student Budget* 235

EVERYDAY PROCESS / *How to Dance Like Fred and Ginger* 240

JOSHUA PIVEN, DAVID BORGENICHT, AND JENNIFER WORICK,

*How to Pull an All-Nighter* 242

“Do not stay up with someone you know will distract you with either idle chatter or sexual tension.”

DAVE BARRY, *I Will Survive . . . Or at Least I'll Be Delayed* 246

“But just in case you ever find yourself in a hostile situation or, God forbid, a Raiders home game, today I'm going to pass along the lessons I learned in Fright School as recorded in my notes.”

ALEX HORTON, *On Getting By: Advice for College-Bound Vets* 250

“I guarantee you've done something harder than a five-page essay.”

ROBERT CONNORS, *How in the World Do You Get a Skunk Out of a Bottle?* 256

“A glass jar. About 4 1/2 inches long, about three inches in diameter, with a pinched-in neck—a large baby-food jar, perhaps. It is jammed over the skunk's head, completely covering it past the ears.”

MICHAEL C. MUNGER, *Ten Tips on Making Writing Work for You* 261

“Nobody's first drafts are good. The difference between a successful scholar and a failure need not be better writing. It is often more editing.”

EMILY DICKINSON, *The Way I read a Letter's—this—* 267

“'Tis first—I lock the Door—”



**8 Comparison and Contrast 269**

Defining Comparison 269

Why Do We Compare? 270

Composing an Essay That Compares and Contrasts 271

*Purpose and Audience / Generating Ideas / Organizing and Drafting / Templates*

Reading a Comparison Essay with a Critical Eye 279

Editing for Common Errors in Comparisons 280

Student Example: JAMIE GULLEN, *The Danish Way of Life* 281

EVERYDAY COMPARISON / A Souvenir Coffee Mug 286

GITANGELI SAPRA, *I'm Happy with an Arranged Marriage* 288

"Such is the dance of modern-day arranged marriage, at least as I, a 24-year-old Hindu born in Britain, have experienced it."

ROGER COHEN, *The Meaning of Life* 291

"Life without death would be miserable. Its beauty is bound to its fragility. Dawn is unimaginable without the dusk."

DAVID SEDARIS, *Remembering My Childhood on the Continent of Africa* 296

"Certain events are parallel, but compared with Hugh's, my childhood was unspeakably dull. When I was seven years old, my family moved to North Carolina. When he was seven years old, Hugh's family moved to the Congo."

NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF, *Food for the Soul* 303

"Bob names all his cows, and can tell them apart in an instant. He can tell you each cow's quirks and parentage. They are family friends as well as economic assets."

BRUCE CATTON, *Grant and Lee* 307

"They were two strong men, these oddly different generals, and they represented the strengths of two conflicting currents that . . . had come into final collision."

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Sonnet 130* 313

"My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"



## 9 Classification 316

Defining Classification 316

Why Do We Classify? 317

Composing a Classification Essay 317

*Purpose and Audience / Generating Ideas / Organizing and Drafting / Templates*

Reading a Classification Essay with a Critical Eye 326

Editing for Common Errors in a Classification Essay 327

*Student Example: MICHELLE WATSON, Shades of Character 327*

EVERYDAY CLASSIFICATION / A Classic Movie Poster 334

STEPHANIE ERICSSON, *The Ways We Lie* 336

"I once tried going a whole week without telling a lie, and it was paralyzing. I discovered that telling the truth all the time is nearly impossible."

AMY TAN, *Mother Tongue* 345

"Sociologists and linguists probably will tell you that a person's developing language skills are more influenced by peers. But I do think that the language spoken in the family, especially in immigrant families, . . . plays a large role."

DAVID BROOKS, *People Like Us* 352

"Many of us live in absurdly unlikely groupings because we have organized our lives that way."

ERIN MCKEAN, *Verbed! Not Every Noun Wants to Stay That Way* 359

"Almost any word can be drafted to serve as a verb, even words we think of as eternal and unchanging, stuck in their more traditional roles."

DEBORAH TANNEN, *But What Do You Mean?* 363

"Women are often told they apologize too much. The reason they're told to stop doing it is that, to many men, apologizing seems synonymous with putting oneself down."

ANNE SEXTON, *Her Kind* 371

"A woman like that is not afraid to die. / I have been her kind."



**10 Definition 374**

Defining Definition 375

Why Do We Define? 376

Composing a Definition Essay 377

*Purpose and Audience / Generating Ideas / Organizing and Drafting / Templates*

Reading a Definition Essay with a Critical Eye 385

Editing for Common Errors in Definitions 386

*Student Example: GAIL BABILONIA, The Celebrity Chef 387*

EVERYDAY DEFINITION / An Epitaph 400

**MARY ROACH, *How to Know If You're Dead* 402**

"The modern medical community is on the whole quite unequivocal about the brain being the seat of the soul. . . . It is similarly unequivocal about the fact that people like H. are, despite the hoochy-koochy going on behind their sternum, dead."

**FATEMA MERNISSI, *The Harem Within* 410**

"A harem was about private space and the rules regulating it. In addition, Yasmina said, it did not need walls. Once you knew what was forbidden, you carried the harem within."

**JACK HORNER, *The Extraordinary Characteristics of Dyslexia* 418**

"But what most non-dyslexics don't know about us, besides the fact that we simply process information differently, is that our early failures often give us an important edge as we grow older."

**BOBBIE ANN MASON, *Being Country* 422**

"I can still see Mama emerging from that restaurant kitchen, carrying two hamburger platters and gabbing with her customers as if they were old friends who had dropped in to visit and sit a spell. In the glass of the picture window, reflections from the TV set flicker like candles at the church Christmas service."

**GEOFFREY NUNBERG, *The War of Words* 432**

"Broad linguistic shifts such as these usually owe less to conscious decisions by editors or speechwriters than to often-unnoticed changes in the way people perceive their world."

**FLANNERY O'CONNOR, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* 436**

"The grandmother shrieked. She scrambled to her feet and stood staring. 'You're The Misfit!' she said. 'I recognized you at once!'"



## 11 Cause and Effect 451

Defining Cause and Effect 451

Why Do We Analyze Causes and Effects? 452

Composing a Cause-and-Effect Analysis 452

*Purpose and Audience / Generating Ideas / Organizing and Drafting / Templates*

Reading a Cause-and-Effect Analysis with a Critical Eye 463

Editing for Common Errors in a Cause-and-Effect Analysis 464

*Student Example: PAULA T. KELSO, Behind the Curtain 465*

EVERYDAY CAUSE AND EFFECT / A Rube Goldberg Pencil Sharpener 482

HENRY LOUIS GATES JR., *The Way to Reduce Black Poverty in America* 484

“Yet it isn’t a derogation of the black vernacular—a marvellously rich and inventive tongue—to point out that there’s a language of the marketplace, too, and learning to speak that language has generally been a precondition for economic success, whoever you are.”

HENRY L. ROEDIGER III, *Why Are Textbooks So Expensive?* 488

“Let us go back in time to what educational historians refer to as the later Paleolithic era in higher education, that is, the late 1960s, when I was in college. Here was how the used book market worked then.”

DAN BARRY, *Cancer’s Oddest Effect* 495

“I had a pre-existing case of foggiest that lifted during and immediately after my chemotherapy regimen: I suddenly experienced acute clarity. Then, as the effects and memory of chemotherapy faded, my confusion returned. Twice.”

HAL R. VARIAN, *Analyzing the Marriage Gap* 500

“Married men make more money than single men. . . . The question is why.”

SHIRLEY JACKSON, *The Lottery* 504

“Mr. Graves opened the slip of paper and there was a general sigh through the crowd as he held it up and everyone could see it was blank.”



**12 Argument 513**

Defining Argument 514

Why Do We Argue? 514

Composing an Argument 514

*Purpose and Audience / Generating Ideas / Organizing and Drafting / Templates*

Reading an Argument with a Critical Eye 529

Editing for Common Errors in Arguments 530

*Student Example: MATTHEW DOUGLAS, *The Evil Empire?* 532*EVERYDAY ARGUMENT / *Life Is Good* 540THOMAS JEFFERSON, *The Declaration of Independence* 542

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

CHIEF SEATTLE, *Reply to the U.S. Government* 547

“Let him be just and deal kindly with my people, for the dead are not powerless. Dead, did I say? There is no death, only a change of worlds.”

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., *I Have a Dream* 553

“I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

BARACK OBAMA, *A More Perfect Union* 560

“Working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and . . . in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union.”

SOJOURNER TRUTH, *Ain't I a Woman?* 574

“If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again!”

MICHAEL LEWIS, *Buy That Little Girl an Ice Cream Cone* 578

“I should be sweeping her out of the pool and washing her mouth out with soap. . . . Actually, I'm impressed. More than impressed: awed. It's just incredibly heroic, taking out after this rat pack of boys.”

DEBATING THE DRINKING AGE 583

RUTH C. ENGS, *Why the Drinking Age Should Be Lowered* 584

“Because the . . . drinking-age law is not working . . . it behooves us . . . to teach responsible drinking techniques for those who choose to consume alcoholic beverages.”

JACK HITT, *The Battle of the Binge* 587

“Alcohol consumption . . . is a socialized phenomenon, which if not taught, yields up a kind of wild child.”



ROBERT VOAS, *There's No Benefit to Lowering the Drinking Age* 591

"It's startling that anybody . . . would consider lowering the drinking age."

DEBATING DRUGS IN SPORTS 595

MARK SISSON, *Should We Allow Drugs in Sports?* 596

"Professional sport has become theater. All the public wants is a good show and an occasional world record."

JOE LINDSEY, *Why Legalizing Sports Doping Won't Work* 602

"We look to sports . . . for an inspiration that mere entertainment cannot provide—there is an implicit contract that the sweat and effort we see before us is real and natural."

WILLIAM MOLLER, *We, the Public, Place the Best Athletes on Pedestals* 607

"What it really comes down to is that the reason [A-Rod] did steroids is you and me."

DEBATING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY 614

SARAH WILENSKY, *Generation Plagiarism* 615

"It's tempting to say new technology has created a blurry zone. . . . But . . . stealing the words and ideas of others is wrong and cannot be permitted."

TRIP GABRIEL, *Plagiarism Lines Blur for Students in Digital Age* 618

"The Internet may . . . be redefining how students—who came of age with music file-sharing, Wikipedia and Web-linking—understand the concept of authorship."

ELLEN GOODMAN, *Who Owns Dr. King's Words?* 623

"At first it sounds like a question for a panel of philosophers: Who owns a dream?"

LAWRENCE LESSIG, *Free Culture* 627

"Free cultures . . . leave a great deal open for others to build upon; unfree, or permission cultures leave much less. Ours was a free culture. It is becoming much less so."

DEBATING THE EFFECTS OF DIGITAL CULTURE 634

AMY GOLDWASSER, *What's the Matter with Kids Today?* 635

"We've made the Internet one more thing unknowable about the American teenager, when, really, it's one of the few revelations."

STEPHEN PINKER, *Mind Over Mass Media* 640

"The solution is not to bemoan technology but to develop strategies of self-control, as we do with every other temptation in life."

PEGGY ORENSTEIN, *I Tweet, Therefore I Am* 644

"How much . . . was I shaping my Twitter feed, and how much was Twitter shaping me?"



**13 Combining the Methods 649****MICHAEL LEWIS, *Liar's Poker* 653**

"The code of the Liar's Poker player was something like the code of the gunslinger. It required a trader to accept all challenges."

**EVERYDAY WRITING / A Book Cover 658****MELISSA HICKS, *The High Price of Butter* 660**

"To me, the cost of butter is more than a price tag. The cost of butter reminds me of my childhood, and how my family struggled to be pioneers in the twentieth century."

**ERIC SCHLOSSER, *What We Eat* 667**

"Fast food has proven to be a revolutionary force in American life; I am interested in it both as a commodity and as a metaphor."

**MALCOLM GLADWELL, *The Tipping Point* 675**

"The rise of Hush Puppies and the fall of New York's crime rate are textbook examples of epidemics in action. Although they may sound as if they don't have very much in common, they share a basic, underlying pattern."

**ATUL GAWANDE, *The Checklist Manifesto* 682**

"Medicine . . . poses a significant challenge: What do you do when expertise is not enough? . . . We've begun to see an answer, but it has come from an unexpected source—one that has nothing to do with medicine at all."

**BILLY COLLINS, *Fishing on the Susquehanna in July* 696**

"I have never been fishing on the Susquehanna / or on any river for that matter / to be perfectly honest."

**Appendix: Using Sources in Your Writing 699**

Finding and Evaluating Sources 699

Incorporating Source Materials into Your Text 704

Acknowledging Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism 707

Documentation 708

MLA In-Text Documentation 709

MLA List of Works Cited 713

*Sample Student Research Paper: DYLAN BORCHERS, *Against the Odds* 724*

Credits 734

Glossary / Index 741