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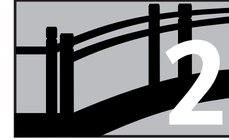
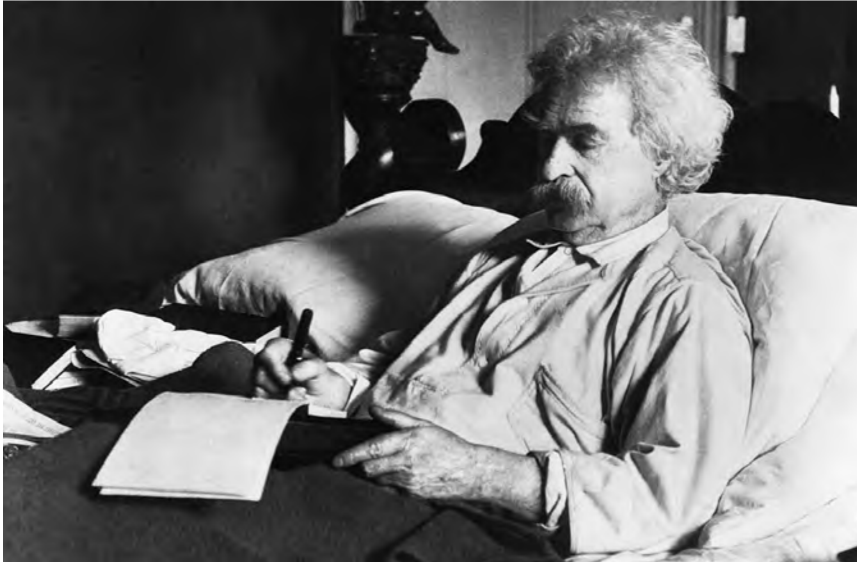
Getting Started





To expect some people to learn to write by showing them a published essay or book is like expecting novice bakers to learn to make a wedding cake from looking at the completed confection, resplendent with icing and decorations. Indeed, the completed product in each case offers a model of what the finished work of art should look like—in concept, organization, shape, and style. Careful examination of the text exposes the intricacies of the finished sentences, paragraphs, logic, illustrative examples, and nuances of style. The text likewise provides cues about the context (intellectual, political, aesthetic . . .) in which it originated, its purpose, and its intended audience. But no matter how hard you look, it's almost impossible to detect in a completed, professionally polished work much about the process by which it was composed—the numerous visions and revisions of ideas and expression; the effort, frustration, even exhilaration; whether the author was composing in bed (see the photo of Mark Twain above), at a desk, or at a computer terminal (see the photos on pages 1 and 56). Blood, sweat, and tears don't belong on the printed page any more than they belong in the gymnast's flawless public performance on the balance beam. The audience doesn't want to agonize over the production but to enjoy the result.

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Becoming a Writer

For better and for worse, computers and other manifestations of electronic technology influence the ways we think, read, and write. (For more extensive analyses of their effects, see the essays by Deborah Tannen [391–95] and Sherry Turkle [397–402].) Growing up surrounded by sounds—from iPods, computers, and cell phones—may provide an electronic wall between the listener and the rest of the world, including other sounds natural and human. Confronting electronic screens—of computers, television, even automobile GPS day in and night out—imposes other people's configurations of reality on one's own view of the world, just as an orientation to books and newspapers did for earlier generations. Through the media and reading, we see the world through others' eyes; and the broader and more diverse these sources of vision, the more points of view the thoughtful person has available to ponder, accept, reject, ignore, or file away for future reference.

For college students, writing provides innumerable opportunities for both processing what you've already been exposed to and escaping from it. You can help yourself focus if you shut out the distractions—other people's words arriving by screen, headphones, or live conversation or music, and colors and images moving in and through your peripheral vision.

As you start to work, urges Stephen King in "A door . . . you are willing to shut" (35–37), find a private writing space, keeping people and other distractions out and yourself in. "The closed door is your way of telling the world and yourself that you mean business; you have made a serious commitment to write. . . ." King suggests you settle on a "daily writing goal" and get to work.

For many people, the most difficult part of writing is getting started. It's hard to begin if you don't know what to write about. In "Polaroids" (39–40) Anne Lamott illustrates a good way to find a subject, analogous to "watching a Polaroid develop. You can't," she says, "know exactly what the picture is going to look like until it has finished developing." Indeed, you're "not supposed to know" at the outset what you'll find when you begin to focus; the picture emerges as you immerse yourself in the subject and begin to identify themes, individuals, revealing details. And gradually the overall shape and structure appear. Aha!

Making "A List of Nothing in Particular" (42–45), as William Least Heat-Moon did when he drove his van through the "barren waste" of west Texas on a circuit of the country, can enable one to extract some meaning, some significance even out of a territory where "'there's nothing out there.'" Least Heat-Moon's list has an eclectic span, seemingly random until it snaps into focus, ranging from "mockingbird" to "jackrabbit (chewed on cactus)" to "wind (always)." Talking with others, making an "idea tree," brainstorming, reading, thinking—even dreaming or daydreaming—all of these can provide you with something to write about, if you remain receptive to the possibilities.

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You may end up writing a piece—preferably short—composed entirely of lists. Even if you simply go somewhere and take notes on what you see, once you've organized them into categories that make logical or artistic sense, you've got the start—if not the finish—of a paper.

Writers' Notebooks

Keeping a writer's diary or notebook, whether you do it with pencil, pen, word processor, or even cell phone, can be a good way to get started—and even to keep going. Writing regularly—and better yet, at a regular time of the day or week—in a notebook or its electronic equivalent, can give you a lot to think about while you're writing, and a lot to expand on later. You could keep an account of what you do every day (6:30–7:30, swimming laps, shower; 7:30–8:15, breakfast—toasted English muffin, orange juice, raspberry yogurt . . .), but if your life is routine, that might get monotonous.

The notebook entries included in this section were written in a variety of circumstances. "Selections from Student Writers' Notebooks" (47–54) met not only course requirements, but were also obviously outlets for many types of expressions and explorations, ranging from the meaning of education, race, and sexuality to the importance of family, music, an ordered environment, and writing.

A provocative and potentially useful writer's notebook might contain any or all of the following types of writing, and more:

- Reactions to one's reading: "I should pick up *Mansfield Park* again. Reading Austen or anyone that good reminds me of what I could be saying, and of the work that has to be put into it" (Loftus 47).
- Provocative quotations—invented, read, or overheard; appealing figures of speech; dialogue, dialect: "I hate the word *gay.* . . . I am happier with the less polite *queer*" (Rodriguez 310).
- Lists—including sights, sounds, scents: "On one wall [of the living room] was a dart board with no darts and the wall behind pocked with holes. The lining had been torn from the bottom of a yellow Chippendale sofa and stuffing poked through. . . . (K. King 51).
- Memorable details—of clothing, animals, objects, settings, phenomena, processes: "The camp seems loudest at night. A huge, dulled murmur flows up from the valleys with hacking, rattling coughs, unending moaning like mantras, mules braying, wails, and shrieks like a child stepped on a nail. Clank tap-tapping, metal pots clanking and wood chopping sounds but no sounds of laughter" (Ryan 54).
- Personal aspirations, fears, joy, anger: "My apartment is stark. I'm stark. . . . I want my masculine, minimal, logical, problem-solving self to dominate. I want that hard, durable exterior that is not unlike a wall. A cool marble wall that endures" (Yoritomo 50).

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- Sketches of people, either intrinsically interesting or engaged in intriguing activities, whether novel or familiar: "A tall African American man with no front teeth . . . handed me a Polaroid someone had taken of him and his friends. . . . His two friends in the picture had Down's syndrome. . . . He pointed to his own image. 'That,' he said, 'is one cool man'" (Lamott 40).
- Analyses of friendships, family relationships: "My parents are getting divorced. . . . We did not put up a [Christmas] tree. . . . This year mom said we could eat when we wanted. But we never did. I ate a beans n franks dinner [by myself] later. My brother went to drink his gift certificate" (Weast 51).
- Commentary on notable events, current or past, national or more immediate: "In California thongs are still Nipper Flippers or Jap Slaps. . . . December seventh is the Ides of March. I'm asked how I can see, is my field of vision narrowed?" (Watanabe 53).
- Possibilities for adventure, exploration, conflict: "Today in class Dudley said he's 'tired of racial issues in class.' Well—if he's tired of them, how does he think I feel? For years I have been the only Black (or at most one of two or three) in class and I have had to deal with white negativism towards Blacks" (Coles 52).
- Jokes, anecdotes, and humorous situations, characters, comic mannerisms, punch lines, provocative settings: "two circling buzzards (not yet, boys)" (Least Heat-Moon 43).

You'll need to put enough explanatory details in your notebook to remind yourself three weeks—or three years—later what something meant when you wrote it down, as the notebook keepers here have done. As all of these notebook entries reveal, those of the student writers in particular, in a writer's notebook you can be most candid, most off guard, for there you're writing primarily for yourself. You're also writing for yourself when you're freewriting—writing rapidly, with or without a particular subject, without editing, while you're in the process of generating ideas. As you freewrite you can free-associate, thinking of connections among like and unlike things or ideas, exploring their implications. Anything goes into the notebook, but not everything stays in later drafts if you decide to turn some of your most focused discussion into an essay. If you get into the habit of writing regularly on paper, you may find that you're also hearing the "voices in your head" that professional writers often experience. As humorist James Thurber explained to an interviewer, "I never quite know when I'm not writing. Sometimes my wife comes up to me at a party and says, 'Dammit, Thurber, stop writing.' Or my daughter will look up from the dinner table and ask, 'Is he sick?' 'No,' my wife says, 'he's writing something.'"

Playing around with words and ideas in a notebook or in your head can also lead to an entire essay: a narrative, character sketch, reminiscence, discussion of how to do it, an argument, review, or some other form

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suitable for an extended piece of writing. After several drafts (76–82), Mary Ruffin's evocative portrait of her mother, who died when Mary was thirteen, emerged from fragments in her writer's notebook to become the polished "Mama's Smoke" (82–84), sophisticated in concept and techniques.

No matter what you write about, rereading a notebook entry or a freewriting can provide some material to start with. Ask yourself, "What do I want to write about?" "What makes me particularly happy—or angry?" Don't write about something that seems bland, like a cookie without sugar. If it doesn't appeal to you, it won't attract your readers either. As you write you will almost automatically be using description, narration, comparison and contrast, and other rhetorical techniques to express yourself, even if you don't attach labels to them. Enjoy.

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STEPHEN KING

"People want to be scared," says Stephen King (a.k.a. Richard Bachman and John Swithen), but "beneath its fangs and fright wig," horror fiction is quite conservative, for readers understand that "the evildoers will almost certainly be punished." He was born in Portland, Maine, in 1947, and after working as a janitor, mill hand, and laundry laborer, he graduated from the University of Maine (BA, 1970) and taught high school English briefly while writing his enormously popular first novel, *Carrie* (1974). This inaugurated a career-long series of bestsellers, from *The Shining* (1977) to *From a Buick 8* (2002), as well as short stories, film, and video scripts characterized by a mix of horror, fantasy, science fiction, and humor. In June 1999 he was hit by a car while taking his habitual walk along a Maine highway. During his long recuperation from serious injuries he wrote *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (2000), in which "A door . . . you are willing to shut" appears.

"Once I start to work on a project," explains King, "I don't stop and I don't slow down. . . . I write every day, workaholic dweeb or not. That includes Christmas, the Fourth [of July], and my birthday." Not working, he says, "is the real work. When I'm writing, it's all the playground, and the worst three hours I ever spent there were still pretty damn good." The work starts, he says, by finding "a door . . . you are willing to shut," avoiding distractions such as telephones and video games. "Put your desk in the corner, and every time you sit down there to write, remind yourself of why it isn't in the middle of the room. Life isn't a support-system for art. It's the other way around."

"A door . . . you are willing to shut"

1 You can read anywhere, almost, but when it comes to writing, library carrels, park benches, and rented flats should be courts of last resort—Truman Capote said he did his best work in motel rooms, but he is an exception; most of us do our best in a place of our own. Until you get one, you'll find your new resolution to write a lot hard to take seriously.

2 Your writing room doesn't have to sport a Playboy Philosophy decor, and you don't need an Early American rolltop desk in which to house your writing implements. I wrote my first two published novels, *Carrie* and *'Salem's Lot*, in the laundry room of a doublewide trailer, pounding away on my wife's portable Olivetti typewriter and balancing a child's desk on my thighs; John Cheever reputedly wrote in the basement of his Park Avenue apartment building, near the furnace. The space can be humble (probably *should* be, as I think I have already suggested), and it really needs only one thing: a door which you are willing to shut. The closed door is

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your way of telling the world and yourself that you mean business; you have made a serious commitment to write and intend to walk the walk as well as talk the talk.

3 By the time you step into your new writing space and close the door, you should have settled on a daily writing goal. As with physical exercise, it would be best to set this goal low at first, to avoid discouragement. I suggest a thousand words a day, and because I'm feeling magnanimous, I'll also suggest that you can take one day a week off, at least to begin with. No more; you'll lose the urgency and immediacy of your story if you do. With that goal set, resolve to yourself that the door stays closed until that goal is met. Get busy putting those thousand words on paper or on a floppy disk. In an early interview (this was to promote *Carrie,* I think), a radio talk-show host asked me how I wrote. My reply—"One word at a time"—seemingly left him without a reply. I think he was trying to decide whether or not I was joking. I wasn't. In the end, it's always that simple. Whether it's a vignette of a single page or an epic trilogy like *The Lord of the Rings,* the work is always accomplished one word at a time. The door closes the rest of the world out; it also serves to close you in and keep you focused on the job at hand.

4 If possible, there should be no telephone in your writing room, certainly no TV or videogames for you to fool around with. If there's a window, draw the curtains or pull down the shades unless it looks out at a blank wall. For any writer, but for the beginning writer in particular, it's wise to eliminate every possible distraction. If you continue to write, you will begin to filter out these distractions naturally, but at the start it's best to try and take care of them before you write. I work to loud music—hard-rock stuff like AC/DC, Guns 'n Roses, and Metallica have always been particular favorites—but for me the music is just another way of shutting the door. It surrounds me, keeps the mundane world out. When you write, you want to get rid of the world, do you not? Of course you do. When you're writing, you're creating your own worlds.

5 I think we're actually talking about creative sleep. Like your bedroom, your writing room should be private, a place where you go to dream. Your schedule—in at about the same time every day, out when your thousand words are on paper or disk—exists in order to habituate yourself, to make yourself ready to dream just as you make yourself ready to sleep by going to bed at roughly the same time each night and following the same ritual as you go. In both writing and sleeping, we learn to be physically still at the same time we are encouraging our minds to unlock from the humdrum rational thinking of our daytime lives. And as your mind and body grow accustomed to a certain amount of sleep each night—six hours, seven, maybe the recommended eight—so can you train your waking mind to sleep creatively and work out the vividly imagined waking dreams which are successful works of fiction.

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6 But you need the room, you need the door, and you need the determination to shut the door. You need a concrete goal, as well. The longer you keep to these basics, the easier the act of writing will become. Don't wait for the muse. As I've said, he's a hardheaded guy who's not susceptible to a lot of creative fluttering. This isn't the Ouija board or the spirit-world we're talking about here, but just another job like laying pipe or driving long-haul trucks. Your job is to make sure the muse knows where you're going to be every day from nine 'til noon or seven 'til three. If he does know, I assure you that sooner or later he'll start showing up, chomping his cigar and making his magic.

Content

1. Why are "the basics" King identifies—"the room," "the door," "the determination to shut the door," and "a concrete goal"—so important for writing? In your own experience, is each of equal importance? Do you share King's preference for writing with the shades drawn to "loud music—hard-rock stuff"? What is your ideal writing environment? How can you or do you control it?
2. If you've read any of King's fiction or seen his movies, how does this knowledge affect your receptiveness to his advice on writing? Does King's advice pertain to other types of writing in addition to the mixture of horror, fantasy, sci-fi, and humor that characterizes most of his work?

Strategies/Structures/Language

3. Advice givers often preach. And readers often resent being preached at. King delivers his advice very emphatically. Is he preaching? If he doesn't offend you, will you take his advice?
4. King alludes to the muse of creativity—traditionally considered a beautiful woman playing alluring music—as a male, "chomping his cigar and making his magic" (¶ 6). Why does King choose such a macho muse instead of a more traditional figure? How does this muse relate to King's writing—his subjects and his style?
5. "A door which you are willing to shut" (¶ 2) works on both the literal and metaphorical levels. Explain why this is a good way to get double mileage out of your language.

For Writing

6. Take King's advice and find a private writing space to which you can retreat daily. Make it your own by adapting the furniture and decoration (if possible), the temperature, ventilation, view (or no view), and sound (music? If so, what kind?) to your liking. Write one page (around 250 words) a day for a full week. As the week goes on, try changing some of the features in your environment (write at different times of the day or night, let people or pets in or keep them out, turn off the

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music or TV), stop answering the telephone, and see what effect each of these changes has on the quantity and quality of your writing.

7. Write an essay that advises beginners about "the basics" of some activity that you love and know how to do well. What do they have to know first? What builds next on that? Then what? What is the desired result? Where can they go astray? Try presenting this information in a step-by-step fashion, and then write at least one step as a narrative (King's method) to see which works better. Have a novice try out your directions to see whether they are clear and produce the intended outcome. If not, ask your reader to help you figure out what needs to be added. More information? A diagram? Bulleted steps? Then, revise your directions and try again.

For comprehension, writing, and research activities and resources, please visit the companion website at <college.hmco.com/english>.

ANNE LAMOTT

Lamott, born in San Francisco in 1954, dropped out of Goucher College after two years to return to Marin County, California and write fiction. Although she published four novels in the 1980s, *Hard Laughter, Rosie, Joe Jones,* and *All New People,* her nonfiction has drawn the most attention—and affection—for its author. *Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year* (1993) is an ironically witty account of her first months as a single parent at age thirty-six, including sleep deprivation, financial anxieties, speculations on what she will tell Sam when he asks about his absent father, and her appreciation of the friends and relatives who constitute *family. Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith* was published in 2005.

But the book from which serious writers take comfort, as well as good advice, is *Bird by Bird: Instructions on Writing and Life* (1994), of which "Polaroids" is an early chapter. Her explanation of the book's title serves also as an explanation of the metaphorical connection between the process of pictures emerging in Polaroid photographs and the way controlling ideas gradually emerge from a writer's experience and come into focus with slow precision. She says,

> Thirty years ago my older brother, who was ten years old at the time, was trying to get a report on birds written that he'd had three months to write. [It] was due the next day. We were out at our family cabin in Bolinas, and he was at the kitchen table close to tears, surrounded by binder paper and pencils and unopened books on birds, immobilized by the hugeness of the task ahead. Then my father sat down beside him, put his arm around my brother's shoulder, and said, "Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird."

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Polaroids

Writing a first draft is very much like watching a Polaroid develop. You can't—and, in fact, you're not supposed to—know exactly what the picture is going to look like until it has finished developing. First you just point at what has your attention and take the picture. In the last chapter, for instance, what had my attention were the contents of my lunch bag. But as the picture developed, I found I had a really clear image of the boy against the fence. Or maybe *your* Polaroid was supposed to be a picture of that boy against the fence, and you didn't notice until the last minute that a family was standing a few feet away from him. Now, maybe it's his family, or the family of one of the kids in his class, but at any rate these people are going to be in the photograph, too. Then the film emerges from the camera with a grayish green murkiness that gradually becomes clearer and clearer, and finally you see the husband and wife holding their baby with two children standing beside them. And at first it all seems very sweet, but then the shadows begin to appear, and then you start to see the animal tragedy, the baboons baring their teeth. And then you see a flash of bright red flowers in the bottom left quadrant that you didn't even know were in the picture when you took it, and these flowers evoke a time or a memory that moves you mysteriously. And finally, as the portrait comes into focus, you begin to notice all the props surrounding these people, and you begin to understand how props define us and comfort us, and show us what we value and what we need, and who we think we are. 1

You couldn't have had any way of knowing what this piece of work would look like when you first started. You just knew that there was something about these people that compelled you, and you stayed with that something long enough for it to show you what it was about. 2

Watch this Polaroid develop: 3

Six or seven years ago I was asked to write an article on the Special Olympics. I had been going to the local event for years, partly because a couple of friends of mine compete. Also, I love sports, and I love to watch athletes, special or otherwise. So I showed up this time with a great deal of interest but no real sense of what the finished article might look like. 4

Things tend to go very, very slowly at the Special Olympics. It is not like trying to cover the Preakness. Still, it has its own exhilaration, and I cheered and took notes all morning. 5

The last track-and-field event before lunch was a twenty-five-yard race run by some unusually handicapped runners and walkers, many of whom seemed completely confused. They lumped and careened along, one man making a snail-slow break for the stands, one heading out toward the steps where the winners receive their medals; both of them were shepherded back. The race took just about forever. And here it was nearly noon and we were all so hungry. Finally, though, everyone crossed over the line, 6

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and those of us in the stands got up to go—when we noticed that way down the track, four or five yards from the starting line, was another runner.

7 She was a girl of about sixteen with a normal-looking face above a wracked and emaciated body. She was on metal crutches, and she was just plugging along, one tiny step after another, moving one crutch forward two or three inches, then moving a leg, then moving the other crutch two or three inches, then moving the other leg. It was just excruciating. Plus, I was starving to death. Inside I was going, Come on, come on, come on, swabbing at my forehead with anxiety, while she kept taking these two- or three-inch steps forward. What felt like four hours later, she crossed the finish line, and you could see that she was absolutely stoked, in a shy, girlish way.

8 A tall African American man with no front teeth fell into step with me as I left the bleachers to go look for some lunch. He tugged on the sleeve of my sweater, and I looked up at him, and he handed me a Polaroid someone had taken of him and his friends that day. “Look at us,” he said. His speech was difficult to understand, thick and slow as a warped record. His two friends in the picture had Down’s syndrome. All three of them looked extremely pleased with themselves. I admired the picture and then handed it back to him. He stopped, so I stopped, too. He pointed to his own image. “That,” he said, “is one cool man.”

9 And this was the image from which an article began forming, although I could not have told you exactly what the piece would end up being about. I just knew that something had started to emerge.

10 After lunch I wandered over to the auditorium, where it turned out a men’s basketball game was in progress. The African American man with no front teeth was the star of the game. You could tell that he was because even though no one had made a basket yet, his teammates almost always passed him the ball. Even the people on the *other* team passed him the ball a lot. In lieu of any scoring, the men stampeded in slow motion up and down the court, dribbling the ball thunderously. I had never heard such a loud game. It was all sort of crazily beautiful. I imagined describing the game for my article and then for my students: the loudness, the joy. I kept replaying the scene of the girl on crutches making her way up the track to the finish line—and all of a sudden my article began to appear out of the grayish green murk. And I could see that it was about tragedy transformed over the years into joy. It was about the beauty of sheer effort. I could see it almost as clearly as I could the photograph of that one cool man and his two friends.

11 The auditorium bleachers were packed. Then a few minutes later, still with no score on the board, the tall black man dribbled slowly from one end of the court to the other, and heaved the ball up into the air, and it dropped into the basket. The crowd roared, and all the men on both teams looked up wide-eyed at the hoop, as if it had just burst into flames.

12 You would have loved it, I tell my students. You would have felt like you could write all day.

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Content

1. In what ways is participating in the Special Olympics like finding one's way into writing about a particular topic? Is it possible to be both a spectator (appreciating what's going on, including the out-of-control parts, but sometimes getting frustrated by the slow pace [¶s 5–7]) and a participant concurrently?
2. What is Lamott's attitude toward the participants in the Special Olympics? How does she convey this? What clues does she give to indicate that she expects her readers to share her point of view? Would the families of Special Olympics participants have a similar point of view? Would the participants themselves?
3. In this essay about "the beauty of sheer effort" (¶ 10), intended as advice for beginning writers, why doesn't Lamott spend more time actually talking about writing?

Strategies/Structures/Language

4. Why does Lamott use the relation of the gradual development of a Polaroid picture (¶s 1–3) as a metaphor for the process of writing? How does this relate to the actual Polaroid photograph (¶ 8) that appears in the essay? Why is the first paragraph so much longer than those that immediately follow it?
5. Only paragraph 10 is of comparable length to the opening paragraph. Why is it located where it is? In it, Lamott uses two scenes, an enactment of a basketball game in action and her replay of "the scene of the girl on crutches making her way . . . to the finish line." How do these scenes contribute to the author's "Aha!" moment, her sudden insight as the meaning of the essay snaps into place?
6. Lamott's technique is to present a collage of many snapshots to illustrate her point. Identify some of these snapshots and explain how they reinforce her concept of "Polaroids."
7. Identify some of the ways in which Lamott conveys the slow pace of the Special Olympics and indicates her changing attitude toward this pace.

For Writing

8. Use an extended metaphor coupled with a series of illustrations to explain to newcomers how to perform a process (see the Magliozzis' "Inside the Engine" [142–46] for examples).
9. In many areas of academic research today, ethical questions are raised about who has the right to speak for whom. In "Polaroids," as in many other essays in this book (see those by Kozol [204–11] and Coontz [213–16]), the author speaks on behalf of people who can't always speak articulately for themselves. With other classmates, compose a set of guidelines for a writer's ethical behavior in representing such people, and include your rationale for these guidelines.

For comprehension, writing, and research activities and resources, please visit the companion website at <college.hmco.com/english>.

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WILLIAM LEAST HEAT-MOON

William Least Heat-Moon, as William Trogdon renamed himself to acknowledge his Osage Indian ancestry, was born in 1939 in Kansas City, Missouri. He earned four degrees from the University of Missouri–Columbia, including a BA in photojournalism (1978) and a PhD in literature (1973). His books include *PrairyErth* (1991) and *River-Horse* (1992). On one cold day in February 1979, "a day of canceled expectations," Least Heat-Moon lost both his wife ("the Cherokee") and his part-time job teaching English at a Missouri college.

True to the American tradition, to escape he took to the road, the "blue highways"—back roads on the old road maps—in the van that would be home as he circled the United States clockwise "in search of places where change did not mean ruin and where time and men and deeds connected." His account of his trip, *Blue Highways* (1982), is an intimate exploration of America's small towns, "Remote, Oregon; Simplicity, Virginia; New Freedom, Pennsylvania; New Hope, Tennessee; Why, Arizona; Whynot, Mississippi; Igo, California (just down the road from Ono). . . ." Though he tried to lose himself as a stranger in a strange land, as he came to know and appreciate the country through its back roads and small towns, Least Heat-Moon came inevitably to know and come to terms with himself. "The mere listing of details meaningless in themselves, at once provides them with significance which one denies in vain," says novelist Steven Millhauser. "The beauty of irrelevance fades away, accident darkens into design." Consequently, traveling—moving along a linear route—lends itself to list making, a good way to impose design on happenstance, to remember where you're going, where you've been, whom you've met, what you've seen or done.

A List of Nothing in Particular

1 Straight as a chief's countenance, the road lay ahead, curves so long and gradual as to be imperceptible except on the map. For nearly a hundred miles due west of Eldorado, not a single town. It was the Texas some people see as barren waste when they cross it, the part they later describe at the motel bar as "nothing." They say, "There's nothing out there."

2 Driving through the miles of nothing, I decided to test the hypothesis and stopped somewhere in western Crockett County on the top of a broad mesa, just off Texas 29. At a distance, the land looked so rocky and dry, a religious man could believe that the First Hand never got around to the creation in here. Still, somebody had decided to string barbed wire around it.

3 No plant grew higher than my head. For a while, I heard only miles of wind against the Ghost; but after the ringing in my ears stopped, I heard

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myself breathing, then a bird note, an answering call, another kind of birdsong, and another: mockingbird, mourning dove, an enigma. I heard the high zizz of flies the color of gray flannel and the deep buzz of a blue bumblebee. I made a list of nothing in particular:

1. mockingbird
2. mourning dove
3. enigma bird (heard not saw)
4. gray flies
5. blue bumblebee
6. two circling buzzards (not yet, boys)
7. orange ants
8. black ants
9. orange-black ants (what's been going on?)
10. three species of spiders
11. opossum skull
12. jackrabbit (chewed on cactus)
13. deer (left scat)
14. coyote (left tracks)
15. small rodent (den full of seed hulls under rock)
16. snake (skin hooked on cactus spine)
17. prickly pear cactus (yellow blossoms)
18. hedgehog cactus (orange blossoms)
19. barrel cactus (red blossoms)
20. devil's pincushion (no blossoms)
21. catclaw (no better name)
22. two species of grass (neither green, both alive)
23. yellow flowers (blossoms smaller than peppercorns)
24. sage (indicates alkali-free soil)
25. mesquite (three-foot plants with eighty-foot roots to reach water that fell as rain two thousand years ago)
26. greasewood (oh, yes)
27. joint fir (steeped stems make Brigham Young tea)
28. earth
29. sky
30. wind (always)

That was all the nothing I could identify then, but had I waited until dark when the desert really comes to life, I could have done better. To say nothing is out here is incorrect; to say the desert is stingy with everything except space and light, stone and earth is closer to the truth.

4 I drove on. The low sun turned the mesa rimrock to silhouettes, angular and weird and unearthly; had someone said the far side of Saturn looked just like this, I would have believed him. The road dropped to the Pecos River, now dammed to such docility I couldn't imagine it formerly

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demarking the western edge of a rudimentary white civilization. Even the old wagonmen felt the unease of isolation when they crossed the Pecos, a small but once serious river that has had many names: Rio de las Vacas (River of Cows—perhaps a reference to bison), Rio Salado (Salty River), Rio Puerco (Dirty River).

5 West of the Pecos, a strangely truncated cone rose from the valley. In the oblique evening light, its silhouette looked like a Mayan temple, so perfect was its symmetry. I stopped again, started climbing, stirring a panic of lizards on the way up. From the top, the rubbled land below—veined with the highway and arroyos, topographical relief absorbed in the dusk—looked like a roadmap.

6 The desert, more than any other terrain, shows its age, shows time because so little vegetation covers the ancient erosions of wind and storm. What appears is tawny grit once stone and stone crumbling to grit. Everywhere rock, earth's oldest thing. Even desert creatures come from a time older than the woodland animals, and they, in answer to the arduousness, have retained prehistoric coverings of chitin and lapped scale and primitive defenses of spine and stinger, fang and poison, shell and claw.

7 The night, taking up the shadows and details, wiped the face of the desert into a simple, uncluttered blackness until there were only three things: land, wind, stars. I was there too, but my presence I felt more than saw. It was as if I had been reduced to mind, to an edge of consciousness. Men, ascetics, in all eras have gone into deserts to lose themselves—Jesus, Saint Anthony, Saint Basil, and numberless medicine men—maybe because such a losing happens almost as a matter of course here if you avail yourself. The Sioux once chanted, "All over the sky a sacred voice is calling."

8 Back to the highway, on with the headlamps, down Six Shooter Draw. In the darkness, deer, just shadows in the lights, began moving toward the desert willows in the wet bottoms. Stephen Vincent Benét:

When Daniel Boone goes by, at night,
The phantom deer arise
And all lost, wild America
Is burning in their eyes.

9 From the top of another high mesa: twelve miles west in the flat valley floor, the lights of Fort Stockton blinked white, blue, red, and yellow in the heat like a mirage. How is it that desert towns look so fine and big at night? It must be that little is hidden. The glistening ahead could have been a golden city of Cibola. But the reality of Fort Stockton was plywood and concrete block and the plastic signs of Holiday Inn and Mobil Oil.

10 The desert had given me an appetite that would have made carrion crow stuffed with saltbush taste good. I found a Mexican cafe of adobe, with a whitewashed log ceiling, creekstone fireplace, and jukebox pumping out mariachi music. It was like a bunk house. I ate burritos, chile rellenos, and pinto beans, all ladled over with a fine, incendiary sauce the color of

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sludge from an old steel drum. At the next table sat three big, round men: an Indian wearing a silver headband, a Chicano in a droopy Pancho Villa mustache, and a Negro in faded overalls. I thought what a litany of grievances that table could recite. But the more I looked, the more I believed they were someone's vision of the West, maybe someone making ads for Levy's bread, the ads that used to begin "You don't have to be Jewish."

Content

1. What details of the desert landscape does Least Heat-Moon use to describe it? How clearly can you visualize this place? Although this desert can be precisely located on a highway map, do you need to know its exact location in order to imagine it? What does it have in common with other deserts? Does it have any particularly unique features?
2. Travel writer Paul Theroux says, "The journey, not the arrival, matters." Is that true for Least Heat-Moon? Explain your answer.

Strategies/Structures/Language

3. Least Heat-Moon structures this chapter from *Blue Highways* according to time (daylight to night) and distance. How does the structure relate to the subject matter?
4. What is the effect of ending this trip through the desert with the image of "three big, round men"—an Indian, a Chicano, and a black (¶ 10)? Does the reference to Levy's Jewish rye bread in the last sentence trivialize this example?
5. What kind of character does Least Heat-Moon play in his own narrative? Is this character identical to the author who is writing the essay?
6. Least Heat-Moon includes many place names. With what effect? Do you need to read the essay with a map in hand?
7. Why are the parentheses in the list? Why do they appear beside some items and not others?

For Writing

8. Make a list of "nothing in particular" that you observe in a place so familiar that you take its distinguishing features for granted: your yard, your refrigerator, your clothes closet, your desk, a supermarket or other store, a library, or any other ordinary place. Write down as many specific details as you can, in whatever order you see them. (Use parenthetical remarks, too, if you wish.) Then, organize them according to some logical or psychologically relevant pattern (such as closet to farthest away, most to least dominant impression, largest to smallest, whatever) and put them into a larger context. For instance, how does the closet or the refrigerator relate to the rest of your house? Does organizing the list stimulate you to include even more details? What can you do to keep your essay from sounding like a collection of miscellaneous trivia? Add drawings, photographs, or diagrams as desired.
9. Write an essay about some portion of a trip you have taken, where you have been a stranger in a strange land. Characterize yourself as a traveler, possibly an outsider, with a particular relationship to the place you're in (enjoyment, curiosity,

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boredom, loneliness, fear, fatigue, a desire to move on, or any combination of emotions you want to acknowledge). Illustrate with maps, photographs, or travel documents, if you wish.

For comprehension, writing, and research activities and resources, please visit the companion website at <college.hmco.com/english>.

Selections from Student Writers' Notebooks

RICHARD LOFTUS, JILL WOOLLEY, ART GREENWOOD, BARBARA SCHOFIELD, SUSAN YORITOMO, BETTY J. WALKER, TAMMY WEAST, KRISTIN KING, ROSALIND BRADLEY COLES, CHERYL WATANABE, STEPHEN E. RYAN

The students who kept these writers' notebooks in courses at the University of Connecticut, Virginia Commonwealth University, and the College of William and Mary in recent years majored in a variety of subjects: King, Loftus, Ryan, and Watanabe, English; Woolley, archaeology; Greenwood, general studies; Schofield, education; Yoritomo, filmmaking; Walker, human resource management; Weast, mass communications; Coles, biology and creative writing. All share a love of the sounds as well as the sense of words, all like to play around with the language; some read omnivorously while others focus on visual images. All bring creativity to their work, which ranges from assisting on archaeological digs to personnel administration to pharmacological laboratory research to editing publications for a hospital and for the Wolf Trap music foundation.

The selections from their notebooks reflect a range of interests and moods as varied as the writers. Reactions to keeping a notebook ("It's better to do it than to talk about it"), a satiric recipe ("Oh, Mom, was there ever a worse cook than you?"), self-analysis ("I could get by, looking good"), an attempt at self-improvement ("I've been trying to put cigarettes down for six years now"), explorations of sound ("HE'LL BANG EM AND HIS CYMBALS CRASH AND HISS"), analysis of an apartment style that mirrors the writer's personal style ("My apartment is stark. I'm stark"), a humorous tirade against housework ("I hate it"), the devastating impact of a divorce on a family's Christmas ("My brother went to drink his gift certificate"), reactions to being black in a white world (Coles), homosexual in a straight world (Loftus), Asian in America (Watanabe). And a joyous reaction to the writer's first publication—"and not in the Letters to the Editor column, either."

These entries offer just a hint of the infinite potential of writers' notebooks.

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Richard Loftus

I read something in some book from some new author in some bookshop somewhere to the effect that writer's block is "reading old fat novels instead of making new skinny ones." My secret is out. 1

• • •

I don't feel like writing now. I should pick up *Mansfield Park* again. Reading Austen or anyone that good reminds me of what I could be saying, and of the work that has to be put into it. How often have I begun a journal and stopped because two days later it didn't seem so good? I suppose I saved myself from some self-flagellation, but also from a record of growth. There are some people in the class who write often, and though their perceptions are no more acute or their difficulties in writing no less than my own, I feel that they're ahead. I must remember what Susan said to me, that "It's better to do it than talk about it." This is doing it, huh? This is getting it down on paper. Knowing that I have to keep this record is the best part. 2

• • •

Green Bean Surprise Casserole

1 can green beans, drained
1 can cream of mushroom soup
1 box cheez-bits

Layer ingredients—beans, then soup and cheez-bits—in greased casserole. Place casserole in preheated 350° oven. Bake forty-five minutes. Serve.

I'm telling you something I've never told anyone. Never, through the long years of dinners made possible by the invention of the electric can opener and the publication of Peg Bracken's *The I Hate to Cook Cookbook.* Never, though the mention of meatloaf still conjures images of a dark, brick-like thing, ketchup glazed and gurgling angrily in a sea of orangish drippings in a pyrex baking dish. Never, even when her mantra spun in my brain like an old forty-five: "Some people live to eat, Richard (my name spoken with accusative gravity), *I* eat to live." Oh, Mom, was there ever a worse cook than you? 3

Jill Woolley

I don't want to be a scholar. I run on intuition. My pleasure is in creating. . . . I hate collecting information and acting like I have something new and 4

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exciting to say about any of it. I'm not an organizer. Maybe I'm not a synthesizer. I'm all talent and no discipline. I can get away with some sweat and inspiration. I can get by with bullshit because my bull is better than 85% of everybody else's hard work. But I know what's coming off the top of my head. I know I'm a phony. At least that's how I feel. No substance. I've disconnected my soul. I've sold myself out because I could get by, looking good.

• • •

5 I meant to throw these boots away. I had them in a box for the Salvation Army pick-up. Somehow they worked their way back on to my feet. It's the same with so many things—boots, men, cigarettes—you try to get them out of your life and they keep coming out on top.

6 I've been trying to put cigarettes down for six years now, on and off. Still, day after day, I pay my [money] for a pack of poison. Why is it easier to smoke than to not smoke? It certainly isn't easier to exercise than to not exercise. It isn't easier to work hard than to not work hard. So why is it easier to smoke?

7 I try all kinds of tricks. I count how many cigarettes I've smoked in a day. I wait until dark to light up. I brush my teeth after every cigarette. But these gimmicks soon fall away and again I'm chain smoking from the time I get up until I retire.

8 I guess I'll keep trying though. Tomorrow, the boots go back on the pile for the Salvation Army. It's a start.

Art Greenwood

9 I live in an apartment with two musicians. Stan is a black man with a deep voice and a mild relaxed demeanor, who plays the drums. Meloni is his complement, fair-skinned and youthful , she sings and she plays the guitar. The are both rock musicians, perhaps, but their types of music are very different. STANLEY—HE PLAYS HIS DRUMS, SOMETIMES, AND HE BANGS EM, HE BANGS EM AND HE BANGS EM, HE'LL ROLL EM, BACK AND FORTH AND BACK REAL QUICK WITH A BASE THUMP, AND HE'LL BANG EM AND HE'LL BANG EM AND HIS CYMBALS CRASH AND HISS WHILE HE BANGS EM AND THE BASE THUMPS. And when he does this it's loud, and the place gets filled, and it feels good, as if you were in your own heart while it was beating. Meloni's music, though, is as different from his as she is, physically, from him. The deep rhythm of his drums doesn't surface in the trickling stream of her singsong. He puts you in your heart, but she leads you through your head. When you listen to her it's like the breeze in the trees or butterflies in springtime: light, airy, and hopeful.

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In what ways does this group strike you as typical of performing musicians? What do you imagine their music sounds like? Are there any clues as to whether they are amateur or professional? What analogies can you make between performing music and writing in collaboration with others (see Trimbur, 72–75)? Why aren't there any women in this group? In what sorts of musical groups would women appear more prominently? Choose three adjectives that best characterize the performance you're watching here.

Barbara Schofield

Sitting in class I realized that I would never be more naked than when I shared my writing. It is painful; it is frightening, because you open your very soul to acceptance or rejection by your peers. All this attempt to communicate with others is complicated by each individual's understanding of language; we try to present ourselves to others with as much clarity and understanding as is possible for another human being to comprehend of another. 10

In my mind's eye, I see all my physical, and thus symbolically, mental scars and deformities, and I wonder. Do my classmates see the moles on my neck? Do they see the puffy rolls of my flesh, my stretch-marked belly reminiscent of three pregnancies? Do they see the eight inch long scars down the sides of each thigh that resemble railroad tracks? What about the 11

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broken blood vessel at the back of my left knee that came with the stress of the second hip surgery? Do they see the peculiar scar on the first digit of my right hand, a constant reminder of the day I sliced a piece of me off with the salami onto the deli scale? If they do, do they recognize these things for what they are, representations of someone's life? Do they accept all this? Do they reject it? And if they do, does it really matter? Have they not come naked to this class also, and aren't their scars just as visible? Of course they are, or so I tell myself, but it barely soothes me enough to honestly write about who I am, and how I came to be the way I am, today.

Susan Yoritomo

12 I want to be safe, so I'll hide in my apartment. I'm always hiding in my apartment. I love my apartment. I can see the sunset from one window and sunrise from another. And it's not really hiding, there's no one after me. It's isolation. It's windows and doors and walls and floors and ceilings, the physical barriers I cherish. I have plants. I wonder and worry and care for them, but it's very technical. There's no love. I like them because they soften the sterile interior of my apartment. As a friend said, they are the "bare minimum" in the way of plants. I have to agree. They are the pointy, blade-like plants which are called tropical but are reminiscent of the desert. Stark. My apartment is stark. I'm stark. I strive for starkness. I hate those irresponsible, indulgent feminine traits that are me, the real me. I want my masculine, minimal, logical, problem-solving self to dominate. I want that hard, durable exterior that is not unlike a wall. A cool marble wall that endures.

Betty J. Walker

13 HOUSEWORK—Housework—I hate it. I have tried for the past 20 years to learn to like it but to no avail. It is so boring. It is repetitive and stagnates the mind. Anyone can do it; it requires no real talent except the willingness to do the same thing over and over again.

14 Now take dusting . . . an exercise in sheer futility. You take a cloth and spray some type of polish on it. You move it around on the surface of the table or chair or whatever and pick up the dust on the rag. You move around the room dusting whatever level surface there is available that does not move. You move on from room to room. After a lapsed period of perhaps 20 minutes, you return to the room you dusted first. What do you find there . . . dust!

15 How about dishwashing and cooking. Those two things will drive you crazy. The cooking goes on forever and you no sooner get one meal completed then it is time to begin another. . . . Over the years I have developed a standard menu of things I can prepare that I don't burn or cause people to be poisoned. My family has learned that if it's Tuesday, it must

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be hamburgers. Or, if it's Friday, it must mean that we'll eat out. You see, I don't cook on Fridays. . . .

16 Lest you form the opinion that I am lazy, let me reassure you—I am. I will work all day at something I enjoy doing. Writing or sewing or creating something keeps me interested and busy and I am never bored. But the repetitive things drive me up the walls. The trouble with housework is that once you have it all done and the house is all clean and shining, six months later you have to do it all over again.

Tammy Weast

17 What makes Christmas Christmas? It is not the carols, the decorations, nor the cold weather. It is not even Santa Claus or turkey advertisements on TV. It must be something in the mind. That's it. Christmas is a state of mind.

18 My parents are getting divorced. This was the first Christmas my mom, brother, and I have spent without my dad. We did not put up a tree. I got the decorations out of the attic though. The first box I opened contained dad's stocking. Mom cried so I put it all away.

19 December 25th was weird. I did not get up until 11 A.M. The whole world had opened their presents while I slept. My brother gave me a leather briefcase. I gave him a $50 gift certificate from Darryl's restaurant. He goes there and drinks a lot lately.

20 Dinnertime has always been around 3 P.M. on holidays. That was because my dad liked to watch the football games. This year mom said we could eat when we wanted. But we never did. I ate a beans n franks dinner later. My brother went to drink his gift certificate.

21 I worked the day after Christmas. All the secretaries in my office had new gold necklaces from men. They all cooed about what a wonderful holiday they had had. I got nauseous because everyone was asking me, "How was your holiday, Tammy?" or "What did Santa bring you?" or "How long will you be eating turkey leftovers?"

22 I went home early. Mom and my brother were all early too. We each seemed to have upset stomachs. It must have been something we didn't eat. Or maybe it was just our state of mind.

Kristin King

23 They lived in a two-million-dollar house that looked like a sty. I remember walking into the living room once and seeing the abuse. On one wall was a dart board with no darts and the wall behind pocked with holes. The lining had been torn from the bottom of a yellow Chippendale sofa and stuffing poked through where the buttons had been ripped off. In front of the sofa was a cherry table with a half-finished model spread out and a tube of glue dripping. There were several high-backed chairs in the room, one Windsor without an arm, another with a torn velvet cover. On the carpet in

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front of the chair was a bowl of milk with Cheerios floating. An empty pop bottle lay on the brick hearth. Someone had tossed a crumpled McDonald's bag on the ashes of last winter's fires. A Steinway stretched underneath a broad picture window. Water rings spoiled the finish and a tinker toy was wedged between two keys. The piano bench, loaded with *Sports Illustrated,* was pushed against the wall. A china bureau, filled with Wedgwood and Lenox, stood in the corner next to the door. A lacrosse stick was propped against one of its broken panes. A black woman in a blue housecoat was attempting to compensate for the absence of a cat's litter box by pushing a vacuum back and forth over the stained carpet.

Rosalind Bradley Coles

24 Today in class Dudley said he's "tired of racial issues in class." Well—if he's tired of them, how does he think I feel? For years I have been the only Black (or at most one of two or three) in class and I have had to deal with white negativism towards Blacks. . . . Every time I've taken writing classes I've had to deal with some white person who had to put a Black person in their story— unfortunately the Black person is never a professional or middle class person, but illiterate, poor, kitchen workers or country hicks or rapists. Even Dudley in his first essay continuously used the word nigger derogatorily (although that's the only way whites can use it). . . . In the same week Grace had a sentence in her essay about a rural man who "knew the difference between a nigger and a colored man." Buffy is writing a story about two Blacks (with college degrees) who interact with a white lawyer. She is trying to adopt a Black dialect for her characters that has rhythm. What she has produced are illiterate Blacks.

25 Sometimes I wonder if these stories are written simply because it was what the author wanted to tell, or if it is a personal attack against me (which really isn't fair to assume, but it has happened so often). It's easy for Dudley to be tired of racial issues when he's white and surrounded mostly by whites. But what about me? Dudley's tired of racial issues. Well, I'm tired of having to see only the negative side of my people portrayed by my peers.

Richard Loftus, again

26 Should I write about sex? Not to be sensational. That's purposeless. I don't think it would be wrong to write about sex, because sex is so personal a subject that to use it is akin to plowing up earth. In the wake of the plow you find things you would not have expected to find, fragments of bone, earthworms, snakes, an old boot, strange rocks, an old wristwatch. Talking about sex digs down and throws up old lies, new lies, guilt, excess, happy memories, all manner of self perceptions ranging from the most superficial to most basic. So sex becomes the catalyst towards some reaction.

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I think I see my own sexuality—my homosexuality—as the thing that made me a better listener. Because it was at thirteen something unpleasant to own up to. Can you imagine having to admit to yourself that you're black? Almost amusing, because I can remember little of my self-consciousness of that particular time, but it was definitely the experience of being the outsider, living through my friends' heterosexual fumblings, being the uninvolved sexless sage. Later, having come out, an experience that has now been appropriated by ostomites, alcoholics, barren parents and anorexics, I was learning the joys of rhetoric. Gay politics is nothing if not rich in rhetoric. The difference between homosexual and gay? Homosexual is what the *New York Times* calls you; gay is what you earn the right to call yourself. 27

It was always surprising to listen to others, if somehow they were aware of my sexuality, if, somehow, the subject came up. Listening to them as they revealed their positions, feigned acceptance, gushed too readily their acceptance, or guarded their words, or condemned—it seemed always to be an exercise in measuring and dissecting. They say this, they mean that. It made me even more careful to choose words that expressed my own individual sense and that told the truth. It also made me aware of how to lie, without *really* lying (hah!). Through listening, nuance is learned. 28

Cheryl Watanabe

After the homes were lost, the businesses destroyed, after the furniture was sold or stolen, after the fathers were taken away and the rights of the land-born children erased you come—to offer money and recognition. Deeds not willing to be forgotten haunt you: Utah or California, horse stalls for hotels, manure for freshener, the death of our sons in Italy whose parents, buried deep in the desert, watered the brush with tears. But your offer comes too late. The children have grown, the night classes paid for, the businesses reestablished, and prominence regained. We have wealth enough to forgive with charity. Just put it in the textbooks, you never put it in the textbooks. 29

In California thongs are still Nipper Flippers or Jap Slaps. People imitate Japanese (or is it Chinese?) when I walk by. December seventh is the Ides of March. I'm asked how I can see, is my field of vision narrowed? Would I like to go to Japan? Only after I've seen Europe and Israel. Do I speak Japanese? No. How come? Do you, being fourth generation French, Polish, Greek, speak French, Polish, or Greek? "I was hoping you'd be Buddhist." "Say some Japanese for me." "Play for me, dance for me, sing for me, cook for me—I love rice." Prejudice is the spear of Ignorance. "You write English very well. Where are you going for vacation?" Back to California. "Have you ever been there?" Yes, I was born in San Mateo and raised in San Jose. 30

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Stephen E. Ryan

Refugee Camp 2
Turk/Iraqi Border
Company A, 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

31 The camp seems loudest at night. A huge, dulled murmur flows up from the valleys with hacking, rattling coughs, unending moaning like mantras, mules braying, wails and shrieks like a child stepped on a nail. Clank tap-tapping, metal pots clanking and wood chopping sounds but no sounds of laughter. The footsteps and shifting of thousands make a pressure on the ear just below the level of a sound. And no strong wind whistles close distractions or carries the sound away. Rising to the hill in the middle of 85,000 Kurdish refugees, the sounds articulate our mission.

32 In the morning, A–10 jets fly across in a low, slow demonstration. The screaming whine of their turbofans demands acknowledgement of their habitual, matin visits. The men look up out of makeshift tents with squinted eyes in a fearful reflex drawn from the sound. They have been down south where the wells still burn. Former conscripts twice fleeing, they fled Coalition destruction and then fled Saddam's genocide. But they and we and the Iraqi division beneath the border know the jet's other sound; the harsh, ripping bellow of the main gun, the tank killer. Welcome, sweet, fearsome companion.

33 Under the wide, banking circles, the women walk the morning road carrying clutched bundles pressed close. The bundles are soft-wrapped like cocoons, the folds unlike the sharp creases in the strained faces of the mothers' dry, silent anguish carrying children to graves. Behind them, men carry angular, longer, wrapped burdens as the dust rises.

34 Above, a rhythmic, tympanic beat from the north begins the helos' arrivals. They approach the small landing pad at full power remonstrating loudly at their heavy loads in the thin, high altitude air. They settle in ungraceful bobs and tilts as wheels unevenly touch down and sag with rotor blade slowing, drooping, giving back their cargo's weight to the ground. Today's arrival of rations, medicine and plastic-bottled water is too late for some, desperate hope for many.

Betty J. Walker, again

35 GOOD NEWS. . . . When it first happened, I was so excited I wanted to just jump up and down and hug the world. I felt like a balloon being blown up and up and up until I was about ready to explode—a feeling of excitement and satisfaction, a pleased-with-myself feeling. I wanted to tell everyone, but at the same time I wanted to keep it as a delicious secret. . . . I am going to have something that I have written published in the newspaper, and not in the Letters to the Editor column, either.

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Content

1. Compare your reading of diaries by people with well-known reputations with the way you read the student writers' notebooks. To what extent does external information, about the authors, their other work, or the conditions of their lives and writing, influence your reading of a particular diary segment—or other writing for that matter? What clues in the language can tell readers whether the writer meant to keep the work private or meant for other people to read it?

For Writing

2. Keep a diary, writer's notebook, or blog, writing three to four times a week for fifteen minutes at a time. Use it as a place to jot down ideas for present or future writing. These may include:

   a. Sketches of people you know well or whom you've recently met
   b. Minidramas of people in action, discussion, or conflict
   c. Reactions to news events or to your reading, other writing, media viewing, or Internet messages
   d. Thoughts you've had or decisions you're pondering
   e. Colorful or otherwise memorable language—read, overheard, seen in ads, on menus, on packages or elsewhere
   f. Events or issues that evoke a strong reaction from you, positive or negative—but not lukewarm
   g. Anything else you want

For comprehension, writing, and research activities and resources, please visit the companion website at <college.hmco.com/english>.