Four Worlds
Second Edition
THE GUIDING QUESTION AND POTENTIAL SITUATIONS

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Although the chapters must follow an order in discussing these acts, they do not provide a mechanical formula for writing a paper. As you engage in these activities, you must bring to bear your own knowledge, imagination, and sentence and editing skills. You may find yourself moving back and forth among these acts as the writing process of any given paper proceeds. Allow yourself to follow your own leads. For example, when you are exploring, you may discover a better question. When drafting, you may feel the need for further exploring or may wish to change your audience. But while you are learning the proposed strategies, it might be helpful to follow the general progression outlined in the chapters until you feel more comfortable and able to experiment.

In learning any complex process, deliberate practice of separate skills is useful so that these skills can be orchestrated eventually into the whole process. If you recall how you learned skills like playing a musical instrument or engaging in an athletic activity, you may be able to see the importance of practicing key moves and useful strategies.

THE GUIDING QUESTION AND POTENTIAL SITUATIONS

THE SUBJECT

As we discussed above, your first writing assignment, with an expressive aim, will allow you to examine some facet of your private world in order to understand its influence on you. One of the most subtle but powerful influences on your life has been the places, the environments in which you have found yourself, either for long stretches of time or for brief but striking periods. Many places have become a part of you. Even though you may think you “just” live in Chicago or Birmingham or Seattle, these places have changed you. The houses, neighborhoods, and job locations that you have spent time in have crept into a part of yourself so quietly that you may never have puzzled over their influence. Your first writing experience will give you a chance to investigate the impact of one of these places on your development.

But because each writing experience is precious and time-consuming,
it is important that you not waste it by selecting either a place with only minor influence or a place whose meaning you already know. Writing is not only communication of something you already know, but much more important, it is a chance to figure out something you do not yet understand. How, then, can you determine what subject, what place is worth spending your time investigating and writing about?

**THE GUIDING QUESTION**

The way to begin is by trying to set a *guiding question*. Good writing begins with questions, not answers—with puzzlement, wonder, curiosity. A writer is basically a questioner. However, you may have been discouraged from questioning by a world that rewards right answers rather than uneasy questions. Even if you have been educated to be an answerer, you can learn to be a questioner. Questions begin with a sense of discomfort or with feelings of exhilaration that arise when your expectations are either not met or are exceeded, when your values are challenged by some situation, event, or experience, when the image of the world in which you grew up does not fit with the world in which you find yourself. Such a state, known as *dissonance*, is one of the best frames of mind for creativity, because it sets the climate for making discoveries, for learning.

To decide on the place you wish to investigate, therefore, one way to begin is by making a list of places that elicit strong attitudes in you—places that you would or did regret leaving, places you despise, fear, or have nightmares about, places that puzzle or amaze you. To test which one provokes the most pressing question you want to answer, apply to each the following two-part strategy.

**STARTING GUIDE**

1. State your subject.
2. Identify the expectations or values you hold that seem to conflict with the place. Are there aspects of the place that do not meet your expectations or that exceed your expectations? Are there aspects of the place that clash with your values?
3. Formulate a question that *(a)* captures that clash or dissonance; *(b)* poses what you need to know to eliminate your puzzlement.
4. Identify potential writing situations.

The first two parts of this strategy interact. A meaningful question comes from a sense of challenge, of incongruity about the place, not directly from the place itself. What is puzzling to you about a place may not be puzzling to someone else. This is your question. If you cannot ask a meaningful question (not a question that could be answered by merely *yes* or *no*), perhaps the subject is not the best one to pursue. If you ask a
question to which you already know the answer, the subject is not worth investigating in this writing experience. Choosing the subject that poses the most important question for you will make your writing process worth pursuing. Posing a well-formulated question is crucial if a writer wishes to begin well, to use writing to reach new understanding. Here are some guidelines to follow in formulating your questions:

1. Study the dissonances you have noticed between aspects of your subject and your values or expectations.
2. Determine which dissonance seems most pressing, which you would most like to pursue.
3. Formulate several questions that, if answered, would help you resolve your puzzlement or unease. Try different types of questions: who, what, why, and so on. Ask yourself which type best represents what you want to answer through your writing investigation. Rule out any questions whose answers you already know or that could be answered by yes or no. These do not initiate genuine writing investigations.
4. Check your questions to see if they express elements of your dissonance.
5. Choose one question as a starting guide, but realize that your question may and often does change as you begin to investigate your subject.

Below are some choices that other students made to begin their writing.* Some analyzed their dissonances and posed their questions in more helpful ways than others. Study the examples to determine which students set useful writing questions.

**GUIDING QUESTIONS**

**WRITER 1**

**Subject:** My summer job as a bank teller—I took the job because it was all I could find. I was not looking forward to it at all; little did I know that I would stay a year and a half and hate to leave.

**My Values and Expectations**
- complicated transactions
- stuffy, all-business coworkers
- strict regulations and security checks

**My Subject**
- constant flow of money
- tellers pulled for one another
- responsibility and trust in each teller

—pressure of accurately counting money
—never had a business class and knew very little about banks
—didn’t even have my own money in this bank
—suspicious customers

**Question:** What aspects of working at a bank appealed to me and altered my attitudes enough for me to really enjoy the work and hate leaving it behind?

**WRITER 2**

**Subject:** My stay in a clinical institution

**My Values and Expectations**
—freedom
—pleasant surroundings

**My Subject**
—sense of confinement
—the smell and artificiality of the place

**Question:** What impact has a stay in a clinical institution had on me?

**WRITER 3**

**Subject:** My visit to Rio in Brazil

**My Values and Expectations**
—natural beauty
—excitement of a jet set city

**My Subject**
—the ugliness of the surrounding huts
—the richness and glamour of the city

**Question:** Why did Rio disappoint me, somehow change me?

**WRITER 4**

**Subject:** My childhood in Grand Rapids

**My Values and Expectations**
—culture and nightlife of a big city
—memories of childhood security in G.R.

**My Subject**
—small-city limitations
—reality of present-day Grand Rapids

**Question:** Why do I dream of going back to Grand Rapids to live when I like a big city?

**WRITER 5**

**Subject:** My uncle’s farm in Wisconsin

**My Values or Expectations**
—a quiet, pleasant place
—nice, even beautiful, spot
—few people
—opportunities for outdoor recreation close by and without crowds

**My Subject**
—very slow pace, more than usual restlessness
—very beautiful spot, special beauty
—few of the opportunities a metropolitan area has for entertainment
—no decent Chinese or Mexican restaurants

**Question:** How do I resolve the conflict between the introverted me and the type of life I grew up with and my appreciation for it?
COMMENTARY

Writer 2 chose a very good subject—a psychiatric clinic that had long haunted her but that she had never ventured to investigate before. She selected two strong values that clashed with her experience of the place—her need for freedom and her need for pleasant surroundings. Her question, however, could more explicitly reflect that dissonance. She revised it to read: "What impact on my need for freedom has a stay in the institution had?"

Writer 5’s farm exceeded his expectations on the whole, although he expressed some dissatisfaction with the lack of entertainment. But his question had nothing to do with the farm. Nor is it clear what type of life he grew up with that forms a contrast with the farm. He revised his question to read: "What impact have the visits to my uncle’s farm had on me?" This second question, however, still does not capture the dissonance. His second revision was better:

What impact have my visits to my uncle’s farm in Wisconsin had on the conflict between the introverted me and my upbringing in the Bay Area of California?

POTENTIAL SITUATIONS

To test your question, select some alternative situations in which to set your investigation. The writing situation includes such elements as an audience or readers and a medium of communication—letter, essay, diary entry, and so on. Expressive writing, which emphasizes the writer, often is written for friends, family, or oneself. Sometimes, though, writers like to share their insights with a larger audience such as magazine readers. To guide your writing, therefore, make a list of potential situations in which you see yourself writing about your subject. Here are some that the writers above considered.

POTENTIAL SITUATIONS

WRITER 1
— an essay or letter for my best friend, Anne
— an essay to share with those working at the bank
— a letter to my dad

WRITER 2
— an entry in my diary
— an essay I’d send back to those in the institution
— an essay I’d write for myself to keep
— a letter to my older sister
— an article for a magazine (which?) that has featured the subject of institutions for teenagers
Your experience in the public world influences you in profound ways. Your life is shaped by attitudes and events, policies and practices of the public world you inhabit. You hold memberships in many societies—some imposed on you by the neighborhood, the state, the country, and even the hemisphere in which you were born and brought up. Other societies you have joined by choice. You may have chosen to be a member of a certain school system, a political district, a church organization, or a political party. You may have joined a youth group, a sports team, a school club. These societies in which you have participated have changed your outlook and way of life. You do not have complete control over this public world. What others in these societies do, what they profess, what they argue over can determine to some extent the way your life develops.

But you are not entirely helpless in this public world. In this chapter you will learn ways in which you can influence these larger contexts through writing. In expressive writing you had a chance to see how writing could help you understand and share some insight into your private world. Persuasive writing enables you

1. to come to a better judgment on or insight into subjects in your public world, and
2. to influence your reader to accept your judgment—to understand, respect, perhaps share or act on it.

Persuasive writing is one of the most powerful types of writing. But it takes sophistication and skill to become an effective persuasive writer. This chapter will begin to examine the crucial powers and skills that this kind of discourse demands.

THE GUIDING QUESTION AND POTENTIAL SITUATIONS

THE SUBJECT

The subject context for this writing experience is a broad one. In the societies that constitute your public world, there is inevitable disagreement about principles, policies, and practices. In short, the public world is cluttered with issues—different points of view on how things should be run, how resources should be allocated, how justice ought to be administered, and so on. Issues can be moral, economic, political, cultural, educational, or religious. They swirl around you. But only some at any given period in your life become compelling for you; only some touch your life. These compelling issues are the subjects for your next writing task.
An issue normally becomes compelling when its implications strike your life. Educational issues such as inadequate high school curricula, poor teaching, and student lack of ability to read, write, and think critically are national issues that may not have been or may not be compelling in your educational situation. Campus policies on housing, admissions, and grading may not be issues in your situation. Disagreement over gun control, abortion, crime prevention or punishment, environmental pollution, while important in themselves, may not compel you at this point if you have had little personal experience with them.

Selecting your subject entails choosing an issue that you find compelling because it has touched your life. You may wish to narrow this context to help you decide. You may wish to consider only educational or social or political contexts in which to determine an issue that genuinely puzzles and disturbs you. Use your strategy for posing questions to help you select the issue that is most compelling in your present life.

THE GUIDING QUESTION

Make a list of possible subjects that have aroused strong feelings in you in the last year—disagreements over beliefs, policies, or practices that have impinged on your way of life. If you want to use this paper as a genuine learning experience, a way of reaching new understanding, select a subject about which you can be open-minded even if you tend now to favor one side of the issue over another. The planning stages of writing can then help you analyze the issue in order to reach a more intelligent, balanced, and reasonable judgment about it.

To start your investigation, use the two-part strategy introduced in Chapter 1 to sort out your feelings of puzzlement, anger, or confusion:

1. Identify the expectations or values to which this issue pertains. What values does it challenge or embody? What expectations of yours does one or the other side of the issue call into question?
2. Formulate a question that asks what you need to learn to resolve the issue in your own mind.

Below are the guiding questions that five writers posed to themselves.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

WRITER 1  
**Subject:** The interhall transfer system at Midwestern University  
**My Values and Expectations**  
—easy interhall transfer system  
**My Subject**  
—applications, deadlines, and interviews
—fair treatment on a “first-come, first-served”

**Question:** Why does the Quadrangle continue to use its present policy of interhall transfers?

**WRITER 2**

**Subject:** The issue that I will be discussing is national health insurance. I have a personal interest and a couple of personal experiences in this area as well as a somewhat informed view on the public debate.

**My Values and Expectations**
— the basic right to health care for all

— our health care system should not put people into bankruptcy due to health problems that they cannot afford

— a country so prosperous as ours is should have an affordable health care system

— the richness of this nation and the ability of our country to spend billions of dollars on national defense

**Question:** Despite the problems that may accompany a national health insurance plan, won’t such a plan help solve many of the national health care problems that we have today?

**WRITER 3**

**Subject:** The women’s movement

**My Values and Expectations**
— being a wife and mother
— developing my talents

**Question:** How has the women’s movement affected housewives’ attitudes toward themselves?

**WRITER 4**

**Subject:** I want to examine the conflict in Northern Ireland because I have relatives there and saw first-hand some of the problems.

**My Values and Expectations**
— peace and tolerance

**Question:** What has caused the struggle in Northern Ireland to continue on and on?

**WRITER 5**

**Subject:** Drunk drivers, especially the penalties

**My Values and Expectations**
— the rights of a person
— one should stay within the bounds of the law

**My Subject**
— transfers based on class rank and requested roommate
— our health care system has become a privilege for the rich
— many people are deep in debt in medical payments that are caused by illness that is no fault of theirs
— with the sole exception of South Africa, we are the only industrialized nation without a national health insurance plan
— the quality of health care available to many people remains poor
— looking down on housewives
— emphasis on job rights
— attitude of the Irish people I met
— continuous violence
— many people are killed by drunk drivers
— the justice system is clogged with cases and many offenders of the law are left off
—individuals are wrong when taking another's life
—law should be enforced when broken
—I don't drink but fully accept that others do and I respect their choice and their rights of what they want to do

**Question:** What type of penalty should be given for drunk driving?

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**COMMENTARY**

Writer 1 has chosen a good issue to pursue, one that is immediately affecting his life-style as a college resident. He does not probe his dissonance very deeply, however. Nor does he seem very open-minded about the problem. His question, suggesting that he wishes to understand the reasons for the policy, has two problems: (1) He will probably not be able to answer it, and (2) the only solution that can come from the question is a change in his own attitude, not a change in the situation. It would be better if his question allowed for both types of resolution. Writer 1 revised his question to read: “What are the advantages and disadvantages of the Quad's policy for interhall transfers?”

Writer 2 has enough personal experience to tackle his issue with more than generalizations and clichés. The statement of his values, however, suggests that he may be unwilling to investigate other sides of the issue. His question will also give him trouble because the way it is phrased can only lead to the answer yes or no rather than to a solution, a judgment. Writer 2 revised his work by adding to his statement of dissonance and by rewording his question:

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**My Values and Expectations**

—low taxes

—individual rights to choose health care

**Question:** On what bases is a national health care program feasible and desirable? Do these bases outweigh the problems of such a system?

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**My Subject**

—health insurance would probably increase taxes

—might limit choices

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**POTENTIAL SITUATIONS**

Setting the writing situation for persuasive discourse is a crucial part of your planning, because this kind of writing emphasizes the audience.
what it cost in dollars for the Union to take Richmond. The name of the Treasurer's horse is trivia. What it cost the Union to take Richmond, on the other hand, might have had serious effects on the course of the war and its aftermath. You might find time and energy to research that. You generally find time and energy to discover things that you regard as important or know, in the bargain, are important to others you write for. If you have formulated a significant starting question, you will know what to investigate.

• **The Scientific Expository Aim**

The *scientific expository aim* proposes a new hypothesis about a subject, a hypothesis unknown even to those knowledgeable about the subject. This type of expository aim is more challenging for the inexperienced writer because it demands extensive background and research on the subject. Writers of dissertations pursue this aim. It may not be beyond you if you write about a subject on which you are an acknowledged expert. If you wish to use this aim, you must be able to advance and prove a hypothesis that, in addition to acquainting your audience with new information, is, as far as you and your audience know, new to the field. If you think you can manage a scientific aim, confer with your instructor, who will give you special guidance. The rest of this chapter addresses the informative expository aim.

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**THE GUIDING QUESTION AND POTENTIAL SITUATIONS**

**THE SUBJECT**

Often topics are assigned for research. In classes in which instructors suggest topics, ask yourself the following question: Do I know enough about any of these topics to prefer one over another? If not, you should do some background reading so that you can decide if a topic is worthy of your scrutiny.

If your instructor does not suggest topics, you may profit from selecting an issue that intrigues you, perhaps the one you wrote about in Chapter 3. Or choose a subject from your intended field of study. Doing research on ideas, theories, movements, or major figures in that field will acquaint you with reference materials in that discipline. You must know enough about a subject to formulate a useful question. No matter how you select your subject, unless you make a personal commitment to it, motivated by your intellectual curiosity, the research writing will not
be worthy of your time or attention. Until you can ask a question expressing your awareness of dissonance about the subject, you lack a genuine starting point. Writer 1’s first choice of subject was quasars, a topic suggested by the instructor that sounded interesting. But because he knew nothing about the subject, he was unable to formulate a starting question. He instead turned to genetic engineering, a subject that had disturbed him since he saw *The Boys from Brazil*. For his second choice he could articulate his question.

**THE GUIDING QUESTION**

If you sail into the library with an open-ended topic, you could drift for hours without the compass of a guiding question. A question helps to chart your search for sources, narrowing your selection. The guiding question arises from your dissonance about the subject.

Here are four topics about which writers were able to ask questions.

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**WRITER 1**

*Subject:* Genetic engineering, one of several current research topics suggested in my biology course

*My Values and the Subject:* In particular, I’m very curious about cloning since I saw *The Boys from Brazil* and saw David Rorvik interviewed on *Today*. He claims his book, *In His Image*, documents how the first human clone was produced. My interest leans toward the current gene transplantation experiments rather than toward research into chromosome structure, though I know the one depends on the other. I’m not sure how cloning fits with my value of not messing with nature.

—treatment of hereditary diseases may become possible through genetic engineering
—could human beings actually control their own evolution?
—patenting of higher life forms because they are genetically engineered for a certain purpose—how far up could this go?
—designing drugs and antibodies to be produced by recombinant bacteria—new hope in cancer treatment

*Question:* Why is genetic engineering, esp. gene transplantation, so controversial? Can this research interfere with nature?

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**WRITER 2**

*Subject:* Coaching baseball—baseball is my favorite sport. I’ve coached baseball for seven years at the 9- & 10-year-old level.

*My Values and the Subject:* Next year I’ll be coaching the 11 & 12 year olds and it will be a much different situation. First of all, this is the first level where the kids pitch instead of using a pitching machine, so I’ll have to teach pitching for the first time. I’ll also have more kids on my team and I may not have an assistant coach, so I’ll have to learn how to better organize practices and how to keep the kids from getting bored. Pitching also introduces many to how to play other positions and different strategies (both offensive and defensive).
Questions: What are some different drills, etc., to keep players interested and organized? What different strategies can be used when you use a pitcher (especially defensive, e.g., pickoff plays)? What are some good ways to teach pitching to beginning players?

**WRITER 3**

**Subject:** Physical therapy and especially the quadriplegic and other spinal injuries

**My Values and the Subject:** I have always been interested in majoring in physical therapy. I enjoy working with others, esp. handicapped. After reading several articles on new advanced technology in regenerating the nervous system so people with paralysis can some day walk again, I want to look in more depth into this subject:

**Question:** What new techniques have scientists come up with in the rehabilitation of a paraplegic?

**WRITER 4**

**Subject:** Breast cancer

**My Values and the Subject:**

—Most importantly, I am interested in this subject because my own mother has breast cancer. She had a mastectomy at Christmastime and is now receiving chemotherapy treatments.

—I am taking Med Chem this semester, which is a cancer course in which a variety of speakers and doctors on cancer come in each week to speak about everything related to cancer.

—I am also curious about this disease since I am a woman with an increased chance of having breast cancer because my mother has it. Also breast cancer is one of the leading causes of death in women.

—What really interests me is how diet is related to breast cancer—this subject is very much involved in my own career of nutrition, medicine, and biology.

**Question:** What are the dietary causes of breast cancer? Is sugar a leading initiator of breast cancer?

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**COMMENTARY**

Writer 1 chooses a topic about which he already knows enough to be familiar with some issues. His question will direct his research to the controversial nature of genetic engineering. This topic is very broad but he narrows it to gene transplants, an aspect that will provide more guidance for his research. The second question does not fully articulate his dissonance. Does he mean to indicate that interference with nature is a problem? Or does he simply wish to know whether such interference exists? The question is not clear and will not be helpful in directing his investigation.

Writer 2 chooses a good subject for research because he needs the information for his summer job. He values good instruction and anticipates the difficulties his new job will bring. His questions will narrow his research to a manageable task.