

Study Guide

# WR

## Writing Rhetorically

*Fostering Responsive Thinkers  
and Communicators*

*Jennifer Fletcher*  
*Foreword by Jim Burke*

Professional development training for  
teachers provided by Stenhouse Publishers



Stenhouse Publishers  
[www.stenhouse.com](http://www.stenhouse.com)

## *Contents*

OVERVIEW .....	3
INTRODUCTION .....	4
CHAPTER 1 .....	5
CHAPTER 2 .....	6
CHAPTER 3 .....	8
CHAPTER 4 .....	10
CHAPTER 5 .....	12
CHAPTER 6 .....	14
CHAPTER 7 .....	16
CHAPTER 8 .....	18
CONCLUSION .....	20

## Overview

From the outset, Jennifer Fletcher admits that teaching writing rhetorically “may actually make your students’ writing seem worse for a while” and that students can indeed succeed in a high school English class with prescriptive or formulaic writing. But, throughout this book, Fletcher makes an impassioned and effective argument for moving beyond “kit writing” and toward teaching writing rhetorically. In doing so, you’ll find that, though you scaffold the process less, your students will develop the cognitive approaches that will help them grow as decision-makers and inquirers when writing in your classroom and beyond.

Moving away from formulas that help students to appear successful in a gradebook can be intimidating, but Fletcher manages that anxiety by supporting teachers as she calls for them to support their students: through exigence, a deep understanding of her audience, and by scaffolding the process rather than the product. Throughout each chapter, you will find research-based approaches for shifting to a rhetorical approach at every stage of the writing process. Fletcher recognizes where these shifts are particularly difficult for classroom teachers and offers a wide range of activities that teachers can apply to nearly any unit or lesson.

Fletcher recognizes that this is not easy work for teachers or for students, so she never oversimplifies the task ahead. In a way that mirrors her belief in the importance of teachers supporting students’ deep learning, she strives to support educators’ deep, rhetorical learning as well. And she has good reason: beyond offering writing instruction that will transfer from one classroom to another, Fletcher lays the groundwork for an approach that fosters listening, inquiry, and most importantly, empowerment in the classroom and beyond.

It is our hope that, with this study guide, you have the opportunity to reflect on what you’ve read as well as your own practice. Use it to process your reading on your own or to spark dialogue with a group.

## INTRODUCTION

# Understanding Writing as Communication and Problem Solving

### Quotes to Consider

“Students don’t get better at making choices if all the choices are made for them. We need to move novices past mimicking the forms of academic writing without fully experiencing the intellectual processes that produce those forms in authentic contexts.” —page xx

“When we teach writing rhetorically, we support students in becoming independent problem solvers who are well prepared to take rhetorical action: to discover their own questions, design their own inquiry process, develop their own positions and purposes, and contribute to conversations that matter to them.”  
—page xxv

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- On page xxi, Fletcher asks some questions to prompt you to consider your own approach to writing. As you reflect on your answers to those questions, what are you learning about yourself and your own writing process?

### Considering Classroom Applications

- As you read this book, what might you be wondering about in moving from kit writing to a more authentic, rhetorical process?

## CHAPTER 1

# Taking the Rhetorical Approach

### Quotes to Consider

“I’ve learned to ask myself a tough question: Is my instructional approach aimed at helping my students to read and write better or helping me to grade more easily?” —page 6

“Teaching for transfer prepares students to navigate change successfully; teaching formulas sets students up to be frustrated with change.” —page 11

“When students only write what they’re told to write, it’s little wonder that they see all rhetorical situations as the same. Students need extended practice making their own choices in response to diverse rhetorical situations.” —page 15

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- How is your understanding of the terms *rhetoric* and *writing rhetorically* taking shape as you read this chapter?
- On page xx of the Introduction, Jennifer Fletcher said, “What I’m asking you to do may actually make your students’ writing seem worse for a while.” How does Chapter 1 help you understand and contextualize this statement?

### Considering Classroom Applications

- As you examine Figure 1.2, in what ways might your students benefit from rhetorical guidelines? What might supporting them look like?
- How and when might you think about integrating the Writers Two Ways activity into your own classrooms?

## CHAPTER 2

# Teaching Writing for Transfer

### Quotes to Consider

“Here’s my argument in a nutshell: If deep learning is the goal, then we need to teach writing for transfer, not compliance.” —page 20

“In its position statement on Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing, NCTE identifies two problematic practices: (1) writing ‘only to prove that they did something they were asked to do’ and (2) learning only ‘a single type of writing’ that they are led to believe ‘will suffice in all situations’ (2016).”  
—page 33

“Framing instruction for transfer of learning is important. We’re preparing students for an unpredictable future, not trying to replicate the status quo.” —page 38

“In *The Rhetoric of Reason*, James Crosswhite reminds us of the pedagogical commitments we make if we allow ourselves to take a deficits-based view of learning: ‘The difference between thinking of people as being deficient, and thinking of people as having abilities and potential that need cultivation, training, and developing is enormous, and it leads to radically different educational approaches and attitudes’ (1996, 5).” —page 48

“Teaching writing for transfer is ultimately about letting go—about stepping back as teachers, so students can step up as expert learners.” —page 51

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- What do you notice about the various scholarly definitions of transfer offered in this chapter?
- How does transfer connect with supporting students’ growth from notice to expert writers?

- What are the benefits when we adopt an assets-based approach regarding our students?
- What are your thoughts on using expansive framing when planning instruction?

### Considering Classroom Applications

- What strategies have you used that you have found to be successful in developing students' procedural, conceptual, and contextual knowledge?
- What challenges do you face in developing students' procedural, conceptual, and contextual knowledge?
- How do you ensure that scaffolds do not become roadblocks for your students?
- What is one idea/concept that you will continue to think about and might try out in your own classroom?

## CHAPTER 3

# Preparing to Enter the Conversation

### Quotes to Consider

“How we teach argumentation not only impacts the writing skills students develop but also affects the kinds of relationships we build in our classrooms, which in turn, affects our capacity for collaborative problem solving. We need to remember that we’re preparing students to enter a conversation, not a boxing ring.” —page 54

“Our goal shouldn’t be to teach students how to fight with evidence; our goal should be to help students engage in reasoned intellectual inquiry.” —page 64

“Instead of just producing reasons and evidence to support a position—work that can be done whether it is meaningful and needed or not—students engage in a process of inquiry and deliberation framed around an essential question: *What is the problem that needs a solution?*” —page 74

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- In what ways do the concept map on page 55 and the tool on page 61 support student thinking without over-scaffolding?
- Take a look at the scenarios on pages 52–59. How would you respond to each situation? What went into your decision-making process?
- Do the reflective Quick-Write on page 72. What are you learning about yourself as a writer?
- How is your understanding of a writer’s purpose shifting or clarifying as a result of the section *Exigence: Finding a Reason to Write?*



### Considering Classroom Applications

- In this chapter, Fletcher describes a Socratic Seminar using inner and outer circles. For what reasons might you consider using this in your own classroom? How might it support students in entering into dialogue?
- How and why might you invite students to develop norms to support dialogue?
- How might exigence and stasis theory inform your students' reasons to write in your next unit?

## CHAPTER 4

# Negotiating Different Voices and Perspectives

### Quotes to Consider

“When students start to see sources as voices in a conversation—and not just tools or resources for completing academic assignments—they understand that more is at stake than just a grade.”—page 83

“It often takes a big shift in thinking to alert students to the responsibilities they have to their sources and readers.”—page 87

“The editors [of the *MLA Handbook*] explain their rationale for these changes: ‘[ . . . ] now more than ever we need a system for documenting sources that begins with a few principles rather than a long list of rules’ (2016, 1).”—page 107

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- How might teaching quotations, paraphrasing, and synthesis rhetorically help enable students to make their own decisions? How does this approach differ from how you’ve taught these concepts in the past or from how you were taught?
- How does the section on documentation styles (pages 106–110) confirm, challenge, or extend your previous thinking around teaching MLA and other documentation styles?
- On page 107, Fletcher cites four statements from the *MLA Handbook*, 8th Edition. In what ways does each relate to transfer of learning or rhetorical problem solving?

### Considering Classroom Applications

- On page 81, Fletcher describes “beginner moves in source-based writing.” Which of these do you recognize from your own experience? How have you scaffolded them in the past? How are you shifting your thinking of scaffolding students from novice to expert?

- In what ways might you consider using the activities on pages 84–91 to support students in understanding their reading and negotiating voices and sources that may inform their writing?
- Which of the “obstacles to understanding” (pages 112–113) do you recognize from your students’ argument writing? Which activities from this chapter might you plan to support them in getting around these obstacles? How might the activities you chose address the root of the obstacle?

## CHAPTER 5

# Designing and Conducting Research

### Quotes to Consider

“Trying to impose a predetermined formula on the research process is a surefire way to guarantee no real research gets done.”—page 116

“One of the most revelatory insights we can share with students is that our depth of eventual understanding is equal to our depth of initial confusion. The more mixed up we are to start, the better chance we stand of ultimately arriving at a cohesive and nuanced conclusion.”—page 117

“If we want students to approach research as creative problem solving - and not a boring duplication of a required form - then we need to make the intellectual labor that goes into the final product more visible to students.”—page 118

“If students ask, ‘Is my thesis OK?’, I say, ‘I don’t know. What evidence do you have?’ And if they say, ‘I don’t have any evidence yet,’ then I say, ‘Then why are you working on a thesis?’”—page 125

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- When have you experienced research that was messy? What did it take for you to find success with it?
- On pages 119–120, Fletcher outlines questions to support students in developing exigence and stasis. How does answering these questions support students in writing rhetorically?

### Considering Classroom Applications

- The next time you engage your students in research, how will you be thinking about helping them own the inquiry process?

- Which classroom activities from this chapter will be most beneficial for you to use with your students this year? Why?

## CHAPTER 6

# Reasoning from Evidence

### Quotes to Consider

“Reasoning is pattern finding. That’s why predetermined organizational structures can sometimes limit our ability to reason through the evidence. If one schema has already been imposed on our vision (e.g., the reason-reason-counterargument outline or a cause-and-effect text structure), it makes it hard for us to see other possibilities.”—page 157

“Toulmin’s model is dialogic. It enacts an imagined conversation between a rhetor and their audience in which the audience accepts or challenges the rhetor’s argument based on their own assumptions, beliefs, and ways of knowing.”—page 159

“Instead of trying to teach students the difference between facts and claims—a difference that will get fuzzy fast in a college classroom where factual claims are daily bread—I find it more helpful to distinguish between data and claims.”—page 160

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- What are you noticing about teaching reasoning in the context of writing?
- Which additional ideas might you add to Figure 6.9 on page 176?
- What are the benefits when we use Anticipation/Reaction Guides with students?
- What are your thoughts on having students explain their story rather than their stance?

### Considering Classroom Applications

- What opportunities might there be in using interrupted reading and collaborative Think Aloud with your students?
- Which classroom examples from this chapter will be most beneficial for you to use with your students this year? Why?

- What challenges do you face in helping students connect data to claims? What opportunities does this chapter provide in this area?
- How do you ensure that students go beyond a superficial understanding of backing and qualification in rhetorical situations?

## CHAPTER 7

# Making Choices About Genre and Structure

### Quotes to Consider

“In teaching writing rhetorically, we’re attempting no less than to help students develop their own theory of communication.”—page 184

“Successful designs start with a careful consideration of the user’s experience.”—page 191

“As students take more control over their own writing process, we can expect to see more mistakes.”  
—page 196

“By now, you’ve probably noticed another benefit of a rhetorical approach: making strategic choices about structure as writers also makes students better readers. A deep sense of how structure directs a reader’s attention helps students use these same structural clues to understand the main ideas in the texts they read.”—page 205

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- On page 183, the author references Applebee and Langer’s research on writing pedagogy in the United States. What thoughts and reactions do you have to their findings?
- Engage in the reflection activity from Figure 7.1 (pages 184–185). What do you notice? What are your thoughts about what you’ve noticed?
- As students move through the years at your school, what genres of writing are they expected to produce? What genres might be missing? Why might be the reasons for this?



### Considering Classroom Applications

- What opportunities do you see with using whole-class brainstorming for rhetorical writing?
- How do you see yourself using the Genre Analysis Graphic Organizer found on page 195? In what ways might you modify this activity based on the strengths of your students?
- In the Strategies for Organizing Texts section, the author provides multiple ideas for learning experiences. Which of these approaches are you most excited about? Why?

## CHAPTER 8

# Revising Rhetorically

### Quotes to Consider

“Instead of just using the lens of teacher approval, students who revise rhetorically see their writing through the various perspectives and practices of the discourse community they’re trying to engage.”  
—page 217

“Conditional knowledge is knowing when and why to do something; it’s a deep understanding of contingencies.” —page 219

“But when I evaluate student work, I often find that the area of greater need is reading.” —page 231

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- What do you notice about the approaches the author uses when providing students with feedback on their writing?
- How does descriptive outlining support both reading and writing?
- Think about how the tips for “good” writing shown in Figure 8.3 (page 221) could be reframed to promote transfer and conditional knowledge.
- What are your thoughts on the approach of “don’t cross out” offered by the author on page 238?

### Considering Classroom Applications

- What strategies have you used successfully when encouraging students to reflect on their writing choices?
- What challenges do you face when asking students to consider the interactions between audience and purpose, purpose and persona, persona and audience, argument and purpose, and between the rhetorical context and the writer’s strategies? How might the ideas in this chapter address some of those challenges?

- How do you ensure that you balance approaches like playing the doubting game (page 230) with providing supportive feedback on a student's writing?
- What is one idea/concept that you will continue to think about after today and might try out in your classroom?

## CONCLUSION

### A Few Final Words

As you read the Conclusion on pages 245–246, what are you noticing about the author’s rhetorical choices? If you were to support students with writing in a similar way, what might be some new approaches you would use as a result of reading this book?

In *Writing Rhetorically: Fostering Responsive Thinkers and Communicators*, Jennifer Fletcher provides us with a philosophy, framework, and practical suggestions to move students from compliance to true creation. As we navigate the new learning landscape, Fletcher’s ideas ring especially true. We hope that this book and study guide have left you inspired and fortified for the journey ahead.

—*Megan Kortlandt and Jenelle Williams*