Peshe C. Kuriloff's *Rethinking Writing* is hardly more than a recap of many freshman writing texts—it's more concise, but presents little new. It claims to be especially designed for advanced student writers; yet, instead of setting forth something new or challenging, it seems satisfied with suggesting slight variations in the writing process. Plodding along with sage advice that is neither exciting nor inspiring, this short book seems too long. Kuriloff reminds me of my mother, steadily repeating good advice several times in slightly different words. And like my reaction to my mother's advice, I feel guilty criticizing it because it is, after all, good advice.

The tone of *Rethinking Writing* is set on page one of the Introduction: "The discussion that follows is intended for serious student writers who look forward to writing beyond their college years." Aimed at college-student writers, this sentence is unlikely to describe most of them. It may even invoke the rebellious child who doesn't want to be labeled a serious writer, student or otherwise, and who may do a lot of writing but is unlikely to look forward to it.

The steady advice starts with the necessity of becoming a self-conscious writer and continues in the first chapter, "Creating Models for Writing," with comments on the writing process:

The process of thinking through, organizing, and writing a paper on almost any subject requires that you use an impressive assortment of cognitive skills. (12)

Do not try to produce writing all at once. Take your time and do it right. (13)

For obvious reasons, planning progresses more smoothly when you know what you're writing about. Researching, reading, and thinking before planning make it much easier to impose order on your ideas. (2)

And I hear my mother saying, "Your room will always look better if your bed is made." And I react as the good child wanting to rebel because of the way I'm being treated.

Structurally, *Rethinking Writing* follows the writing process through the first three of six chapters, and these three—on process, audience, and revision—are the most repetitive and least interesting. The first chapter includes revision: "In order to revise successfully, you have to distance yourself enough from your work to achieve perspective." The second chapter repeats similar advice: "In order to read your own work, however, you have to distance yourself from the words you have so carefully selected and switch..."
from proud writer to critical reader." From the third chapter comes more: "Knowing how to read your writing so that you achieve the perspective you need to revise successfully requires considerable skill and practice." Chapter Five, on the writer's ideas, and Chapter Six, on the writer's personality, seem to be misplaced. It doesn't make sense to leave them until the end when creative thinking, brainstorming, and visualizing (found in Chapter Five) and voice (found in Chapter Six) are needed early in the writing process.

Chapter Four, "The Conventions of Writing," presents the one clear attempt to go beyond freshman writing. It focuses the most clearly on advanced composition by giving attention to flexibility and to the requirements of different disciplines by examining a lab report, a social science research paper, and a literary/critical paper. The approach and tone, however, do not change:

When formally interpreting a literary work, for example, you must root all interpretations in the text you are discussing. An effective example of literary criticism will make frequent reference to the text, including direct quotations wherever appropriate. Fidelity to the text is a prerequisite for credibility. (144)

The disappointment of reading the same message in three succeeding sentences is especially acute in light of the need for a rhetoric with an interdisciplinary emphasis. The text that comes closest to achieving this is Linda Simon's Good Writing, a combination rhetoric/reader. Full of more good discipline-specific assignments than one class could possible complete, and accompanied by usable readings, Good Writing falls somewhat short on writing advice.

But Rethinking Writing does not include any specific assignments, nor is it a reader. It is a short advice book that includes some awareness of different kinds of college writing and their value to different disciplines, a companion text to be read as support for specific assignments and other class business. In this respect, it is most like William Zinsser's On Writing Well—a short, general advice text filled with examples. But there the similarity ends. Zinsser succeeds because a short text minus assignments needs to inspire, and Zinsser inspires. Kuriloff preaches. While Zinsser shares himself with the reader, Kuriloff shares advice. Zinsser varies his approach, including first-person insights and admissions of problems he faces, third-person involvements with the reader, and second-person direct advice. Kuriloff steadily gives second-person direct advice.

After reading Zinsser, I feel that I could write well; I want to, even though it's going to be hard work. After reading Kuriloff, I feel that writing is indeed a weighty task and probably beyond me; at any rate, I don't especially want to try. The difference is highlighted by the comments each makes after presenting a passage from E.B. White as an example of good writing. Here's Kuriloff:
In this lyrical outburst, White carries the reader from phrase to phrase, just barely pausing at a comma or semicolon until he completes his image and the sentence ends. Such a sentence does not appear by chance. Clearly, White considers what he wants to say and how he wants to sound. This sentence works to convey his distinctive voice. (204)

Now compare Kuriloff's discussions with Zinsser's:

Now there's a man writing about a subject that I have absolutely no interest in. Yet I enjoy this piece thoroughly. I like the simple beauty of its style. I like the rhythms, the unexpected but refreshing words ("deified," "allure," "cackling"), the specific details like the Laced Wyandotte and the brooder house. But mainly what I like is that this is a man telling me unabashedly about a love affair with poultry that goes back to 1907. It's written with humanity and warmth, and after three paragraphs I know quite a lot about what sort of man this hen-lover is. (29)

I'm intimidated by Kuriloff's commentary, especially when I read that "such a sentence does not appear by chance." I'm reminded that here is a much greater writing talent than mine, and I feel little chance of rising to such heights. The tone, here and elsewhere, intimidates me because Kuriloff seems to have this writing problem well in hand. She has conquered, and all that remains is for me to see reason and do likewise. But I'm right there with Zinsser as he shares his subjective reaction, and I'm left feeling that I have a chance of sharing with my readers what sort of person I am, hen-lover or not.

Rethinking Writing raises anew all the questions of what we need in an advanced composition text, and its shortcomings reflect the problems of defining advanced composition that the field is currently facing. To what extent should an advanced composition text be a replay of freshman rhetorics? If it is to be considerable, Kuriloff succeeds—at least in terms of recognizing and describing the writing process. Should it have an interdisciplinary emphasis? If so, Kuriloff offers one chapter while Simon offers the entire text. Should it contain assignments? If so, Kuriloff offers none, whereas Simon provides choices of specific assignments supported by the text. Most important, what attitude toward writing does the text promote? Here is Kuriloff's greatest failure and Zinsser's success. Zinsser may be difficult to weave into a course, but students respond enthusiastically to him. A student may or may not need structure or assignments in the text, depending on the instructor, but a student always needs inspiration and a belief that good writing is possible. The problem with Rethinking Writing is that it only rethinks; it doesn't refeel.