
Reviewed by Nancy J. Tyson, University of South Florida

Though it is self-characterized as a developmental text, this new composition anthology could be applied in more advanced courses. It will also interest JAC readers because of its conspicuous incorporation of current theory. Its author/editor's guiding philosophy is that the ability to write depends on the ability to read. Assuming that students who don't ordinarily read for pleasure often have the greatest writing difficulty, Adams has chosen the selections for their current appeal to readers from varying ethnic and social backgrounds, and she has designed the textual apparatus to "stimulate ideas," teach reading proficiency, and implement process-oriented writing strategies.

This is more than just a collection of essays; in fact, new or experienced instructors could plan a course using it alone. What makes it relatively unusual for its genre is an eighty-page rhetorical discussion of reading and writing skills that precedes the anthology proper. One unit promotes more effective reading, teaching how to distinguish fact from opinion, statement from implication, main ideas from supporting detail. A second covers prewriting, drafting and revising, presenting the three components of the writing process as "recursive" and interrelated, not as separate, linear stages. The second unit, which builds upon the first, emphasizes the importance of audience: the needs of the reader are the obligations of the writer. Each of the two units in the rhetoric section provides several short writing assignments to reinforce essential concepts. Adams' presentation is basic without being condescending, so this opening section could be effective either as a primer for freshman English or as a quick review in the advanced composition course.

The reading selections with accompanying teaching aids occupy the rest of the text. These are primarily short essays (averaging two to three pages) with a few stories and poems—a well balanced collection chosen on the basis of student appeal and current controversial interest. Some standard authors are represented (Walt Whitman, James Thurber, Theodore Roethke), but most titles are by contemporary writers and popular journalists like Mario Puzo, Russell Baker, and Pulitzer Prize-winning humorist Dave Barry. Some will spark recognition in a media-aware audience of non-readers: Ann Landers, Coretta Scott King, Phil Donahue. Others, like Vincent Ruggiero, will be familiar primarily to teachers. The selections are divided into loose thematic units, such as "Human Behavior," "Changing Social Values," and "Cultural Heritage." An alternate table of contents accesses examples of the standard rhetorical modes: comparison/contrast, definition, and so on.
Each thematic unit includes one student essay followed by a critical analysis of the essay and, in some cases, suggested revision strategies. Preceding each selection are several questions to stimulate thought, and a list of vocabulary words and their definitions. Following each selection are four discussion/activity sections: "Understanding the Content," "Looking at Structure and Style," "Evaluating the Author's Viewpoints," and "Pursuing Possible Essay Topics." These aids derive from the reading and writing principles taught in Part One and, like the readings, are designed to accommodate a range of ability levels. Appendices include a minimal introduction to library research, a model research paper, and a brief style manual based on the new MLA documentation procedures. An accompanying thirty-six-page Instructor's Guide offers approaches for teaching each selection in full-class and small discussion groups, and suggests minimal reading levels for most selections, ranging from fifth and sixth grade (Langston Hughes' "Salvation") through fifteenth grade (Coretta King's "The Death Penalty Is A Step Back").

Viewpoints is resourceful but not prescriptive, current but not trendy. The composition instructor who needs a congenial text for unmotivated students at any academic level might well consider it.


Reviewed by Marie J. Secor, Pennsylvania State University

The recent interest in argumentation among compositionists has been marked by the increasing number of textbooks and readers on the subject. The sources of this interest are varied. First, the writing-across-the-curriculum movement has led many to see argument as a unifying concept, a perspective that cuts across the disciplines and abstracts the elements shared by all academic writing situations. The principles governing effective argumentation are field-invariant and can be expressed in general terms, though their application and emphasis will vary from one discourse community to another. Second, the very notion of advanced composition as distinguishable from freshman or developmental composition precipitates a turn toward the study of argumentation. After all, if argumentation has traditionally been the last assignment in the conventional, modes-oriented composition course, it makes sense that it should be the starting point for the next semester of composition instruction. From this perspective, the study of argument seems to find its natural home in advanced composition.

Anthologies emphasizing argumentation, therefore, contribute to the development of advanced composition courses and are welcome additions.