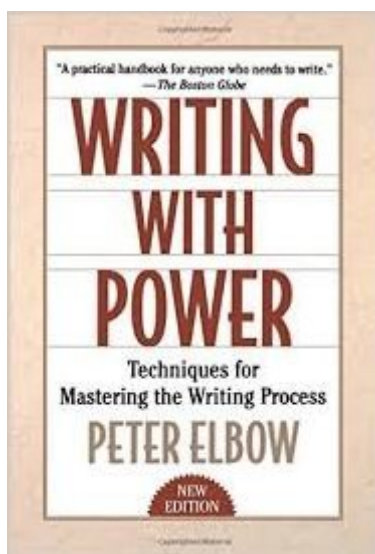


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# Writing With Power: Techniques For Mastering The Writing Process



## Synopsis

A classic handbook for anyone who needs to write, *Writing With Power* speaks to everyone who has wrestled with words while seeking to gain power with them. Here, Peter Elbow emphasizes that the essential activities underlying good writing and the essential exercises promoting it are really not difficult at all. Employing a cookbook approach, Elbow provides the reader (and writer) with various recipes: for getting words down on paper, for revising, for dealing with an audience, for getting feedback on a piece of writing, and still other recipes for approaching the mystery of power in writing. In a new introduction, he offers his reflections on the original edition, discusses the responses from people who have followed his techniques, how his methods may differ from other processes, and how his original topics are still pertinent to today's writer.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Whatever your reason for writing, Peter Elbow has a "recipe" to guide you. A longtime proponent of "freewriting" (writing without stopping, for a preset amount of time), Elbow incorporates its use in a variety of ways. Have a limited amount of time? Spend half of it freewriting and half of it cleaning up your prose. Got all the time in the world (and only a vague sense of what you want to say)?

Freewrite, then focus, then freewrite, then focus, repeatedly, until you get "a trustworthy vision of your final piece of writing." Elbow offers a plethora of prompts for priming the creative pump, as well as several ways to revise the piece of writing that results: thorough revising, revising with feedback, cutting and pasting, proofreading, and the like. He pays close attention to the ways in which focusing on an audience can assist or interfere in the writing process, including a terrific chapter on

the strangeness of writing for teachers, in which "your task is usually to explain what you are still engaged in trying to understand to someone who understands it better." And he provides an excellent section on how to solicit the kind of feedback you want. Though it is a new edition of a 1981 book, there is nothing tired about *Writing with Power*: it provides many tools to help a writer feel empowered throughout the writing process. --Jane Steinberg --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

"Students for the first time are excited about being able to transform their thoughts into clear language with a new found confidence."--Alan Dernalowicz, Mount Wachusett Community College  
Praise for the previous edition: "Page after page, chapter after chapter, Peter Elbow gives direct and down-to-earth advice for beginning writers."--*Teachers and Writers*  
"A practical handbook for anyone who needs to write."--*The Boston Globe*  
"A valuable aid for those who need to write who are hindered by lack of tools needed to successfully complete such a task on a day-to-day basis."--Gary Douglas, WITC --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Elbow has clearly thought about words for a long time and his book is the distilled gold from that thinking--a treasury of insight into the intricacies of the writing process and a conceptual toolbox full of techniques to get you writing fluently and effectively. His advice applies equally well to creative and expository writing. The book falters a bit in presentation. To integrate the many good ideas into my daily practice, I'll have to review the material several times and I wish the book had been designed with a greater awareness for the reader's need to review. A visual reference chart would have been helpful to keep track of the techniques and their uses. Also, Elbow is so good at thinking about writing that sometimes he thinks too much. I'm sure that musing on a variety of possible ideas was helpful to the author's own writing process, but some of his notions are too windy, and the book could have been much more powerful without them. Despite my minor frustrations, I say again: this may be the most helpful book on writing I have ever read. The author has the uncanny ability to get inside a writer's mind and speak to you directly from where you're struggling. There were many things I'd been doing--some right, some wrong, but most of them unconsciously. Elbow helps you become a more conscious writer and presents a wide array of non-gimmicky tools that help generate high-level work. He also completely re-conceptualizes what it means to write and, in the process, he can bring even the most alienated writer back into the fold, making writing approachable, useful, and even fun.

The title "Writing With Power" explains it all or rather lives up to the promise. Peter Elbow is a proponent of free writing to loosen the mind and get your creative inspiration in full gear. He doesn't subscribe to rules that are too stringent or that hamper the writers flow. Free writing is especially good when working with a first draft. He proposes not stopping the story or book until you get the first draft completed. Yes, you've still got to do the research, read a lot, brainstorm important ideas, outline (in some cases) and write well. This book goes a long way in showing the reader just how to write with power.

Elbow's discussion of the importance of writing clearly is the best I have read. He put into words how most writers feel about writing, at whatever level they perform. His suggestions for revision work. I read with fascination how I happen to be practicing "the most dangerous" method for getting words on paper. Until I read this, (and you must read it for yourself to appreciate), I thought all writers planned what they wrote the same way. He didn't scare me (I don't think he's trying to scare anyone; just warn them, so they have options) into changing. This method has worked for me throughout my journalism career--so I write fiction the same way. So much more in this book. So helpful--and this book is written clearly. Highly recommend. P.S. I sure hope this review is clearly written

on time and as described

A large variety of techniques for writing and revising, suitable for all types of writing. This is not a formula book, rather a book that helps build confidence and skills. I'm going to use what I learned. The final chapters on voice and "magic" are a bit over my head, but I think that they will make more sense to me as I gain skills.

Elbow's book is my favorite text not only for writers, but for anyone who needs to write. Elbow explains his own tortuous journey to good writing, admitting that the only way he can get words on paper is to start with all the wrong words in all the wrong sentences. Reading this confession helped me enormously because I write in exactly the same way. I always thought I was simply unskilled. Elbow helped me realize that in fact, all writers write differently just as all people think differently. While writing with power is a difficult quest, it's achievable. In readable, accessible prose, Elbow explains how.

Before reading Elbow's book, I was quite skeptical concerning "freewriting" -- raw writing, writing without concern for the rules of grammar, writing for the sheer sake of getting words on paper. Elbow overcame my skepticism with powerful examples, reports from his own experience & that of his pupils, and clever exposition. Rather than ducking the complexities and contradictions of good writing, Elbow tackles them head-on. His strategy involves aggressively seeking counter-arguments to his suggestions, and he often admits that two opposing principles both contain elements of truth. He then gives thoughtful advice on how to cope with such complexity. Many of his guidelines involve dialectical or cyclical practices, e.g. paying attention to breathing life into your prose, but then revising for structure, and then returning once again to make sure you haven't choked the life out of what you've written. In combination with Robert Boice's book, *First-Order Principles for College Teachers*, Elbow's book would make a wonderful present for a beginning academic or other professional whose livelihood depends on good writing. Graduate students in all fields would also benefit. And, of course, people who TEACH writing could find much of value in this book. Elbow, however, seems to have a dim view of many of his colleagues' tactics!

A fellow aspiring writer recommended this book when I mentioned that my writing seemed flat and not very compelling. This book is well organized with clear bullet summaries at the end of each chapter so it's easy to skip through for what you want. The exercises are helpful and some are very creative. The author looks beyond the basics and gets into the writer's psyche. I'm newly motivated to write at least a little every day and have strong strategies for boosting my writing style.

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