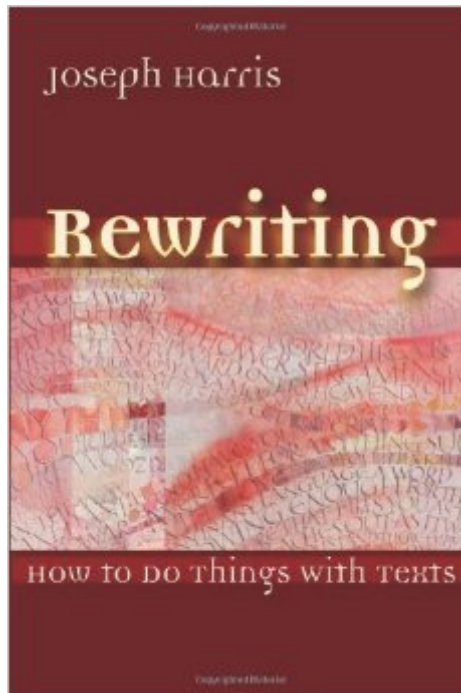


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# Rewriting: How To Do Things With Texts



## Synopsis

"Like all writers, intellectuals need to say something new and say it well. But unlike many other writers, what intellectuals have to say is bound up with the books we are reading . . . and the ideas of the people we are talking with." What are the moves that an academic writer makes? How does writing as an intellectual change the way we work from sources? In *Rewriting*, a textbook for the undergraduate classroom, Joseph Harris draws the college writing student away from static ideas of thesis, support, and structure, and toward a more mature and dynamic understanding. Harris wants college writers to think of intellectual writing as an adaptive and social activity, and he offers them a clear set of strategies—a set of moves—for participating in it.

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## Customer Reviews

Written by Duke University Writing Program director Joseph Harris, *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts* is a guide written especially for college students and professionals seeking to refine their academic writing technique. Leaning away from the static ideas of thesis, support and structure and toward a more naturally flowing and dynamic writing style, *Rewriting* challenges the reader to think of writing an adaptive, social activity and shape one's written intellectual opinions and discussions accordingly. Presented strategies for coaxing a more persuasive and intuitive tone into one's logical academic written arguments include forwarding (taking words, images, or ideas from text and putting them to use in new contexts), countering (suggesting different ways of thinking rather than simple nullification of a given ideal), and much more. Recommended for intermediate to advanced

academic writers for its solid recommendations to make prose more readable, immersive, thought-provoking and natural-sounding.

This book has helped me immensely in my teaching and in my own writing. I use it as a textbook for my college composition students. Four chapters are on making "interesting use of sources" in your writing. These chapters--"Coming to Terms" (more than just summarizing), "Forwarding" (more than just agreeing with), "Countering" (more than just disagreeing) and "Taking an Approach" (more than just "applying" someone else's ideas)--show the moves for using the words and ideas of others to present and develop words and ideas of your own. The final chapter on "Revising" gives practical, useful ideas and strategies for moving beyond a first draft. The "Afterward" lays out in brief Harris' idea of a writing course. Though somewhat positioned as "bonus" chapters, either of them alone are worth reading the book for. The explanations of concepts throughout are clear and yet intellectually rich enough to chew on. One of the biggest strengths of this book are the very concrete examples throughout, often in the form of multi-paragraph quotations from published intellectual writing. It is much more of a "book" than a "textbook." Harris' intelligent and generous voice comes through well in the writing.

I'm using this book in a composition teaching class at the master's level, and so far I am very impressed with the quality of content and how the book was put together. I will likely require this text later when I teach English, because it is a very good look at how to use texts in academic settings without coming across as a style guide. The emphasis is on engaging ideas with respect and integrity to highlight or adjust your own writing accordingly, and I can see this being very useful as a tool to explain why proof-texting is so harmful.

In this book, Harris really spins things around to make you think. He shows you-- the writer-- how to integrate other people's texts into your work. He takes great care to explain what is needed, when it is needed, and every option imaginable as far as slants and takes on what to do. I recommend this book to anyone who is writing research, critiques, or even to anyone who grades student papers. It has given me insight far beyond what I had thought I needed, and because of that I have learned a great deal. It's an easy read; it is brief, to the point, organized, and thought-provoking.

A required reading for a college course, but very beneficial and full of fresh ideas. Harris, applying the very content he prescribes, weaves quotes, theory, examples, and suggested practices to

expand and illuminate writing instruction. He offers a wealth of knowledge and experience to future instructors of writing, yet he also shapes his advice to all writers throughout the text. I have to admit that I had to reread certain sections due to text complexity, but all to the ends of comprehending the text and expanding my lexicon.

This is an extremely helpful book on writing. Used it as a grad student. Helped me pinpoint some persistent issues in my writing and gave me some strategies to resolve those issues. Rewriting always helps, but it's also good to know HOW to do that--how to think objectively about one's own work.

Harris' *Rewriting* is a thoughtful discussion of a number of the basic moves in academic writing, particularly in the humanities and social sciences. Other reviewers have brought up some issues with Harris' book, and I'd like to echo these. Harris' book presents little new information, reviewing some of the basic methods in academic writing, but is written in a sophisticated and playful manner that may put some students off. Harris' is a book to be read slowly. I'd be tempted to assign it in a college-level class with a major writing component, but students may not read it at the slow speed the book requires. I suspect this book would work best for intermediate to advanced undergraduate writers. It might overwhelm beginning students who are just getting a handle on the nuts and bolts of academic work, while there should be little new here for students who are further along in humanities and social science majors. All the same, Harris' book is a graceful and enjoyable treatment of academic writing, a lucid reconsideration of topics other handbooks on research and writing treat only briefly.

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