

# WORD CRAFT

*A new guide for writers  
keeps the reader in  
mind*

## THE CRAFT OF RESEARCH.

By Wayne C. Booth,  
Gregory G. Colomb,  
and Joseph M. Williams.  
The University of Chicago  
Press, 294  
pages, \$12.95.

BY PAUL SIGNORELLI

THE AVERAGE reader or writer, seeing a book titled *The Craft of Research*, might do little more than stifle a yawn before moving on to something more inviting. Perhaps an appropriate response for a select few, most of us would be making a big mistake.

Written by three University of Chicago faculty members specifically for college students preparing their first research papers, *The Craft of Research* is an easy-to-read guide with helpful hints for almost anyone who puts words on paper. It reflects the authors' love of writing and their respect for readers. *Craft* conforms to *The Chicago Manual of Style* and is connected to it through the series, *Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing*. It is well organized by descriptive chapter and subsection headings, so readers can either read it straight through or simply examine the sections they need. A detailed table of contents and an equally useful index guide writers to specific information.

One of the book's many

strengths is its emphasis on the notion that all of us need to continually think about the readers we are trying to reach. That theme is introduced early—in the preface—and the authors promise to show writers “how to read your own text as others will and thereby know better where and how to revise it.” Many of us undoubtedly have a list of writers to whom we would like to send a copy of this chapter; it doesn't take much to make the leap from seeing how the book could help college students to understanding how it can be used by writers of everything from newsletters and annual reports to longer nonfiction and fiction works.

The authors suggest that “even before you take the first step toward a research paper you must think about the kind of conversation you intend to have with your readers, about the kind of relationship you want to create with them, about the kind of relationship that you hope they are willing and able to have with you.”

Leading their own readers through the process of conducting research and then producing a finished manuscript, Booth, Colomb, and Williams provide anecdotes and a series of “Quick Tip” sections in outline form to help researchers complete their task. Recalling some of their own embarrassing moments in compiling research, the authors reassure us:

*[Don't] feel that you are the only one ever to make an especially silly mistake. Booth still winces when he remembers the graduate paper he turned in on Shakespeare's *McBeth*. And Williams would prefer to forget the report he was supposed to give but never did because he could find no references to his assigned topic, that great Norwegian playwright Henry Gibson.*

Helpful reminders are abundant: Show work in progress to trusted friends or colleagues while it is still in draft form. Turn to expert reference materials and to accessible specialists, and don't be afraid to ask for assistance. “If you feel too shy or proud to ask [for help], get over it,” the authors advise. “Talk to your librarian. Others do it all the time.”

Warnings are also issued to those turning to on-line sources: “There are on-line electronic editions of Shakespeare so sloppily edited that using them would label you as incompetent,” the authors point out in one of their more chilling observations.

*Craft* ends with a useful list of reference sources for writers. Beginning with general-interest reference books such as *The Columbia Encyclopedia* and *Books in Print*, the authors go on to offer nearly 20 pages of special resources for a variety of disciplines, including the humanities (*Benét's Reader's Encyclopedia*), literary studies (*The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*), and music (*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*).

Returning to one of their major themes, the authors conclude with the forceful advice they so consistently reiterate throughout the book:

*We believe that by understanding the complementary process of reading and writing, students can better plan and conduct their research by anticipating what they have to find, think about, and eventually write about. By understanding their own reading, they can as writers better anticipate the expectations of their readers.*

And maybe prevent them from yawning.

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Paul Signorelli, director of volunteer services for the San Francisco Public Library and co-owner of Authors and Audiences, has written for a variety of publications.