

## Review

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Jaqueline McLeod Rogers and Catherine G. Taylor, *Across the Disciplines: Academic Writing and Reading*, Toronto: Pearson Canada, 2011. 470 pages.

*Across the Disciplines: Academic Writing and Reading* is a new textbook for academic writing courses in post-secondary educational institutions. Although loosely based on an earlier work by the same authors (Behrens, Laurence, Leonard J. Rosen, Jaqueline McLeod Rogers, and Catherine Taylor. *Writing and Reading Across the Disciplines*. Custom Edition for the University of Winnipeg. Pearson Education, 2007), this new book presents a radical and innovative improvement in several ways. Basing their approach on the belief that “successful academic readers and writers employ certain methods and conventions that greatly facilitate their work” (p. vii), McLeod Rogers and Taylor explore those techniques in a direct and pragmatic manner, producing a remarkably useful textbook that will be welcomed by students and instructors alike. It incorporates in a single, moderately sized volume instruction in rhetoric, a sequence of exercises, and a full-fledged reader. The authors address the key problems and main fields of both scholarly research and writing, and provide valuable suggestions and guidelines for all essential activities in this domain, thus offering their readers a clear step-by-step introduction into the ways academic machinery functions and into routine procedures to make it run smoothly.

*Across the Disciplines* is divided into two parts. The first one, entitled “Rhetoric” (pp. 1-147), is a practical guide to essential forms and facets of academic discourse. The book opens with a chapter that first explains the meaning of critical thinking and its central place in all academic work, and then introduces a number of strategies for active reading, active listening, and research, including sections on narratives and visual texts. At the same time, readers are shown how “disciplinary approaches shape disciplinary knowledge” and how writings within a single discipline are similar in terms of methods involved, key concepts, and terminology. In the following chapter, after examining the basic structure of argument, different types of thesis statements and the way to write them, the authors provide a detailed description of all stages of the recursive writing process, supporting it with numerous recommendations at each step of the course, and adding a section on writing strong and coherent paragraphs. The next problem addressed and elucidated is the perennial dilemma of how to develop one’s own voice and how to negotiate the narrow space between personal opinion and detached scholarly discourse, especially in an era when scientific truth and biased interpretation seem to overlap to a greater extent than ever before. Chapter Four is dedicated to different forms of representing sources, with clarifications on when and how to use them, and a number of relevant examples; it also tackles the ever-important issue of how to avoid plagiarism and gives detailed instructions on documenting sources. The book then focuses on the question of writing critiques and reviews, which is presented in the same lucid manner, and finally, in Chapter Six, on the development of the research essay and the important strategies of integrating sources into an argument. In

addition, issues such as choosing a topic, finding sources, creating a research space, and finalizing a major research project are all analyzed and explained. In such a fashion, the first part of this textbook gives a plethora of useful and applicable suggestions and guidelines; even if some of the suggested strategies may seem mechanical at first, they certainly lead directly to establishing successful writing practices. Numerous exercises, clearly defined concepts, worksheets, point-form writing plans, and many other forms of additional material further enrich the book. It would be very difficult to fit more usable material into a mere 147 pages, which is considerably shorter than many other textbooks of a similar kind.

The second, considerably longer (pp. 143-468) portion of the book is the reader ("Anthology"), containing twenty-eight essays organized around seven topics: Rhetoric and Writing (Chapter Seven), Political Studies and Homelessness (Chapter Eight), Cultural Studies and Body-Image (Chapter Nine), Psychology and the Problem of Conformity (Chapter Ten), Education and Schools in Canada (Chapter Eleven), New Media (Chapter Twelve), and Questions of Canadian Identity (Chapter Thirteen). Each chapter begins with two short sections whose aim is to prepare students for the readings: an introduction delineating the main topic and its implications and a list of questions intended to help the readers connect their previous knowledge or personal experience to the central theme. Each text is in turn followed by two sets of questions, one for active reading and the other for critical reading. Finally, at the end of each chapter there is a list of research and writing suggestions for further study. The readers are thus equipped with several tools designed to help them understand rhetorical strategies, analyze the texts, and put them in a larger perspective. The choice of texts also contributes to the overall quality of the book, given that the majority of them are scholarly papers, with proper academic structure and the necessary apparatus, including quotations, citations and bibliography.

In comparison with most other textbooks for academic writing available on the market – and there are quite a few – *Across the Disciplines* shows a number of important advantages, to both students and instructors. First- and second-year university students will certainly appreciate its clarity and its pragmatic, straightforward approach, unfortunately so often missing in similar publications. The book avoids inordinate dwelling on the niceties and intricacies of different theories of writing, discourse, and education, which – however intellectually challenging or scholarly significant – are for the most part lost on students in early stages of their post-secondary studies. Instead, it gives them an effective, thorough, and helpful program to pursue in order to develop the resources they need and commonly lack. At the same time comprehensive and easy to follow, *Across the Disciplines* includes all the necessary elements of scholarly research and writing students need to learn in order to be successful in their academic endeavours, and presents them in an understandable and methodical way. Instructors, too, can only profit from such a well-organized textbook, as it will provide them with both an excellent tool when structuring their courses and a rich source of practices and texts they can use in the classroom. The exceptionally clear logical structure in the way the topics are sequenced and presented and the amount of directly useful information define best the crucial quality of this book. In view of such beneficial and valuable assets it offers, it is to be expected that it will be

widely used for a full range of undergraduate courses in colleges and universities across North America.

## Bio



After obtaining his BA at the University of Belgrade with the thesis *The Epigraphy of Roman Sepulchral Monuments from Singidunum*, Ivan Roksandic continued his MA studies at the same institution and at L'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris, France, focusing on the archaeological context of the earliest North-West Semitic alphabetic inscriptions (1700-1200 BC). He got his PhD. at the University of British Columbia with the dissertation *The Ouroboros Seizes Its Tale: Strategies of Mythopoeia in Narrative Fiction*, which examined the influence of mythological narratives on twentieth-century novel. His subsequent research interests concentrated on linguistics, especially on problems in pre-Spanish toponomastics in the Caribbean, on pre-Columbian languages of the region, and on Arawak language family. He is currently a member of the Department of Anthropology faculty at the University of Winnipeg, teaching mostly core linguistic courses.