

## Book Review

# Lunsford, A. (2021). *Let's Talk...A Pocket Rhetoric*. W. W. Norton & Company.

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With so many “how to write” books on the market and freely accessible resources online, writing scholars must continue to find ways to distinguish their content. At first glance, Andrea Lunsford’s *Let’s talk...A pocket rhetoric* seems similar to existing writing resources for undergraduate students (the noted audience for the text), which made me question the *need* for yet another guide. While, yes, similarities exist, there are distinct differences, too, which ensure that *Let’s talk* is a modern and useful contribution to an undergraduate student’s bookshelf and could serve as a text book for a writing intensive course.

*Let’s talk* is organized into seven parts: rhetoric, reading, writing, research, language and style, design, and media. While parts like writing (part 3) and research (part 4) explain topics that students may have experienced in writing-focused and non-writing focused classes (e.g., arguing, summarizing, synthesizing ideas, responding to research, and using sources ethically), other parts of *Let’s talk* offer valuable instruction for our current context. For example, the book begins with a chapter about listening (in part 1), which forces the reader—the student writer who will use this book—to slow down, take a step back, and not jump right into the writing process. This short chapter is useful in that it prompts the reader to consider the value of active and attentive listening and its connection to writing. Beyond this initial chapter on listening, Chapter 4—“Developing Academic Habits”—is useful for readers because they can take a moment to think about habits that will help them with their writing process. Topics addressed include curiosity, creativity, and flexibility. In the reading section (part 2, chapters 5 and 6), Lunsford appropriately addresses topics of misinformation and confirmation bias.

Other notable contributions of the book for the modern writer are the parts on design (part 6, chapters 25 and 26) and media (part 7, chapters 27-30). In the Design section, Lunsford asks the writer to consider elements of texts beyond the words; for example, she explains the impact of font, layout, use of white space, and use of visuals in texts. In the Media section, Lunsford addresses

multiple modes of presentation beyond the traditional research paper. For example, she considers other print and oral modes of communication, and she writes about digital and social communication including infographics, posters, podcasts, and social media. These genres have not been introduced or explained in general writing handbooks of the past.

Beyond the distinct parts of the book which make it relevant, Lunsford encases her discussion of rhetoric with an acknowledgement of the current societal context. She acknowledges the pandemic of COVID-19, the prevalence of online learning opportunities, new challenges for learners and educators (e.g., navigating fake news), and the inclusion of new forms of communication (e.g., vlogs, blogs, oral presentations) that are current in post-secondary classes. By addressing expected and new elements of genre and rhetoric, she ensures that *Let's Talk...A Pocket Rhetoric* is approachable and relevant for students across disciplines.

In addition to this acknowledgment, her inclusion of writing samples related to current day matters (e.g., movements such as Black Lives Matter) and many links to additional examples (e.g., [livingroomconversations.org](http://livingroomconversations.org)) provides an opportunity for reader connection and reflection. Regardless of students' academic disciplines, the use of such examples will help them to connect with the instruction and examples provided.

While this text would be valuable for an undergraduate audience, it is situated in an American context. Additional international examples could have broadened the reach of the text. Further, while the book is approachable, it is text-heavy, and there are little to no prompts for students to write and reflect. For example, the text could have included writing activities that could connect to the content but also serve as assignments for writing- and non-writing intensive courses similar to other writing instruction texts (e.g., grammar handbooks, *They Say/I Say* by Graff & Birkenstein). The inclusion of more opportunities for student activities would make the book even more useful as a required text for an undergraduate writing course.

## Reference

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