

Better Writers, Better Thinkers

Stephen Arkle

Lake Washington School District, Kirkland, Washington

Many chapters in this book provide a good sense of what writing to learn is and how it works. I will explain in this chapter how I use writing-to-learn techniques to help students to think through an idea more clearly. Two aspects of writing to learn are very important: it helps students to understand content better, and it shows them that writing is a process with various stages. When students have a full grasp of material and can use the stages of writing to develop their ideas, they become better thinkers.

One of the biggest hurdles for most students is finding meaning in what they read. Lectures do not always help them to understand the piece of literature being studied. The lecture isn't their experience: their personal connection with the material. Louise Rosenblatt has explained the importance of getting students to think on their own about material.

Although all students should not be required to give the same sort of expression to their reaction, in most cases a personal experience will elicit a definite response; it will lead to some kind of reflection. It may also lead to the desire to communicate this to others whom the boy or girl trusts. An atmosphere of informal, friendly exchange could be created. The student should feel free to reveal emotions and to make judgments. The primary criterion should not be whether his [or her] reactions or his [or her] judgments measure up to critical traditions, but rather the genuineness of the ideas and reactions he expresses. The variety and unpredictability of life need not be alien to the classroom. Teachers and pupils should be relaxed enough to face what indeed happened as they interpreted the printed page. Frank expression of boredom or even vigorous rejection is a more valid starting point for learning than are docile attempts to feel "what the teacher wants." When the young reader considers why [she or] he has responded in a certain way, [she or] he is learning both to read more adequately and to seek personal meaning in literature (1975, 70).

Rosenblatt emphasizes three points here and throughout the rest of *Literature as Exploration*. First, students need to be engaged with what they read. Second, students need to learn to trust their reactions to what they have read so that they might reconstruct their ideas. And third, thinking should be done by students. The teacher should not interpret material, that is should not provide meaning or ideas about the text. Interpretation will carry more weight with students if the ideas are their own. It is their "exploration of experience" (Edward DeBono, *Teaching Thinking*, (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 33).

The writing-to-learn process offers the kind of engagement with material that Rosenblatt recommends. Students have a basis from which to respond, even if the response is boredom or rejection. The students are no longer passive receivers of information. What is gained by allowing students to draw on their own resources and experiences is ownership of ideas. This ownership of ideas provides the foundation for quality in writing and thinking because of the students' investment in ideas.

With the teacher directing and intervening in the writing and thinking processes, the students develop ideas in writing which will help them to understand and to communicate material more thoroughly. As the students evolve their own ideas, they also realize that writing is a process: a process that is not completed in one sitting. My writing-to-learn program consists of eight stages, each gradually increasing the complexity of thought required. These are dialectics, first thoughts, metaphorical questions, metaphorical characteristics, comparative lists of comparable concrete textual evidence, controlling idea, instant version, and draft. I will explain how students use these stages to develop the framework for a critical essay on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Following the explanation of these stages, I will describe how I evaluate the final written product. I include this evaluation "process" because it helps reinforce the concern for student-centered learning and the growth of ideas through writing.

Dialectics

From the beginning I wanted the students to begin developing and dealing with their ideas about the novel, so I turned to **dialectics** because they help students develop ideas by responding to and reflecting on what they have read. Dialectics give students a place to record ideas, to think, to discover, and to begin the long process of refining ideas. In the broadest sense, the dialectic gives the students a chance to begin translating or grasping the meaning of the material in a way only they

can understand. At first, I like to have my students focus on particular aspects of a piece to let them get used to the dialectics. For example, one time they may only focus on the interaction between characters or another time only on what a character thinks. This focus usually depends on the type of paper they will be writing. After they have done a dialectic response, students usually have some new ideas as well as a sense of personal engagement with the topic. Here, for example, is what one student wrote after doing a dialectic response to *Frankenstein*. (The numbers in parentheses refer to text pages from which the responses are drawn.)

I. Nothing contributes so much to tranquilize the mind as a steady purpose—a point on which the soul may fix its intellectual eye.

Walton is enthralled with the stranger. Almost infatuated. His description of the stranger narrating is so complimentary that it borders on the naive (16).

II. With this deep consciousness of what they owed towards the being which they had given life . . . (Frankenstein's childhood) (33).

Frankenstein's motive "I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation" (47).

"Learn from me how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world" (52).

"No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (52).

"A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind and never allow passion or a transitory mind to disturb his tranquility."

He will not end up creating the perfect human being (54).

The description of the monster's "birth" (56).

This sounds like Raskolnikov (58).

I can't believe it. He brings life to this monster, and then makes no attempt to destroy it—instead, abandoning it totally to run free as it will. His behavior is similar to Raskolnikov's during his illness, and while he recovers from it.

Victor discovers the monster. Becomes convinced his monster is the murderer. Spends the night in a rainstorm (68).

III. A being whom I myself had formed, and endued with life, had met me at midnight among the precipices of an inaccessible mountain (74).

Frankie's first words with the monster high in the mountains—what drew him there (95–96).

The beginning of the monster's tale (98).

Like Adam, the monster eats the fruit of the tree of knowledge. "Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous and magnificent, yet so vicious and base?" (114).

"What was I?" (116).

IV. Compares himself to Adam.

Compares himself more to Satan—does this fit into his image of an alter ego?

Frankenstein's guilt at creating the monster and consequently leaving it immediately after creation is like a young girl who has committed adultery. She no longer wants to see the face of her lover and the very thought and fear of the act she has committed makes her sick (124).

The monster demands Frankenstein create another monster. This would destroy him though. He would surely fall prey to another bout of sickness. If Frankenstein became the monster's friend he would have him completely under his thumb (137).

"The prospect of such an occupation (creating a female monster) made every other circumstance of existence pass before me like a dream, and that thought no longer had to me the reality of life" (142).

Frankenstein imprisoned in the dungeon of his own mind, of his own grief (189).

It is obvious to me that the monster meant he would kill Elisabeth on Frank's wedding night, because he had avowed to revenge himself by killing F's family. Evidently, F. thought it was he the monster was to be after because he couldn't emotionally accept the possibility of Elisabeth's death. It was too horrible to be true.

If the monster was F's alter ego, F. has now become his own alter ego since he is so intent upon his revenge (197).

"I was the slave—not the master, of an impulse which I detested yet could not disobey" (the monster at F's deathbed) (209).

Walter to Fred—"You throw a torch into a pile of buildings, and they are consumed, you sit among the ruins and lament the fall" (289).

Both the monster & Frankenstein feel that their crimes have degraded them "beneath the meanest entrance (?)." They both compare themselves to the "fallen angel" in the end (209).

The monster. "I am an abortion. Your abhorrence cannot equal that with which I regard myself. Where can I find rest but death?" (210).

Types of thinking presented here range from comprehension to paraphrasing information about plot to analysis (breaking down selection of material) such as the comparative statement about Raskolnikov of *Crime and Punishment* and Victor of *Frankenstein*. This student has begun thinking independently and making broad personal connections to the text. Ownership of ideas has begun.

First Thoughts

In the next stage of the process I ask students to narrow their observations. They review their dialectic writing and then summarize predominate ideas or impressions they have about Victor or the novel. Although primarily concerned with comprehension, this part of the process also focuses on application because they are selecting and converging on a particular idea or ideas. These **first thoughts** often focus on very specific responses to characteristics, images, and colors. Here is an example of one student's first thoughts.

My first impression dealt with Walter. His fascination and admiration of Victor is so strong that it borders on infatuation. Victor seems to be immersed in his own occupations and self during boyhood—a kind of introvert I would think that the morals he learned from his parents would have prevented him from “playing God” and creating the fiend. Victor seems to have no sexual attachments to Elisabeth which I think is odd. He doesn't seem to care for women much at all. As a matter of fact Walter is kind of the same way writing home to his sister, instead of a lover or wife.

Although short, this first thought focuses on the quality of Victor's relationships. When viewed in relation to the previous writing on which it is based, this selection demonstrates a narrowing and refining process because the focus is more particular and less general than the dialectic. First-thoughts focus attention on the whole of a character or novel and pull disconnected thoughts together. These responses, like all the responses in the prewriting stage, are shared orally with the class while I act as a director of discussion. This peer feedback benefits both the writer and the listener.

Metaphorical Questions

With a more specific focus in mind, I next invite students to consider the metaphorical aspects of *Frankenstein*. Some students need an explanation of these aspects. I provide them with an example. If the metaphor of a gathering storm has been chosen, one could focus on certain qualities of the storm (gray clouds, giant thunderheads, and thunder itself). After I have demonstrated the qualities of a particular metaphor, the students are usually able to generate their metaphorical lists. Drawing on the list of previously answered questions, one student listed these characteristics.

Metaphor: Dark Forest

Characteristics: hiding good
animals
multi-faceted
depressing to humans
yet hiding things we consider good

Metaphor: Volcano

Characteristics: unpredictable
full of inward turmoil
steam released
heaving
under unnameable pressure

After students have selected metaphors, I have them begin analysis. They are to pick one metaphor they are drawn to and think of characteristics typifying that metaphor—the more the better. I ask students to broaden and refine their thinking about the character or novel with metaphorical questions, reminding them that they should use their “first thoughts” as only a guide, and that they may revise the response later, if they wish, but that first responses are often more perceptive than carefully considered ones. One student’s responses are given after each question.

If this novel were:

a machine, what would it be? can opener.

a color? gray, peppery and black.

an animal? wolverine.

a weather condition, what would it be? turbulent.

a poison, what would it be? cyanide.

a weapon, what would it be? a dull knife.

history, what important moments would it be? civil war or medieval.

a mood, what would it be? angry, depressed, edgy, miserable.

nature, what aspects would it be? avalanche, dark forest or volcano.

a person (specific character, or relative, or man, woman, or child),
what would it be? God, or small impulsive child.

After students respond to these questions the class discusses what they did. Metaphorical questions allow students to judge, infer, and see things that they hadn’t previously noticed. The switch to associative thinking at this stage keeps students flexible in approaching their essays.

Metaphorical Characteristics and Textual Evidence

The analytical step is further refined when I have the students compile a list of the metaphor's characteristics on one side of a journal page. Opposite this list, they provide another list of concrete examples from the text, examples that best "fit" the metaphor's characteristics. Working through these comparative lists, the students are forced to recognize, first, workable metaphors and second, clearly demonstrated relationships between the metaphor's characteristics and the textual evidence. Susanne K. Langer refers to this metaphorical relationship as "the recognition of a common form (pattern) in a different thing" (*An Introduction to Symbolic Logic*, 2nd ed. New York: Dover, 1953. p. 31). Once this linking is completed, students are asked to explain the relationship between the example cited and that metaphor's characteristics. This task forces students to think, to synthesize—not to approach relationships mechanically.

Controlling Idea

Specifying a controlling idea for an essay is a difficult task for some students because writing this statement forces them to evaluate their ideas. I decided to have the students write their thesis statement (controlling idea) after the metaphor, complete with characteristics and textual support, had been developed. Writing a thesis at this point allows students time to explore the feasibility of relationships between their metaphors and text. They were to use the analogy to help reveal and reinforce their essay's controlling idea.

Instant Version

After they have developed a controlling idea, students use their comparative list with metaphor and textual examples to write an **instant version** of their essay. I remind them to deal with only one part of their metaphor and to limit themselves to an example or piece of evidence for each point they make. I ask to provide an order for characteristics which they feel best typify it and then to provide some overt reasoning pattern for the chosen order. They are also to explain how these examples support their controlling idea. The points then become less isolated because they are discussed in relation to each other and to the controlling idea. The metaphor or analogy allows for personal connections and perceptions, an important aspect when the teacher doesn't want to

force a totally artificial organization on the writer. Although analytical in nature, this stage also requires students to judge the effectiveness of their idea in an explanatory format. The following excerpt is from one student's instant version:

Just as the characteristics in the fiend can be understood more clearly through the analogy of the forest, the characteristics of his creator can likewise be examined in relation to nature and better understood. It is easy to compare Victor Frankenstein's fate to an avalanche. The only way to keep an avalanche from sliding out of control is to not start it in the first place. An avalanche can never be controlled once it has started, and exploring the possibilities of creating a person, there was no going back. The snowfields that contain so much potential for destruction are seemingly pure and innocent, yet underneath they are shifting layers of treacherous ice. Frankenstein claims that he could never escape the fate of creating his disaster, the fiend.

The results of playing creator seemed to him so innocent, all the world would love him; yet the consequences of his deed were deadly and ruinous.

Once Victor starts playing with the dead, the chain of events leading to the creation of the ruinous fiend seems inevitable. Like the avalanche, he slides out of control.

My application was at first fluctuating and uncertain; it gained strength as I proceeded and soon became so ardent and eager that the stars often disappeared in the light of morning whilst I was yet engaged in my laboratory. "None but those who have experienced them can conceive of the experiments of science" (49).

Victor starts out in the scientific realm, slowly and full of uncertainty, but as he gains knowledge, he gains momentum. His thirst for knowledge becomes so great that he sacrifices normal human comforts to satiate it. The avalanche too, begins slowly and nothing deters it as it gains momentum. But in the end, we see that the avalanche results in a crashing destruction. Victor's situation also ends in wanton destruction. The creature is horrible from the first, and moves on to destroy family and friends, as well as others the creature meets along the way.

The avalanche, which inevitably and ultimately ends in destruction, is hardly even preventable. The warming and cooling shifting layers of ice beneath the snowfields are so delicate that even the slightest events will touch off an avalanche. So it is with the events of our lives or a book read, that may change our outlook on life, so delicate is the thread that weaves it. Such is the case with Victor Frankenstein.

Although this instant version is in the early stages of the writing process, it shows the writer's attempt to deal with both metaphor and meaning found in the text.

The instant version step of the process allows students to write whatever comes to mind about their controlling idea—to play with relationships more fully. Second, students need not be concerned about mechanics, as the excerpt about shows. And third, students are able to see if the ideas work as well on paper (in essay form) as they do in lists and in their minds.

Once the instant versions are finished (usually two to three days, plus class time), students share them with their **writing groups**. I have the writing group members focus on the whole instant version of their essay with questions like: Does the piece make sense as a whole unit? If it doesn't, which parts specifically distract from the whole and why? Students find writing groups valuable at this stage because they can try various ideas or approaches without the fear of being overly committed to an idea. They also know that they will have time to revise the material which does not work well. The writing group stage further reinforces the process and the concern for student-centered learning.

Draft

After the students have shared these instant versions I have them move to the final stages of writing the completed essay. They write a much tighter essay, fill in gaps of thought and finally edit. They then have a draft which can be revised again and finally edited for clarity. Once this "draft" is done they go back to the writing group where questions are asked again. Has the writer been specific? Is it clear where the writer is headed and has he or she developed a train of thought which is easily followed? Has the writer been specific in explaining points in relation to the controlling idea? Again the goal is to elaborate and clarify. The following openings from two students' essays show how the metaphor was used to help shape their essays on Frankenstein:

Example One

When I was a child, I was interested in the culture of the North American Indians. It fascinated me. I read everything about them that I could lay my hands on and carefully handcrafted copies of their artwork. Indian art was my pet, my infatuation. As I grew and began to understand the people around me, I realized everyone has a pet, whether it be their hobby, religion, or career, and that sometimes the infatuation becomes obsession. In the novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, the main character, Victor, is extremely interested in natural science. He discovers how to create life and decides to try it. Creating the human becomes an obsession with him; he cannot give up the power that he has. And the possibilities of becoming famous if he is successful in creating life entices him. Once his goal is set in his mind, Victor cannot ignore it; the mo-

mentum of his previous successful experiments carry him until he completes his creation.

The characteristics of Victor Frankenstein's personality can be understood more clearly if they are compared to an avalanche. A delicate thread keeps the snowfields from becoming an avalanche, and once that thread snaps, the resulting avalanche is impossible to control. Similarly, there is a delicate thread of fate running through Victor's life that seems to snap when he becomes fascinated with science. This leads to obsession with the idea of creating a human, and Victor falls out of control. The snowfields that contain so much potential for destruction are seemingly pure and innocent enough—if it were just a dream—but his inspiration and the ability to make good the dream renders it deathly and ruinous.

Like the terrible dream-turned-reality, an avalanche is deadly and destructive. However, the realizing of the dream is more easily prevented than an avalanche. The warming and cooling shifting layers of ice beneath the snowfields are so delicate that even the slightest events, such as changes in temperature, and sound vibrations will touch off an avalanche. So it is with the events of our lives. A book read, or an hour spent in a new situation may rotate our outlook on life, lending new goals to strive for. Such becomes the case of Victor Frankenstein. Two events which would seem minor to any other, touch off the force that leads Victor to his demise. The first is his introduction to the ancient alchemists, who stirred his spark of scientific curiosity during youth. It was at a party that he chanced to come on the works of Agrippa. When he enthusiastically showed them to his father, his father told him it was "sad trash." This aroused his curiosity to the point where he "continued to read with the greatest avidity." Frankenstein relates that, if his father would have explained to him that the works were simply outdated, "It is possible that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin." If Victor had not, on that day, picked up the works of Agrippa, he would have "thrown Agrippa aside and have contented (his) imagination, warmed as it was, by retuning with greater ardour to (his) former studies." But once his scientific curiosity is put into play, he becomes obsessed, full of "a student's thirst for knowledge."

Example Two

"Adam had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the special care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature." This quote explains the manner in which God has created man. It shows the care and wisdom he needed to assume the role of Creator. As Creator, God, out of love, gave man the provisions needed to survive and live a happy and prosperous life. In the novel *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein attempts to play the role of God by bringing forth life. Victor, though, does not possess the qualities needed to successfully nurture his creation. Lacking in these qualities, Victor only brings about destruction for himself and others because of his creation.

This destruction comes about in different stages of the novel. These stages can be thought of as the life of a child. When the child is first born it has no understanding of the world, its ways of communicating, or its customs. As time goes on the child's parents use their "love" and "knowledge" to teach the child the essentials needed to survive and live a happy life. If the parents do not give the child the right amount of caring and teaching the child can turn out to be what our society calls a "backward child." When Victor creates his creature, he is stepping into the role of a parent, the creature being his "child." As Frankenstein grows in knowledge and understanding, Victor is unable to love and accept him as he should, this leading to destruction for both. It is because Victor lacks the qualities of love and acceptance that he cannot successfully raise Frankenstein into a prosperous and happy being.

Granted, these opening sections have some drawbacks, particularly in mechanics and sentence flow, but because of the pass/rewrite system of evaluation I use (which I will discuss in the next section) they are more than acceptable. Spelling errors and construction problems aside, these essays are interesting to read because of the student's personal involvement with the metaphor. In Example One the student moves from a childhood goal to Victor's obsession to the avalanche metaphor to obsession. In Example Two the chain of God—creator, Victor—monster and eventually parent—child is established. The writers have established a framework from which the reader can understand—to agree or to disagree with the writer's viewpoint.

The *Frankenstein* sequence reveals important aspects of the writing-to-learn concept. First, the assignment is broken into steps that facilitate the narrowing of material from general to specific. Second, as the sequence narrows, ideas need to be further and further qualified, forcing students to think, make choices and decisions. And third, the process itself fosters intellectual independence because the ideas which are narrowed and refined are the student's and not the teacher's. With this independence also comes ownership and with ownership comes the desire to do high quality work.

Evaluation

So far I have barely mentioned evaluation, that time-consuming task all English teachers face. In evaluating a final written essay, I believe that one cannot base everything on some subjective criteria or become so objective that we are impersonal. The evaluation "processes" I use help to reinforce the process and the concern for students' own ideas.

To begin with, it is important to draw a distinction between two types of evaluation, formative and summative. Formative checks the

student's work as it progresses. I like to think of it as a monitoring of the thinking process that the student goes through in the process of writing. I might check the steps used in the sequence of an essay or even monitor dialectics so that I can adjust learning if necessary. I can record in my grade book a plus (+) for students who have done an exceptional job for a series of dialectic entries while those who did only an average job receive a check (✓). Summative evaluation, on the other hand, is evaluation that takes place when the essay is turned in—it evaluates the finished product, the student's "performance."

The process I use to evaluate finished essays draws on the two types of evaluation. I call it the pass/rewrite system. Every essay assigned has criteria for evaluation. For example, in one essay I might emphasize construction of an argument, and in another I might emphasize the use of a metaphor for clarity of argument. I refer to these criteria as my "Specific Evaluation" criteria for the assignment itself. I also use what I refer to as my "Primary Evaluation Considerations" which are adapted from William Irmscher's (*Teaching Expository Writing*. New York: Holt, 1979) criteria for letter grades on essays.

Primary Evaluation Considerations for Essays (P/R, Graded Revisions & Final)

When evaluating your essays, I will use: first, the primary criteria listed below; second, the specific criteria for the particular essay being written or rewritten (this is linked very closely to the first); and third, (for the Graded Revisions only) how well you follow those items listed in "Notes On Graded Revisions."

The A essay:

1. An ability to avoid the obvious and thus gain insights that are personal and often illuminating.
2. A capacity to develop ideas flexibly and fluently, yet with control and purpose.
3. A special concern for expressiveness, as well as clear communication, even if it entails coining a word that the language does not provide.
4. An ability to use punctuation rhetorically, using it for effect as well as for clarity.
5. A willingness to be inventive with words and structures in order to produce a clearly identifiable style, even though at times the effort may be too deliberate or fall short of the writer's intentions.

The B essay:

1. An ability to absorb ideas and experience and to interpret them meaningfully in a context of the writer's own conception.
2. A capacity to develop an idea with a clear sense of order.

3. A capacity to draw upon words adequate to express the writer's own thoughts and feelings.
4. An ability to use mechanics as an integral part of the meaning and effect of prose.
5. A capacity to consider alternate ways of expression as a means of making stylistic choices possible.

The C essay:

1. A tendency to depend on the self-evident and the cliché and thus to write uninformative discourse.
2. A tendency to make the organization obvious or to write aimlessly without a plan.
3. A tendency to limit the range of words and thus a dependence on the clichés and colloquialisms most available.
4. An ability to use mechanics correctly or incorrectly in proportion to the plainness or complexity of the style.
5. A general unawareness of choices that affect style and thus an inability to control the effects a writer may seek.

The D and E essays:

1. A tendency to exploit the obvious either because of lack of understanding, inability to read, failure to grapple with a topic, or, in many instances, lack of interest. The substance of essays therefore ranges from superficial to barren.
2. A tendency to wander aimlessly because of a lack of overall concept.
3. A tendency to play safe with words, using those the writer can speak or spell.
4. The incidence of mechanical error is high in anything more than a simple sentence.
5. A tendency to write either convoluted sentences or very simple sentences.

One final consideration is the student's growth in writing skills (growth in one or all of the primary evaluation criteria), which I monitor from assignment to assignment.

Using the pass/rewrite system, I keep the "Primary Evaluation Considerations" and "Specific Evaluation Criteria" in mind as I respond to student writing. The five areas of content, form, diction, mechanics, and style are all reflected in some way. If the student does not meet the criteria for "The C essay," either on the primary criteria or on the specific criteria, the essay is given a "rewrite." The student is not given a

summative grade, but a formative one indicating that the essay is not yet acceptable. The student then rewrites the "rewrite" (within one week) and turns it in again.

To receive a grade for the course students pick two of four pass/rewrite essays they have written and revise them for a grade. I use the same evaluation criteria (primary and specific), and I consider how much improvement students have shown on the revision. The pass/rewrite system relieves much of students' anxiety because the thinking process and clarity are emphasized, not the grade.

Since I began using writing-to-learn techniques and the pass/rewrite system, the papers are much better. This evaluation system encourages growth in student writing. Formative evaluation encourages the process of writing and the development of thinking, much more than does summative evaluation alone.

Students need to learn and respond to the world around them, to develop their thinking and writing abilities to the fullest, and writing to learn fosters all of this. Through sequences like the one described here, my students learn that there is more than one way to write an essay. Students are given the opportunity to think on their own and to present their own ideas. They don't have to write an essay based on foreign ideas presented by an outside source. The writing-to-learn strategies themselves create the framework from which to work, and the writing process (data, prewriting, writing, sharing, revising, editing, evaluation) complement or carry the thinking process (data, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation) to such an extent that the two became inseparable. Because the students own their ideas, because they spend time moving through the process, they not only become better writers but better thinkers capable of dealing with almost any material.