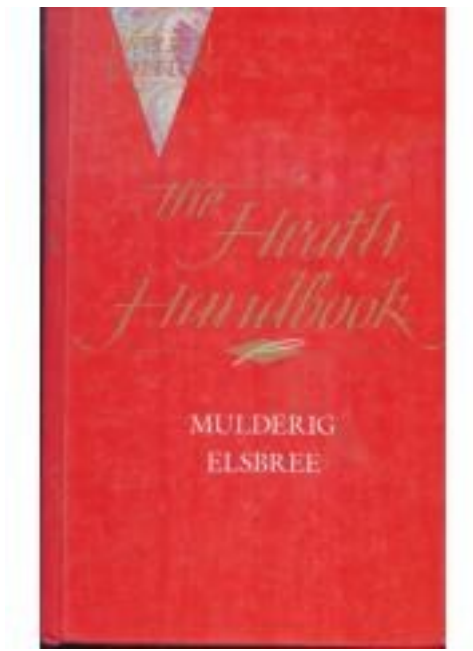


The Heath Handbook



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As you begin this book on writing, it may surprise you to know that no less a person than Plato had serious doubts about the value of learning to write. More than 2,300 years ago, the Greek philosopher argued in one of his works on rhetoric that a person's education is better served by oral discussion and debate than by writing. Unlike a speaker or teacher, he pointed out, a printed

book cannot answer its readers questions, nor can it in turn pose questions to make sure that readers have correctly understood what they have read. According to Plato, those who become dependent on the written word will gradually lose their powers of memory and the ability to think on their own. Believing their knowledge greater than it actually is, they will become conceited and complacent, a burden rather than an asset to their society.

No matter what we think of Plato's doubts about the value of writing, we shouldn't overlook the important fact that he used writing to express those doubts. If he had not, his ideas would probably be unknown today. Plato's written attack on writing suggests in a paradoxical way the inevitability of written communication in the exchange and transmission of ideas. During the centuries since he lived, technological advances ranging from the development of inexpensive paper to the invention of the desktop laser printer have continued to underscore the central role of writing in our civilization. Indeed, our lives would be unimaginable without the written word. Try to picture a world with no books or newspapers, no greeting cards or instruction manuals, no bills, recipes, advertisements, or love letters, and you will realize that we write, quite simply, because we must.

作者介绍:

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