

Introduction

OBJECTIVES

Effective Writing aims to help students of American English improve their writing skills in a wide variety of texts. The various problem-solving activities included are designed to help students discover what a well-written text is and how it is different from a series of poorly connected sentences. Once students become aware of the differences, they then have the opportunity to practice skills that are needed in order to write effectively.

This book concentrates on the skills that are specific to the *writing* of English. There are other aspects of language, such as vocabulary and grammar, that are common to all uses of language. These aspects are important to writing, of course, but they are not *specific* to writing. Although the activities in this book will provide students with practice in vocabulary and grammar, this is not the main objective.

LEVEL AND PROGRESSION

Effective Writing is for intermediate and high intermediate students of American English. The book is intended for adult learners of all kinds, not specifically for one kind of learner. Thus, business students studying English can gain as much from the book as students in a college setting or those in an adult education or job-training program. In short, the skills practiced throughout the book are useful for all kinds of writing.

Effective Writing is a source book. In other words, just as the book does not teach all there is to know about writing, the material does not require students to work from the beginning of the book to the end doing all the exercises along the way. Rather, the book provides students and their teachers with material that can be exploited to suit their particular needs. For example, if punctuation is a particularly weak point for a group of learners, they can work through all the exercises on punctuation without doing the other exercises in the various chapters.

Most units can be completed in 5–7 hours of class time; the first three units will probably take less time than the later units. However, many of the activities can be assigned as homework and then checked in class, which cuts down on actual class time substantially.

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STUDENTS' PROBLEMS IN WRITING

Here are some of the reasons that a student's writing may be ineffective or difficult to understand, along with the exercises that deal with that particular problem. (For a full description of these exercises, see the section "Types of Exercises" on page 4.)

- a) The ideas may not be presented in an order that makes sense to a reader. See these exercises: **Organizing Ideas** and **Selecting and Ordering Information**.
- b) The relation between the ideas may not be clear because of the absence, or inappropriate use, of linking words and phrases, such as *because*, *for example*, *first*, *on the other hand*. See **Relating Ideas: Linking Words and Phrases**.
- c) The writer's attitude to what he or she is writing may not be clear: Is the writer describing, suggesting, or criticizing something? This problem is taken up in **Showing Attitude** and also to some extent in **Using Reporting Words**.
- d) The ideas may not be grouped together into distinct paragraphs, or the student may begin practically every sentence on a new line. Again, the beginning of a paragraph – or the beginning of a longer text – might not start the reader in the right direction; similarly, a paragraph – or a longer text – may not end appropriately. All of these problems are dealt with in **Writing First and Last Sentences**, **Writing First and Last Paragraphs**, **Writing Paragraphs**, and, to some extent, in **Comparing Texts**.
- e) A text may contain ideas that are not relevant to what the writer wants to express, or the writer may find it difficult to think of enough ideas. See **Selecting and Ordering Information** and **Adding Examples and Details**.
- f) The sentences may not have clear punctuation: There may be commas and periods without any good reason, or there may be no punctuation where there should be. This is treated mainly in the **Punctuating** exercises.

While it is useful to work on all these different aspects of writing in distinct exercises, it is also important that students practice combining the separate skills in one complete, cohesive, well-written text. Opportunities for this are found in **Writing Text Based on Visual Information**, **Writing Text Based on a Conversation**, **Comparing Texts**, and **Debating Issues**. In addition, there are suggestions for further writing activities in the **Practicing Writing** section at the end of each chapter.

APPROACH

The approach is learning by doing. There are various reasons for this. First, students generally find that doing something (being active) is more interesting than being told about it (being passive). Second, if students come to understand something through learning to use their own resources to solve problems, their understanding will be more thorough, and they are more likely to retain what they have learned. Third, it is only when students put something into practice that any incorrect or imperfect learning is revealed, and it is revealed both to the students themselves and to the teacher. Experience shows that learning by doing is interesting, efficient, and, most important, successful.

Teachers should note that in some cases the stated purpose of an activity is not its only purpose. For instance, the stated objective of the **Organizing Ideas** exercises is to work out the original order of the sentences. However, in order to carry this out,

students will have to concentrate on ways of joining sentences together into texts. In this case, the process of discovering words and phrases that accomplish this is in fact a more important objective than the finished product, the organized text.

GROUP WORK

Group work plays a major role in this approach. The instructions for each exercise generally suggest that the task, or at least part of it, should be done by a number of students working together in a group. This is because a group of learners will, among them, usually have the knowledge and the skills needed to do the exercises. Group size can range from two to six, but three or four is probably optimal.

An individual learner's ability to organize ideas in writing is often independent of his or her general language level. Some otherwise successful language learners may have a poor sense of organization and vice versa. However, when several students work in a group and pool their abilities, they will normally be able to contribute all the elements necessary to produce clear writing. This pooling of abilities, and the discussion that arises during the exercise, will gradually strengthen every individual's skills in writing (and, as a side benefit, in speaking) English.

Group work does not normally end with the students being given the right answer by the teacher. The students can continue to argue their way to the right answer after the small-group task is completed. For example, someone can write the various suggested answers on the board, and the class can then discuss the differences (see **Organizing Ideas**). A second way is to join each group with one or two others, and the larger groups can discuss the different solutions represented by the smaller groups. A third possibility is to split up the original groups and form others of the same size. The teacher can simply give these instructions: "Get into new groups of three or four in a way that no one else in your new group is from your old group." The students then regroup and compare solutions.

Of course, group work is not *required* for students to benefit from using this book. Teachers – and students – should feel free to be creative in the ways they approach the exercises, whether individually, in pairs, in small groups, with a teacher or tutor, or as a whole class. The possibilities are many. The book may even be used for self-study, since the Teacher's Manual contains an answer key to the exercises.

TEST PREPARATION

Effective Writing can be used to prepare students for standard writing examinations administered by colleges, universities, state and local school boards, and the like. It also provides valuable practice for the *Test of Written English*, as it includes many of the essay types used in this test as well as other standard writing tests, such as writing an essay based on a visual, comparing and contrasting, and stating an opinion.

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UNITS	TYPES OF EXERCISES													
		Organizing ideas	Relating ideas: linking words and phrases	Showing attitude	Using reporting words	First/last sentences/paragraphs	Selecting and ordering information	Comparing texts	Text based on a conversation	Text based on a visual	Adding examples and details	Debating issues	Punctuating	Practicing writing
1. Formal and Informal Letters	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5		1.6					1.7	1.8	
2. Writing a Story	2.1	2.2		2.3	2.4		2.5		2.6			2.7	2.8	
3. Reports	3.1	3.2		3.4	3.3	3.5	3.7	3.6	3.8			3.9	3.10	
4. Articles	4.1	4.2			4.3	4.4		4.5	4.6	4.7		4.8	4.9	
5. Instructions	5.1			5.2	5.3		5.4	5.6	5.5			5.7	5.8	
6. Business Letters and Memos	6.1	6.2		6.3	6.4		6.5		6.6			6.7	6.8	
7. Stating an Opinion I	7.1	7.2	7.3				7.4	7.5	7.6	7.7	7.8	7.9	7.10	
8. Stating an Opinion II	8.1	8.2	8.3		8.4	8.5	8.6			8.7	8.8	8.9	8.10	

TYPES OF EXERCISES

Each chapter contains a different combination of exercises and activities, as can be seen from the chart above. Descriptions of the different types of exercises follow and provide this information:

WHAT: A description of what each exercise type consists of.

WHY: The reason for each exercise type within the overall objective of learning to write better.

HOW: General suggestions on how each type of exercise can be approached in the classroom. More specific and detailed suggestions for each exercise are included within each chapter of the Teacher's Manual.

WHICH: A list of all the exercises of each type that are to be found in the book.

ORGANIZING IDEAS

What The sentences of a text appear in random order. Students try to recompose the text by deciding on the correct order of the sentences. Certain words and phrases have been underlined to draw attention to the part they play in joining the original text together. (Words and phrases that join sentences into unified, or cohesive, texts are called here “cohesive ties.”)

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There are several different kinds of cohesive ties used in these exercises. A few examples follow:

1) I worked for Union Pacific Railway. While at Union Pacific, I had experience in computer programming.

The words *Union Pacific* are repeated in the second sentence, and refer back to the same words in sentence 1. This repetition creates a tie, binding the two sentences together in meaning.

2) I worked for Union Pacific Railway. While there, I had experience in computer programming.

The word *there* in sentence 2 refers to the place mentioned in sentence 1, Union Pacific Railway. This kind of reference, a substitute word, creates a tie between the meanings of the two sentences.

3) I worked for Union Pacific Railway. It's a very large company.

The word *it* in sentence 2 refers to the noun mentioned in sentence 1, Union Pacific Railway. The pronoun replaces its noun, and its use creates a tie between the two sentences.

4) My primary job was computer programming. Other duties included bookkeeping and filing.

Although there is no repetition of a word from the previous sentence, there is use of a synonym; *duties* in sentence 2 has a clear connection to *job* in sentence 1, and this kind of synonym reference creates a tie. Also, the word *other* in sentence 2 contrasts with *primary* in sentence 1.

These exercises require close reading on the part of students because of the need to pay attention to the underlined textual devices. The exercises give the students a good general idea of what makes a *text* different from a string of unconnected sentences. (A *text* is defined by Halliday and Hasan in *Cohesion in English* as “any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole.”)

Why As with many classroom activities, the objective stated in the instructions – to find the right order of the sentences – is not the only purpose. In addition to providing an opportunity for group work and for class discussion, this kind of exercise helps students to see for themselves the importance of “cohesive ties” in joining sentences together into unified wholes. (Of course, these terms need not be used with students.) Moreover, by discussing the various possibilities of order for the sentences and justifying their reasons, students will gradually find out exactly how these cohesive ties operate. As pointed out earlier, students should be allowed to work out the solution on their own, and the teacher should avoid short-circuiting the discussion by too quickly telling students what the right answer is.

How One way to do these exercises is to write or type the sentences, giving one copy to each group. The copies should be cut into strips, so that each strip has one sentence. This makes it easy for students to move the sentences around into different arrangements. Working in small groups, the students should read the texts, paying close attention to the words and phrases underlined. Each group works out the best order through discussion. When the groups have reached a conclusion, their suggested orders should be compared. The teacher, or one of the students, can (without comment at this point) write the orders suggested by the various groups on the board, producing columns that can then be compared, for example:

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Teacher's Manual and Answer Key

Jean Withrow

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

<u>Group</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
	d	d	d	d	d
	f	f	f	f	f
	e	b	b	e	b
	j	e	h	j	e
	b	j	e	b	j
	h	h	j	h	h

The teacher can mark the sequences that all the groups have in common and which are in fact correct like this:

<u>Group</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
	d	d	d	d	d
	f	f	f	f	f
	e	b	b	e	b
	j	e	h	j	e
	b	j	e	b	j
	h	h	j	h	h

The teacher can now ask the students to give their reasons for and against the sequences where there are differences. If necessary, the teacher can point out what it is in the text that gives the clue to the right order, which often means referring again to the words underlined. On the whole, the students should argue their way to the correct solution rather than simply be told what it is.

Which 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1, and 8.1.

RELATING IDEAS: LINKING WORDS AND PHRASES

A *linking word* is defined for the purposes of this book as a word or phrase that shows the logical relation between sentences or between clauses.

Structurally, there are three kinds of linking words and phrases used in these exercises:

- 1) **Transition words** like *however*, *well*, *besides*, and *for instance*: They join two sentences together in meaning. They are generally set off by commas, no matter what position they are in, because, in a sense, they interrupt the structure of the sentence. They can begin a sentence, end it, or appear after the subject.

Examples: I can't go. *However*, my friends can.

I can't go. My friends can, *however*.

I can't go. My friends, *however*, can.

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- 2) **Conjunctions** joining two independent clauses, such as *and*, *so*, *but*, and *or*: They show a connection in meaning between the two clauses. They are generally preceded by a comma.

Examples: I want to go, *but* I can't.

This is the second invitation I received, *and* I can't accept either of them.

- 3) **Subordinating conjunctions** introducing a subordinate clause or phrase, such as *because*, *although*: The subordinating conjunction itself is part of a dependent clause and requires no commas to set it off; however, the dependent clause is followed by a comma if it begins a sentence.

Examples: I can't go *because* I'm working.

Because I'm working, I can't go.

What In earlier exercises, the first few linking words and phrases in each passage are underlined. Students are asked to talk about what these words mean, how they link ideas, and how they are punctuated. For the rest of each passage, the linking words have been removed, and students must supply a suitable word to fill the blank, either by choosing from a given list or (in later exercises) thinking of a word themselves.

Why Students who are learning English often have difficulty using linking words and phrases to show relationships between sentences. Correct and appropriate use of these words and phrases helps hold a piece of writing together and gives readers clues to the writer's meaning. By discussing why a certain word is appropriate in a particular context, students become aware of how these words can be used effectively and accurately. The *discussion*, or the *process* of arriving at the correct answer, is what is important. Students need to realize that there are good and bad reasons for their choices. Through doing exercises of this type, students learn to apply these same skills to their own writing.

How Working in groups of two to four, students should first read the whole text to understand the meaning, and then discuss the underlined words and phrases in the first part of the text, answering the questions given in the instructions. This part of the activity is very important, as it prepares students for the rest of the exercise; it helps them establish criteria for the choices they will make. Students should not skip this and go on to filling in the blanks.

Groups should then select the best word or phrase to fill the blanks in the rest of the passage. The teacher should give time for consensus to be reached in each group. When each group has finished, the conclusions (and differences) can be discussed by the whole class, using a procedure similar to the one described in **Organizing Ideas**, "How." Alternatively, each group can join with one or two other groups, and these larger groups can compare their answers.

Which 1.2, 2.2, 3.2., 4.2, 6.2, 7.2, and 8.2.

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SHOWING ATTITUDE

An *attitude word* can be defined as a word or phrase that shows how the writer feels about what he or she is writing. For example:

Obviously, if the scandal became public knowledge, some officials would have to resign, and **personally**, I don't think that would be such a bad thing.
 Here the words in bold type are attitude words.

What The attitude words have been removed from a text and students supply an appropriate word to fill the blank by choosing from a given list.

Why Words that show a writer's feeling or attitude toward a subject are especially important when a piece of writing expresses opinion, such as a personal letter, an editorial, or an argumentative essay. Such words greatly strengthen a piece of writing that intends to convince readers of something. Attitude words are not always easy to use accurately and effectively, however, as meanings are sometimes difficult to explain and differences may be subtle. For this reason, exercises such as **Showing Attitude** are useful for students. Through practice and clarifying discussion, students can gradually acquire a number of common attitude words that they can eventually use in their own writing.

How The same approach can be used for this activity as was suggested for **Relating Ideas**. Another way to follow up the small-group work is to put the passage on an overhead transparency and have individuals write their choices in the blanks. At the same time, the individual or one of his or her group members should tell why they picked each word and what attitude it shows. The class can then agree or disagree with the choices, and changes can be made until a "correct" version is accepted by all. The discussion generated by this activity is very important, since often one uses attitude words by "feel" rather than by logical explanation.

Which 1.3, 7.3, and 8.3.

USING REPORTING WORDS

What Students learn to report direct speech. The earlier units focus on common kinds of reporting words, such as *said*, *told*, and *asked*, and later units on less common reporting words, like *admitted*, *explained*, and *thought*. In each exercise, examples of several ways to report direct speech are given. Students are given practice in using a variety of reporting words, and in later exercises are asked to choose the best word to report a piece of direct speech. Often the best word also tells not just *what* a person said, but *how* the person said it. It gives a clue to the speaker's or writer's attitude. This kind of exercise should encourage students to use these kinds of words when reporting speech in their writing.

How Students can work in small groups discussing the examples of reported speech, then share their findings with the whole class. This step is vital

preparation for the writing exercise that follows and should not be skipped. It is most helpful if students first talk out the sentences they will write, even if they eventually write them individually. In this way, there can be discussion of why a particular alternative was chosen or why the sentence should be in a certain tense. Volunteers can write their completed sentences on the board for whole-class discussion, or students can give their sentences to the teacher for correction.

Which 1.4, 2.3, 3.4, 5.2, and 6.3.

WRITING FIRST AND LAST SENTENCES/PARAGRAPHS

What Well-written paragraphs make a written text easier to understand. Each paragraph should usually have a first sentence that introduces or leads into the rest of the paragraph, and a final sentence that summarizes the paragraph or makes a final point or leads to the next paragraph. In an extended text (say, a report or a letter), the first paragraph should get the reader interested in the topic and, usually, should outline the main points; the last paragraph should leave the reader with a sense of completion, often by referring back to the main subject or by placing this subject in a broader context.

There are various types of exercises:

- a) choosing the best answer from a list;
- b) making up a suitable answer to fill a blank; and
- c) writing the rest of an incomplete text.

Why Well-written paragraphs allow rapid and efficient reading of a text. It should be possible for a reader to skim through a long passage by reading the first paragraph, then the first sentence of each successive paragraph, and the final paragraph, and get an overall idea of what the text contains. The various exercises on paragraphs are meant to show students how to write first and last sentences/paragraphs that help readers easily understand the important points in a piece of writing.

Note: Of course, there are more ways of organizing paragraphs and passages than the one used here. However, native users of the language can allow themselves a wider range in their choice of expression; the learner of English, on the other hand, needs to achieve mastery of a smaller, but generally serviceable, range of possibilities.

How Again, students should work in groups when making choices; the findings of each group should be discussed by the whole class. Where writing is required, students can either work as a group, with one person functioning as the group secretary, or individually. If they work individually, it is best if they then compare and discuss their various pieces of writing in small groups before discussing them as a whole class. Several alternatives can be read aloud and/or put on the board for class discussion and critique.

Which 1.5, 2.4, 3.3, 4.3, 5.3, 6.4, and 8.4.

*Introduction***SELECTING AND ORDERING INFORMATION**

What Students are given the beginning of a written text, such as a letter or an article, and are asked to complete it. They are given a long list of ideas for possible inclusion. Working in groups, learners choose the most relevant ideas from the list and reject the others. The next step is to group the ideas into paragraphs, each one dealing with one aspect of the subject. Groups must also decide on the best order for the paragraphs. Finally, students should write the complete text, adding linking words, phrases, and sentences and concluding paragraphs where necessary.

Why Students often complain about not having enough ideas on any given topic to include in their written piece. In these exercises, a list of ideas is given to the students; they then work to identify the relevant and less relevant ideas. In doing this they realize the difference between having an idea and choosing to use it. These skills can be used when students make up their own lists of ideas on a topic (for example, in the **Practicing Writing** exercises).

Of course, what one person considers relevant, another may consider irrelevant; similarly, a fact that is relevant in one circumstance may not be relevant in another. These exercises are designed to make students aware of what makes something relevant by forcing them to consider not only *what* they are writing, but also *why* they are writing and *to whom*. There is no one indisputable answer in all cases. Although some items in the lists will be quickly accepted or rejected by everybody, others will lead to disagreement. Arguments are valuable, for it is only when students are forced to defend their view that they will be able to define what relevance is.

How Each individual should first read through the list silently, making a note of the ideas he or she would include. Then the small group should work through the list, marking off all the ideas where everyone agrees, and noting those ideas where there is disagreement. The disputed ideas should be discussed as thoroughly as time allows.

Next, individuals can silently group sentences into paragraphs, and later the group can compare individual suggestions. Individuals will then need to write out each group of sentences as a paragraph, adding the linking words, phrases, and, sometimes, sentences needed to logically connect the ideas. The final paragraph will demand the most “original” writing, as students will have to come up with their own sentences, as opposed to organizing sentences that have been supplied. A group may want to compare individuals’ written paragraphs as they go along, as each person’s solution will no doubt be different and students will be helped by hearing the ideas of others. There is no reason to insist that all the texts be exactly the same.

Note: Working through each step of this exercise can take up to two hours. Although this is time well spent, teachers might choose to devote less class time to this and assign some of the steps for homework.

A logical extension of this activity is to have students make up their own lists of ideas on a topic. Topics can be suggested by the class or assigned by the teacher. The class can work on their lists either individually or in groups, with a group secretary writing down all suggested ideas. Then, starting with the lists they themselves have made, groups can go through the steps outlined above. This kind of brainstorming is a valuable technique for writers, and a good skill for students to practice.