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# Introduction

## **About This Book**

For language learners, writing is very useful. You put some ideas down on paper, and then you have the time and the opportunity to examine those ideas, change them, and correct any errors. You might add to what you first wrote—or you might delete it. In other words, you can revise what you have written. With writing, the ideas you express in a new language are available to you for scrutiny and analysis. Most good writers seldom get everything right the first time and spend a lot of time revising—Hemingway rewrote the ending to *A Farewell to Arms* 39 times. Since language learners have a lot to think about besides ideas, time for revision is especially important.

Another feature that helps writers improve their writing is feedback from readers. Often in a classroom, the teacher is the only reader of the students' work. But students are readers as well as writers, and a piece of writing communicates its ideas only when others read it. So in this book you will be asked to read and respond to one another's writing; the responses from others will help you revise your own work.

We learn to write not from lectures or from instructions in a book but from doing a lot of reading and writing. So you will find readings in this book—readings that have been written by professional writers and by students. And you will have the opportunity to write not only essays but also journal entries and short practice passages. Besides reading and writing, language learners also need as many opportunities as possible to talk to other people and to try to make themselves clearly understood in the new language. Thus, this book contains many activities in which you will discuss ideas with your classmates—in pairs, in small groups, or as a whole class.

Part I, "Processes," leads you through activities that will help you to plan, write, and revise an essay on people and places for which you can draw on source materials such as pictures and readings as well as on your own experiences. Then, turning to Part II, "Materials: Pictures and Readings," for more source materials, you can use those same processes (or as many as you choose) to write essays on other themes. Part III, "Editing: Twenty-one Troublespots,"

provides you with guidelines for editing your writing to improve syntax and grammatical accuracy.

Samples of the writing of students whose native language is not English appear throughout this book. Unless otherwise noted, these samples have been corrected so that you will not be confused by incorrect grammar and spelling; however, the content, vocabulary, and organization of the student writing remain unchanged.

### ***What You Need***

The basic tools you will need to work with, along with pens, pencils, and a typewriter or a word processor, are these:

- A notebook. Recommended is a three-ring looseleaf binder measuring 8½ by 11 inches that will permit you to remove pages to show other students and to hand them in to your instructor.
- A package of white 8½-by-11-inch looseleaf paper, lined, with margins and with punched holes that fit the binder. If you type your drafts or use a word processor, some of your paper should be unlined, without ruled margins.
- A dictionary. Recommended are the *Oxford Student's Dictionary of American English* (Oxford University Press, 1983) and the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford University Press, 1974), both specially written by A. S. Hornby for students of English as a second language. Also recommended is *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: Second College Edition* (Houghton Mifflin, 1985), which is used by many American students.

### ***Some Introductory Classroom Activities***

The purpose of the Classroom Activities is to provide you with some writing activities that are relevant to your experience and to present a basis for a discussion of issues that are important for language learners.

1. With other students—in pairs, small groups, or the whole class—discuss some topics that you think you would enjoy writing about and compile a list. These topics can be put on the chalkboard.
2. From the list, choose your two favorite topics, and write a short reaction (no more than one page) to one of them. (You will write about the other one later.) Write in class for about 7 to 10 minutes *in your native language*. Write for classmates who speak your language, telling them what you know about the topic, and try to make them interested in your ideas.

3. Form a group with three or four classmates, and, in English, tell each other what you wrote. Also discuss what was difficult about writing in your native language. If the students in your group speak your language, read your composition aloud. Otherwise, tell the others, in English, what you wrote about in your first language, and read aloud a few sentences of the piece you wrote so that your group can hear what your language sounds like. Then pass your paper around the group so that others can see what your language looks like on the page. Point out any different methods of writing (for example, left to right or right to left) and the variety of writing systems (for example, alphabets, syllabaries such as the Japanese *katakana*, and logographic systems that represent words, such as the characters of Chinese and the Japanese *kanji*).
4. Now take approximately 7 to 10 minutes to write in English on the second topic that you selected. Pretend you are writing the first draft of an article to be published in a class magazine. Again, keep your response short.
5. Read aloud to your group what you wrote in English. Discuss what was difficult about writing in English.
6. With the whole class, list on the chalkboard the conclusions you can draw from this exercise in writing in your native language and in English. For example: What are the difficulties? What are the similarities and differences? To help with this task, ask yourself the following questions: What did you do first in each case? What did you worry about most in each case? What helped you most in each case?
7. Write your answers to the accompanying language and writing questionnaire on a sheet of paper. Then, either as a class or in a small group, discuss your answers.

## LANGUAGE AND WRITING QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How much instruction (how many years? how many hours a week?) have you received in writing in your native language? In English?
2. What similarities and differences have you observed about the way you write in your native language and in English?
3. Outside a school setting, when and why do you write in your native language or in English? (For example, do you write notes, letters, stories, diary entries, or essays?)
4. How have teachers—in native-language and English classes—responded to your writing? (For example, have they commented on content, made suggestions for revision, required rewriting, or corrected errors?)
5. Do you feel more confident about writing in your native language or in English?
6. What language do you dream in?

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978-0-521-65761-7 - Exploring Through Writing: A Process Approach to ESL Composition, Second Edition

Ann Raimes

Excerpt

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As you use this second edition of *Exploring Through Writing*, if you do any writing that you are particularly happy with, please send me a copy of it: Ann Raimes, College Department, St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, U.S.A. I included in this book some of the writing sent to me by students who used the first edition. Your writing could find its way into future editions. In any case, I would love to read it.

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# PART I

## *Processes*

# Getting Started

In the first three chapters, you will do a lot of writing, but you will probably not produce polished essays. The purpose of this writing is not to test whether you can spell and use the grammar of English; instead, the aim is to let words suggest more words and to let ideas suggest more ideas. In this way, you can find a topic that interests you and explore it. Then, when you begin work on an essay, you will not face a blank sheet of paper with a feeling of panic.

In Chapters 1 to 3, you will be concentrating on exploring a subject—by examining your own experience, by talking to others, by reading, and by writing. Some pictures and readings on a subject theme are included, and additional materials on other themes appear in Part II. You should also gather ideas from other sources, such as what you know already, what others say, and what you read elsewhere. The activities in these chapters will help you generate ideas that you will be able to use in an essay. As you get your ideas down on paper, you will like some parts of what you write more than others, so there will be pieces you want to keep and pieces you want to discard. The decision will be yours.

Because this section emphasizes getting ideas down on paper, your instructor will not necessarily correct all the writing you do in these chapters. However, you will have many opportunities to work on correcting grammatical and spelling errors later. First you need a subject to explore.

## CHAPTER 1

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# *Search Your Memory*

Writers usually draw heavily on their experience and knowledge as they write. Chapter 1 asks you questions that lead you to do this.

### ***Writing 1***

Take a few minutes to write brief notes in response to the following questions on the general subject of people and places.

1. What place in your past do you remember with the most affection?  
What people do you associate with that place?
2. What place in your past do you remember with the least affection?  
What people do you associate with that place?
3. If you could choose any place in the world to live, where would you choose?
4. Did you grow up in the city or in the country? What was good or bad about it? Who were the people that you grew up with?
5. What does the term *home* mean to you?

Questions to help you search your memory by writing about topics in other subject areas included in this book appear in Part II, along with the five collections of pictures and readings.

### ***Classroom Activity***

This activity involves using clear and vivid language to describe an experience; listening carefully to a story; transforming the story into your own words; and trying to include all the necessary details while keeping the spirit of the original story. Gathering information from others by interview is a common activity to prepare for academic writing.

Join up with a partner, and take a few minutes to tell your partner about





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## SEARCH YOUR MEMORY

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One of my classmates, Lisette Casiano, likes one place better than any other. It is her aunt's house in Puerto Rico. She spent a lot of time there in the summer. Lisette likes the warm weather in Puerto Rico. Her aunt and uncle have horses and the house has fields all around it. Lisette likes to ride horses, and when she is tired, she just goes for short walks in the fields. Most of all she likes to spend the nights, which are very peaceful, sitting on the front porch with her aunt and uncle and listening to stories about their life. She likes to watch the stars in the sky when it is a clear night.

Yeugenia Vaystub

Russia



