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STUDENT OVERVIEW

“As you work with writing skills, don’t compare yourself with others. Compare yourself then with yourself now.”

Writing effectively is not as difficult as you may think. You can learn to be a good writer if you practice effective techniques. The operative words are the last three: “practice effective techniques.” A good piece of written material includes clear organization, solid content, and good use of language skills. You should have something to say, present it in appropriate order, and write correctly. All of those points will be covered in the three main parts of this book: Writing Sentences, Writing Paragraphs and Beyond, and Connecting Reading and Writing.

PART ONE: WRITING SENTENCES

The first part, Writing Sentences, concentrates on effectiveness. Beginning with the simplest aspects of sentences, namely subjects and verbs, the text moves to the larger word units of clauses and sentences, with their numerous patterns. It shows you the difference between complete sentences and incomplete sentences, between sound and unsound

arrangements of words, and between correct and incorrect punctuation. While giving you the opportunity to experiment and develop your own style, it leads you through the problem areas of verbs, pronouns, and modifiers. If you are not sure when to use *lie* and when to use *lay*, when to use *who* and when to use *whom*, or when to use *good* and when to use *well*, this book can help you. If you're not sure whether the standard expression is *between you and I* or *between you and me*, or if you're not sure about the difference between a colon and a semicolon, you will find the answers here. That line of *if* statements could be applied to almost every page in this book. Perhaps you are not sure of the correct answer to most of these questions. The good news is that by the end of the course, you will be sure—and if your “sure” is still a bit shaky, then you will know where to find the rules, examples, and discussion in this book.

The text in Part One follows a pattern: rules, examples, exercises, and writing activity. Again, you learn by practicing sound principles. As you complete assignments, you can check your answers to selected exercises in the Answer Key in the back of the book so that you can monitor your understanding.

PART TWO: WRITING PARAGRAPHS AND BEYOND

The second part, Writing Paragraphs and Beyond, presents writing as a process, not as something that is supposed to emerge complete on demand. Writing begins with a topic, either generated or provided, and moves through stages of exploration, organization, development, revision, and editing. If you have suffered, at least at times, from writer's block, this book is for you. If you have sometimes produced material that was organized poorly so that you did not receive full credit for what you knew, then this book is for you. If you have sometimes had ideas, but you did not fully develop them, so that your work was judged as “sketchy” or “lacking in content,” then this book is for you.

PART THREE: CONNECTING READING AND WRITING

The third part, Connecting Reading and Writing, gives you models of good writing and lively ideas for discussion and writing. The selections are presented with observations and exercises to help you develop effective reading techniques. In working with these assignments, you may discover that you can learn a great deal from other writers—if you can read perceptively, understanding both what the writers say and how they say it.

Some reading selections are paragraphs and others are essays. They are rich in invention, style, and cultural perspective. Several are written by celebrated authors such as Maya Angelou, Gary Soto, and N. Scott Momaday. Some are written by students, individuals like you who entered college, worked on language skills, and learned. Well-written and fresh in thought, these models are especially useful because they were done as college English assignments. Each of the students whose writing is included in this book learned writing skills in a developmental program before taking freshman composition. Several of them also studied in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

The selections are grouped in two ways: according to theme and according to form of writing. For example, the writings in “Prized and Despised Possessions” are all descriptions. Of course, no one selection is entirely in a single form, although one may predominate. Many forms are presented—narration, description, exemplification, process analysis, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, and argument—because you will need to use many of these forms in your college work. Topics such as “Discuss causes of (*a war, depression, a disease*)” and “compare and contrast (*two theories, two leaders, two programs*)” abound across the curriculum. Studying the principles for these forms and reading good examples of pieces that demonstrate the effective use of these forms will help you get full credit for what you know, in your college classes and elsewhere.

APPENDIXES

This book also has four appendixes, a collection of support materials that were too valuable to be omitted from a college book on writing: Parts of Speech, Taking Tests, Writing a Letter of Application and a Résumé, and Brief Guide for ESL Students.

STRATEGIES FOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Here are some strategies you can follow to make the best use of this book and to jump-start the improvement in your writing skills

1. *Be active and systematic in learning.* Take advantage of your instructor's expertise by being an active class member—one who takes notes, asks questions, and contributes to discussion. Become dedicated to systematic learning: Determine your needs, decide what to do, and do it. Make learning a part of your everyday thinking and behavior.
2. *Read widely.* Samuel Johnson, a great English scholar, once said he didn't want to read anything by people who had written more than they had read. William Faulkner, a Nobel Prize winner in literature, said, "Read, read, read. Read everything—trash, classics, good and bad, and see how writers do it." Read to learn technique, to acquire

Self-Evaluation Chart

Organization/ Development/ Content	Spelling/ Vocabulary/ Diction	Grammar/ Sentence Structure	Punctuation/ Capitalization
needs more specific support such as examples, 299	avoid slang, 231	fragments, 55	difference between semicolons and commas, 172
refine outline, 224	avoid clichés such as "be there for me," 231	subject-verb agreement, 93	comma after long introductory modifier, 164, #2
use clear topic sentence, 221	it's, its, 201	comma splice, 68	comma in compound sentence, 164, #1
	you're, your, 203	vary sentence patterns, 22	
	receive, rule on, 198		

ideas, and to be stimulated to write. Especially satisfy your curiosity and to receive pleasure. If a main component of your course, approach it systematically as you do writing.

3. *Keep a journal.* Keep a journal even though it may not be required in your particular class. It is a good practice to jot down your observations in a notebook. Here are some topics for daily, or almost daily, journal writing:

- Summarize, evaluate, or react to reading assignments.

- Summarize, evaluate, or react to what you see on television and in movies and what you read in newspapers and in magazines.
- Describe and narrate situations or events you experience.
- Write about career-related matters you encounter in other courses or on the job.

Your journal entries may read like an intellectual diary, a record of what you are thinking about at certain times. Keeping a journal will help you to understand reading material better, to develop more language skills, and to think more clearly—as well as to become more confident and to write more easily so that writing becomes a comfortable, everyday activity. Your entries may also provide subject material for longer, more carefully crafted pieces. The most important thing is to get into the habit of writing something each day.

4. *Evaluate your writing skills.* Use the Self-Evaluation Chart inside the front cover of this book to assess your writing skills by listing problem areas you need to work on. You may be adding to these lists throughout the entire term. Drawing on your instructor's comments, make notes on matters such as organization, development, content, spelling, vocabulary, diction, grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, and capitalization. Use this chart for self-motivated study assignments and as a checklist in all stages of writing. As you master each problem area, you can erase it or cross it out. Most of the elements you record in your Self-Evaluation Chart probably are covered in *Sentences, Paragraphs, and Beyond*. The table of contents, the index, and the Correction Chart on the inside back cover of the book will direct you to the additional instruction you decide you need.
 - *Organization/Development/Content:* List aspects of your writing, including the techniques of all stages of the writing process, such as freewriting, brainstorming, and clustering; the phrasing of a good topic sentence or thesis; and the design, growth, and refinement of your ideas.
 - *Spelling/Vocabulary/Diction:* List common spelling words marked as incorrect on your college assignments.