

PAUL MUNSELL

MARTHA CLOUGH

A Practical Guide for Advanced Writers in English as a Second Language



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PAUL MUNSELL

Michigan State University

MARTHA CLOUGH

University of Houston



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**A Practical Guide
for Advanced Writers
in English
as a Second Language**

PREFACE

AUDIENCE

A Practical Guide for Advanced Writers is designed for students who are learning English as a second language at the university or graduate level, who are in an upper intermediate or advanced preacademic English course (above 65 on the Michigan or above 470 on TOEFL), or who can write as good a composition as the sample labeled 65 in Appendix II.

PURPOSE

A Practical Guide sets four major goals for students:

1. To write more accurately in English.
2. To select and organize ideas effectively and to present them in the most common and effective formats.
3. To gain confidence and experience in approaching academic writing requirements.
4. To make progress in reading, listening, and speaking skills as a byproduct of the readings and discussions.

METHOD

The principal method used is the writing of short compositions on topics of interest and importance. Each unit is designed to be completed in less than one class period, so a writing assignment can be given at each meeting if desired.

To complement this basic method four other fundamental means are also used. First, each unit contains extensive prewriting activities to help clarify and specify the topic. Second, the materials emphasize editing in three ways: before writing by means of the editing exercise, during writing by self-editing and use of the checklist, and after receiving the composition that has been marked by the teacher by correcting mistakes. Third, each unit provides special guidelines to make the writing form of that unit completely explicit. Fourth, five units give practice in one of the most important, and sometimes neglected, skills of good writing: rewriting a paper written earlier.

MAIN DIVISIONS

The textbook is divided into three parts:

Part I. This part introduces basic forms of writing, such as chronological order, description, and argumentation, using personal topics for which all students have ample information. The units cover fundamental concepts such as selection of a theme, paragraph development, use of support, and appropriate sentence length.

Part II. This part treats the forms of writing in greater depth through the use of topics that are familiar but require extending personal knowledge and understanding to topics of high interest in our modern world. The exercises deal in detail with matters of topic development; organizational patterns; style; effect on the reader; and specific methods of support through use of examples, explanations, analogies, and facts.

Part III. This part emphasizes topics that require research or the study of supplementary sources. The units assume competency in the basic principles introduced in Parts I and II and provide more practice of these principles, using such topics as the biographies of famous leaders, energy, the environment, technology, and economics. Units 50 through 58 cover the writing of formal research papers, from use of the library to the compilation of the bibliography.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

A Practical Guide is designed to give the teacher maximum flexibility, as indicated in the Teacher's Guide (available at no charge from the publisher) and in the introductions to each unit. As examples of this flexibility, there are more units than can be covered in a typical term, so some parts of units or even entire units can selectively be omitted or given as homework. There are choices of topics in each unit to appeal to a wide range of interests. Particularly in Part I, there are paired units that can be treated together by more advanced groups. Units can be covered in class without a writing assignment, or the writing assignment may be carried over several units to give opportunities for the writing of longer and more complex papers. The course can emphasize spoken skills by having well-planned class discussions, can provide for the writing of personal journals, and can encourage peer correction. These and many more options are readily available to suit the needs of the class.

The teacher is strongly encouraged to keep a folder for each student and to put papers that the student has recorrected in it. This not only helps students to keep all their work in one place, but also provides the teacher with a ready reference for how many papers students are writing and reediting. The students should have access to these folders for all revising units (Units 11, 19, 32, 39, 50). In courses in which students will be graded, the folder is a convenient way for the teacher to have a large amount of material available with which to measure progress, effort, amount of work completed, and consistency. Students should be notified from the beginning of the purposes and responsibilities regarding the folders.

The students should also be encouraged to keep a notebook or folder in which to record common mistakes, grammatical notes, important words, and questions they intend to ask.

Finally, the students should be required to have at least one good dictionary and reference grammar. Since availability and teachers' preferences vary so widely, each teacher should announce at the beginning of the term which reference books are required.

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PART

I

Introduction

Part I introduces basic organizational forms of writing: chronological order, spatial order, description, classification, process, comparison/contrast, and argumentation. Within each of these forms the emphasis is on the choice of a theme, overall arrangement of the composition, paragraph development, and selection of content.

Through the editing exercises, the sample compositions and many of the warmup exercises, Part I also offers directed practice in correct use of structure, vocabulary, spelling, and mechanics. Two of the units are addressed to the conditional forms of verbs, a grammatical structure that represents a specific problem even for advanced writers.

Each unit is built around personal content that is not only interesting but that also offers the writer large quantities of useful information. If a topic such as “My Home” seems easy or removed from academic writing on the surface, experience with advanced writers suggests exactly the opposite. Not only is the topic ideally suited for eliciting a rich storehouse of information, providing the basis for a vivid example of descriptive writing, and making the concepts of theme and paragraph development convincingly clear, but the subject matter almost invariably allows writers to experience a warm memory that motivates rather than simply directs the writing.

However, for advanced writers who are experiencing little difficulty with the forms, organization, or language of Part I, these units should be done as quickly as possible. Personal writing, if extended too long, can become self-conscious or even embarrassing. One way to use the units efficiently and quickly is to view them as pairs, as in the following listing.

Units 2 and 3 (descriptions of a trip).

Units 5 and 6 (descriptions of a place).

Units 7 and 8 (classification of activities or influences).

Units 9 and 10 (how to do or make something).

Units 13 and 14 (comparison/contrast and advantages/disadvantages).

Units 15 and 16 (use of conditional verb forms).

Units 17 and 18 (argumentation and explanation).

Each of these pairs can be treated as a single unit and only one writing assignment given. Only those exercises in each unit that appear necessary for the class need be used.

Each unit is designed to be used in one fifty- to sixty-minute class session. In fact, most of the units can effectively be completed in less than thirty minutes, allowing students to begin or even finish writing within the class period. Both writing under pressure in class and writing at leisure outside of class should be encouraged.

The materials as designed are intended to be complete and self-contained. However, each class should provide any additional activities that will promote learning and satisfaction with the course. Interesting class discussion, writing of personal journals, and peer interaction are highly recommended.

Unit 1 contains the information necessary to prepare students to use all of the following units. Even if no writing assignment is given, the remainder of the unit should be completed. Similarly, Units 11, 12, 19, and 20 are essential to the overall development of a mature writer and should be covered. In the rest of Part I the teacher's and students' needs should determine the selection and speed of the units and the exercises.

Unit 1

First Impressions

Writing forms: Description; chronology

Writing skills: An overview of the writing process; characteristics of a good composition

INTRODUCTION

Many students who are using this textbook have recently moved to a new place or have experienced a dramatic change in environment. But even if you have not traveled recently, you certainly must remember finding yourself at some time in your life in new and unusual circumstances. The first impressions of a trip, change of residence, or new environment are the topic of this unit.

TIP

Before you sit down to write, be sure you have the materials you need: the right type and size of paper, pen or pencil and eraser, proper lighting, a dictionary, and your writing assignment.

WARMUP EXERCISE I: AN OVERVIEW OF THE WRITING PROCESS

In this unit you will prepare for writing, and you will develop an overview of the goals and principles of this textbook by carefully examining a composition that has been written, edited, and revised by a proficient speaker of English. When you write your first draft of a composition, it will probably not be so long, clear, neat, or well organized. Nonetheless, there are many features that you should attempt to imitate, features that will be discussed and illustrated in the following exercise.

Before we look at the specific features of a good composition written in English, however, reviewing the general stages that a good writer uses in approaching the writing task will provide a broad, useful orientation. You should assume, since you are probably well educated in your native language, that indeed you are already highly proficient as a writer, and many of these concepts will serve largely as review.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Read the following stages of good writing. Reflect on your own experience and understanding and be prepared to comment, in a class discussion, on the overall process of writing.

1. *Think of ideas, facts, or events.* You obviously have to have something to write *about*, and an indispensable step is collecting your material. You may have the material clearly in mind or you may have to read extensively, conduct interviews, and complete a research project in order to collect your data. Frequently, even when you have the information stored somewhere in your mind, it is necessary to go through a stage of “brainstorming,” review, or discussion to recall and clarify the information.
2. *Organize your content around a purpose or theme.* The content you have collected in step 1 might be only loosely organized, uneven in importance, and not directed toward a specific goal. You must group your ideas, discard weak or irrelevant details, and put them into order so that they produce an overall effect or theme.
3. *Rendering your content into language.* Steps 1 and 2 are to some degree independent of any particular language, but in step 3 you find ways of turning your ideas into words. This stage is especially hard in a second language, but even in one’s native language it represents a real struggle, requires a high degree of skill and experience, and is always subject to revision.
4. *Evaluate what you have written and revise it.* No matter how carefully you have proceeded through steps 1 through 3, after you have written something, you will invariably find weaknesses or omissions, especially if you read it a long time after writing it. If you want to write something with which you are really satisfied, you must reexamine it carefully *after* you write it, repeating the steps outlined previously: thinking of things you ought to include; looking for better ways of organizing your thoughts; and working on better ways of turning your ideas into clear and interesting English.

WARMUP II: CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD COMPOSITION

The steps outlined previously will be practiced systematically throughout the units of this textbook. In this first unit, it will be useful to examine a composition that was written following these guidelines. The questions that follow will direct you to those significant aspects that should be present in your compositions.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Read the sample composition on pages 6–7 at least once, carefully noting the ideas, the organization, and the format.
2. Answer each of the questions. (For your convenience, if you are working independently of the teacher, the answers to the warmup exercises, where relevant, are provided in the answers section between Units 20 and 21. Never consult the answers until you have completely finished the exercise.)