



PASSAGES

An Intermediate/Advanced Writing Book

Len Fox

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Len Fox

Brooklyn College of the City University of New York



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*To those who have taught me,
more than anyone else,
about living and loving life:
Ginny, Amy, Lucy*

TO THE TEACHER

This book is concerned with “passages” of different sorts. For one thing, there are reading passages at the beginning of each chapter, which I hope you and your students will find worth discussing and writing about. Secondly, the reading passages and writing assignments in the book are concerned with the “passages” that we make throughout our lifetimes: childhood, going to school, getting a job, joining adult society, forming adult relationships, facing old age, and death. These are stages that we all must pass through. Hence, we should be glad for the chance to read about these stages, to talk about them, to think about them, and to write about them. Finally, we as teachers are concerned that our students make the “passage” from being inexperienced, unskilled writers to being more proficient ones. I hope this book will help.

Model Passages and Writing Assignments

Each chapter begins with a passage that is meant to stimulate thinking and discussion on the “theme” of the chapter (which is related to the larger theme of each section of the book: growing up, education, and so on). The first five chapters have paragraphs as models (two descriptive, one narrative, two opinion and support), and the students are asked to write their own paragraphs at the end of the chapter. In chapter six, the essay is introduced (thesis sentence, introduction, body, conclusion), and the model passages from this point on are essays (two opinion and support, one descriptive, one narrative, one definition, two classification, one comparison). In some chapters, the student is told what type of essay to write (chapter six, opinion and support; chapter eight, problem solution; chapter nine, comparison), but in most chapters, the student is given a choice of different questions which call for different essay types. I have provided sample outlines of the model passages at the beginning of the chapters; outlines in the writing sections of a type of paragraph or essay that students could write, and, in an appendix, additional models (which I wrote myself) based on the sample outlines given at the end of each chapter.

Students should be given ample time to think and to discuss (the crucial “brainstorming” phase) before writing. I strongly encourage students to do an outline before writing, although they don’t necessarily have to stick to it exactly in their writing. I feel that a certain amount of invention occurs during the writing process, so we can’t necessarily hold ourselves or our students strictly to an outline. The outline is particularly important for students who have difficulty in presenting their ideas in a logical, organized way.

Exercises

I have written this book for English as a second language and basic writing students. Some of the exercises and grammar sections (prepositions, articles, present perfect tense) are specifically intended only for ESL students. These are indicated by an asterisk next to the exercises. But most of the exercises and grammar sections (comprehension questions, sentence ordering, punctuation, proofreading, writing correct sentences, coordination, subordination, subject-verb agreement, use of pronouns, passive verb forms) will be useful for *both* ESL and basic writing students. The sentence ordering exercises and the rhetorical devices sections deal with the recently much discussed topics of cohesion and functional devices. The proofreading exercises (a crucial and much neglected phase of writing) take the students through three steps: errors underlined and indicated in the margin (in chapters 1-3); errors indicated only in the margin (in chapters 4-7); errors indicated only at the top of the passage (in chapters 8-13). Many of the exercises involve students working in pairs or small groups and writing paragraphs with a grammatical focus. This serves the threefold purpose of teaching grammar, teaching writing, and teaching students to communicate and interact with each other (an important aspect, I believe, of what should go on in any classroom).

Evaluation

What happens after the writing assignment is done? Well, there are three things that I consider important. First, students must get the feeling that the teacher has taken their writing and ideas seriously. The teacher can make comments (either in the margin, at the beginning, or at the end of a paper) not only on what is *not* good ("You need an example," "Not true," "Unclear,"), but also on what *is* good ("Good point," "Nice story," "I agree"). Students should feel that the teacher is a sympathetic "listener" and should be encouraged to feel good about their writing and about themselves (at least encouraged enough to feel like going on and doing another writing assignment). In addition, I strongly recommend having students read their papers to each other in small groups, thus giving them an "audience." (During group reading, the teacher can move from group to group, making sure the students' comments are valid and helpful.)

Second, the teacher should first indicate the *major* grammatical errors, allowing the student to see *patterns* of errors (two or three specific types of errors that he or she especially tends to make). This "focused correcting" (not correcting everything) tells students that they must learn the rules governing a particular grammatical area, learn to proofread for this particular type of error, and learn to eliminate it from their writing. The teacher should not overcorrect; overcorrecting simply discourages students, suggesting to them that there is no way they will ever become competent writers.

Third, after content and major grammatical errors have been corrected, I would suggest correcting other, less important errors. We are thus talking about *three* drafts of a paper: a first rough draft, a second draft with content and major grammatical errors corrected, and a third draft with other errors corrected. At Brooklyn College, my colleagues and I are coming to feel that it is better to write fewer essays (maybe eight rather than twelve over a semester), and to do a more thorough job of preparing for and revising/correcting each assignment. In this way, the student is more likely to learn from the preceding assignment how to make the next one better.

Thanks

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LEN FOX

TO THE STUDENT

Writing can be both educational and fun. It can be a way for you to tell about your life and personal experiences, to share your ideas about your studies, or to communicate to others what you have learned through reading. Sometimes you even learn what your own ideas are, or force yourself to form well-thought-out ideas and opinions, through writing. In the words of John Updike, "Writing and rewriting are a constant search for what one is saying."

Writing may not come easily to some of you. You may not have been asked to write much in the past, or you may not have been asked to write formal essays or to do the sort of "academic writing" that students are expected to do in college. This book is meant to be an introduction to that sort of writing. I have tried to present interesting model passages and writing assignments in order to make the learning as painless as possible. In fact, I hope you will enjoy sharing your experiences and ideas with your classmates and will come to feel, if you don't already, that writing is an enjoyable, challenging, creative activity, one that you do not just because "the teacher tells you to," but because you want to.



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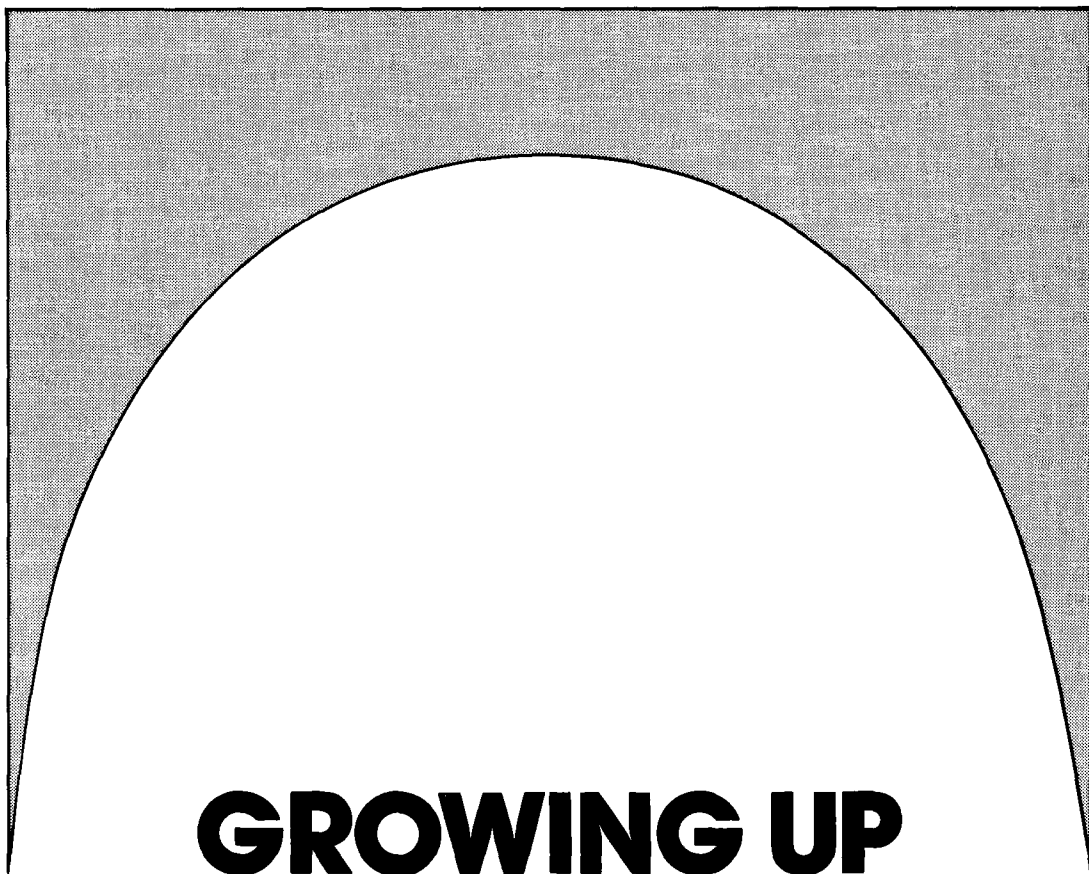
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Part One

PARAGRAPHS



GROWING UP



ONE

A SPECIAL PLACE

Many children who live in the city see the country only in picture books or movies. Some kids, however, through the Fresh Air Fund (a program that sends city kids to the country), get to spend two weeks in the country every summer. In the following passage, Mario Puzo, who was a Fresh Air Fund kid, tells how the country was a special place for him.

from "Italians in Hell's Kitchen"
Mario Puzo

As a child I knew only the stone city. I had no conception of what the countryside could be. When I got to New Hampshire, when I ran barefoot along the dirt country roads, when I drove the cows home from pasture, when I darted° through fields of corn and waded through clear brooks, when I gathered warm brown speckled° eggs in the henhouse, when I drove a hay wagon drawn by two great horses — when I did all these things — I nearly went crazy with the joy of it. It was quite simply a fairy tale come true.

The family that took me in . . . gave me those magical times children never forget.* For two weeks every summer from the time I was nine to fifteen, I was happier than I have ever been before or since. The man was good with tools and built me a little playground with swings, sliding ponds°, seesaws. The woman had a beautiful flower and vegetable garden

moved very quickly
spotted

a smooth slope for
children to slide down;
a slide

*The three dots (. . .) mean that a part of the original text has been omitted.

the sound made by fat
when it is cooking

and let me pick from it. A cucumber or strawberry in the earth was a miracle. And then when they saw how much I loved picnics, the sizzling° frankfurters on a stick over the wood fire, the yellow roasted corn, they drove me out on Sunday afternoons to a lovely green grass mountainside. Only on Sundays it was never called a picnic; it was called “taking our lunch outside.” . . .

There came a time, I was fifteen, when I was told I was too old to be sent away to the country as a Fresh Air Fund kid. It was the first real warning that I must enter the adult world, ready or not.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Puzo like the country so much?
2. What is the meaning of the expression “It was like a fairy tale come true”?
3. Why did Puzo have to stop going to the countryside?

Form

The passage is about what a special place the countryside was to Puzo (“I nearly went crazy with the joy of it”; “I was happier than I have ever been before or since”). In the passage, he gives many *details* (specific examples) of what he saw and did there. Following is an outline of the passage:

- par. 1: on what Puzo did in the countryside
- details:
 - smelled grass and flowers and trees
 - ran barefoot
 - drove the cows home
 - ... etc.
- par. 2: on what the family did with Puzo
- details:
 - man built a playground
 - woman let him pick from the garden
 - picnics
- par. 3: on when it ended

Rhetorical Devices

- ▣ Puzo first mentions the “*stone city*,” which contrasts with the soft, natural, colorful things described in the rest of the passage.
- ▣ The repetition of *when*-clauses (clauses beginning with *when*) connects the first paragraph and makes it flow.
- ▣ Puzo uses many *descriptive adjectives* (*dirt country roads*,” “*warm brown speckled eggs*,” “*sizzling frankfurters*,” “*green grass mountainside*”) which appeal to the reader’s senses (seeing, feeling, smelling, hearing), and also *specific* rather than *general* verbs (*ran barefoot*, *darted*, *waded*) which tend to interest the reader and create visual images.

- ❑ Puzo suggests what a wonderful experience this was by using words related to magic: *fairy tale, magical times, a miracle.*

GRAMMAR AND SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Exercise 1: Sentence Ordering

Put the following sentences in the correct order.

1. The man was good with tools and built me a little playground with swings, sliding ponds, seesaws.
2. A cucumber or strawberry in the earth was a miracle.
3. And then when they saw how much I loved picnics, they drove me out on Sunday afternoons to a lovely green grass mountainside.
4. The woman had a beautiful flower and vegetable garden and let me pick from it.
5. Only on Sundays it was never called a picnic; it was called "taking our lunch outside."
6. The family that took me in gave me those magical times children never forget.

Exercise 2: Prepositions*

Fill in the correct prepositions (then check the passage at the beginning of this chapter).

_____ a child I knew only the stone city. I had no conception _____ what the countryside could be. When I got _____ New Hampshire, when I smelled grass and flowers and trees, when I ran barefoot _____ the dirt country roads, when I drove the cows home _____ pasture, when I darted _____ fields _____ corn and waded _____ clear brooks, when I gathered warm brown speckled eggs _____ the hen-house, when I drove a hay wagon drawn _____ two great horses — when I did all these things — I nearly went crazy _____ the joy _____ it.

Complete Sentences

Complete sentences in English include a *subject* (a noun or noun phrase) and a *predicate* (a verb followed by its object or *complement*). In the following sentences, the subject is underlined with one line and the predicate with two:

	<u>I</u>	<u>knew only the stone city.</u>
	<u>It</u>	<u>was quite simply a fairy tale come true.</u>
<u>The family that took me in</u>	<u>gave me those magical times</u>	
	<u>children never forget.</u>	

*May be omitted by basic writing students.