

**English
Skills
with
Readings**

John Langan

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John Langan

ATLANTIC COMMUNITY COLLEGE

**English
Skills
with
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ENGLISH SKILLS WITH READINGS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Langan has taught reading and writing at Atlantic Community College near Atlantic City, New Jersey, for the past seventeen years. The author of a popular series of college textbooks on both subjects, he enjoys the challenge of developing materials that teach skills in an especially clear and lively way. Before teaching, John earned advanced degrees in writing at Rutgers University and in reading at Glassboro State College. Before graduate school, he spent a year writing fiction that, he says, "is now at the back of a drawer waiting to be discovered and acclaimed posthumously." John supported himself during this time and while in school by working as a truck driver, machinist, car battery assembler, hospital attendant, and apple packer. He presently lives with his wife, Judith Nadell, near Philadelphia. Among his everyday pleasures are listening to Phillies games, cooking, gardening, running, and watching reruns of the television show *Taxi*.

TO THE INSTRUCTOR

English Skills with Readings will help students learn and apply the basic principles of effective composition. It will also help them master essential reading skills. This nuts-and-bolts book is based on a number of assumptions about the writing and reading processes:

- First of all, *English Skills with Readings* assumes that four principles in particular are keys to effective writing: unity, support, coherence, and sentence skills. These four principles are highlighted on the inside front cover and reinforced throughout the book. Part One focuses on the first three principles; Part Five treats sentence skills fully. The rest of the book shows how the four principles apply in different types of paragraph development (Part Three), in traditional five-paragraph essays (Part Four), and in both paragraphs and essays (Part Six).
- The book reflects the belief that the best way to begin writing is with personal experience. After students have learned to support a point by providing material from their own experience, they are ready to develop an idea by drawing upon their own reasoning abilities and upon information in notes, articles, and books. Students are asked to write on both experiential and objective topics in Parts Three and Four. And the reading selections in Part Six generate a variety of first- and third-person assignments.
- The book also assumes that beginning writers are more likely to learn composing skills through lively, engaging, and realistic models than through materials remote from the common experiences that are part of everyday life. For example, when a writer argues that proms should be banned, or catalogs ways to harass a teacher, or talks about why some teenagers take drugs, students are more apt to remember and follow the writing principles that may be involved. After reading vigorous papers composed by other students and some of the stimulating selections by professionals in Part Six, students will understand better the power that good writing can have. They will then be more likely to aim for similar honesty, realism, and detail in their own work.

- Another premise of *English Skills with Readings* is that mastery of the paragraph should precede work on the several-paragraph essay. Thus Part One illustrates the basic principles of composition using paragraph models, and the assignments in Part Three aim at developing the ability to support ideas within a variety of paragraph forms. The essential principles of paragraph writing are then applied to traditional five-paragraph essays in Part Four. Finally, in Part Six, each reading selection is followed by two paragraph assignments and one essay assignment.
- Other parts of the book reflect additional beliefs about what is important in an English text. Part Two describes several factors that are crucial for writing effectively, including the evaluation of one's own attitude about writing, the use of prewriting techniques, and the ability to create logical outlines. The grammar, punctuation, and usage skills that make up Part Five are explained in a clear and direct way, without unnecessary technical terms. Here, as elsewhere, enough exercise material is provided so that students can get "hands-on" experience with the skills in question.
- Another premise is that, since no two people will use an English text in exactly the same way, the material should be organized in a highly accessible manner. Because each of the six parts of the book deals with a distinct area, instructors can turn quickly and easily to the skills they want to present. At the same time, ideas for sequencing material are provided by three boxes titled "Some Suggestions on What to Do Next"; the boxes appear in the opening chapters of the book. And a detailed syllabus is provided in the Instructor's Manual.
- Finally, an assumption central to this book is that reading and writing are closely connected skills—so that practicing one helps the other, and neglecting one hurts the other. Part Six enables students to work on becoming better readers as well as better writers. An introductory section to Part Six offers a series of tips on effective reading; and ten questions after each of the selections provide practice in key reading comprehension skills. A set of discussion questions also follows each selection, serving to deepen students' understanding of the content and to make them aware of basic matters having to do with structure, style, and tone. Last, there are three writing assignments for each selection, along with guidelines to help students think about and get started with the assignments.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THIS BOOK AND ENGLISH SKILLS

- Parts One to Four are essentially the same as the four rhetoric sections of *English Skills*. There are two omissions: "Additional Paragraph Assignments"

has been removed from the end of Part Three and an article titled "A Suicide at Twelve—Why, Steve?" from Part Four. There is also an addition: a new writing assignment appears at the end of each chapter in Part Three. Titled "Writing about a Reading Selection," this assignment asks students to read one of the professional essays in Part Six that illustrates a certain rhetorical mode. (For example, in the chapter on comparison and contrast, students are asked to read "People Need People," which develops its point through the use of contrast.) They are then asked to write a paragraph using the mode of development in question.

- Part Five of *English Skills*, "Special Skills," has been omitted to help create space for the fifteen readings. Note, however, that some of the content of "Key Study Skills" can be found in the selection "Power Reading"; and information that originally appeared in "Writing a Résumé and Job Application Letter" now appears (in a somewhat different form) in the selection "Finding a Career and a Job: A No-Nonsense Guide."
- Part Six of *English Skills*, "Sentence Skills," has been reduced somewhat, again to create space for the readings. Material omitted includes the diagnostic and achievement tests, "Sentence Sense," and five of the ten editing tests.
- As the title indicates, what is most different in this book is the inclusion of fifteen reading selections, by professional writers, along with detailed reading and writing apparatus following each selection.

THE READINGS

- The fifteen selections have been chosen for their content as much as for rhetorical mode. They are organized thematically into three groups: "Goals and Values," "Education and Self-Improvement," and "Human Groups and Society." Some reflect important contemporary concerns: for instance, "Why Reading Counts," "People Need People," and "What It Means to Be Young Today." Some provide information many students may find helpful; examples are "Power Learning," "Finding a Career and a Job: A No-Nonsense Guide," and "Bye-Bye, Blahs!" Some recount profoundly human experiences: "The Tryout," "Adolescent Confusion," and "A Drunken Ride, a Tragic Aftermath." And at least one selection, "How to Think Clearly," was chosen for the special challenge it offers. All the selections should capture the interest of a wide range of students. (A list on page *xiii* presents the readings by rhetorical mode.)
- Each reading begins with a preview that supplies background information where needed and stimulates interest in the piece.

- The ten reading comprehension questions that follow each selection give students practice in five key skills: summarizing (in the form of an alternative title), determining the main idea, recognizing key supporting details, making inferences, and understanding vocabulary in context. Reading educators agree that these are among the most crucial comprehension skills. A special chart at the back of the book enables students to track their progress as they practice these skills.
- Discussion questions following the reading comprehension questions deal with matters of content as well as aspects of structure, style, and tone. Through the questions on structure in particular, students will see that professional authors practice some of the same basic composing techniques (such as the use of transitions and emphatic order to achieve coherence) that they have been asked to practice in their own writing.

When assigning a selection, teachers may find it helpful to ask students to read the preview as well as to do the reading comprehension and discussion questions that follow the selection. Answers can then be gone over quickly in class. Through these activities, a writing teacher can contribute to the improvement of his or her students' reading skills.

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•John Langan

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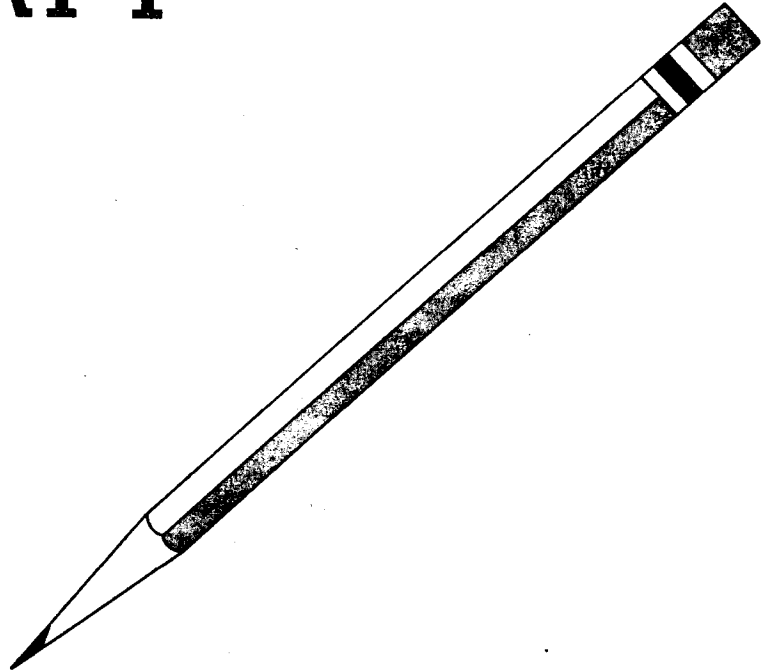
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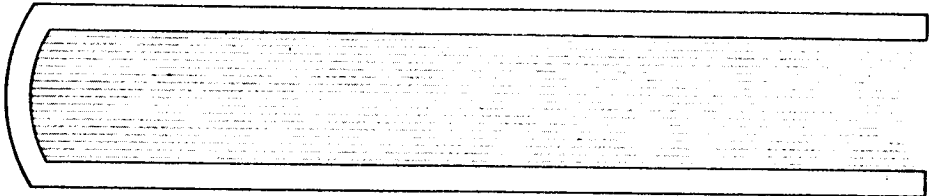
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PART 1



Basic Principles of Effective Writing



PREVIEW

Part One begins by introducing you to the book. As you work through the brief activities in the introduction, you will gain a quick understanding of the book's purpose, the way it is organized, and how it will help you develop your writing skills. Part One then describes the four basic steps that can make you an effective writer. The four steps are:

- 1** Make a point
- 2** Support the point with specific evidence
- 3** Organize and connect the specific evidence
- 4** Write clear, error-free sentences

Explanations, examples, and activities for the first three steps are provided so that you can master the steps. (You will be referred to Part Five of the book for a detailed treatment of the fourth step.) After seeing how the steps can help you write a competent paper, you will learn how they lead to the four standards, or "bases," of effective writing. You will then practice evaluating a number of papers in terms of the four bases of unity, support, coherence, and sentence skills.