

The Vital Arts— Reading and Writing



Dorothy Rubin

***the vital arts-
reading
and writing***

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With love to my understanding, helpful, and supportive husband Artie, my delightful daughters, Carol and Sharon, and my precious granddaughter, Jennifer. Also, in memory of my dear mother, Clara.

preface

Our world is a complicated and competitive one. Love may make it go round, but we need understanding to stay on it comfortably. To understand more than our individual experiences can teach us – to deal with modern society and technology, that is, on terms better than those of primitive man – we must be able to get and to give information. The harsh fact is that most information is still passed through the written word, and anyone who finds either reading or writing difficult is seriously handicapped in the civilized struggle for a place in the world. Reading and writing are not frills of education; they are essentials of education.

The Vital Arts – Reading and Writing is a text and workbook to help students read and write effectively. Effective reading, as I see it, is reading that takes in not only what is said but how it is said, why it is said, and whether the statements hold up under reasoned examination. Effective writing is, first, writing that is correct by common standards of usage, punctuation, and spelling. It is also writing that lays down the writer's meaning in an order of words, sentences, and paragraphs that a reader cannot mistake. The mechanical understanding necessary for effective writing and reading is basic, but it is an understanding to be learned. From my experiences in my own learning, in teaching language arts to future teachers, and in teaching basic skills to college freshmen, I know that the understanding can be learned. This book is based on those experiences and that knowledge.

Many of the students who open this book will have worked with its principles before. I hope, however, that my presentation of the principles in simple units and the integration of reading and writing will provide new insights to familiar problems. The emphasis in *The Vital Arts – Reading and Writing* is on the rapid, enduring, and enjoyable acquisition of fundamentals. The contents progress from the simple sentence to the complete short theme and elementary logic. But the chief difference between this book and a conventional basic-skills manual is the integration of instruction.

The text is divided into three units. The first is devoted mainly to sentence formation, the second to understanding and use of the paragraph, and the third to composition as a whole. Each unit is divided into lessons, and each lesson is divided into four parts. The parts of each lesson, however, present four different aspects of writing or of writing and reading rather than four segments of a single topic. The four components are related to each other but involve the student in experiences with a variety of skills instead of in an endurance test of unvarying concentration. The first lesson, for example, introduces the simple sentence, sentence subjects, the general use of punctuation marks, and spelling; the second lesson continues with the compound sentence, sentence predicates, capitalization, and more on spelling. The parts of the lessons are cumulative, that is, a topic such as punctuation is pursued throughout the book as part of each lesson until the student has met, and met again, every punctuation mark and its uses. The student is never subjected, however, to a single, gruelling marathon in punctuation.

We know that reading helps us to acquire information and that it provides a stimulus for writing. From reading we gain a feeling for sentence structure and variation; we expand our vocabulary. Reading, in short, develops language sense. As reading and writing are interrelated, they are presented together in *The Vital Arts – Reading and Writing*. Beginning with Unit II, "Paragraphs," each lesson incorporates a part on reading skills. The discussion of the writing applications of a main topic, for instance, follows a lesson part on reading paragraphs for their main ideas. The juxtaposition of activities reinforces the learning of each and, at the same time, provides more variety and interest for the student.

Each lesson part provides a simple, concise explanation of the specific skill it presents and supports each explanation with numerous examples analyzed as necessary. Practice in using the particular skill follows. Answers to the practices are given at the end of each lesson. At the end of each unit, word puzzles and review crossword puzzles add to the challenge. Repeated practice in each skill will be encountered as the student works through the book. Repetition of problems and access to the answers insure the overlearning essential to fixing a principle in the mind.

In addition to the primary content of the book there are three appendixes. The first contains a diagnostic test for each of the three units of the book. The second consists of extra practice exercises for each lesson, but these exercises are not answered in the book and so may be used as quizzes or in-class assignments. The third appendix is a comprehensive handbook-glossary for reference that gives definitions and explanations for every term or principle in the text.

If a glossary of terms appears in the appendix, grammatical and other terms presumably appear in the text. Unavoidably, some do. I have tried to give principles in practical, comprehensible language as often as possible, for a rich grammar vocabulary helps no one write well. But some explanations cannot be given without names, and when I cannot escape a word like “appositive,” I define it and then use it. But I hope readers will find I have succeeded in cutting down the usual list of names to be learned and that they will benefit from a concentration on practical principles in place of one on terminology.

The organization of *The Vital Arts – Reading and Writing* will adapt to a variety of courses and student needs. Someone who wants to follow a single topic from start to finish without interruption can do so by turning from lesson part to lesson part. The answers to the main exercises are in the book, and the content is self-pacing. A student taking a conventional class and a student enrolled in a learning lab or self-help program will gain equally from the text.

D.R.

I would like to thank Anthony English for being the personification of a perfect editor. His valuable suggestions, creative editing, intelligent insights, and uncanny wit have made working with him an extreme pleasure and privilege. I would also like to thank John Travis for being such a patient, kind, considerate, and helpful production editor.

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unit I

SENTENCES

Introduction

The sentence is a significant unit of language, a unit that has meaning. It is a word or group of words stating, asking, commanding, supposing, or exclaiming. The sentence contains a subject and a verb that are in agreement in number with one another. It begins with a capital letter and ends with a period (.), a question mark (?), or an exclamation point (!). There are four types of sentences: the simple, the compound, the complex, and the compound-complex.

There are clear-cut rules for correct sentences, but correct style is a much more complicated matter. Short sentences are used for effect, and so are longer sentences. There are times for repetition in writing, and there are times for brevity. Good writers use word imagery and descriptive phrases to make their writing colorful and interesting. Knowledge of how to use the various methods of expanding and combining sentences, as well as how to avoid using “overworked phrases,” helps develop writing style.

Special Note

Although there are practices in the following lessons on recognizing simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences, the emphasis is on the writing of sentences. The recognition practices are presented to make you aware of the different types of sentences that you encounter in your everyday reading and to help you to gain experience in working with them.

