Study Writing

A course in written English for academic and professional purposes

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Thanks

Study Writing results from a long process of in-house materials development at the Institute for Applied Language Studies of the University of Edinburgh. An earlier writing course was developed by Gill Schärer and Ben Heasley as a pre-intermediate textbook presented in the form of a self-study programme. The evident need for material to help adult learners of English to write led Ben Heasley and Liz Hamp-Lyons to write a course commencing at post-intermediate level and intended for classroom use. The course was piloted at the IALS and revised as a result; it was piloted again at the IALS and elsewhere (a period during which Ben Heasley moved on to Ain Shams University, Egypt, and was able to bring a further dimension of experience to the book). This final version has, therefore, been extensively tried out.

We would like to record our debt of gratitude to Gill Schärer for her involvement in the early stages and for the use of several texts and tasks. Thanks are also due to:

- Clive Criper, Director of the Institute for Applied Language Studies, for his support of the project through all its stages;
- colleagues at the IALS, especially Tony Lynch, who oversaw the piloting with several generations of EAP students;
- colleagues at the Universities of Aston, Warwick and Essex who piloted later versions and provided feedback;
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But thanks are due most of all to our families: Mike Lyons (and Christopher, who arrived on the scene between versions!); Hilda Heasley, Yana, Myles and Cian. Without their patience and the happiness they gave us we could never have persevered to this outcome.

An overview of unit contents

PART I

Unit	*Introduction*	*About writing*	*Using grammar in writing*
1	Describing spatial relationships	Bird's eye view vs. pedestrian's view descriptions	Guiding the reader through the text
2	Presenting data as a classification	Criteria and logical orders for classifications	Language structures for classification
3	Defining objects and concepts	Defining as part of a text	Grammatical expansions of definitions
4	Functions of generalizations	General–specific pattern and the structure of text	Order of word groups in sentences and text
5	Making comparisons and contrasts	Organizing comparisons and contrasts in text	Expressions of comparison and contrast in sentences and text
6	Understanding time order	Writing about events in time	Grammatical expressions of time; time structure in texts
7	Describing processes in linear sequence	Using sequences when describing processes: the clarity principle, the reality principle	Using the passive voice in descriptions
8	Following a cyclical process	Describing cycles in text using topic sentences for clear text structure: the relevance principle	Relative clauses
9	Understanding cause↔effect relationships	Degrees of certainty about cause and effect: the honesty principle	Expressions of cause and effect

PART II

Unit			
10	Deciding how to organize the whole text	Text structure: Situation→ Problem→Solution→ Evaluation	Writer–reader relationship: the four co-operative principles
11	Developing text within an S→P→S→E framework	Text-based tasks focusing on:	situation problem solution evaluation
12	Text-based tasks without guidance		

Contents

Teacher's guide

To the teacher

Study Writing is designed for students of English as a foreign or second language at post-intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency in English. It is intended for anyone who wishes to learn English for academic or professional reasons. It has been trialled with students ranging in age from 17 to 50 from many different backgrounds.

Timing

The course provides about 40–60 hours of classwork. Not all students, however, will need to do every exercise of every unit. It is also assumed that some writing tasks will be assigned for homework. In general, we have erred on the side of providing too many rather than too few tasks, giving teachers considerable flexibility regarding the number of hours they will take to complete the course, depending on the exact needs of their own students. (See *Teacher's guide A (1).*)

General principles

The course is based on an approach which emphasizes the discoursal and cognitive aspects of writing. Essentially we see writing as a form of problem-solving in which the writer faces two main tasks: (a) generating ideas in language, and (b) composing these ideas into a written structure adapted to the needs of the reader and the goals of the writer. This is why we ask students to think about different kinds of information and different ways of organizing writing. We believe that writing and reading are closely associated, and that a developing writer can learn a great deal from the study of sample texts from the writer's point of view. (See *Teacher's guide C.*)

Because we wish to emphasize the cognitive and discoursal aspects, we pay rather less attention to grammar, discussing only selected topics which experience suggests cause particular problems. This does *not* mean we think grammar is unimportant. On the contrary, without a solid basis of grammatical control, the student cannot hope to develop into an effective writer. But it is our view that error-free writing is less important than writing which addresses the topic clearly, develops it in a rational and relevant way, and takes account of the needs of the reader. Our experience agrees with the findings of many research studies: that once students are writing fluently and confidently, they will be more inclined and more able to write accurately.

Course organization

In Part I of the course, Units 1–9, a range of writing types are introduced and practised. In Part II we explore a framework for handling complete expository texts, both as reader and as writer. The final unit offers students the opportunity to think about writing in general as a creative process, and to explore some of the ways this process develops.

Units 1–9 have three main sections: *About writing* explores the principles of writing; *Using grammar in writing* focuses on aspects of grammar which are particularly critical for writing expository texts; and *Consolidation* gives students the opportunity to write long stretches of text under fewer constraints, applying what they have learned in the unit, and exercising their developing skill as a whole. The units in Part II, because they are dealing with the structure of whole texts, are not so readily divisible, and are structured differently from unit to unit.

General advice on teaching procedure

We do not believe that there is a 'right way' to teach writing, and we do believe that individual teachers should be allowed the freedom of making their own decisions. Nevertheless, the writers of a book always have certain ideas and assumptions which necessarily affect the book they write, so that it is easier to use the materials in some ways than others. We state our general views here in the hope that they will be helpful to the teacher seeking to understand why we have done this-or-that, and how *we* might teach it: this is not intended as a prescription of how any other teacher should do it.

Writing is clearly a complex process, and competent writing is frequently accepted as being the last language skill to be acquired (for native speakers of the language as well as for foreign/second language learners). Few people write spontaneously, and few feel comfortable with a formal writing task intended for the eyes of someone else. When the 'someone else' is a teacher, whose eye may be critical, and who indeed may assign a formal assessment to the written product, most people feel uncomfortable. It makes sense, then, that the atmosphere of the writing classroom should be warm and supportive, and non-threatening. It helps if teachers show willingness to write too, and to offer their attempts for class discussion along with those of the students; it helps if students can work together, assisting each other, pointing out strengths and weaknesses without taking or giving offence. Many of our tasks suggest working with a partner or in groups, and we see this work as very important: not only does it make the task livelier and more enjoyable, but it makes sure that students see that writing really is co-operative, a relationship between writer and reader. Usually the writer has to imagine a reader, but co-operative writing provides each writer with a reader and makes the writing task more realistic and more interactive.

Writing is commonly seen as a three-stage process: pre-writing, writing and rewriting. Although this is very much an oversimplification, it is a helpful one. In the past teachers concentrated on the end of the second stage, i.e. after the writing had been done. They did not see how they could intervene at the pre-

writing and writing stages, and rewriting was seen only as 'correcting the mistakes'. We now understand the importance of all three stages as part of the writing process, and try to help students master the *process* by participating in it with them, rather than contenting ourselves with criticizing the *product*, i.e. the composition, without knowing much about how it was arrived at.

We have included a *Teacher's guide* at the back of the book, for those teachers who would like more detailed guidance on how to use the book, or/and about the teaching of writing in general. The topics covered in the guide are listed on the Contents page. There are also teaching notes on each unit (and on the *To the student* introduction) at the end of the guide.

To the student

About *Study Writing*

Before you begin to work with *Study Writing*, you probably have some questions you would like to ask about the course. Some of the questions students most often ask have been answered below. Of course, you will learn many more answers yourself as you study the course.

Q: Who is this course for?
A: It's for anyone who wants to study English seriously, who is adult (over about 17), and who is already able to write reasonably correct sentences in English but wants to be able to write longer pieces, paragraphs and complete texts, which are not only grammatically correct but also well-organized and informative. Most people who use this book will either be going to follow a course of study at a college or university which uses English, or planning to take an advanced examination in English.

Q: How will this course help me?
A: Firstly, it will give you practice in using many common ways of organizing texts as a whole (i.e. complete pieces of writing), and of organizing information within texts. Secondly, it will provide you with plenty of examples of different types of texts which other writers have produced and will help you to see the principles on which the organization of these texts is based. Thirdly, it will point out some of the most common grammatical difficulties which can prevent non-native writers of English from producing acceptable texts.

Q: Is learning to write English as difficult as it seems?
A: Well – it is very difficult to write like a Shakespeare or a D.H. Lawrence in a language which is not your own. But you are not aiming at great literature: you simply need to be able to write clear, accurate English which has a central idea and other related information and gets the meaning across to your readers. Because this type of English writing is highly structured and operates by rules or expectations which can be explained to you, and which you can see in example texts, it is much easier to learn than so-called 'creative writing' like novels, poetry and plays. Of course, information-based writing (usually called 'expository writing') is creative too: you take the ideas and information, apply the conventional patterns to them, but in your own way, so that you create a text which is unique to you.

Q: How is this course organized?

A: The course has two main Parts. In Part I, the main functional types of writing are introduced and practised. In Part II you will study the organization of texts in a different way, which will enable you to see each one more as a whole with parts than as a range of parts. Each Part is divided into several units, and there is a particular aspect of writing for you to concentrate on in each unit. You will also get opportunities to write whole texts throughout the course, so that you don't forget that the aspects you study are only parts of the whole skill of writing, and not the complete answer. The tasks you have to do become more difficult as the book progresses, until at the end you should be able to produce your own original text without any supports. The units in Part I have three main divisions: *About writing* tries to give you some insights into the process and structure of writing, and helps you to organize your own writing; *Using grammar in writing* focuses on one aspect of English grammar which is particularly helpful for writing expository texts; *Consolidation* provides the opportunity to put together everything you have learned in the unit, together with your other knowledge of writing in English, and allows you to show your skill in creating a short text of your own.

Q: Do I need to do anything else, apart from studying this course, in order to improve my writing ability?

A: While we sincerely believe that this course will help you become a competent writer, we are the first to acknowledge that there are limits to what any course can achieve. This limitation results from the fact that writing is such a complex activity that it cannot easily be broken down into a series of skills and subskills for teaching. While no course can ever teach you everything you need in order to become a competent writer, there is no reason why you cannot learn all there is to know about effective writing. To help you do just this, we include a *Study writing yourself* section in this introduction.

Study writing yourself

In this section we will concentrate on two ways in which you can help yourself learn to be a better writer.

1 One not so obvious approach to writing is through wide reading. Reading is essentially an attempt to find out why the writer bothered to write in the first place, i.e. to discover the writer's goal. To help readers achieve an understanding of her or his goal a writer must use some general framework to support whatever point she or he is trying to make. You will meet these frameworks in *Study Writing*. However, you can best appreciate how they can be varied to achieve different goals by studying other people's writings. In addition, you can best evaluate their relative effectiveness by examining how other writers use them. For example, if you want to compare two opposing viewpoints, do you present the one you favour first or last? The best way to answer this question is to examine what other competent writers do and then make up your own mind.

We could go on at great length about the advantages of wide reading and show how useful it is for learning grammar and vocabulary among other things. However, to do so would make this introduction unnecessarily long. We hope that what we have pointed out will convince you of the necessity of reading widely.

2 The most obvious way you can help yourself become a good writer is by writing. We strongly suggest that in addition to completing the tasks in *Study Writing* you also keep your own personal journal. Buy yourself an extra notebook, and try to write down some ideas every day, in English, about anything that interests you. Write down your opinions on life, love, the writing class, whatever interests you. As you write do not worry too much about putting your ideas in order, just let them flow; you will be surprised at what you will learn about your own thoughts, attitudes, feelings, etc. Neither should you worry about length; just keep going until the ideas stop. In some cases you may not produce more than a set of key-words, in others a set of notes, while, occasionally, you will surprise yourself by producing pages and pages of writing. The main purpose of this stage is to find out what you know/feel/etc. about the topic in hand.

The second stage is more difficult. Once a week, reread your journal, select one topic and rewrite it for a particular reader. This may be your teacher, a fellow student, or the whole class. You will need to think carefully about how to present your topic in such a way that your reader(s) can follow it. Instead of asking as you did in the first stage, 'What do I know about topic X?' you will have to ask yourself, 'What does my reader need to know about topic X?'

The transition from 'What do I know about X?' to 'What does my reader need to know?' is not an easy one to make, though it is a very necessary one. However, as with most things in life, once you begin to approach the problem, you will find a way through it.

Conclusion: How do you think you can become a 'good' writer of English?

So far, in this introduction, we have talked mainly about how *we* think you can become a 'good' writer of English. The time has now come for *you* to say how *you* think you can improve *your* writing.

Task

As your first attempt at keeping a journal we would like you to consider the following question:

What do I think will help me become a 'good' writer of English?

To start you off you might consider the following statements:

1 The most important thing for me is to study more grammar.
2 The most important thing for me is to have a good teacher.
3 The most important thing for me is to memorize useful expressions and sentences.
4 The most important thing for me is to read more.

5 The most important thing for me is to have a lot of practice in writing.
6 The most important thing for me is study more vocabulary.
7 The most important thing for me is to think about what makes writing effective.

When you have written up your journal, bring it to the next class and in groups of three or four discuss your beliefs. After the discussion, elect a spokesperson who will communicate your shared ideas to the class.

PART I

Unit 1 Spatial relationships

Introduction

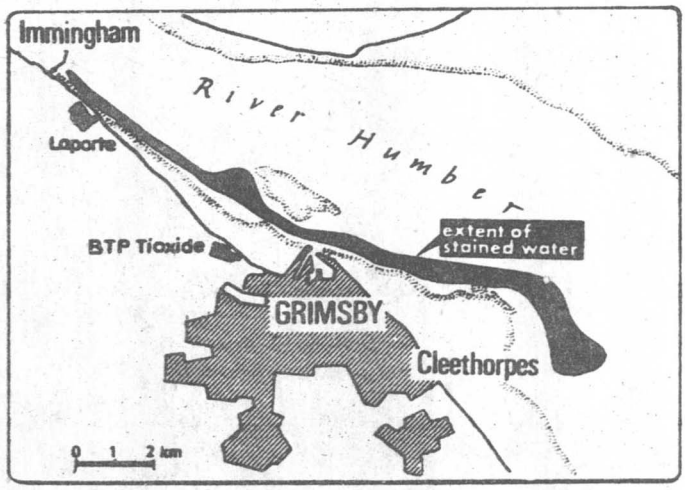
Very often we have to describe in writing the location of a place, how a place is laid out or how a set of objects are connected (as in equipment for an experiment). In this unit we will look at some of the ways of describing spatial relationships. Spatial descriptions are often accompanied by a visual aid, such as a plan, map, or diagram.

Task 1

Read the following text by yourself and then look at the map which accompanies it. With a partner, discuss the text and the map and decide whether the map helps you to understand the text.

Acidic pollution

The discharge of waste from the production of titanium dioxide along the Humber estuary in Britain causes serious acidification of local waters, wipes out aquatic organisms and pollutes the beaches of Cleethorpes with acid and iron. The two main titanium dioxide plants in Britain are BTP Tioxide of Grimsby and LaPorte Industries of Stallingborough – both of them on the Humber estuary. Between them they discharge more than 60,000 m^3 of acidic waste daily. As a result, a long strip of land along the south bank of the estuary from Immingham to Cleethorpes has a brownish-red colour from the discharge.



(*New Scientist*)

Not all texts describing spatial relations are accompanied by a map. For example, the writer of the following text, 'The Abraham Moss Centre', did not include a map. The text describes the location of a school and is part of the introduction to an educational research project.

Task 2

Read the passage and then:

a) make a note of the expressions which tell the reader where a place is;
b) using the information in the text, draw a simple map of the area;
c) say what you think the writer's aim was in producing this description;
d) say whether you can draw an accurate map on the basis of the information provided in the passage.

The Abraham Moss Centre

The Abraham Moss Centre is a low, white complex of buildings on the borders of Cheetham and Crumpsall, just to the north of the centre of Manchester. Although the site itself was industrial wasteland, it is in the heart of a residential district. Along one side of it runs a railway, but in every other direction it is surrounded by semi-detached and terraced housing of the inter-war years. Both Cheetham and Crumpsall were fairly prosperous Victorian developments, but Cheetham in particular has undergone extensive redevelopment.

(A.D. Edwards and V.J. Furlong *The Language of Teaching*)

Some of the expressions in the above text tell you *what* various places are, or were:

'The Abraham Moss Centre is *a low, white complex of buildings*'.

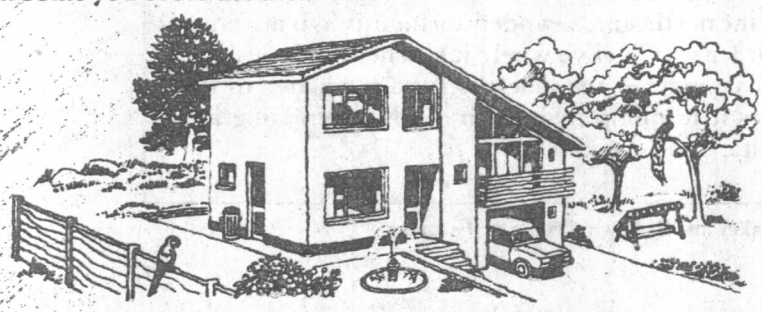
Other expressions tell you *where* various places are, or were:

'The Abraham Moss Centre . . . buildings *on the borders of Cheetham and Crumpsall*'.

Task 3

a) Add as many expressions of spatial relationships as you can to this illustration. Some you could use are:

opposite
between
beside
behind
(etc.)



b) Write four sentences to describe some spatial relationships between objects in the illustration, for example:

The fountain is *in front of* the house.