Basic Composition for ESL

An Expository Workbook

THIRD EDITION

Jann Huizenga
Courtenay Meade Snellings
Gladys Berro Francis

NEWBURY HOUSE/HEINLE & HEINLE
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Preface

This writing workbook has been designed for university-bound students or professionals who are studying English as a second language at the advanced-beginning or intermediate level (approximate TOEFL range 320–420). It is flexible enough, however, to be used by any others wanting to improve their basic writing skills. Specifically, the text is intended to be used after students have gained rudimentary competence in writing at the sentence level. It provides material for about sixty class hours of instruction, or a twelve-week writing course.

Basic Composition for ESL is rooted in the belief that basic organizational skills and modes of communication *can* and *should* be taught at a very early stage in the nonnative student's writing career; it need not be postponed, as it traditionally has been, until students have a firm grasp of grammar at the sentence level. Students who concentrate from the outset on the grammatical aspects of writing, ignoring writing as organized communication, must often break bad habits in advanced writing courses. Therefore, this text undertakes to develop an *early* approach to writing as coherent, meaningful communication, even though this communication is as yet grammatically simple. Straightforward, step-by-step explanations and exercises guide the student. Six practical and academic writing purposes are covered in six units: *Giving Instructions, Telling What Happened: Objective Reporting, Analyzing by Cause and Effect, Comparing and Contrasting, Classifying,* and *Describing a Mechanism or a Process.*

It is very important that writing assignments offer control at this level, but at the same time, they must provide creative outlets. *Basic Composition for ESL* offers a balance of control and creativity. This situation of "controlled creativity" is set up in the first two sections of each unit by a short prose piece displaying the rhetorical purpose in question, followed first by exercises on organization and grammar and then by a planning and writing assignment that parallels the sample prose piece and for which students receive visual cues. Both the vocabulary and the organizational

principles students need to use are similar to those of the sample prose piece. The structure of the picture cues gives students working guidelines. At the same time, however, because of the visual rather than verbal nature of the cues, students feel responsible for generating the sentences. The pictures leave room for student creativity and invention; within guidelines, students can try new lexical items and grammatical structures and expand on the topic by adding their own details. For more secure students, especially, this option to take risks is important. By the third section of each unit, the control gives way to looser guidance; students are encouraged to experiment with what they have learned by writing on one of four suggested unillustrated topics or developing their own topic.

Basic Composition for ESL is structured so that the six writing purposes and the general content of the units gradually increase in complexity. Each unit opens with a brief introduction discussing the writing purpose taught in that unit and pointing out its academic and practical use. There are three sections per unit, and each section contains the following segments: Planning, Writing, Organization, Grammar and Punctuation, Student Plan, and Student Composition.

Each section begins with a sample plan (in the form of an outline, an idea map, a chart, or informal notes) followed by a short prose piece illustrating in clear and simple language the rhetorical purpose in question. The topics are diverse and of potential use and interest to foreign students: "How to Feel Comfortable at an American Dinner Party," "The First Manned Flight to the Moon," "Earthquakes," and so on. The Organization segment requires students to actively work with logical relationships, main idea sentences, transitions, and techniques for paragraph development, all of which are introduced here in a simple and structured manner. The Grammar and Punctuation segment treats grammatical structures and punctuation points as they are relevant to the writing purpose in question. Finally, the Student Plan and Student Composition at the end of each section provide students an opportunity to experiment with and consolidate what they have learned. The progression in each unit is from guided to free. In the first section of each unit, student writing is controlled by picture cues. In the second section, students have a choice of following picture cues or of writing an unguided composition (but one nonetheless similar to the section's sample prose piece). The third section allows students, as mentioned above, to write on one of several unguided topics or to develop their own.

This Third Edition continues the attempt begun in the second to put increased emphasis on the process of writing and on the various strategies writers can use in the process. This new edition introduces students to the prewriting strategies of informal note making, idea mapping, and chart making in addition to more formal outlining and encourages more pair and group brainstorming prior to planning and/or writing. Audience concerns are dealt with in more depth as well; all sample prose pieces have been contextualized and made more realistic by including information on who wrote the piece and for what reason. The Stepping Along activities in each Student Composition section, added in the second edition, guide students in the steps of drafting, peer reading, redrafting, and editing. The steps are adaptable and may, of course, be used, omitted, or changed according to students' needs and instructor's preferences. Where students are working on an initial draft, their attention has been drawn primarily to clarity of content and organization. Students should get down the substance of what they want to say before worrying about polishing it. Thus, specific editing activities are left for last and up to the discretion of individual instructors; but for easy reference, a chart of correction symbols that may be used to help students edit their work is included on pages 249–250.

Basic Composition for ESL has several other important features. The numerous illustrations throughout enliven the text and can be used effectively to elicit oral production in a preoutlining and/or writing phase. A glossary at the end of the book provides simple definitions and examples of terms used within the text. Finally, the accompanying *Instructor's Manual*—which can be ordered with the student book from Scott, Foresman and Company—provides an answer key for the instructor's convenience, detailed comments on general and specific ways to use the text, discussion of problems that may arise, and suggestions for the correction of student compositions.

We appreciate the helpful input of our colleagues and students over the past few years. We are grateful to reviewers Jane Curtis of Roosevelt University and Dolores Mirabella of South Seattle Community College for their many suggestions.

We thank our editors Roseanne Mendoza, Elaine Goldberg, and Diane Beausoleil for their careful attention to this manuscript. Artist Kim Crowley deserves special thanks for his fine illustrations.

Finally, gratitude is due to our families, whose patience and support are deeply appreciated. We particularly thank our husbands, Kim, Bill, and Vic, for sharing their general and technical knowledge with us.

Introduction

The aim of this book is to teach you some basic points about writing. Knowing how to express ideas in writing in an organized way is important for everybody, but it is especially important for you as a student or professional. By the time you finish this book, you will have mastered the basic steps of the writing process and will be able to write compositions for six practical and academic purposes.

What is a composition?

A composition is a piece of writing about one central topic. It may consist of one or more paragraphs. If the central topic is broad and needs to be divided into several subtopics, each of these subtopics should be developed in at least one paragraph. For instance, if you want to discuss types of food, you may want to break your central topic down into four subtopics: meat, dairy products, fruits and vegetables, and grains. You might use, then, a separate paragraph for each subtopic. A composition of more than one paragraph usually has an introduction and a conclusion that are separate paragraphs.

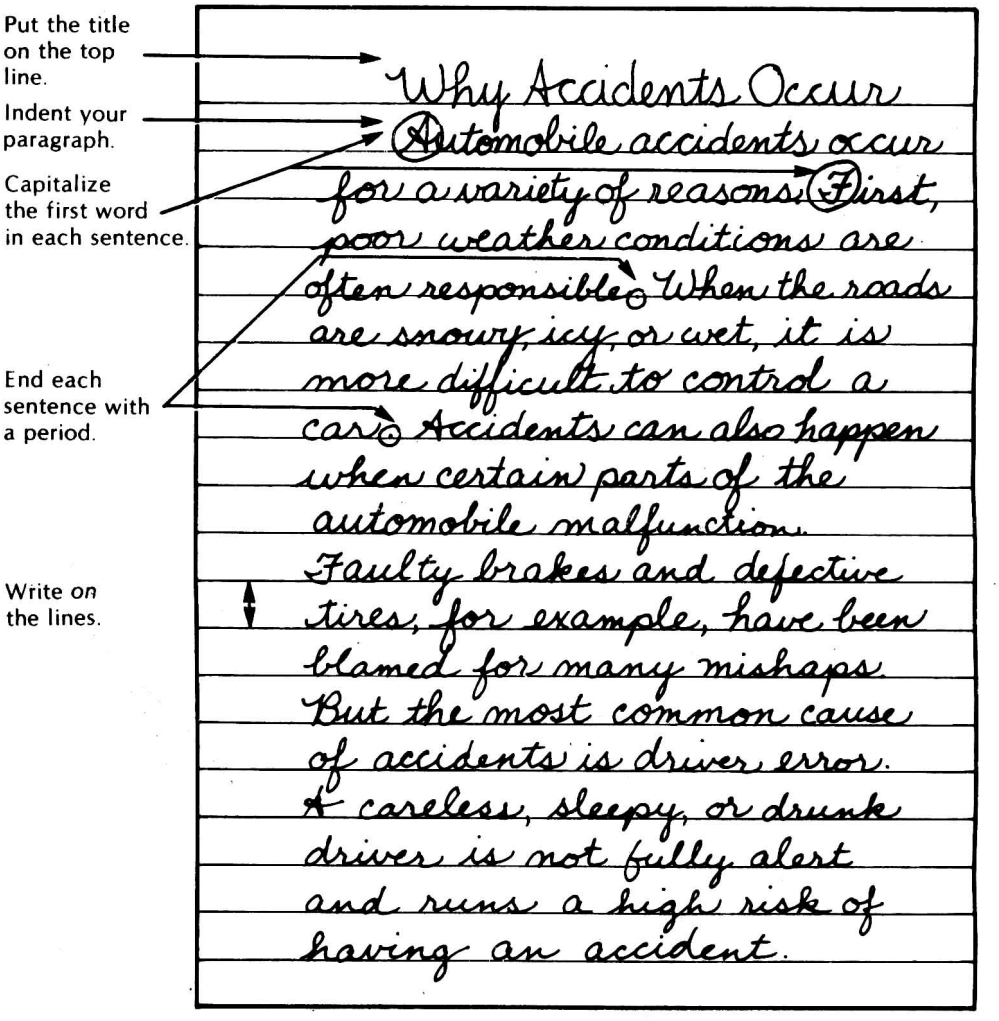
What is a paragraph?

A **paragraph** is a group of related sentences that communicates one central idea. A paragraph may be short or long according to the simplicity or complexity of the subject.

What does a paragraph look like?

The first line of a paragraph is indented in most kinds of writing. This means that you must leave an empty space to show the beginning of the paragraph. A

composition that has one paragraph will have only one indentation. A composition that has two paragraphs will have two indentations, and so on. Make sure that you capitalize the first word in each sentence and end each sentence with a period (.), question mark (?), or exclamation point (!). If your paragraph is a composition, put your title at the top of the page.



How does a paragraph begin?

A paragraph usually begins with a general statement. We call this general statement the main idea sentence, though it is sometimes called a topic sentence. The main idea sentence tells the reader what the paragraph is about and limits the kind of information that should be included in the paragraph. The main idea sentence is usually the first sentence of the paragraph, but experienced writers sometimes place it in the middle or at the end of the paragraph.

How does a paragraph progress?

The main idea sentence is followed by **major points.** The major points are the sentences that explain the main idea sentence. They give more information about it. Below, the major points of the paragraph are in italics. They are expanded with additional details.

> Automobile accidents occur for a variety of reasons. *First, poor weather conditions are often responsible.* When the roads are snowy, icy, or wet, it is more difficult to control a car. *Accidents can also happen when certain parts of the automobile malfunction.* Faulty brakes and defective tires, for example, have been blamed for many mishaps. *But the most common cause of accidents is driver error.* A careless, sleepy, or drunk driver is not fully alert and runs a high risk of having an accident.

What holds a paragraph together?

Ideas in a paragraph are often connected with **transitions.** Transitions show the relationship between these ideas. Transitions include words and phrases such as *first, finally, in addition, for example,* and *in contrast.* Without transitions, your paragraph will not read smoothly. You will learn to use different kinds of transitions for different purposes. Transitions are also used to connect paragraphs.

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Unit 1

Giving Instructions

In this unit, you will practice writing clear instructions. When you give instructions, you explain how to do something. You are giving instructions when you tell someone how to cook a chicken, how to get downtown, or how to change a tire. In academic and professional situations, it is often necessary to explain clearly in writing how to do something. You might need to explain, for example, how to conduct a chemical experiment, how to diagnose a certain illness, or how to program a new computer. There are several important points to remember when you write instructions.

1. *Use chronological order.* First and most important, when you tell someone how to do something, remember to write the steps for the process in exact order, just as you do them. If you are explaining how to cook a chicken, for example, you need to tell how to clean it before you tell how to season it.
2. *Keep your audience in mind.* You must decide before you begin to write whom the instructions will be for. A city resident and a tourist will not need the same directions for going downtown.
3. *Be clear.* Explain your instructions clearly. Keep your sentences short. If they are confusing, your reader may not be able to follow your directions correctly.
4. *Be thorough.* Explain each step carefully—not only *what* to do but *how* to do it. For example, when explaining how to change a tire, don't just tell your reader to raise the car. Instead, explain exactly how high to raise it and what tool to use.
5. *Be exact.* Make sure your facts and details are precise. If you are giving directions, say, "Go twelve blocks" instead of "Go about half a mile."
6. *Stick to the point.* Be sure all the information you include is related to your main purpose. When telling how to change a tire, don't discuss where to buy cheap tires or how long new ones should last. Such details may interest the reader, but they won't help in changing the tire.
7. *Be complete.* Be very careful not to leave out any steps. Remember, you know how to do what you are explaining, but your reader might not.