

WRITING BY CHOICE

**Intermediate Composition
for Students of ESL**

Judith Rodby

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Preface

Writing by Choice is a composition text that involves low-level (advanced beginners and intermediate) English as a Second Language students in not only writing, but also reading, speaking, and listening activities. The text can be completed in fifty to sixty hours of class time and is divided so that, in programs with four- or five-week sessions, the students can finish it in two sessions.

Writing by Choice is designed to guide low-level ESL students in developing effective strategies for composing in a foreign language. These students too often reduce writing to a matter of transcribing correct sentences. Writing is never merely transcription, however. It is not a “uni-directional process of recording pre-sorted, predigested ideas.”* It is a process of discovery and choice, from content to form.

ESL students who “learn” to write in English solely by analyzing written products or doing controlled-exercises never experience the process of composing. When these students are finally faced with the task of communicating in written English, they are understandably overwhelmed. They may rely on self-defeating strategies to get words onto the page. They may begin by invoking rules and grammar lessons before they know what they want to say and without thinking about those to whom they want to say it. They may view English writing in black and white terms, bringing meticulously transcribed pages to a native speaker to ask, “Is it right or wrong?”

The objectives of *Writing by Choice* are to provide students with both the strategies and the structures for communicating to readers in written English.

*Barry Taylor, “Content and Written Form: A Two-Way Street,” *TESOL Quarterly*, 15 (March 1981), 5.

In essence, *Writing by Choice* directs the writing process rather than controlling the final product.

In each half of the text the students themselves write a “book.” In Chapters 1 through 6, students write an “orientation book for other non-native speakers who will be studying, living, and perhaps working in the United States. Chapter 7 introduces students to the writing of letters. In Chapters 8 through 11, the students write for a more general audience, Americans interested in other countries and cultures, and they write about their own countries or those of their classmates. The instructor’s manual, available upon written request to the publisher, provides extensive details on other “book” sequences which the author has found to be successful.

Each chapter guides students through the process of writing a piece in several drafts. In Part I the students use heuristics to analyze the audience and purpose for their writing and, in doing so, to find ideas for their books. The questions posed in this section are intended to generate ideas, not particular modes or syntax. After the students write a first draft, they move on to Part II where revision exercises provide relief time between drafts. Then students revise their own drafts, guided by readers’ responses and checklists that correspond to the exercises in revision. Finally, in Part III, editing exercises and checklists are provided to guide students in learning to check their own papers.

Writing by Choice is designed so that the teacher can assign only those exercises that will help students to revise and edit their own writing. In the best of all possible worlds (small classes and light teaching loads) the instructor could assign these exercises on an individual basis. The exercises begin by illustrating how to indent paragraphs and space sentences appropriately. Later, students work with subordinators, coordinators and other formal elements of textual cohesion such as agreement, pronoun reference, and verb tense. They are asked to explore how, when, and why they should connect ideas in paragraphs and compositions. They examine the differences in clarity and meaning that are produced through their choices. They also practice editing for capital letters, plural and past tense morphemes, terminal punctuation, and so on.

Writing by Choice is also constructed to aid teachers in focusing their evaluations of student writing. The checklists can be used to provide students with feedback throughout the process of arriving at a final draft. Space is provided for teachers’ comments after the editing section of each chapter.

The vocabulary in *Writing by Choice* has been selected for low-level students. This does not mean, however, that the students will know all of the words, or that teachers will never have to gloss unfamiliar words.

Writing by Choice is not a text in written grammar; it is a book about composing in English when it is a second or foreign language. However, it could be used in conjunction with a grammar course.

J. R.

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Introduction to Students

Writing in a second language is very hard work. You have to think about many things at once. For example, you have to find ideas and vocabulary, and you may worry about grammar, punctuation and spelling. Most people cannot think about all of these problems at the same time. For example, when you think about grammar, you may forget your ideas. Your writing may be full of perfect grammar, but your ideas may be confusing. You need to learn how to manage writing problems one by one.

Writing by Choice will help you learn to write step by step, so that you can express your ideas clearly. In each chapter you will write papers in several drafts. (See the example draft at the end of this introduction.) You will learn how to find ideas and how to make plans for your first draft. You can revise the first draft by adding, erasing, moving and connecting ideas. You may revise your papers several times. When you have a final draft, you will learn to check your grammar, spelling and punctuation.

As you work in this book, you will write two books of your own. The first book will be about living, studying and perhaps working in the United States. You will write this book for others who will come to the United States. You can choose the information to write about: What do new students need to know? What information will help them? After you write, you can put maps and pictures in your book.

The second book will be about your own country and your classmates' countries. You will write this second book for Americans who might travel or work outside the United States. You can choose many things to put in your book. Who do you want to write for? Students? tourists? businesspeople? What do they need to know about other countries?

✓ Chapter 1

PART I. YOU, AN AUTHOR

As you learn to write in English, you will write two books. The first book will be about living, studying and working in the United States.

You will begin to write your first book by writing about yourselves. You can introduce yourself to the readers of your book.

A. Before You Write

First answer these questions. They will help you find ideas for your writing in this chapter and all the other chapters.

1. Who will read your book? What do you know about them?
(Where are they from? Do they live with their families? Do they go to school all day? Do they work?)
Draw a picture in your mind of the people who will read your book.
2. Now think about what they want to know about you, the writer. Do they want to know your age? Your country? Your weight? Your job or your major in school?
Make a list: _____

Read this example of an introduction. It is printed on the back of a book of poetry.

Gary Soto is a Chicano poet. He used to work in the fields of the San Joaquin Valley of California. Now he teaches Chicano studies at the University of California at Berkeley. He writes about his family and his friends, about the large angers and the small joys of their lives. He has won many prizes for his poems.

(Adapted from Gary Soto, *The Elements of San Joaquin* (Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977).

B. Write

Now you have some ideas for your writing. Use your ideas and write about yourself. Do not worry about mistakes. You can fix mistakes later. When you finish, let your writing cool off. Do Part II exercises with the class. Then revise your writing.

PART II. REVISING

On page 2 you saw one writer's revisions. In this section of the chapter you will work on revising other people's writing. These exercises help you to revise your own work.

A. Connecting Ideas

Exercise 1. Read the paragraph below. What is the writer talking about? Is the paragraph hard to understand? Why?

I moved to Chicago. I lived in Hong Kong. I did not understand anything for six months. I rode my bicycle to school. I got my driver's license. There were too many cars. We visited Hawaii first. English classes were hard.

The writer wanted to tell a story about moving from Hong Kong to the United States. He wanted to explain that he used to ride his bicycle to school in Hong Kong, but in Chicago he has to drive because it is unsafe to ride a bicycle in the heavy traffic.

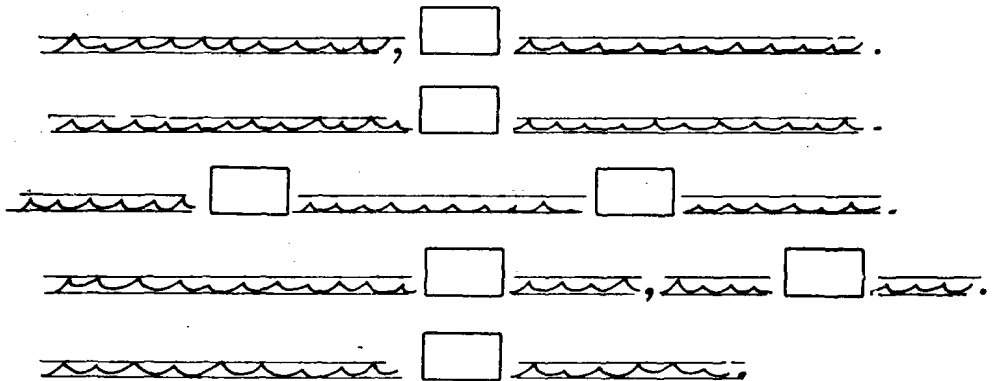
The story is hard to understand because the ideas are not connected for the reader. The writer has left out too much information, and the reader has to guess about the connections between the ideas.

When you write in English, you can use connecting words to show your reader how your ideas fit together. For example, the word *and* connects ideas

that are similar or equal. The word *but* connects ideas that are different or contrasting. The word *because* can connect cause and result. These words, *and*, *but* and *because*, connect ideas inside of a sentence.

Exercise 2. Study the examples and diagrams below. Notice the commas.

Type I. Coordinator Connecting Words
and



I went to the store, and I bought rice.

I went to the store and bought chicken.

I went to the store and bought rice and chicken.

I went to the market and picked up strawberries, bananas, and oranges.

Then I went home and cooked dinner for myself.

but

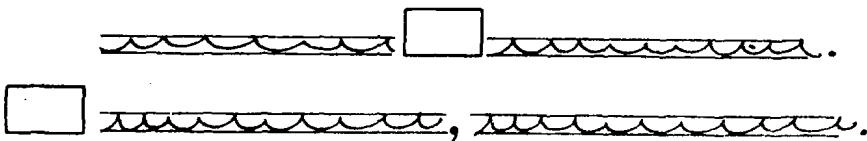


Los Angeles is an exciting city, but I do not like the pollution.

I hear stories about Hollywood, but I never go there.

Suzanna's house is very crowded, but her parents do not want her to move out.

Suzanna likes living with her family, but some days she wants to be alone.



Kong did not understand anyone in the United States because he did not speak English.

Because Kong needed to drive to school, he got a driver's license.

Suzanna cannot study in the evening because her brothers and sisters make noise.

Because she has to do homework, she gets up at 5:00 A.M. every day.

B. Using Examples

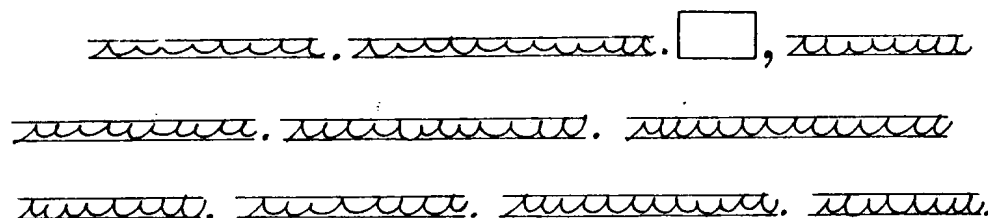
Exercise 3. Read the sentence below.

Honolulu, Hawaii, is an interesting place.

We do not know what the writer means by the word *interesting*. Is the writer thinking about the buildings? The streets? The people? We do not know. The writer needs to give some examples: maybe the rainbow-colored fish, the pink and purple flowers, the smell and sound of the ocean. . . .

You can use the words *for example* to connect specific information to the general or main idea. Study the examples and diagram below.

Type III. Conjunctive adverb *for example*



Foreign students have many difficulties when they come to the United States. For example, they have to eat strange food and speak a foreign language.

Some days I hate to write. For example, occasionally my head feels empty. I cannot think of anything to say. I sit at my desk and stare at the paper. I look at the walls. I draw pictures with my pen. When ideas do not come to me, time passes very slowly.

C. Revising Sentences

Exercise 4. Read the sentences below. You can revise them by adding connecting words.