

JOHN LANGAN

ENGLISH SKILLS WITH READINGS

THIRD EDITION

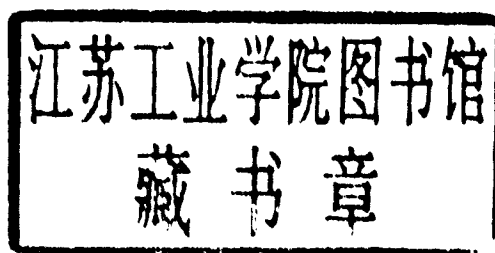


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JOHN LANGAN

Atlantic Community College



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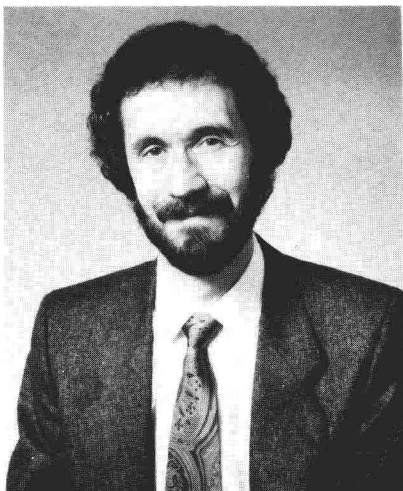
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



John Langan has taught reading and writing at Atlantic Community College near Atlantic City, New Jersey, for over twenty 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, he earned advanced degrees in writing at Rutgers University and in reading at Glassboro State College. He also spent a year writing fiction that, he says, “is now at the back of a drawer waiting to be discovered and acclaimed posthumously.” While in school, he supported himself by working as a truck driver, machinist, battery assembler, hospital attendant, and apple packer. He presently lives with his wife, Judith Nadell, near Philadelphia. Among his everyday pleasures are running, working on his Macintosh computer, and watching Philadelphia sports teams on TV. He also loves to read: newspapers at breakfast, magazines at lunch, and a chapter or two of a recent book (“preferably an autobiography”) at night.

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 process:

- 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 Four treats sentence skills fully. The rest of the book shows how the four principles apply in different types of paragraph development (Part Two), in traditional five-paragraph essays (Part Three), and in both paragraphs and essays (Part Five).
- The book reflects the belief that, in addition to the four principles, there are other important factors in writing effectively. After a brief introductory chapter, the second chapter of the book discusses prewriting, rewriting, and editing. Besides encouraging students to see writing as a process, the chapter also asks students to examine their attitude about writing, to write on what they know about or can learn about, to consider keeping a writing journal, and to include outlining as part of the writing process.
- *English Skills with Readings* assumes 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 on their own reasoning abilities and on information in notes, articles, and books. Students are asked to write on both experiential and objective topics in Parts Two and Three. And the reading selections in Part Five 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 an instructor, 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 Five, 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 Two aim at developing the ability to support ideas within a variety of paragraph forms. The essential principles of paragraph writing are then applied to the traditional five-paragraph essays in Part Three. Finally, in Part Five, each reading selection is followed by two paragraph assignments and one essay assignment.
- Another assumption 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 five 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”; these 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 Five enables students to work on becoming better readers as well as better writers. An introductory section to Part Five 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 Three are essentially the same as the three rhetoric sections of *English Skills*. There are three omissions: the research assignment (typically “Writing Assignment 4”) has been omitted from the sequence of writing assignments that follow each type of paragraph development in Part Two; the “Additional Paragraph Assignments” have been removed from the end of Part Two; and an article titled “A Suicide at Twelve—Why, Steve?” has been taken out of Part Three.
- There is also an addition: an extra 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 Five illustrating 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 Four 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 Learning”; 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 Five of *English Skills*, “Sentence Skills”—which becomes Part Four in *English Skills with Readings*—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, “Let’s Really Reform Our Schools,” “Television Changed My Family Forever,” 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 “How to Think Clearly.” Some recount profoundly human experiences: “The Tryout,” “Adolescent Confusion,” and “A Drunken Ride, A Tragic Aftermath.” All the selections should capture the interest of a wide range of students. (A list on pages xiii–xiv 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 (by choosing 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, instructors may find it helpful to ask students to read the preview as well as to answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions that follow the selection. Answers can then be gone over quickly in class. Through these activities, a writing instructor can contribute to the improvement of his or her students’ reading skills.

NOTES ON THIS EDITION

With pleasure and gratitude, I have watched the audience for *English Skills with Readings* expand each year. Instructors continue to say that the four bases really do help students learn to write effectively. And they continue to comment that students find the model passages, activities, assignments, and readings in the book especially interesting and worthwhile.

At the same time, more and more instructors have said that the book would benefit from an earlier emphasis on the writing process. In this edition, therefore, I have expanded my treatment of prewriting and other important factors in writing and relocated those materials as the second chapter of the book. Instructors who are more comfortable with the previous format of the text can easily skip the second chapter and move directly to the next chapter and its treatment of the first

two steps in effective writing. The material skipped can then be worked into a course a bit at a time.

Here is an overview of what is in this new edition:

- The first chapter, “Getting Started,” now introduces students to the basic principles of effective writing in more detail. Almost immediately, students read and discuss a model paragraph; they are then asked to write a paragraph of their own. This “baseline” paragraph provides the instructor and the student with a standard of comparison that can be used to measure progress in writing during the semester.
- The second chapter, “Important Factors in Writing,” includes material that made up Part Two in earlier editions of the book. Some of that material has been revised, and there are new sections on keeping a journal and prewriting in the form of diagramming or “mapping.”
- “Introduction to Paragraph Development”—the chapter that begins Part Two—has been expanded to include writing for a specific purpose and audience, using peer review, and using a personal checklist.
- Part Four, “Sentence Skills,” has been enlarged to include two new chapters—“Pronoun Types” and “Adjectives and Adverbs.”
- Many smaller changes appear throughout the book. For example, there is a new introduction to “Transitions” in Part One; the chapter on run-ons in Part Four now includes subordination as a method of correction; two rhetorical chapters in Part Two (“Explaining a Process” and “Examining Cause and Effect”) and three sentence-skills chapters in Part Four (“Misplaced Modifiers,” “Dangling Modifiers,” and “Faulty Parallelism”) have been resequenced.
- Finally, three new selections are now part of the fifteen selections in Part Five: “Old before Her Time,” by Katherine Barrett; “Television Changed My Family Forever,” by Linda Ellerbee; and “Let’s Really Reform Our Schools,” by Anita Garland. All three selections deal with themes that should engage the interest of students and make for rewarding writing assignments.

SUPPLEMENTS

A newly designed Instructor’s Manual includes, whenever possible, separate answer sheets for each skill. Instructors can easily copy the appropriate sheets and pass them out to students for self-teaching. The manual and a computer disk of mastery tests (now in both IBM and Macintosh formats) are both available from the local McGraw-Hill representative or by writing to the College English Editor, 43d Floor, McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10020.

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John Langan

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