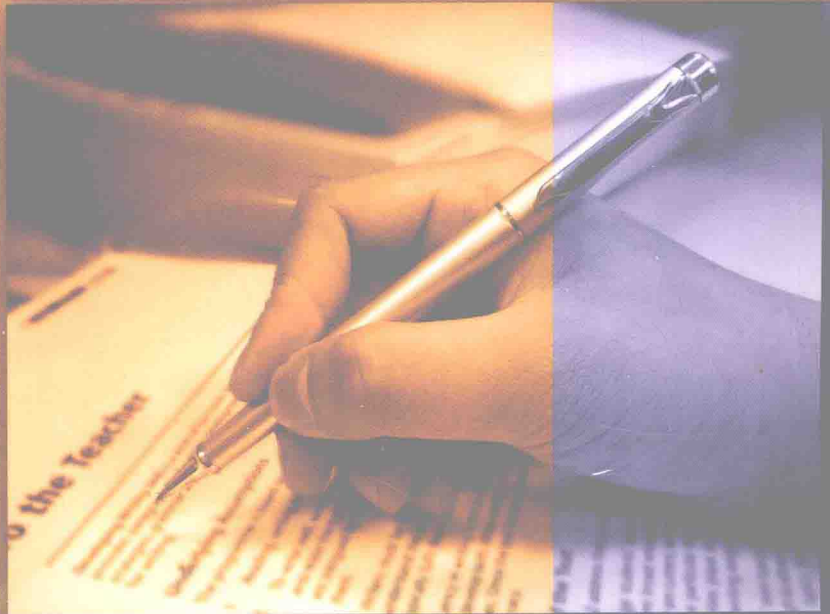


L E A R N E R S

LEARNING
WITH A
DIFFERENCE

Developing Writing Skills

Mary K Ruetten



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MASTERING THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS THROUGH INSTRUCTION & PRACTICE

Developing
Writing Skills

1

**MASTERING THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS THROUGH
INSTRUCTION & PRACTICE**

Mary K Ruetten

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Dedication

To All Current and Returned Peace Corps Volunteers

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Mary K Ruetten

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To the Teacher

Developing Writing Skills is a series of four books for secondary students. The programme provides paragraph-level writing development, introduction to and use of rhetorical strategies, grammar support, and a rich selection of readings that serve as springboards for writing.

Underlying Assumptions

The programme is based on the following assumptions:

1. Reading, writing and thinking are interrelated activities.
2. To write well, writers must engage with ideas. They must find ideas interesting and relate them to their knowledge and experience. The more that student writers are intrigued by ideas, the more time and effort they will spend in writing about them.
3. Writers must be aware of the context in which they are writing. They must understand the expectations of target audiences and the ways of thinking that typically fulfil those expectations.
4. Fluency in writing is not to be confused with grammatical accuracy; writers need to develop both. When creating a text, writers focus on rhetorical and organizational issues. Once the text has been drafted, they need to pay attention to grammatical accuracy.

Design of the Text

Books 1 and 2 address these underlying assumptions in the following ways:

1. To engage students' interest, each chapter is organized around a theme. The themes are broad enough so that all students can relate to them; at the same time, they are current, serious and relevant to an academic setting. Student writers explore the particular theme through journal writing, reading and discussion. These activities pique students' interest, foster critical thinking, and provide a context for writing assignments.
2. The students' own topics develop from the general theme of the chapter, which is focused enough to allow for unified class discussion but broad enough to generate individualized topics. Interaction with the theme allows students to build a knowledge base and to write about it with complexity.
3. Each chapter focuses on a method of development: narration, description, or analysis. In particular, the book focuses on types of analysis: process, comparing/contrasting, classifying, and cause/effect.

4. Each chapter contains samples of both professional and student writing. The professionally written selections serve both to engage students' interest and to exemplify a method of development. Since few writers rely on only one method of development to make their point, the passages reflect a blend of methods. Nevertheless, the primary mode of development is evident in each. The student writings function as examples of a method of development as well. By looking at the choices other writers make, students can develop awareness of context and method. They learn what is appropriate in writing and what rhetorical strategies are available to them.
5. Each chapter offers a variety of activities designed to familiarize students with the concepts of focusing on a main idea, developing support, and organizing a text.
6. Each chapter introduces cohesion devices relevant to the method of development and provides examples of their use.

Books 3 and 4 focus mainly on a rhetorical mode of development and the conventions associated with that mode. Each chapter contains four basic components: getting started and journal writing activities, reading selections, an introduction to the rhetorical pattern, and the relevant composition skills (devices for achieving coherence).

Most chapters begin with several readings based on a theme, with topics geared towards the interests of academically oriented students. The readings are followed by comprehension/discussion questions intended to generate lively class discussions. In addition, each chapter topic is reinforced in the examples and activities throughout the chapter. The reading passage also functions as an example of the rhetorical modes and of professional writing, providing evidence that the principles of rhetoric apply in writing both outside and inside the classroom. The reading component allows for flexibility in teaching: Teachers who wish to focus on the academic content of the essays could begin with the introductory essays, and teachers who prefer the developmental approach could begin with the sections on rhetoric.

In the rhetoric section, the patterns are carefully and clearly explained and illustrated, often with student samples that could be used as models early in the chapter. The section on composition skills introduces techniques for achieving coherence, such as the use of adverbial clauses and transitional expressions, and encourages the application of those skills in the writing of compositions, thus emphasizing the necessity for revision in the writing process. In addition, each chapter includes exercises for mastery of the composition skills. To further encourage revision and a focus on accuracy, the writing component in each chapter includes references to relevant grammar points. To conclude the chapter, writing assignments of varying difficulty are included. These assignments are typical of those students might encounter in public examinations.

The chapters of these books contain the following activities:

1. **Getting Started.** This section begins with journal writing, inviting students to connect personally to the theme of the chapter and to share their experiences with others.
2. **Reading.** This section is introduced with photographs or drawings accompanied

by discussion questions and is followed by comprehension and discussion questions. New vocabulary is glossed in the margin. The activities in both the Getting Started and Reading sections are designed to engage students with the theme by activating their background knowledge and by tying their knowledge and experience to the knowledge and experience of others.

3. **Preparing to Write.** This section introduces the main rhetorical points of the chapter and focuses on developing a main point, support and organization. In this section, students work through the relevant steps in the writing process and, in some chapters, write a paragraph as the last activity.
4. **Writing.** This section asks students to write a paragraph or essay, starting from the beginning of the writing process. Students prepare to write; then write and revise. Revising allows for peer or self evaluation. Students apply rhetorical strategies from the previous section, internalizing the steps of the writing process.
5. **Using Language Effectively.** This section focuses on cohesion and grammar. Students are encouraged to work on accuracy in their writing. An optional Internet activity extends students' knowledge of the chapter's theme and reinforces the rhetorical strategy in speaking and writing.
6. **More Reading and Writing.** This section contains another reading and more topics for writing and discussion. The reading, somewhat more challenging than the earlier one, relates to the chapter's theme and is followed by comprehension and discussion questions. It can be used at the beginning of the chapter in conjunction with the first reading to provide more background and discussion of the topic, or it can be used as a follow-up activity. The topics for writing and discussion are good assignments for journal writing and group activities.

Each book includes an Appendix on prewriting strategies to which reference is made whenever it would be of assistance to the students.

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Introducing the Paragraph



Theme

Reasons for Writing

Goals

Writing

- To write a paragraph
- To understand the parts of a paragraph
- To understand the characteristics of a paragraph
- To understand and undertake the writing process
- To begin a journal for writing

Reading

- To read about and reflect on learning to write



Getting Started

Discussion/Brainstorming: Writing off Stress

People write about their personal experiences and feelings in journals or diaries for many reasons. Many people, including therapists and their patients, believe writing can reduce stress and help heal some illnesses.

In your group, discuss these questions:

1.
 - a. Do you think writing can help to heal people?
 - b. How can writing help to heal people?
 - c. What kinds of illnesses can writing help to heal?
 - d. Review these terms: "chronic", "catharsis".
2.
 - a. Do you believe illnesses are caused by a person's mental health?
 - b. Do you agree that writing helps to relieve stress or worry? Does it ever cause stress?
 - c. What are some other reasons for writing in a diary or journal besides its healing effects?

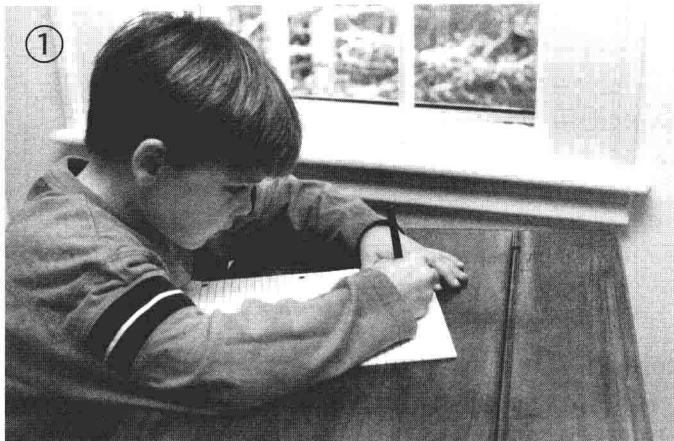


Reading

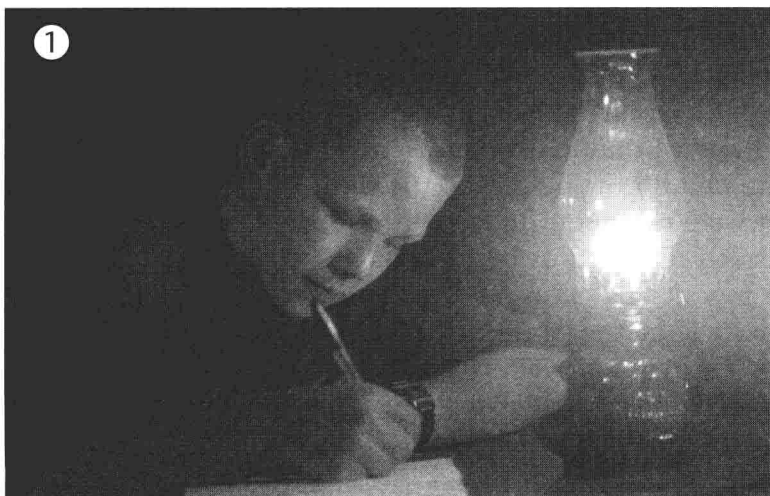
Discuss these questions with your classmates.

1. Look at the photographs on page 3. What do you think is the relationship between the people in each set of pictures?
2. Describe the pictures in each set. Say what you think is happening in each picture.
3. Have you written a letter recently? Who did you write to? What did you write about?

Set A



Set B



Reading

From Reaching Across the Gap: How I Write

by Michael C. Flanigan

This reading is part of an essay by Michael C. Flanigan, who is a Professor of Composition at the University of Oklahoma. It was published in 1988 in a book entitled Writers on Writing.

training in self-control

*learning to form the
letters of the alphabet
at the beginning*

My sister Mary and my brother Leo were the first two audiences I wrote for. Mary and the boys (four of us) were separated when my father joined the navy at the beginning of World War II. Mary stayed with my mother while we went to St. Francis's Home for Boys to get **discipline**, uniforms, and cleanly ways. I was five, the youngest in the five-hundred-boy school. I remember how much I wanted to write to my sister, so after our daily lessons of reading and **penmanship** (the rest of school is forgotten) I would return to the dorm in the evening and practise. I wrote and wrote and wrote. All the **initial** writing was practice—to get my penmanship right, to string words together for sense, to punctuate, to fill a page, then another and another until a pad was gone.

*sure about the quality
of*

Finally I wrote a letter to my sister. I filled a page with “How are you? Hope you are fine. Miss you. Love you. Leo, Pat and Pete are fine. Leo is growing trees from sticks. Please write.” I was not **confident of** my first attempt at written communication, so I stuffed the letter with jokes from magazines, some buttons I had collected, and a holy medal. All things I knew my sister liked.

very small (adj)

Within a week my letter was answered. Besides a thankyou for the gifts were descriptions of Mary's new school, how she was learning to ride a bike, and hosts of other information about herself and our mother—three full pages. She asked one question: “How does Leo grow trees from sticks?” I didn't know. He just told me. I knew I had to find out. When I asked, Leo explained in **minute** detail how he picked the right branches from trees, cut them, soaked them, and on through a whole fascinating process that I repeated as best I could in my next letter. I also followed my sister's example and told about bits and pieces from our lives at the “military school”. Our correspondence continued for over four years until we boys were sent to see our father in Spokane in 1946. The letters stopped on both ends. A few months later the family was back together.

In 1950 Leo went to Korea. Again the **urge** to write, to create a reality of home for him, overtook me. I wrote every day for two years until he came home. The letters focused on things I knew he would want to hear about: the state of the house he was building when he left, the orchard he helped plant on Uncle Vic's farm, the mountains he loved, friends we both knew, relatives, and a host of the details that made up his life and ours together ...

strong desire

What this early letter writing taught me was to focus on audience. Communication is not possible without common understandings, backgrounds, experiences ...

Comprehension

Answer the following questions.

1. How many members were there in the family?
2. Where were they? Why?
3. Why did the writer practise writing?
4. How did the writer feel about his first letter to his sister?
5. What did he write about in the second letter to his sister?
6. Why did Flanigan write to his brother Leo?
7. What did he write about in his letters to Leo?
8. What did the writer learn from his early experiences of letter writing?

Discussion

Discuss these questions with your classmates.

1. Do you remember learning to write? What do you remember about the experience?
2. Have you ever written regularly to someone? Who? What did you write about?
3. The writer says that "Communication is not possible without common understandings, backgrounds, experiences ..." Do you agree with him? Explain your answer.
4. If you write to someone who has a different background or experience from yours, what do you need to do? Explain your answer.

The Parts of a Paragraph

Most of the writing you do consists of paragraphs. A **paragraph** is a small unit of writing that focuses on one idea. This one idea is explained and developed in the paragraph. (The first line of each paragraph may be indented. The indentation signals the beginning of a new paragraph.)

A paragraph generally has three parts:

(1) **a topic sentence**

The topic sentence shows the topic (what the paragraph is about) and the writer's attitude.

(2) **support**

The supporting part of the paragraph explains, describes, or develops the main idea given in the topic sentence.

(3) **a conclusion**

The conclusion of the paragraph usually summarizes or comments on the main idea.

The length of the paragraph depends upon the complexity of the topic.

Look at the three main parts in this paragraph written by a student. The topic sentence is in bold print and the concluding sentence is underlined. The rest of the paragraph is the support.

Parents can help their children be successful in school by encouraging them. Children usually enjoy playing games instead of studying, so parents have to take the responsibility to monitor their children's activities at home after school and to remind them to do their homework. Parents should also encourage their children by buying for them storybooks with pictures, or textbooks or tapes that help children learn to spell or read. The best way to encourage children to study efficiently is to reward them when they get an "A". As a child, I experienced this. My parents gave me a reward when I had studied well, and then I was very excited. So, if parents really want their children to succeed in school, they need to pay attention to their children's studies and encourage them.*

— Truong Dinh

* In this book, you will read many paragraphs written by ESL students while they were in an ESL class. The grammatical errors have been corrected to make them easier to read and understand.