

Writing Matters

Writing skills and strategies
for students of English

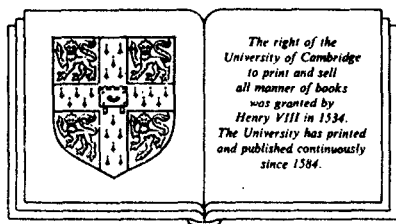
*Kristine Brown and
Susan Hood*

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To the student

About the book

This book is to help you develop your writing ability in English, so that you feel more confident about the writing you need to do in everyday life. The exercises give you the opportunity to practise this day-to-day sort of writing (e.g. job applications, personal letters, notes and messages). They give you help with the aspects of writing you might find difficult (e.g. the organization of ideas, choosing the right word, linking ideas, paragraphing, spelling, punctuation). Units 4 and 5 give you special help with spelling and punctuation.

The exercises show you that *how* you write depends on:

- *who* you are writing to (your *reader*)
- *why* you are writing (your *purpose*)
- *what* you are writing about (your *content*)
- *where* and *when* you are writing (the *situation*).

So you are not always asked to write in a formally correct way.

The exercises emphasize that writing is a *process* which *always* requires some preparation, drafting and revising. You are not asked to 'get everything right' the first time. You get special help with the process of writing in Units 1, 2 and 3.

Units 6–13 help you with writing that you often need or want to do. Units 14–16 give you ideas for personal, creative and fun writing.

In Units 6–16, the exercises at the beginning of each unit ask you to practise only one or two aspects of writing at a time (e.g. punctuation, layout). The exercises towards the end of these units are more open-ended, and ask you to practise more features of writing. In these later exercises there is the opportunity to choose situations and tasks that are *personally* relevant to you.

There is a lot of opportunity to develop and practise your reading and speaking skills in this book. You are often asked to look at other people's writing and to discuss it. This is a good way of improving your own writing.

Using the book

If you are working alone, it is *especially* important that you read this part carefully. It will help you get the most benefit from the book.

The book is in two parts, with each part divided into two sub-sections. It is best to begin with Part 1, *The writing process*, Units 1, 2 and 3. These are important to *all* other units.

You should then begin the *Writing sub-skills, Spelling and Punctuation*, Units 4 and 5. Do not try to complete either of these units in *one session*. In Unit 4,

To the student

Spelling, do only one part at a time (e.g. identifying spelling errors, spelling unfamiliar words). In Unit 5, *Punctuation*, do only two or three items of punctuation at a time (e.g. capital letters, full stops).

While working on these, you should begin on Part 2, *Context units*. Choose whichever units you want to do. It doesn't matter in which order you do them, except that you should do Unit 10, *Formal letters*, before Units 11–13.

In every unit, it is essential to work through the Introduction. In each Context unit, the Introduction gives you a model of writing and a number of important points to study. If you are working alone, it is very important that you think about (and perhaps write down the answers to) any questions you are asked to discuss here.

After this, choose exercises which match your needs and interests. Wherever an exercise gives you a choice, think about a reader, a purpose, content and a situation which are personally relevant to you. (Think of a friend you really want to write a letter to, think of an issue you have a strong opinion on, include details from your personal life on a postcard.)

Wherever possible, *do* something with your writing (send your letter, submit your opinion to the editor of your class or school magazine, send your postcard). If you do not have a class or school magazine, you could help to organize one!

In most units, there are a few exercises which ask you to discuss or work with other students. If you are working alone, it is best to write down your thoughts in these exercises.

It is a good idea to collect examples of writing, and to use these as extra models for your own writing.

There are answers at the back of the book for exercises where there are only one or two answers possible, or where a model answer seems necessary.

To the teacher

About the book

The aim of this book is to help students at the low intermediate to intermediate level to develop their writing ability in English and to give them the confidence to use this ability in everyday life. Students at this level usually want to and need to write independently, but often avoid it or handle it less proficiently than they do speaking, listening or reading.

The reasons for this are many and varied, but in this book we aim to break down four major barriers to student confidence. The first is that because writing is a more permanent record of one's language proficiency than is speaking, the demand for unrehearsed writing is more threatening to the learner. The second is that learners often feel that they do not have the necessary knowledge and experience of language that writing demands. The third barrier is the view, often reinforced in classroom texts, that writing must be correct, in a formal sense, irrespective of context. The fourth is the related view that such formal correctness must be achieved first time round in a one-off writing attempt.

This book aims to address directly each of these issues. Firstly, it provides non-threatening guided opportunities to practise (or rehearse) the very sort of writing tasks that are required in real life. Secondly, it provides guidance and practice in the aspects of language and form so important to effective writing. So, you find models of different types of texts with explanations and discussion points. You find exercises which deal, for example, with organization and ordering of ideas, paragraphing, linking ideas, appropriate word choice, economy of phrasing, layout, spelling and punctuation. (Particular focus on these last two is provided in Units 4 and 5.) Thirdly, the book emphasizes that the demands of writing vary considerably depending on the proposed reader, the purpose, the content and the writing situation. Students are urged to think about the relationship between these four determinant factors and the features of written language above. For example, there are exercises on appropriate wording to achieve results in letters of protest or complaint, exercises on economic use of words to keep down cost in advertisements, and so on. Lastly, it reflects throughout that writing is a process which always, but to varying extents and in varying ways, requires preparation, drafting and revising. The exercises help students to be more aware of this process and thereby to improve the effectiveness of their writing. (Particular focus on this is provided in Units 1, 2 and 3.)

The book does not aim to teach items of vocabulary or grammar, except where such items seem to be specific enough to the writing context and important enough to the successful completion of the tasks being set to warrant

special guidance and practice. There are many textbooks which do teach these things and students and teachers may want to refer to these as they use this book. The exercises in this book will however provide a realistic and relevant context within which students can practise any newly acquired items of grammar and vocabulary.

Although written primarily for adult students for whom English is a Second Language, we also see this book as being useful for adult native speakers of English who wish to improve their everyday writing, and for secondary school students.

The writing contexts in Part 2 were chosen on the basis of their appropriateness for adult students at this level in terms of interest and need. Writing extracts used as models or within exercises were chosen on the same basis and also because of their appropriateness in terms of language complexity.

Although the emphasis is on functional writing, there is also opportunity provided for non-functional writing. Units 14, 15 and 16 consist of exercises directed at more creative and imaginative writing.

The exercises vary somewhat in level of complexity to cater for all students in the target group. As well, there is flexibility within many exercises to provide for response at a variety of levels. In the Context units (6–16), there is a progression from exercises which focus on specific and therefore more manageable aspects of writing to those which are more open-ended and uncontrolled. Along with this progression goes the increased opportunity for individual response.

Opportunity for developing reading skills exists with the provision of writing models and with exercises where students must respond in writing to something they have read. In addition, there is opportunity for discussion. In Units 6–16, students are asked to talk about their own experiences and needs, and to study and discuss the writing models presented.

Using the book

The book is arranged in two parts, with each part divided into two sub-sections. We feel it is best to begin with Part 1, *The writing process*, Units 1, 2, 3, and to work through them systematically, as these units are relevant to all subsequent units. The exercises in them, though unavoidably dealing with some of the contexts to follow, demand as little as possible in the way of exact knowledge and experience of those contexts.

The *Writing sub-skills* units – Unit 4, *Spelling* and Unit 5, *Punctuation* – are best worked through next, concurrently with a context unit from Part 2. You are advised not to attempt to cover all of Unit 4 or Unit 5 in a single lesson. In Unit 4, *Spelling* it would be best to take one part per lesson (e.g. identifying spelling errors, spelling unfamiliar words), so taking at the least four lessons to complete it. In Unit 5, *Punctuation* it would be best to do two or three items of punctuation per lesson, so taking twelve or thirteen lessons to finish.

While doing Units 4 and 5, you should begin on Part 2, the *Context units*. They are arranged roughly in order of complexity and typical length of texts, but except for Unit 10, *Formal letters*, which is best done before Units 11–13, it does not matter in which order you do them. That will depend more on your students' needs and interests and on other language work you are doing.

In each unit there is an Introduction which gives a background and a purpose to the exercises in the unit. Once a unit is selected it is vital to take students through this Introduction. After this, your choice of exercises will, again, depend on student need and interest. In exercises where choice is given it is important to encourage students to think of readers and purposes, content and situations personally relevant to them. Wherever possible they should be encouraged to publish their writing (send a personal letter or postcard to a friend, send off a job application, submit a letter to the editor of the local paper or to the editor of the class magazine). The production of a class or school magazine, mentioned in many parts of the book as a venue for publication, is particularly relevant in Units 12, 13, 15 and 16 as a means of providing an interested audience and a real purpose for writing.

In all Context units it would be a good idea to encourage students to bring in examples of writing and to use these as further models for study and discussion.

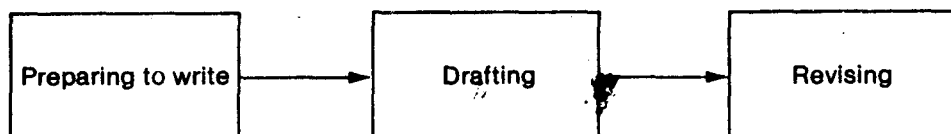
Answers are provided at the back of the book where there are a limited number of answers possible or where the provision of a model answer seems necessary.

Part 1: Core units

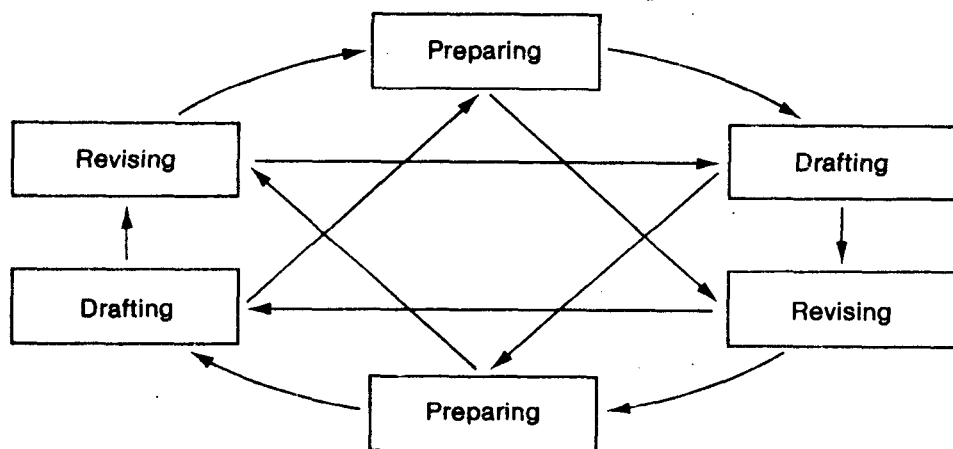
THE WRITING PROCESS

Introduction

The next three units are very important. They describe the three main stages of the writing process. For ease of discussion, we present these three stages like this:



but in practice the process is often more like this:



The writing process depends on:

- *who* you are writing to or for (*reader*)
- *why* you are writing (*purpose*)
- *what* you are writing about (*content*)
- *where* you are, *how much time* you have, *how* you feel, etc. (*situation*).

There is no *one* way to write. The ideas in the next three units are only suggestions. Try them all. Some you may find useful in one type of writing. Some you may find useful every time you write.

Whatever you do, you will benefit from lots of practice. So *write often* – even if it's only for a short time and even if it's only for yourself.

Many of the exercises which follow continue through the three units, so keep all your writing until the end of Unit 3, Revising.

1 Preparing to write

Introduction

Most writing requires some preparation. How long you spend on this preparation, and what you do, largely depends on your *reader*, your *purpose*, the *content* and the writing *situation*. For example, a quick message to a friend requires different preparation from a letter to a company applying for a job.

The ideas below will be useful to you in preparing to write.

Remember: *Keep all the writing you do in these exercises for use in the next two units.*

Ideas

BRAINSTORMING

This means you 'storm' or search your brain for ideas.

- Write them down very quickly. They don't have to be in English.
- Don't worry about how useful they will be.
- Don't worry about neatness and correctness.

e.g. Brainstorming in preparation for a job application letter:

Assistant Chef - Advertiser Sat 11th July
Asian cooking is my specialty
2 years experience in America
Prefer part-time work but P/t is OK
Close to home
Don't mind split shifts
3 year certificate course

Exercise 1

Choose an item that interests you from those below. You are going to write something about it for a student magazine (a letter to the editor, an article, a story). Prepare by brainstorming.

(Keep the notes you make for use in exercise 1, Unit 2, *Drafting*.)

Are women the stronger sex?

IN BRIEF

Marriage less popular



DON LANE, talking about his one-year-old son, PJ: "I worry that I'll be 72 when he's 20. It's a big gap. But if I feel as young then as I do now there won't be any problems."

HANG THEM

SOME say hanging criminals makes us as bad as they are. This is not so.

It is done with the minimum of pain and the victims know why they are being hanged.

SPEED WRITING

This is a warm-up activity to get you writing freely.

- Give yourself a time limit (say two minutes).
- Write as much as you possibly can on a topic.
- Write whatever comes into your head: It doesn't matter if it doesn't all make sense.
- Keep writing until the time is up.
- Don't worry about neatness and correctness.

e.g. Speed writing in preparation for a letter to a teacher about a child's problems at school:

P. seems to be very unhappy this year - don't really know what the cause is - but I feel I have to find out - maybe other students in the class - perhaps the teacher - seems to be able to cope OK with the work - brings his homework home and doesn't seem to mind doing it. He has mentioned another boy who has a problem with

Exercise 2

Choose from one of the following topics and write a letter to the editor of your class magazine.

work children television

prepare by doing two minutes speed writing.

(Keep your writing for exercise 4, Unit 2, Drafting.)

ASKING YOURSELF 'WH' QUESTIONS

This idea is useful for longer pieces of writing.

- Write down some questions about the topic.
who ... ? what ... ? where ... ? when ... ? why ... ? how ... ?
- Think of as many questions as you can.

e.g. 'Wh' questions in preparation for a letter to the Council about the bad condition of the roads:

What is the problem?
Who is being affected by it?
Where is the problem worst?
Why is it so bad here?
When is the Council going to do something?

Exercise 3

Imagine you are planning to move to another city. You need to have accommodation arranged before you move. Prepare a letter to send to some real estate agents in your new city, telling them what you are looking for. Make up a list of 'wh' questions to remind yourself of what you need to mention in your letter. e.g. 'When do I need the accommodation?'

(Keep your questions for exercise 3, Unit 2, *Drafting*.)

GETTING YOUR IDEAS INTO ORDER

This is something you could do after brainstorming, speed writing, or 'wh' questions.

- Look through your notes.
- Use numbers or arrows to put them in the order you want to mention them in writing.

e.g. Ordering notes in preparation for a job application letter:

Assistant Chef - Advertiser Sat 11th July

- ③ Asian cooking is my specialty
- ② 2 years experience in America
- ④ Prefer part-time work but F/t is OK
- ⑥ Close to home
- ⑤ Don't mind split shifts
- ① 3 year certificate course

Exercise 4

Below are some notes a writer made in preparing to write a letter of complaint to the Council about the lack of playgrounds in the area. Rewrite the notes in the order you would mention them.

nowhere for children to play
heavy traffic → accidents
most play in streets
worry for parents
need grassy areas - concrete surfaces mean broken bones
somewhere for parents to watch children play
need some playground equipment

Exercise 5

Use some of the notes you made in one of the previous exercises (brainstorming, speed writing, 'wh' questions). Use numbers or arrows to put the notes in the order you want to mention them.

USING MODELS

Models or examples can help you with what to write and how to write it.

- Look for models of the kind of writing you want to do.
- Keep a file of these so you will have them when you need them.
- Think about the content (the information included, the questions asked, the ideas mentioned).
- Look closely at the language used. Underline or make notes of any useful expressions.
- Look closely at the organization of ideas.

The model on the left was useful in writing the advertisement on the right.

BABYSITTER required to mind 8-year-old boy before and after school, 3 days/wk. Preferably with other school-aged children. Lewisham area. Phone Jim after 6pm. 71 3029.

Tutor required to help with English, after 5pm, 2 nights/wk. Preferably in my home. Summer Hill area. Phone Ming after 4.30 p.m. 798-2014

Exercise 6

Imagine you want to sell a refrigerator. Look carefully at the advertisements below.

- Take note of any useful words or abbreviations.
- Discuss with other students the kind of information included, and the order in which it is mentioned.

FOR SALE

CANE CHAIRS (2) one large \$35, 1 small \$10. 70 3211.

PHILIP TV 63cm color in good condition \$350. Lounge 8 seater as new \$550. 708 1217.

PHILIPS refrigerator, good working condition, \$100. 74 2091.

LARGE green lounge, excellent condition, \$50. Garden seats and large pots. 78 8515.

SEWING MACHINE Brother industrial plain sewer, excellent condition, very little use, suit outdoor worker or factory \$650. 759 9022 after 6 pm.

SKI BOOTS, ladies' 6 1/2, white & black, men's size 12 in navy, weinmann wind ups, \$80 each or best offer. Ladies' stocks included. 71 6801.

Exercise 7

Read the following letter to the editor carefully.

- Write down the three phrases that are used to introduce and to link the writer's three arguments against the death penalty.
- Write down any other useful words or expressions.

SIR, Ms M. Squires of Coogee (24/6/88) writes that hanging criminals is the only way we can stop others from committing serious crimes. I strongly disagree.

In the first place, there is absolutely no evidence to support her claim. What's more, if we as a society murder those who commit murder, we are no better than murderers ourselves.

Violence is no answer to violence. And then there is the question of whether we can ever be 100% sure of a person's guilt. What should happen if an innocent person were hanged? No, Ms Squires, the death penalty is not the answer. What we need instead is a more caring society.

MRS K. HAVEL
Richmond

MARKING POINTS TO MENTION IN REPLY

If you are replying to a letter or advertisement:

- Reread that letter or advertisement.
- Underline parts that you want to mention in reply.
- Keep the letter or advertisement handy when you are writing as a reminder of things to mention.

e.g.

Salesperson

We are seeking a mature person with experience in sales. Some experience with selling power tools would be an advantage, and applicants should hold a current driver's licence and be available for some weekend work.

Salary is negotiable. A company vehicle will be provided. Applications should be directed in writing to:

Mr Alf Singer
Personnel Manager
ANDERSON and LEECH POWER
TOOLS PTY LTD
P.O. Box 635
Port Adelaide 5015