

Reviewed by John Graney

WRITING PROCESSES AND STRUCTURES: AN AMERICAN LANGUAGE TEXT

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Intermediate ESL writing textbooks sometimes seem somewhat insubstantial. They enable teachers to work with the rhetorical modes, practice the appropriate grammar, provide a few examples, and finish with some suggested topics for further writing. When teaching a fifteen or sixteen week semester course, a textbook that provides more than just the essential grammar and writing practice is a must. It is a further benefit if the textbook contains interesting readings beyond the model paragraphs that can be responded to while offering different topics for exploration. *Writing Processes and Structures*, an ambitious book, meets those criteria, in addition to offering several different activities for vocabulary acquisition and journal writing.

Writing Processes and Structures consists of seven parts, along with an appendix and answer key. The first part is called The Basics, and it covers working with Microsoft Word, parts of speech, sentence types and punctuation, basic definitions, journal types, and peer evaluation. Parts 2 through 6 cover paragraphs in five rhetorical modes: description, narration, process, comparison and contrast, and persuasion. The final part introduces the essay. Each part consists of 10 elements. The ten elements include the paragraph type

or essay described, vocabulary acquisition activity, grammatical skill, writing skill focus, journal type, graded writing assignment, summary, reflections on progress, assignment checklist, and journal summary. The appendix consists of paragraph type summary charts, journal types and additional suggestions, and student paragraphs. The answer key, true to its name, provides answers for many of the grammar and writing exercises.

As is clear from the above summary, this book contains much for the teacher to use in a writing class. The author provides some excellent writing exercises. Each writing chapter opens with a set of journal writing prompts, which I have used for students to put in their blogs, as well as additional writing activities at the end of the chapter for graded writing. The topics at the end of the chapter usually have more scaffolding with support for various parts of paragraphs, in addition to readings that lead into a writing activity. The readings include paragraphs from Sherlock Holmes and a travel brochure in the description chapter; the Guy de Maupasant story, *The Diamond Necklace*, in the narration chapter; and recipes in the process paragraph chapter, along with speeches by John F. Kennedy, Franklin Roosevelt,

and Abraham Lincoln. Each chapter includes several readings to which the students can respond. Also, ten types of journal activities are offered, including creative listings and dream journals, a four-entry journal, and a memorandum journal. Also, the author has done a fine job of showing students how to develop a paragraph with a clear thesis statement and strong supporting facts.

Grammar structures and vocabulary acquisition sections sustain the writing activities section. The grammatical structures introduced in the chapters often correspond well with the writing mode. Much work is devoted to punctuating sentences, subject-verb agreement, independent clauses, and connectors. The vocabulary acquisition activities include connotation and literal meaning, along with verbs, nouns, adverbs, and dictionary use to determine the correct meaning for words that have several meanings and more than one part of speech, such as *rose*, *bump*, and *blame*. In addition, many of the paragraph activities include vocabulary items to demonstrate appropriate use.

While the book contains more than most writing teachers will be able to use in one class, unless they only teach the entire book, it is not a perfect book. Some of the problems involve proofreading errors such as on page 163, the connector for the activity is *_or example*; on page 199, the sentence pattern leaves out a comma ; and on page 225, item number 3, the word to be looked up, *rose*, is not bolded. These types of errors should be corrected in a second edition. The persuasion paragraphs examples reinforce some types of writing that I try to get my students beyond, including a topic sentence that begins, "There are three reasons why..." In a book with so much substance, an index would be very helpful for teachers to find targeted work. Also, the chapter that illustrates *comparison and contrast* paragraphs is the content that we teach called *contrast* paragraphs, which causes some confusion for students.

I have used this textbook for two semesters and have yet to figure out how to use it most effectively. I hasten to add that this is not the fault of the book. The book is so rich in activities and ideas that it may take teachers a while to get comfortable with the sheer volume of its content. However, it can be used

"out of the box," so to speak, without a great deal of supplementation. Of the books currently on the market, this one clearly goes a few steps beyond its competitors and sets a new standard by including vocabulary acquisition in a textbook geared for writing.

The Author

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