

Writing a Book Review for Publication: A concise format to follow in writing a book review of an ESL textbook ¹

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Begin with this information:

Title and subtitle

Author

Publisher

Year of publication

Number of pages

Reviewed by (= your name, your professional affiliation)

Paragraph 1: Summarize the level, purpose, and audience for the book. For example, “This intermediate level reading textbook is intended for a high school audience.” State the ways in which the author or authors believe it is unique, e. g. “The text uses a storyline with themes common to the experience of today’s secondary school students to connect the lessons and keep the students interested...” Add commentary about the elements that make the book special for the audience. For example, “The many clear and focused reading exercises not only lead the students to better understanding of the storyline, but the variety of exercises also help the students develop...”

Paragraph 2: State what you see as particular strengths in the textbook. For instance, “(*Title*) fills a need for a developmental reading skills text in the multicultural classroom for the following reasons:...” Add any weaknesses or problems that you see (if any) and how the weaknesses might be dealt with, e. g. “The high school audience, of course, is likely to want to read the whole story without doing the exercises because of the high interest level of the story, However,...”

Paragraph 3: Apply the text to your own experience with books, comparing it to other texts or expectations for kinds of textbooks, e. g. “Unlike the traditional intermediate textbook, ...”

¹ This article was adapted for our purposes from one originally published in the AZ-TESOL Newsletter, Vol. 17, No. 2. Summer, 1996.

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Paragraph 4: Give your own opinion of the book, whether you think you would enjoy using it in your classroom; whether you think the students would find it useful, engaging, motivating, etc.; and whether you recommend the textbook to other teachers. Add any other commentary that seems appropriate to you at this point. You don't always have to give a positive review. State your honest, personal opinions.

BOOK REVIEW: SOME IDEAS FOR CONVERSATION

New Ways in Teaching Speaking. Kathleen M. Bailey and Lance Savage, Editors. TESOL, 1994. 307 pp.³

Reviewed by David J. Kramer, Institute for English Language Programs, Harvard and Center for English Language and Orientation Programs (CELOP), Boston University.

New Ways in Teaching Speaking is much more than a conversation topic resource book. It's a compilation of activities submitted by ESL professionals from all over the world. Most of its entries incorporate a variety of language skills with detailed instructions for their use. The book is divided into four major parts: "Fluency", "Accuracy", "Pronunciation", and "Speaking in Specific Contexts". Each part consists of several sub-sections: For example, Part II, "Accuracy", is divided into "Functions", "Grammar", and "Vocabulary". In their introduction the editors state that the primary reason for the book's organization is ease of access for the user. The book does not adhere to any particular ESL teaching approach.

Ease of access is definitely one of the books' stronger points. The titles of many articles automatically give the gist of the exercise: In the Accuracy/Grammar section, for example, self-explanatory titles such as "Get It Done", "Why Questions", and "The command Game" are found. On the other hand, "Travel Talk Round Table" leaves one somewhat in the dark; but a simple turn to the indicated page quickly clarifies the nature and purpose of the activity.

³ This review was originally published in MATSOL *Currents*, Summer 1996. Vol. 22, No. 3. p. 16.

Each activity is covered on two or three pages. In the left margin of the entry's first page the proficiency level(s) appropriate to, and the goals and mechanics of, the activity are outlined. For example, for "Grammar/Travel Talk Round Table": Levels: Intermediate+; Aims: Review present perfect and time expressions *ever/never*. Contrast present perfect with simple past and *ago*. Practice distinction between /b/ and /v/; Class Time 30-70 minutes; Preparation Time: None; Resources: Chalkboard, chalk, paper, and pencils" (p. 163)

The presentation of activities is orderly and comprehensive. Each exercise begins with a short, introductory paragraph followed by step-by-step instructions, listed under "Procedure". Extra ideas and comments appear under the heading "Caveats and Options". Many entries are more extensively outlined, often including diagrams, charts, and sample lists of sentences and vocabulary, a definite plus. Several entries include references to related academic readings. All conclude with a blurb about the contributor.

I was eager to browse through the chapters and discover new ideas. As an experienced teacher, I was already familiar with a number of the activities (or some variation thereof), but also I was reminded often of activities which I had used in the past and had let slide into disuse. All too often we rely on our own never-fail bag of tricks. Even if one is already familiar with an exercise, something new can be learned from the many variations and follow-up suggestions.

The book's final section "Speaking for Specific Contexts", is of special interest to teachers of upper-intermediate and advanced students who still lack the fluency and the know-how for giving effective class presentations. We all have struggled through students' oral presentations--some good, others less so and requiring patience from the entire class. The activities in this section require a lot of thought and preparation by the student; they stress that much more than speaking goes into an oral presentation. For such presentations, outlines and visuals are strongly encouraged, as well as feedback forms filled out by the entire class. I have successfully implemented Linda Abe's contribution, "Speakers and Listeners as Partners", in which students talked about some aspect of another classmate's culture or country. This is a project which involves preliminary research and verification through conversation. Interest was high, and in many instances it was not the teacher who took responsibility for re-stating and clarifying, but rather the student-observer who wanted to ensure the accuracy of information

about his or her country. This activity is characteristic of the many student-centered ideas in the book.

Both ESL novices and experienced professionals will benefit from reading *New Ways in Teaching Speaking*. Although the “ways” might not always be so new, they will most certainly help us reflect upon and add to our ever-evolving teaching repertoires.