

## ADVANCED WRITING SKILLS

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Advanced Writing Skills is addressed to adult learners of English who have passed the Cambridge First Certificate examination or have reached a comparable level. It was field-tested at Eurocentre, Bournemouth, and at the Instituto Anglo-Mexicano de Cultura in Mexico City. It undertakes to build students' command of written English to a level adequate for the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency examination. For the student who has no specific academic goal, the book promises "a higher level of English knowledge" and some experience in performing "the kinds of written tasks which (he) might one day want to perform in English."

The book has been designed to be flexible enough to serve for intensive courses (doing nearly all the work in class), for non-intensive courses (using many of the exercises for homework), and for private study. It is apparently intended for a semester of work.

The authors have organized their book around a notional/functional view of language. Language associated with a given function or functions is presented and manipulated in each unit, and the unit is designated by the name of the function it expounds (e.g. Advice and Opinion, Suggestions, Protest and Complaint.)

The book's eleven units each divide into four sections. The first of these sections is a reading text followed by five different kinds of exploitation exercises. The second section of each unit is a "revision-test" covering some of the functions, grammar, and vocabulary items of previous units. The third section presents new functions, grammar, and vocabulary (much of it already contextualized in the reading text) and provides varied exercises for manipulation. The final section of each unit is the writing task, which purports to integrate the new language item studied.

Advanced Writing Skills has several features to recommend it. The authors have designed the majority of exercises to be done orally, and recommend many for group work as well. Reading texts are either "real" or realistic letters and newspaper articles, and are reasonably interesting. Except in two cases where "compositions" are assigned, writing tasks are similarly realistic. Language functions are presented

clearly, thoughtfully, and in some detail, with attention to rather fine shades of connotation in their exponents. Associated exercises have variety and are carefully worked out. The treatment of grammar items is similarly clear, thoughtful, and varied.

Although each unit includes only one principal writing task, an "Option Box" gives additional topics. In addition, references are given to a very attractive "Resources File" bound into the back of the book which provides additional writing topics based on an eclectic group of forms, advertisements, cartoons, and telegrams.

Finally, the answer key also bound at the back of the book should help the teacher dispense with unnecessary and tedious oral correction and help to individualize study.

My reservations about the book have to do with preparation for the writing tasks. Since this is a writing course, the writing task ought to provide the pay-off in each unit. It should have been so well prepared for that completing it is a series of small revelations for the student ("So that's how it works!"). The model provided, and the functions, grammar, and vocabulary studied should illuminate the task, and vice versa. However, that is not always the case in Advanced Writing Skills, in spite of the fact that the authors describe the writing task as "the main piece of practice in which (the student) can use the language (he has) studied in the unit."

The fact that there is a reading text in each unit leads one to expect that it will serve as a model for the writing task. This is true in some units, but not in all. Unit 3, for example, provides a newspaper feature article which narrates someone's experiences as a kidnap victim. The writing task in Unit 3, however, asks for a "composition" reminiscing about a former teacher.

As I have mentioned, units are named for functions. These functions sometimes but not always correspond to the rhetorical or macro-function to be fulfilled by the student in the writing task. In some units the designating function is just a micro-function which is treated much as grammatical items are. Thus Unit 3 is headed "Permission," but the reading text is narration and the writing task is reminiscence, as noted above. The language in Unit 3 associated with asking and giving permission is in fact reported speech (I asked to be allowed to get in touch with my wife). This function might better be called reporting. What is more, this reporting language would not necessarily facilitate the writing task for the student.

The treatment of grammar calls up similar reservations. In Unit 1, the writing task is a letter to the British Embassy in the student's country, asking advice about how to become a tour guide for English-

speaking tourists. The grammar points studied in Unit 1 are future time clauses and the pattern exemplified by It's rather odd that you should know my uncle. The inclusion of these grammar points in the letter would be something of a challenge to a native speaker. For a learner, however advanced, the writing task would become more problematic than enlightening, especially in view of the fact that he is also trying to include some functional exponents and a selection of the vocabulary items studied.

One further criticism of the book is that it would have benefited from a more rigorously spiraled structure so that the student could re-practice and perhaps finally control the rather complex grammatical forms.

In spite of these weaknesses, I believe that Advanced Writing Skills should be considered by anyone who is designing a writing course for students at the level and with the needs specified. An experienced teacher could fairly easily exploit its strengths and compensate for its shortcomings. The structure of the book is simple and inherently flexible, and would allow for some variation in course design to suit the differing needs of groups in successive terms, without changing texts.

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