

WRITERS AT WORK: FROM SENTENCE TO PARAGRAPH
BY L. BLASS & D. GORDON

Blass, L., & Gordon, D. (2010). *Writers at work: From sentence to paragraph*. New York: Cambridge University Press. List price: \$29.00.

Reviewed by
Ly Nguyen

Writers at Work: From Sentence to Paragraph is part of a four-book series aiming to develop students' writing skills through a process approach. In keeping with the title, the focus of the book is on sentence and paragraph level writing. As the first book in the series, it has the difficult balancing job of providing beginning-level students with the necessary language while guiding them through the writing process.

The book is divided thematically into ten chapters, whose organization reflects the process approach. Each chapter opens with two prewriting sections, "Getting Started" and "Preparing Your Writing," which consist of vocabulary and grammar activities to provide students with language and ideas for writing. After writing their first draft, students can go to "Revising Your Writing" for additional vocabulary, connecting words, and peer feedback. In the next stage "Editing Your Writing," students learn to correct common grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors with the help of an editing checklist. Lastly in "Following Up," students share their final draft with a partner and complete a self-assessment checklist. The first seven chapters focus on developing sentences while the last three introduce the basics of paragraph writing.

The content is appropriate for the intended audience of adult ESL learners in the US. Each chapter covers one familiar and high-interest theme such as oneself, families, and work. Some activities about language and culture assume that students come from heterogeneous backgrounds. There are numerous references to American culture in the texts, reflecting the book's American setting. Nonetheless, it is possible to adapt the content for younger learners or learners in an EFL setting.

The activities are generally interesting, interactive, and varied while closely following the unit's theme. This is especially true with the "Getting Started" section, which contains various discussion and communicative activities and makes good use of pictures, lists, and graphic organizers. In contrast, grammar activities, while useful and relevant to the writing task, tend to be less interactive and more repetitive, consisting mostly of form-focused exercises such as filling in blanks and rewriting sentences.

Throughout the book there is an emphasis on student collaboration and autonomy. Students can help each other write better while reflecting on their own writing through many discussion and peer feedback activities. Writing stages are broken down into manageable steps with clear, simple explanations, which facilitates comprehension and independent learning. Helpful checklists are included in each chapter to encourage students to monitor their own progress.

The texts used in the book are mostly short descriptive sentences and paragraphs, which is justified given the focus on sentence and paragraph writing. However, they appear to be

inauthentic, having been constructed for the purposes of the activities and simplified to match the students' proficiency level. While inauthentic texts may fit the tasks better and be more manageable for beginning level students, they are not necessarily an accurate reflection of real life writing. This is, however, just a minor complaint in an otherwise excellent textbook.

Overall I would recommend *Writers at Work: From Sentence to Paragraph* to anyone looking for a good introductory level writing textbook with an emphasis on process and scaffolding.

Reviewer

Ly Nguyen has worked as an ESL instructor and tutor in Vietnam. She holds a B.A. in linguistics and is currently a student in the M.A. ESL Program at the University of Minnesota.