

Second Edition

Writing Better English

FOR ESL LEARNERS

ED SWICK



New York Chicago San Francisco Lisbon London Madrid Mexico City
Milan New Delhi San Juan Seoul Singapore Sydney Toronto

Contents

Introduction vii

- 1 Preparing to Write 1
 - Verb Tenses 2
 - Auxiliaries 16
 - The Passive Voice 26
 - The Subjunctive Mode 31
 - Conjunctions 38
 - Pronouns 44
 - Possessives and Plurals 62
 - The Comparative and Superlative 68
- 2 Beginning to Write 75
 - Sentence Completion 75
- 3 Writing Original Sentences 87
 - Understanding the Format 87
 - Writing According to the Format 88
- 4 Story Completion 115
 - Understanding the Format 115
 - Completing Stories with Original Phrases 115
- 5 Writing Letters 151
 - The Friendly Letter 151
 - The Business Letter 157
- 6 Writing Original Themes 167
 - Appendix A: Irregular Verbs in the Past Tense and Past Participle 173
 - Appendix B: Verbs and Tenses 177
 - Answer Key 187

Introduction

Writing in any language is a difficult skill to acquire. Therefore, as an ESL student you should approach writing in English carefully. In order to write well, you want to first have an understanding of grammatical structures, vocabulary, and tense usage. You practice those concepts until you can use them with relative ease. Then you are ready to practice writing original material.

This book does two things:

1. It gives you an abundant review of basic structures.
2. It provides various forms of writing practice within a controlled program that focuses on improving the skills needed to write accurately.

In Chapter 1 you will have the opportunity to learn or review grammar basics. By checking the Answer Key at the end of this book, you can find the correct or example answers to the exercises. If you have an English-speaking friend, you might ask him or her to check your work.

If you wish, you can follow your progress by using a very simple method. After each exercise, count every word that you have written—even little words like *the*, *a*, *and*, or *but*. Then count every error you have made in spelling, tense, word order, missing words, or any other potential mistake.

Divide the number of words you have written (*W*) by the number of errors (*E*) you have made. The result is a number (*N*) that you can compare after every exercise you write:

$$W \div E = N$$

If you wrote sixty words and made twelve errors, you would come up with:

$$60 \div 12 = 5$$

If the number is getting larger, you are making progress.

After completing the review exercises, you will be ready to begin Chapter 2. In this chapter you will complete sentences with your original phrases, and you will use your own ideas as you write. You will see a sentence similar to this:

John borrowed _____ to get to work.

You might write something like this:

John borrowed his father's new car to get to work.

For each exercise in Chapter 3 you will compose ten short, original sentences while using a phrase as the specific element in each sentence. For example:

Sample phrase: The new car

Used as the subject: The new car is in the garage.

Used as the direct object: Mary loved the new car.

Used after the preposition to: A man came up to the new car.

You may, of course, use dictionaries and grammar books as aids in order to write as correctly as possible. You could give yourself a time limit (fifteen minutes or thirty minutes) for writing the exercise, but use the same number of minutes each time you write.

In Chapter 4 you will fill in the missing phrases or sentences in a story. They can be any phrases or sentences that you wish, but they must conform to the plot of the story. For example:

The Diamond Ring

The robber crept into the hallway of the dark house and turned on the light. On the desk he saw a beautiful silver box holding a diamond ring, which he put in his pocket. Then he opened the window, jumped to the ground, and fled down the street.

Chapter 5 deals with letter writing. Each letter can be written within the same framework of time (fifteen minutes, thirty minutes, or longer). There is a difference between “friendly” letters and “business” letters. This part of the writing program will help you to write both types of letters.

In Chapter 6 you will write original stories. The stories are to be based on the assigned topic, and they should include the grammar structures indicated. For example:

Sample title: Lost in the Desert

Include these structures:

the relative pronoun *which*

to want to in the past perfect tense

the conjunction *if*

You would then write a story about someone lost and roaming the desert. You would probably write of heat and thirst and of the difficulties of finding a way to safety. And somewhere in your story you would have three sentences similar to these (which include the required sample structures):

She believed she saw a lake, **which**, unfortunately, was only a mirage.

She **had** often **wanted to** climb a sand dune.

If she found water, she knew she would survive.

If you feel you have not done well enough in any chapter of this book, do not go on to the next chapter. Instead, repeat the chapter that needs improvement. Set a standard of quality for yourself and conform to it. Use the Answer Key not only to check your work but also to find suggestions for how to write appropriate sentences for any of the exercises.