Beginning to Write

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Beginning to Write

Writing activities for elementary and intermediate learners

Arthur Brookes and Peter Grundy

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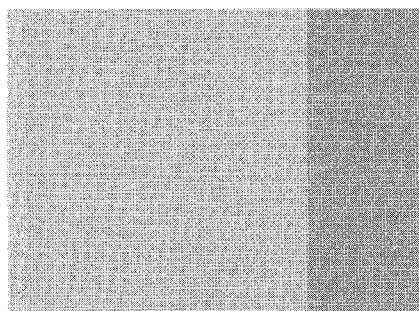Intermediate Learners
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Acknowledgements

Read this first

We have written this book because we believe that it is important to teach writing as a skill in its own right from an early stage in language learning. The majority of the exercises in this book are concerned with this kind of writing.

The introduction which follows examines what writing is and how it should be taught. It concludes with a section providing advice on how to use the hundred or so activities which you will find in this book.

The activities in this book are suitable for elementary or intermediate learners of all ages. They are grouped in chapters to help you find the kind of activity you are looking for more easily. The activities in the early chapters are, on the whole, easier, and involve students in copying-type exercises which help to build confidence, including some which are equally enjoyable ways of using writing as a support for language learning. Later groups of activities are, on the whole, more difficult. Some give practice at writing completed products, while others concentrate on a single aspect of the writing process. There are also activities on the use of computers in teaching writing (though many of these exercises can also be used without them). Finally, there are activities on assessment – especially the learners' own self-assessment.

We often suggest that students should work in pairs or groups. There are two reasons for this. The first is to raise the students' awareness of the writing process by planning their work in the particularly conscious way that writing collaboratively involves. The second is to make writing a less lonely or secretive activity than it sometimes appears to be.

You will also notice that we rarely want writing lessons to result in products for the teacher to assess. Instead, we often suggest making a wall display of student writing – this way, writing is taken seriously, readership is provided, and students learn from each other. At other times, writing triggers further writing or discussion. This approach should make your work easier and should make writing less stressful for your students. It also provides a more public, genuine context for writing.

Read this first

The authors of every book owe a lot to others. In our case we recognise the influence of those whose work has caused us all to rethink the teaching of writing in recent years, not only basic researchers, but particularly also practitioner-researchers. Of these, we especially recommend Raimes (1987) as a stimulating general book, Hedge (1988) as a classroom-based book, and White (1988) for an excellent chapter-long discussion of general issues. We have also learnt a lot from our own students, both practising teachers on MA courses, and EAP and general language learners. For years we have been trying out the ideas they inspired in us – and now we are passing these on to you as a book.

However we would not be passing these ideas on to you in such an orderly way were it not for our editor, Penny Ur, who together with Alison Sharpe at CUP helped us first to focus our original ideas more precisely and then greatly to improve the earlier drafts of the book itself. We are also very grateful to Jane Clifford at CUP who looked after the book from beginning to end, and to Liz Driscoll whose meticulous editing saved us many embarrassments.

Finally, thank you for reading our book. We are genuinely interested in how it works for you, and hope that you won't hesitate to write to us with any thoughts or reactions you may have.