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0521534968 - Study Writing: A Course in Writing Skills for Academic Purposes, Second Edition
Liz Hamp-Lyons and Ben Heasley
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CAMBRIDGE

SECOND EDITION

STUDY *writing*

A course in writing skills for academic purposes

Liz Hamp-Lyons
Ben Heasley

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We must also thank colleagues who over the years since the original *Study Writing* was published in 1987 have approached us at conferences with words of praise for the book; and more recently, it has been a pleasure to meet academic colleagues – in ELT and other disciplines – who have reported that *Study Writing* was a significant force in helping them write well enough to further their academic careers: these have been the people who provided the impetus we needed to undertake a new edition.

Our families have grown up since 1987, but their role in our lives remains central. Our love and thanks go as always to Mike, Nick and Chris; and to Hilda, Yana, Myles and Cian.

To the Student In this section we will outline answers to frequently asked questions. We hope you find them helpful.

Q: Who is this textbook for?

We think *Study Writing* is most suitable for students whose English level is between intermediate and early advanced (approximately IELTS 5.0–7.0, ‘old’ [paper and pencil] TOEFL 480–600, computer-based TOEFL 160–250, or ‘new generation’ iBT TOEFL 55–100).

Typically you will be adult (17+), be able to write reasonably correct sentences in English, but want to develop your ability to write better academic essays, projects, research articles or theses. Most users of this book will either be going to follow a course of study at an English-medium college or university, or planning to take an examination in English, such as the written paper in IELTS or TOEFL.

Q: How will the course help me?

It will help you in five main ways. Firstly, it will introduce you to key concepts in academic writing, such as the role of generalisations, definitions and classifications. Secondly, you will explore the use of information structures such as those used to develop and present an argument, a comparison or a contrast. Thirdly, you will be guided through the language as it is used in academic writing. Fourthly, you will become familiar with particular genres such as the research paper. Finally, you will try out some of the processes which we have found help students to improve their writing abilities, such as how to participate in a virtual peer group and how to get feedback on a piece of writing before you present a final draft.

Q: Do I need to do anything else, apart from studying this course, in order to improve my writing ability?

While we sincerely believe that this course will help you become a competent writer, we are the first to acknowledge that there are limits to what a course can achieve. This is because writing is a very complex process involving the ability to communicate in a foreign language (English) and the ability to construct a text that expresses the writer’s ideas effectively. The more communicative exposure and practice you can get, the more you will support your progress in writing.

One highly recommended approach to improving your writing is through reading. Specifically, we recommend reading widely in the area of your study/interest. The best way of becoming familiar with the demands of academic writing is to study how other writers meet

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these demands. For example, if you are unsure of how to use definitions in an academic text it makes sense to see how established writers deal with this issue. We recommend keeping a log book of extracts from readings that strike you as interesting/useful from a writer's point of view. These extracts can highlight a range of items, such as language expressions that can be used to signal support for an argument, or ways of moving from one topic to another.

A more obvious way you can help yourself to improve is by writing regularly. Part of writing ability is skill-based, and like any skill it gets better with practice. Even writing that nobody reads except yourself is good practice, helping you to think about ideas and how to express them. But especially important is attending to any feedback that you get on your writing. Without attention to feedback, improvement will not take place. You and other learners can discuss the ideas and arguments in each other's writing and learn a lot from that; you can give written feedback to each other on how effective you find each other's texts (we don't advise you to try to correct each other's language though!) Your teachers will provide you with feedback on language errors, but also on content, organisation and style. In engaging with different kinds of feedback you will improve the quality of your writing in terms of grammar, vocabulary choice, organisation and content.

To the Teacher

Study Writing is designed for students whose English level is between intermediate and early advanced (approximately IELTS Band 5.0–7.0, ‘old’ [paper and pencil] TOEFL 480–600, computer-based TOEFL 160–250, or ‘new generation’ iBT TOEFL 55–100). Typically they will be adult (17+), be able to write reasonably correct sentences in English, but want to develop their ability to write better academic essays, projects, research articles or theses. Students will most likely either be going to follow a course of study at an English-medium college or university, or planning to take an examination in English, such as the written paper in IELTS or TOEFL.

Timing

While the course provides between 40 and 60 hours of classwork, it is not advisable for every task to be undertaken in class time. Many tasks will be more appropriate for homework, for example researching on the World Wide Web or writing long texts. In general, we have erred on the side of providing too many rather than too few tasks, giving considerable flexibility to teachers in how they manage the course and respond to the needs of the students.

General principles

Study Writing is based on an approach which emphasises the discursal and cognitive aspects of writing. We see writing as a form of problem-solving in which the writer is faced with two main tasks: a) generating ideas, and b) composing these ideas into a written text that meets the needs of a reader and efficiently communicates the author’s message. In generating ideas we promote group work, brainstorming and visualisations such as clustering. In transforming these ideas into a written form we guide students in exploring the use of information structures such as generalisations, definitions, the use of Situation–Problem–Solution–Evaluation, and the Introduction–Method–Results–Discussion structure used in research papers. We also stress the value of being attentive to how other, more established writers meet the demands of academic writing. We recommend that students keep a log book of extracts from readings that strike them as interesting and useful from a writer’s point of view. These extracts can highlight a range of items, such as language expressions that can be used to signal support for an argument, or ways of moving from one topic to another.

We also acknowledge that part of writing ability is skill-based, and like any skill it gets better with practice because it helps students to think about ideas and how to express them. Therefore it makes

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sense to encourage students to write even if nobody will read what they write. This is not to downplay the provision of feedback to the student. Without attention to feedback, the rate of improvement will be unnecessarily slow. We help students discuss the ideas and arguments in each other's writing and show them how to give written feedback to each other on how effective they find each other's texts. However, it is up to you as teacher to provide feedback on language errors, and also on content, organisation and style. In engaging the student with these different kinds of feedback they will improve the quality of their writing in terms of grammar, vocabulary choice, organisation and content.

The first edition of *Study Writing* had a substantial section on 'Providing feedback on written work'. In the late 1980s, few second-language teachers knew about process approaches to the teaching of writing, and it was useful to provide such support material, but that situation has changed substantially. This edition of *Study Writing* continues to stress the importance of working with others, and of talking about ideas when engaging in a writing activity, but there is much less need to explain how these processes work. We have instead provided an updated and more sophisticated treatment of 'Assessing written work', which we hope will be of use to the modern English language teacher who knows about curriculum and about pedagogy for teaching writing, but may be less confident about assessment. You will find this material in Appendix C.

Course organisation

Unit 1 provides the student with an overview of the major elements involved in academic writing. They learn to examine and evaluate their own writing processes, to distinguish between academic and personal styles of writing, explore the grammar of academic discourse and begin visualising their texts. Subsequent units build on this foundation and students are guided, on the one hand, towards mastery of increasingly complex information structures and, on the other hand, through strategies (such as peer group review) that help them produce increasingly more complex texts. This development culminates in Unit 10, which deals with the creation of whole texts, the structure of the research report and papers, creating bibliographies and trying to achieve an authorial voice.

General advice on teaching procedure

The general principles which we outline here are taken from the first edition of *Study Writing* and have, we believe, stood the test of time.

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We do not believe that there is a 'right way' to teach writing, and we do believe that individual teachers should be allowed the freedom to make their own decisions. Nevertheless, the writers of a book always have certain ideas and assumptions which necessarily affect the book they write, so that it is easier to use the materials in some ways than others. We state our general views here in the hope that they will be helpful to the teacher seeking to understand why we have done this or that, and how we might teach it: this is not intended as a prescription of how any other teacher should do it.

Writing is clearly a complex process, and competent writing is frequently accepted as being the last language skill to be acquired (for native speakers of the language as well as for those learning a foreign/second language). Few people write spontaneously, and few feel comfortable with a formal writing task intended for the eyes of someone else. When the 'someone else' is a teacher, whose eye may be critical, and who indeed may assign a formal assessment to the written product, most people feel uncomfortable. It makes sense, then, that the atmosphere of the writing classroom should be warm and supportive, and non-threatening. It helps if teachers show willingness to write too, and to offer their attempts for class discussion along with those of the students; it helps if students can work together, assisting each other, reviewing each other's texts, pointing out strengths and weaknesses without taking or giving offence. Many of our tasks suggest working with a partner or in groups, and we see this work as very important: not only does it make the task livelier and more enjoyable, but it ensures that students see that writing is really cooperative, a relationship between writer and reader. Usually the writer has to imagine a reader, but cooperative writing provides each writer with a reader and makes the writing task more realistic and more interactive.

Writing is commonly seen as a three-stage process: pre-writing, writing and rewriting. Although this is very much an oversimplification, it is a helpful one. In the past, teachers concentrated on the end of the second stage, that is, after the writing had been done. They did not see how they could intervene at the pre-writing and writing stages, and rewriting was seen only as 'correcting the mistakes'. We now understand the importance of all three stages as part of the writing process and try to help students master the process, by participating in it with them, rather than contenting ourselves with criticizing the *product* – the composition – without knowing much about how it was arrived at.

We have included a *Teaching notes and Key* at the back of the book, for those teachers who would like more detailed guidance on how to use *Study Writing*.