



# Effective Writing

# PART 1

## Introduction

Part One is a guide to the goals of effective writing and includes a series of activities to help you practice and master these goals. Begin with the introductory chapter, which makes clear the reasons for learning sentence skills. Then move on to Chapter 2, which presents all the essentials you need to know to become an effective writer. You will be introduced to the four goals of effective writing and will work through a series of activities designed to strengthen your understanding of these goals. Then, walk through the steps of the writing process—from prewriting to proofreading—in Chapter 3. Examples and activities are provided to illustrate each step, and after completing the activities, you'll be ready to take on the paragraph writing assignments at the end of the chapter. Finally, in Chapter 4, learn how online and electronic resources can help make the writing process both easier and more rewarding.

At the same time that you are writing papers, start working through the sentence skills in Parts Two and Three of the book. Practicing the sentence skills in the context of actual writing assignments is the surest way to master the rules of grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and usage.

*Can you think of other careers, besides the one pictured here, in which good written communication skills are required? Why do you think writing is important to so many different types of careers?*

# Learning Sentence Skills

## Why Learn Sentence Skills?

Why should someone planning a career as a nurse have to learn sentence skills? Why should an accounting major have to pass a competency test in grammar as part of a college education? Why should a potential physical therapist, graphic artist, or programmer have to spend hours learning the rules of standard English? Perhaps you are asking questions like these after finding yourself in a class with this book. On the other hand, perhaps you *know* you need to strengthen basic writing skills, even though you may be unclear about the specific ways the skills will be of use to you. Whatever your views, you should understand why sentence skills—all the rules that make up standard English—are so important.

## Clear Communication

Standard English, or “language by the book,” is needed to communicate your thoughts to others with a minimal amount of distortion and misinterpretation. Knowing the traditional rules of grammar, punctuation, and usage will help you write clear sentences when communicating with others. You may have heard of “Telephone,” the party game in which one person whispers a message to the next person; the message is passed, in turn, along a line of several other people. By the time the last person in line is asked to give the message aloud, it is usually so garbled and inaccurate that it barely resembles the original. Written communication in some form of English other than standard English carries the same potential for disaster.

To see how important standard English is to written communication, examine the pairs of sentences on the following pages and answer the questions in each case.

1. Which sentence indicates that there might be a plot against Ted?
  - a. We should leave Ted. These fumes might be poisonous.
  - b. We should leave, Ted. These fumes might be poisonous.
2. Which sentence encourages self-mutilation?
  - a. Leave your paper and hand in the dissecting kit.
  - b. Leave your paper, and hand in the dissecting kit.
3. Which sentence indicates that the writer has a weak grasp of geography?
  - a. As a child, I lived in Lake Worth, which is close to Palm Beach and Alaska.
  - b. As a child, I lived in Lake Worth, which is close to Palm Beach, and Alaska.
4. In which sentence does the dog warden seem dangerous?
  - a. Foaming at the mouth, the dog warden picked up the stray.
  - b. Foaming at the mouth, the stray was picked up by the dog warden.
5. Which announcer was probably fired from the job?
  - a. Outside the Academy Awards theater, the announcer called the guests names as they arrived.
  - b. Outside the Academy Awards theater, the announcer called the guests' names as they arrived.
6. Below are the opening lines of two students' exam essays. Which student seems likely to earn a higher grade?
  - a. Defense mechanisms is the way people hides their inner feelings and deals with stress. There is several types that we use to be protecting our true feelings.
  - b. Defense mechanisms are the methods people use to cope with stress. Using a defense mechanism allows a person to hide his or her real desires and goals.
7. The following lines are taken from two English papers. Which student seems likely to earn a higher grade?
  - a. A big problem on this campus is apathy, students don't participate in college activities. Such as clubs, student government, and plays.
  - b. The most pressing problem on campus is the disgraceful state of the student lounge area. The floor is dirty, the chairs are torn, and the ceiling leaks.

**Teaching Tip**  
Read each sentence aloud so that students can "hear" the errors.

8. The following sentences are taken from reports by two employees. Which worker is more likely to be promoted?
  - a. The spring line failed by 20 percent in the meeting of projected profit expectations. Which were issued in January of this year.
  - b. Profits from our spring line were disappointing. They fell 20 percent short of January's predictions.
9. The following paragraphs are taken from two job application letters. Which applicant would you favor?
  - a. Let me say in closing that their are an array of personal qualities I have presented in this letter, together, these make me hopeful of being interviewed for this attractive position.  
sincerely yours'  
Brian Davis
  - b. I feel I have the qualifications needed to do an excellent job as assistant manager of the jewelry department at Horton's. I look forward to discussing the position further at a personal interview.  
Sincerely yours,  
Richard O'Keeney

In each case, the first choice (*a*) contains sentence-skills mistakes. These mistakes include missing or misplaced commas, misspellings, and wordy or pretentious language. As a result of such mistakes, clear communication cannot occur—and misunderstandings, lower grades, and missed job opportunities are probable results. The point, then, is that all the rules that make up standard written English should be a priority if you want your writing to be clear and effective.

## Success in College

Standard English is essential if you want to succeed in college. Any report, paper, review, essay exam, project, or assignment you are responsible for should be written in the best standard English you can produce. If you don't do this, it won't matter how fine your ideas are or how hard you work—most likely, you will receive a lower grade than you would otherwise deserve. In addition, because standard English requires you to express your thoughts in precise, clear sentences, training yourself to follow the rules can help you think more logically. The basic logic you learn to practice at the sentence level will help as you work to produce well-reasoned papers in all your subjects.

## Success at Work

Knowing standard English will also help you achieve success on the job. Studies have found repeatedly that skillful communication, more than any other factor, is the key to job satisfaction and steady progress in a career. A solid understanding of standard English is a basic part of this vital ability to communicate. Moreover, we are living in an age of information—a time when people who use language skillfully have a great advantage over those who do not. Fewer of us are working in factories or at other types of manual labor. Many more of us are or will be working with information in various forms—accumulating it, processing it, analyzing it. No matter what kind of job you are preparing yourself for, you will need to know standard English to keep pace with this new economy. Otherwise, you are likely to be limited to low-paying jobs that offer few challenges or financial rewards.



*"First off, there's no 'y' in resume . . ."*

## Success in Everyday Life

Standard English will help you succeed not just at school and work but in everyday life as well. It will help you communicate more effectively with friends and family, or express yourself more clearly when you write a letter of complaint to a company about a product. It will allow you to write letters and e-mails inquiring about bills—hospital, medical, utility, or legal—or about any kind of service. To put it simply, in our daily lives, those who can use and write standard English have more power than those who cannot.

## Your Attitude toward Writing

Your attitude toward writing is an important part of learning to write well. To get a sense of just how you feel about writing, read the following statements. Put a check beside those statements with which you agree. (This activity is not a test, so try to be as honest as possible.)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. A good writer should be able to sit down and write a paper straight through without stopping.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Writing is a skill that anyone can learn with practice.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I'll never be good at writing because I make too many mistakes in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Because I dislike writing, I always start a paper at the last possible minute.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I've always done poorly in English, and I don't expect that to change now.

**Teaching Tip**

You may want to provide additional statements such as "Good writers don't need any help" and "The teacher is the only one who can help me."

**Teaching Tip**

Get students to talk about other skills they have mastered. Draw parallels to writing.

Now read the following comments about these five statements. The comments will help you see if your attitude is hurting or helping your efforts to become a better writer.

**1. A good writer should be able to sit down and write a paper straight through without stopping.**

The statement is *false*. Writing is, in fact, a process. It is done not in one easy step but in a series of steps, and seldom at one sitting. If you cannot complete a paper all at once, you are like most of the other people on the planet. It is harmful to carry around the false idea that writing should be a fast and an easy matter.

**2. Writing is a skill that anyone can learn with practice.**

This statement is *absolutely true*. Writing is a skill, like driving or cooking, that you can master with hard work. If you want to learn to write, you can. It is as simple as that. If you believe this, you are ready to learn how to become a competent writer.

Some people hold the false belief that writing is a natural gift that some have but others do not. Because of this belief, they never make a truly honest effort to learn to write—and so they never learn.

**3. I'll never be good at writing, because I make too many mistakes in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.**

The first concern in good writing should be *content*—what you have to say. Your ideas and feelings are what matter most. You should not worry about spelling, grammar, and punctuation while working on content.

Unfortunately, some people are so self-conscious about making mistakes that they do not focus on what they want to say. They need to realize that a paper is best done in stages and that the rules can and should wait until a later stage in the writing process. Through review and practice, you will eventually learn how to follow the rules with confidence.

**4. Because I dislike writing, I always start a paper at the last possible minute.**

This practice is all too common. You feel you are *going to* do poorly, and then your behavior ensures that you *will* do poorly! Your attitude is so negative that you defeat yourself—not even allowing enough time to really try.

Again, what you need to realize is that writing is a process. Because it is done in steps, you don't have to get it right all at once. Just get started well in advance. If you allow yourself enough time, you'll find a way to make a paper come together.

**5. I've always done poorly in English, and I don't expect that to change now.**

How you may have performed in the *past* does not control how you can perform in the *present*. Even if you did poorly in English in high school, it is in your power to make this one of your best subjects in college. If you believe writing can be learned, and if you work hard at it, you *will* become a better writer.

In brief, your attitude is crucial. If you believe you are a poor writer and always will be, chances are you will not improve. If you realize you can become a better writer, chances are you will improve. Depending on how you allow yourself to think, you can be your own best friend or your own worst enemy.

**Teaching Tip**  
Comment  
on other  
statements  
made in class.

## How This Book Is Organized

- A good way to get a quick sense of any book is to turn to the table of contents. By referring to the Contents pages, you will see that the book is organized into three basic parts. What are they?

*Part One: Effective Writing*

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*Part Two: Sentence Skills*

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*Part Three: Reinforcement of the Skills*

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- In Part One, the final section of Chapter 3 includes activities in the writing process.
- Part Two deals with sentence skills. The first section is "Sentences." How many sections (skills areas) are covered in all? five
- Part Three reinforces the skills presented in Part Two. What are the three kinds of reinforcement activities in Part Three?

*Combined Mastery Tests*

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*Editing and Proofreading Tests*

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*Combined Editing Tests*

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- Helpful charts in the book include the checklist of sentence skills on the inside back cover.



- Finally, the four appendixes at the end of the book are

*(A) ESL Pointers, (B) Sentence-Skills Diagnostic Test,*

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*(C) Sentence-Skills Achievement Test,*

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*(D) Answers to Introductory Activities and Practice Exercises*

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## How to Use This Book

First, read and work through Part One, “Effective Writing”—a guide to the goals of effective writing followed by a series of activities to help you practice and master these goals. Your instructor may direct you to certain activities, depending on your needs.

Second, take the diagnostic test on pages 621–626. By analyzing which sections of the test give you trouble, you will discover which skills you need to concentrate on. When you turn to an individual skill in Part Two, begin by reading and thinking about the introductory activity. Often, you will be pleasantly surprised to find that you know more about this area of English than you thought you did. After all, you have probably been speaking English with fluency and ease for many years; you have an instinctive knowledge of how the language works. This knowledge gives you a solid base for refining your skills.

Your third step is to work on the skills in Part Two by reading the explanations and completing the practices. You can check your answers to each practice activity in this part by turning to the answer key at the back of the book (Appendix D). Try to figure out *why* you got some answers wrong—you want to uncover any weak spots in your understanding.

Your next step is to use the review tests and mastery tests at the end of each chapter in Part Two to evaluate your understanding of a skill in its entirety. Your instructor may also ask you to take the other reinforcement tests in Part Three of the book. To help ensure that you take the time needed to learn each skill thoroughly, the answers to these tests are *not* in the answer key.

The emphasis in this book is on writing clear, error-free sentences. The heart is practice material that helps reinforce the sentence skills you learn. A great deal of effort has been taken to make the practices lively and engaging and to avoid the dull, repetitive skills work that has given grammar books such a bad reputation. This text will help you stay interested as you work on the rules of English that you need to learn. The rest is a matter of your personal determination and hard work. If you decide—and only you can decide—that effective writing is important to your school and career goals and that you want to learn the basic skills you need to write clearly and effectively, this book will help you reach those goals.