

# UC Berkeley

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Reading for Today 1: Themes for Today (3rd ed.) - Loraine C. Smith and Nancy Nici Mare

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*English Grammar: Step by Step, Books 1 and 2*  
*Gramática del inglés: Paso a paso, Books 1 and 2*

Elizabeth Weal

Palo Alto, CA: Tenaya Press, 2010.

LORRAINE RUSTON

*Napa Valley College*

Elizabeth Weal's *English Grammar: Step by Step* and *Gramática del inglés: Paso a paso, Books 1 and 2* give beginning adult ESL students excellent practice in mastering basic grammatical concepts through their simple explanations, extensive practice, and clear, easy-to-use layout. Though the practice exercises are in English in Books 1 and 2 of *Step by Step* and *Paso a Paso*, the grammar explanations are in Spanish in the Spanish versions.

The Level 1 grammar books begin with very basic grammar points such as the ability to use *to be* and *to have* in simple sentences, contractions, statements, and questions. The author also teaches capitalization, punctuation, and parts of speech (nouns, verbs, and adjectives). The books are organized into five chapters. Each chapter has the same format: The left-hand page contains an explanation of the grammar point with several examples; the facing page provides practice exercises including fill-in-the-blanks, word-order unscrambles, and reading-comprehension questions related to a chart or paragraph.

The Level 2 grammar books, which have six chapters, have the same organization as the Level 1 books. Their content includes the simple present tense and the present progressive, the use of *do/do not* and *does/does not* in negative statements and questions, the use of *there is/there are*, and prepositions.

In both the Level 1 and Level 2 books, each chapter ends with a summary followed by three pages of review exercises that can also be used as a chapter test. Each book has an answer key in the back of the book, making it possible for students to use these books independently. Each book also includes a bilingual dictionary with pronunciation so that students can look up the spelling of words they need to complete the exercises.

A teacher's manual called *Teaching English: Step by Step* suggests ways in which the instructor can offer communicative lessons, putting student knowledge of grammar to use in "real world" situations. Beyond these speaking activities, each teacher's book also includes many reproducible activity pages with vocabulary cards, listening exercises, and dictation.

One characteristic that sets the *Step by Step* grammar series apart from other grammar books—other than the obvious point that Spanish speakers can

read the explanations in their native language—is that the differences between English and Spanish grammar are explicitly noted. For example, in giving a warning about the English use of “do not,” *English Grammar: Step by Step 2* identifies a common difficulty Spanish-speaking students encounter:

Many people who are learning English try to translate **do not** in negative sentences in the present tense. Don't try it! You can't translate it. Observe that when **do** is used in a negative sentence, it does not mean “to do.” (p. 78)

Another highlight of these books is that they present material in smaller chunks than other grammar texts, making the grammar more manageable—especially for those who do not come from strong academic backgrounds. For example, rather than teaching all possessive pronouns in a page or two, the Level 1 books include a section on *my*, another on *his* and *her*, a third on *your* and *our*, and a fourth on *its* and *their*. Similarly, the exercises that follow each explanation tend to be simpler than those found in other books. Many grammar book exercises, for example, ask students to choose the one word or phrase in a sentence that is incorrect from four options. In the *Step by Step* books, students are presented with two sentences (for example, *I no like pizza.* and *I don't like pizza.*), and then must choose which one is correct.

I have used the Spanish versions of these books with noncredit beginning adult ESL classes in which all of the students were Spanish speakers. Those with limited educational backgrounds benefited greatly from the Spanish descriptions of grammatical concepts. It was also useful for them to have the directions for the exercises written in Spanish. The teacher's book, with its collection of speaking activities, is particularly helpful, and my students have learned much from one of its kinesthetic exercises, Scrambled Sentences, in which students must make multiple sentences from a predefined word list.

While the clear explanations, easy-to-use layout, and extensive practice make *English Grammar: Step by Step* useful even for mixed-language classes, these books do have drawbacks when used with such a population. Specifically, the translation of vocabulary into Spanish and the explanations of the differences between Spanish and English can be an unnecessary distraction for non-Spanish speakers. In addition, between 10% to 15% of the exercises require students to translate sentences from Spanish to English, an impossibility for non-Spanish speakers.

Teachers with mixed-language classes whose students include Spanish speakers may want to encourage these students to buy the *Paso a Paso* books for use at home. The book's low price (\$10 plus shipping when purchased from the author) make this an option for many.

*Gramática del inglés: Paso a paso 1* and *2* are outstanding texts for ESL beginning classes of Spanish speakers, especially when used in combination with the speaking and listening activities offered in the teacher's guide, *Teaching English: Step by Step* (2011, 2012). Teachers who have learners from a variety of language backgrounds also may find *English Grammar: Step by Step* useful.

*American Accent Training (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)*

Ann Cook

Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Education Series, 2012.

VENUS TRITASAVIT

*College of San Mateo*

“What? Slow down. Can you say that more clearly?” Oftentimes, when non-native speakers of English are misunderstood, they are asked to repeat themselves. Already feeling uncomfortable and self-conscious, these speakers loudly and painstakingly enunciate every word, only drawing attention to their mispronunciation. Rather than directing students to speak more loudly and slowly, *American Accent Training* encourages students to speak so quickly that their words run together and, when appropriate, so softly that some words cannot be heard.

*American Accent Training* (AAT; 3rd ed.) is designed for any nonnative speaker of English who would like to sound more “American” in casual day-to-day interactions as well as in formal presentations. Author Ann Cook points out that, while accents are not bad, average Americans have a hard time understanding nonstandard accents. Like most pronunciation texts, AAT includes sections on how to pronounce vowels and consonants; however, unlike other texts, it highlights two main characteristics of an “American” accent—intonation and word connections—by devoting significant parts of the text to explanations and exercises of these key components.

Most ideal for intermediate to advanced learners, Cook's textbook includes nationality guides, an answer key, a teacher's guide, and five audio CDs. With its thorough explanations and professional, yet accessible tone, the text can stand alone with minimal teacher instruction and would be most appropriately used for independent work (e.g., language lab assignments, supplemental homework, online course work). Each chapter opens with detailed explanations and examples of the pronunciation feature and is followed by listening exercises, controlled speaking exercises, and longer reading passages with the target feature. For example, to teach the pronunciation of the consonant /t/, AAT explains that the American T should sound like a /t/ at the beginning of word, a /d/ in the middle of a word, and be “held” at the end of a word. Each rule comes with a list of commonly used words and multiple passages with the T in context.

The newest 3rd edition is much more student centered than the previous 2nd edition in its sequencing and division of content. Foundational concepts such as thought groups are moved into earlier sections so that students build upon a broader base of understanding. While the 2nd edition launched immediately into a very intense two-chapter, 70-page analysis of intonation and word connections, the 3rd edition opens with multiple short chapters on the following overview topics: forming the relaxed American sound, forming vowels, learning a new language, and mechanics of the mouth. Much more streamlined and easier on the eyes, the 3rd edition concisely lists the main point at the start

of each chapter, includes only relevant exercises, and features clearer charts of mouth position and air pathways.

What makes *AAT* so appealing is that it places the proper amount of emphasis on the most salient aspects of the American accent. While many textbooks provide only limited practice with suprasegmentals such as rhythm, stress, and word connections, Cook's text systematically introduces these critical aspects of pronunciation in early chapters and reinforces accurate usage throughout the entire text. To help students concretely measure progress, *AAT* instructs students to practice and record the same diagnostic passage upon mastery of each new pronunciation feature.

The teacher's guide provides not only clear explanations of the most common problems students have with each aspect of pronunciation, but also specific words to train students to form target sounds. Especially helpful are the nationality guides and native language tips, which cover specific challenges for speakers of native languages varying from Arabic to Korean to Russian.

Some of the strengths of *AAT*, however, are also its limitations. While the text devotes multiple chapters to key components such as intonation and rhythm, less popular topics such as nasal and throaty consonants barely receive any coverage; without even a chart or description of how to form these individual consonants, students have little more than just a couple of pages of word lists. This unbalance in both length and complexity of topics makes it challenging to plan a syllabus, almost requiring instructors to jump around from chapter to chapter. Although the nationality guides and language tips provide a variety of suggestions for different types of speakers, the scripted CD does not provide a variety of authentic samples in multiple contexts (e.g., informal, transactional, personal, extemporaneous, etc.). Accounting for the tendency of students to forget to practice in daily situations, the speakers on the CD exaggerate so much that the average American listener (and some students) may find the speaking unnatural.

Despite these drawbacks, *AAT* proves to be an informative and effective text for independent learners. By including more "live" explanations for the areas that are lacking, and by directing students to authentic samples of videos and radio broadcasts, teachers can provide students with a complete learning experience that emphasizes the unique characteristics of American English.

### ***Contemporary Topics 2:***

#### ***High Intermediate Academic Listening and Note-Taking Skills (3rd ed.)***

Ellen Kisslinger and Michael Kisslinger (Eds.)

White Plains, NY: Pearson Longman, 2009.

Audio CD and DVD, 2010.

**TANA MOBLEY**

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**C***ontemporary Topics 2* student book, with audio CD and DVD, meets the needs of high-intermediate ESL students working to improve their aca-

ademic listening, note-taking, and discussion skills. According to the editors, *Contemporary Topics 2* is able to do this through the use of “stimulating” lectures with “live audiences” on various topics.

*Contemporary Topics 2* follows the same pattern of organization for 12 separate lectures as the other books in its four-level series. This provides a strong degree of consistency and predictability. The initial sections of each chapter consist of prelistening and vocabulary-building activities and note-taking strategies, followed by active listening activities such as note taking and answering comprehension questions. After the lecture, students are asked to participate in a shorter listening activity, review of the lecture notes, assessment, and expansion activities. Academic lectures cover a variety of academic fields, addressing everything from “Phobias” (psychology) and “Team Building” (business) to “The Silk Road” (history) and “DNA Testing” (biology).

“Connect to the Topic” and “Build Your Vocabulary” are prelistening sections designed to build schema and familiarize students with key words and phrases present in the lecture. Though helpful, the vocabulary section could be improved by recycling collocations from the first part to the next. For example, in Unit 4, the collocations *components of* and *contribute to* are presented only in Part A, not B. There are also a few instances in which the collocations presented are so infrequent (*run in families* in Unit 4 and *bring enjoyment to people* in Unit 5) that when I tested their frequency of use with the online site of Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English, they did not even appear. While the editors may have included these collocations because they appear in the lecture, emphasizing such rare collocations may not be the best use of student time and attention.

The next section, “Focus Your Attention,” is designed as a pre-note-taking and prelistening activity, introducing students to a variety of note-taking methods and strategies. This section is generally helpful but would be more appropriate if the note-taking suggestions were better matched to the lectures. The suggestions in each unit, such as use of particular symbols and abbreviations, do not always coincide with the lecture content that follows. For example, Unit 7 lists 13 separate note-taking symbols, yet only a few of them are useful for the lecture that follows.

The editors describe the lectures in the section “Listen to the Lecture” as ones that involve “engaging instructors” and “live student audiences.” The videos are actually simulated lectures with scripted speeches and therefore lack many of the qualities of authentic spoken language that university students need. On the other hand, the realistic and varied topics and accents can help increase students’ readiness for more challenging academic listening tasks. The simulated lectures also provide students with controlled practice in note taking and listening for main ideas and specific details.

“Talk about the Topic” follows the listening section and features a simulated student discussion. The best part of this section is the last, a helpful production and reinforcement exercise that contains questions for small-group discussions in which students practice the discussion strategies they have just heard and identified.

In “Review your Notes,” students compare the notes they took as they listened to the lecture with the notes in the textbook. This is a useful activity and a great opportunity for peer review and discussions. Next, “Take the Unit Test” and “Extend the Topic” offer opportunities for assessment and extended production activities at the end of each unit. I would suggest, however, that students do “Extend the Topic” before taking the unit test. Also, these tests would be more beneficial if labeled as self-assessments or quizzes to lessen pressure on students.

The student textbook, audio CD, and DVD are all well formatted and easy to use. Though some instructors may assume it is simply a nice option, the DVD—new to this edition—is truly a key part of the learning process with *Contemporary Topics 2* because it adds a helpful visual component. It has options for turning subtitles on or off, and it makes it easy to navigate among lectures, discussions, and note-taking samples for each lecture. The actors also have a variety of accents, and the lectures are on a broad range of topics, making the listening activities challenging while maintaining student interest. The CD can be used for homework and/or reinforcement of the lectures. Also available is a helpful teacher’s pack, containing lecture transcripts, answer keys to the student book, and photocopyable quizzes.

*Contemporary Topics 2* with audio CD and DVD provides students with solid listening and note-taking practice and help expand students’ vocabulary as well as their awareness of some collocations and cohesive devices, thereby developing skills essential for future academic studies. A few of the sections in the student book could be better arranged and some activities revamped to be more authentic or practical, but in its most recent 3rd edition, *Contemporary Topics 2* still does a good job of meeting the needs of its target audience, high-intermediate students enrolled in programs for English for Academic Purposes.

## References

Regents of the University of Michigan. (2013). *The Michigan corpus of academic spoken English*. Retrieved from <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/micase>

### *Reading for Today 1: Themes for Today (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)*

Lorraine C. Smith and Nancy Nici Mare  
Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning, 2011.

ANTHONY KAZANJIAN

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**H**ave you ever struggled with guiding beginning ESL learners through reading a long piece of text, not sure of how to get them to process it all? If so, *Themes for Today* might be for you as it is a well-designed skills-based reader that is sure to aid in developing reading proficiency in low-level learners.

The *Reading For Today* series is designed to cultivate specific skills and strategies for adult EAP learners. The first book in the *Reading for Today* series,

*Themes for Today*, is appropriate for beginning-level readers with limited vocabulary and grammar knowledge.

The book is divided into six units, headed by cultural and academic themes such as “Home and Family,” “Exercise and Fitness,” and “Science and History.” Each unit contains two chapters, focusing on a specific theme, such as a story about an unusual family, the New York City Marathon, and an account of the origin of the moon. Although the texts appear to have been developed specifically for this book, the themes are likely to interest and appeal to learners of various ages and backgrounds. Furthermore, each chapter is entirely self-contained, allowing teachers the freedom either to cover entire units or focus on individual chapters as they see fit.

Each chapter begins with a prereading preparation section, which includes a short task or list of questions designed to elicit students’ background knowledge. Large, full-color photographs begin each section, giving students a clear visual representation of the topic, and the interactive tasks can be done quickly and easily in pairs or discussion groups. The reading passage is then presented in two formats—the first in three separate sections, with each section followed by true-false, multiple-choice, and short-answer questions to check comprehension of vocabulary and content. In the second format, the passage is presented in its entirety, and the students are asked to scan for specific information and infer main ideas. Here, teachers can easily assess students’ overall comprehension.

Offering teachers and readers choice in how to approach each passage is an effective way to appeal to diverse learning strategies. Analytic learners may prefer processing the text and monitoring their own comprehension step by step. In contrast, holistic learners may enjoy reading the entire passage. The format and sequencing of the reading tasks are designed so that teachers and students can select which parts of the passage and questions to focus on. The multiple-choice questions seem especially effective in encouraging and assessing students’ ability to infer meanings of new vocabulary in context as the correct answers require a close reading.

The authors clearly realize that vocabulary building is essential for low-level learners to develop reading skills and have included many activities for this purpose. These focus on grammatical functions in context, thereby drawing readers’ attention to form. Gap-fill quizzes and crossword puzzles finish off each chapter. The book is thus flexible in letting teachers adapt tasks to suit learner needs without requiring a supplementary workbook.

After each reading, teachers can opt to use any number of discussion questions or follow-up activities presented in the book for postreading tasks. The variety of activities is impressive, and most of these make explicit use of the target vocabulary and concepts in each reading. However, many of these tasks seem to lack authenticity and purpose, and teachers may need to think of creative ways to bring purpose to these tasks.

A few other shortcomings lie in the lack of difficulty in the questions and activities themselves. Students may not be challenged to think critically or read actively in response to the true-false and short-answer questions, which some-



times contain wording virtually identical to the text itself. Therefore, students may be required only to identify words and phrases in the text instead of displaying comprehension. It is disappointing to see that the crossword puzzle and gap-filling quizzes also seem to have lifted their items and clues from the passages verbatim.

Although task types vary within each chapter, *Themes for Today* follows a uniform structure throughout; students may get bored with the same cycle of activities as they progress through the chapters. The book can be taught as a stand-alone text to accompany a reading course, yet supplementary materials may be needed to keep learners engaged. Teachers may find that the book lacks genre variety as the passages all reflect expository rhetorical structure. Limiting the range of genres may be fine for learners who simply need to know how to find information for academic reading, but it may frustrate those who want to learn English for other purposes. Furthermore, text content is heavily centered around US culture, making this book an inappropriate choice for EFL settings and ESL settings outside of the US.

Overall, *Themes for Today* offers reading topics likely to engage students, and the vocabulary-building tasks will undoubtedly help beginning students develop crucial language skills. The book is also very adaptable for teachers in its range of comprehension and vocabulary tasks and extremely learner-friendly thanks to its clear layout, color photos, and activation of different reading strategies. Teachers will also appreciate the many discussion and follow-up activities. However, there remains room for improvement. Reading-comprehension questions should be reworded so that students are actually reading *critically* instead of simply finding information, and many tasks should be redesigned to elicit authentic and meaningful outcomes. One can hope that future editions will overcome these shortcomings, but until then, *Themes for Today* is still a carefully developed, appropriate choice for beginning ESL learners for academic purposes.

***Read This! Intro (1<sup>st</sup> ed.)***

Daphne Mackey

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

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**A**re you worried about not having enjoyable reading materials for your beginning-level adult students? Are you trying to help students develop their vocabulary and build their reading skills? Then *Read This! Intro* would be a great resource for you.

*Read This! Intro* is the first book in a four-level series and is intended for high-beginning English learners on an academic track. The readings are spread over 15 chapters with chapters divided into five units. Each unit presents a theme such as education, sociology, science, marketing, and TV and film; within each unit, chapters focus on a secondary content area. Each chapter includes

a reading and a balance of pre- and postreading activities to build reading comprehension, vocabulary, and other reading skills. A wrap-up at the end of each unit recaptures ideas and vocabulary from all three chapters of the unit.

*Read This! Intro* focuses largely on vocabulary. Selected words from each reading are previewed, presented, practiced, and recycled in each chapter. In the vocabulary preview section, words from the two academic disciplines in each reading as well as those from the Academic Word List (AWL) are extracted for preteaching. The parts of speech and certain collocations are listed before the readings for key words. These words appear in bold in the readings, whereas selected low-frequency words are glossed at the bottom of the page.

After reading, students revisit the same vocabulary items that they previewed and encountered in the reading. They are asked to select appropriate words to complete a reading summary and to tackle various tasks that require both top-down and bottom-up processing. In the unit wrap-up, students review the words identified in the three chapters and are asked to match words with definitions. Follow-up discussion questions also draw upon the vocabulary in these three chapters. Additionally, the unit tests included in the *Teachers' Manual* require retrieval of the target vocabulary covered in each unit.

*Read This! Intro* also features a variety of reading skills—namely identifying main ideas, recognizing causes and effects, comparing and contrasting, sequencing events, and decoding details—and tasks requiring students to both decode a text as well as use contextual and other top-down strategies to demonstrate their understanding. Each unit and chapter begin with prereading activities to activate students' prior knowledge and help provide context for the reading to come. Then a reading is provided. After each reading, students move from answering simple multiple-choice and true-false questions as well as matching and chart-completion activities to participating in controlled end-of-unit discussions, interviews, and writing tasks requiring greater interpretation and analysis. Some open-ended discussion activities are also provided. In the unit tests and online student exercises, students are asked to answer questions with short answers to show their understanding.

The supplemental materials accompanying the book make it easy to use the text in the classroom. The MP3 CD-ROM provides audio recordings of all readings, which are also available online. The *Teacher's Manual* offers sound suggestions for how to teach each unit section as well as student book answer keys for reference. Also available are photocopiable unit tests in the *Teacher's Manual* and an online student activity site that provide students additional reading practice.

The rich content of *Read This! Intro* makes it adaptable to a variety of settings. As intended, the 15 texts in the book can be sequentially and systematically used for intensive reading instruction in English for Academic and Professional Purposes (EAPP) programs for beginning-level students. Some readings are also appropriate for business English training. Some are especially relevant to psychology students learning English. Still others are ideal for raising cultural awareness.

Although *Read This! Intro* is a strong textbook for vocabulary and read-

ing skill development, it has its limitations. A major shortcoming involves the book's core reading selections, which have no authentic diaries, folktales, news reports, magazine articles, or digital sources such as blog posts. All of the texts are nonfiction stories whose language has been adapted to make them level appropriate. The author has provided an online student website with authentic texts to help address this deficiency.

Another weakness lies in the preview of vocabulary. Although the textbook emphasizes dictionary use in prereading, neither the textbook nor the *Teacher's Manual* provides sufficient lessons on dictionary use or selection. Moreover, some sections focus too closely on reconstructing a text's literal meaning, often to the exclusion of promoting critical thinking.

Certain defects aside, *Read This! Intro* still trumps many reading textbooks on the market with its varied approaches to enhancing students' vocabulary and reading skills, particularly comprehension strategies. Ready to teach your beginning-level students how to read? If so, *Read This! Intro* is worth the investment.

### ***National Geographic Reading Explorer 3 (1<sup>st</sup> ed.)***

Nancy Douglas

Boston: Heinle Cengage, 2010.

KIMBERLEY MURAKAMI

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Judging a textbook by its cover might lead you to pick up a copy of National Geographic's *Reading Explorer 3*. Gorgeous full-color photography, eye-catching graphics, large type, and a clear, organized layout suggest a reading experience appealing to visual learners and mature, curious students interested in the world around them.

*Reading Explorer 3* is a collection of simple and simplified accounts written for the intermediate learner and is part of a six-level content-based series. The book is organized around 12 units focusing on real-world topics that one might expect from *National Geographic*, such as archaeology, endangered species, and the mind. Each unit contains two texts that approach the topic from differing perspectives. For example, Unit 2, titled "Skin Deep," includes a selection that examines the notion of beauty and attractiveness and another that explores the traditions of beauty found in different world cultures, such as tattooing and scarring.

Review units that consolidate and recycle the vocabulary from the previous three units focus on a different UNESCO World Heritage Site, and, through the use of an informative graphic, highlight a global view of topics such as biodiversity and cultural heritage. The level-appropriate readings are thorough and in a style characteristic of *National Geographic*. This book uses award-winning photographs and engaging and informative maps to draw the reader in, creating a visually exciting learning experience in reading skills and strategies.

The book's prereading activities are one of its strengths. Schema elicitation

and building activities are designed around photographs and discussion questions. Readers might also be asked to use information from a graphic such as a time line or a map, make predictions based on titles, photos, and captions, or scan for specific information. With some texts, key vocabulary is presented before reading. Postreading activities include multiple-choice and matching comprehension questions, vocabulary practice, and critical-thinking questions that can be used as discussion questions and writing prompts.

Each unit highlights a particular aspect of vocabulary, such as a word's collocations, affixes, or common uses. Focusing on vocabulary in this manner can encourage students to develop skills for studying vocabulary on their own. The teaching of active reading strategies—such as doing timed readings, demonstrating how to break the text into smaller pieces to aid comprehension, and using graphic organizers to categorize and organize information—are lacking, but the resourceful teacher can easily incorporate these.

The accompanying CD-ROM contains material that can be used in class or as homework. Its 12 videos, which can be viewed with or without subtitles, correspond to each unit in the textbook, providing additional ways for students to interact with the target vocabulary of each chapter. Audio versions of the first text found in each unit are accompanied by additional reading comprehension and vocabulary questions. The final page of each unit in the book contains two activities for use with the video.

The textbook is organized in such a way that it could be used as part of a content-based course or unit. Visually appealing, it could serve as a way to generate excitement and interest in a topic while exposing students to diverse approaches to presenting information, such as through maps, graphs, and charts. One could also make this textbook available to students for extensive reading practice. Additionally, this book could be a good candidate for self-study although the student book does not provide an answer key.

Providing some textual variety could make this book even better. The texts, though very well written and composed in a form that may be familiar to most students, are very similar to one another in style and genre. Keeping with the consistency of the style of writing found in *National Geographic Magazine* is both an asset and a drawback. Students, especially those who might already enjoy reading *National Geographic* in their primary language, might be motivated to use this book and cultivate skills for reading this style of text. However, exposure to a wide variety of texts and genres is essential for providing readers with opportunities for practice, skill building, and strategic development. *Reading Explorer 3* does not provide this.

The skills are not given equal attention. For one, the inclusion of the CD-ROM addresses listening skills but noticeably lacks activities involving writing. The number of questions and prompts addressing reading comprehension and vocabulary practice is quite low for an intermediate book. For instance, following each selection are five reading-comprehension questions. *Reading Explorer 3* does an excellent job of presenting vocabulary in context but does not provide a means for readers to use the vocabulary productively.

Critical-reading skills, such as identifying the main idea or topic of a text,

and activities asking readers to identify cause and effect or separate fact from opinion are addressed all too briefly. For an experienced instructor, adding these activities to a lesson might be obvious and automatic. However, for the novice teacher, expanding the lesson in such ways might prove to be more of a challenge. A directive found in the book encourages students to visit the Heinle website for more information on the topics in the book. However, the site appears to be geared more toward instructors than students, featuring information about the *Reading Explorer* series itself. More than the current target list of vocabulary is needed on the student website.

Despite these shortcomings, *Reading Explorer 3* is a beautiful book that immediately captures the attention of the reader and should be considered as a valuable addition to topical and content-based courses. It is a visually stunning resource that could spark students' curiosity and interest in the world while helping improve their reading skills and build their vocabulary.

***Ready to Write 1: A First Composition Text (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)***

Karen Blanchard and Christine Root

White Plains, NY: Pearson Education, 2010.

PETER CHHUOR

*California State University, Fullerton*

**R***eady to Write 1: A First Composition Text* integrates reading, speaking, and listening skills with writing but is still at its heart a writing textbook that gives adult learners and college students ample opportunities to express themselves and build their confidence through various exercises and authentic writing tasks.

The book is intended for beginning-level ESL students who have some limited experience and knowledge with both written and spoken English. There are nine chapters, each covering topics related to personal topics and everyday life such as writing about friends and families and giving instructions.

Every chapter is divided into three parts according to the writing process: prewriting, writing, and revising. In the prewriting sections, for example, students are taught strategies such as brainstorming and listing. In the writing sections, students are taught how to use their writing to describe, summarize, compare and contrast, analyze data, and answer short test questions. In addition, at the end of each chapter, a great "real-life writing" section focuses on authentic tasks for students such as writing an email and filling out an order form.

Other sections complement the writing process. "Paragraph Pointers" gives students helpful tips on writing a paragraph, such as describing what a "title" is, its importance when writing a paragraph, and how to write one. A "Grammar Guide" helps students practice grammar points pertinent to the given writing assignment, such as subject-verb agreement. In "You Be the Editor," students, individually or with a partner, learn to edit by proofreading for grammatical errors in a paragraph.

Although the book features a wide range of activities, some of them are a bit repetitive and could use some variety. For example, the “Giving Instructions” chapter has students go through the same activities for four different scenarios, for instance, looking at the pictures, sequencing them, and writing a paragraph. Having a little more variety could help keep things fresh for students and prevent the activities and exercises from becoming tedious.

Visually, the text is well laid out without being cluttered with text. There are plenty of illustrations and photos throughout the book, although unfortunately all in black and white. The pages could be a bit more colorful, but the textbook’s overall design and organization are appealing enough.

Although it does try to incorporate reading, listening, and speaking skills, *Ready to Write 1* is still best suited as intended: for a writing course, not for a core ESL course. Paired with a good multiskills textbook, *Ready to Write 1* could be used for a core ESL class that teaches all four skills.

Overall, *Ready to Write 1* is a textbook that would fit in well for any beginning ESL writing course targeting adults. It is well organized, contains many useful sections, and has plenty of activities and authentic writing tasks.

### ***Engaging Writing 1: Essential Skills for Academic Writing***

Mary Fitzpatrick

White Plains, NY: Pearson Education, 2011.

EMILY MONTGOMERY

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**M**ary Fitzpatrick’s *Engaging Writing 1: Essential Skills for Academic Writing* introduces ESL students to the genre of academic writing by equipping them with tools to digest, analyze, discuss, and create six types of academic paragraphs. Written for intermediate-level ESL students who are new to the vocabulary and concepts of academic writing in English, the book provides a thorough and example-heavy guide to help students dive into this genre without being overwhelmed.

This text would most practically be used as the primary textbook of a writing course in a program designed to train ESL students preparing for university or college courses. Though individual exercises or chapters could be used in isolation, students would most benefit by working sequentially through the entire book so that they gain a comprehensive understanding of the basics of academic writing by the end of the course.

Each chapter has a unique theme designed to encourage thought and interaction among students from a variety of backgrounds and ages. It is easy to imagine a classroom of diverse students having engaging discussions about their accomplishments, the differences in raising children in different cultures, or how to make communities better—three chapter themes used in this text.

Each chapter is divided into three main sections: “Reading for Writing,” “Writing,” and “Revising.” “Reading for Writing” begins with an original text by a contributing author with background relevant to the chapter theme. Compre-

hension and analysis activities follow, emphasizing discussion and collaboration. Task-based group activities encourage students to take notes, listen, and contribute instead of being passive. Next, vocabulary-building exercises push students to learn not only the most common words in college texts but also strategies for coping with unknown words. Lessons focus on the relationships between word forms and affixes, helping students learn to become autonomous vocabulary learners. Conveniently, words from the most common word families in academic English are denoted with asterisks.

In the next section, students receive the chapter's writing task. Placing the prompt early in the chapter helps give purpose to the examples and activities that follow. The chapter offers strategies for how to approach and complete a specific writing task. Follow-up exercises then test students' understanding. After ensuring students understand the given assignment, the text focuses on the writing process with lessons such as how to brainstorm for or organize ideas for writing assignments. The section ends with sample final drafts of the writing assignment, giving students additional writing models to evaluate.

The third and final section of each chapter focuses on revision, both at the paragraph and sentence level. Students practice revising example paragraphs in the book, their peers' writing, and finally their own writing. The appendices supplement this section well by providing relevant lessons on grammar, punctuation, and capitalization as well as peer-review forms catered to each specific chapter's assignment.

The way that individual lessons and activities are interwoven to provide students with the tools they need to complete each chapter's writing assignment shows great planning and consideration. For example, Chapter 1 introduces basics such as topic sentences and asks students to write a process paragraph about an accomplishment. Because students will need to use past tense to do so, one of the lessons reviews that grammar point. Another small section on the appropriate formatting of a final draft provides particularly helpful tips, especially to students new to typing and turning in assignments in English.

The second chapter has a descriptive paragraph as the main writing assignment. Since students are learning how to use details in their writing for this assignment, the related vocabulary exercises focus on noun and adjective suffixes so students can appropriately use these in their descriptions.

Chapter 3 follows the same structure for teaching how to write a paragraph that gives reasons. Here students are taught to organize with outlines, to define terms, to change verbs to adjectives when appropriate, to combine sentences using coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, and to write sentences with cause-and-effect structures.

Chapter 4 is the first to introduce using an outside source in the students' writing. To write a paragraph on the effects of an occupation on a person, students interview their classmates to practice gathering and reporting information. As in previous chapters, the sections build upon one another, equipping students with the tools necessary to complete this task: lessons on interviewing, using quotations, and maintaining unity in a paragraph.

The fifth chapter teaches students to write a contrast paragraph, again with

many related examples and supplemental activities. In Chapter 6, students write an opinion paragraph, which they are taught to expand into an essay. The parts of an essay are described largely with terminology learned in earlier chapters about paragraphs to help ease students' transition to the essay. For example, the thesis statement of an essay is presented as corresponding to the topic sentence of a paragraph.

Students who use this book will surely learn a great deal about academic writing basics, but this textbook fails to adequately teach students how to incorporate information from other sources into their writing. While lessons such as the interviews in Chapter 4 introduce this concept, students are ultimately left without instruction on how to respond to other texts and arguments. It is unfortunate this was overlooked as it is such a fundamental skill, and it would be worthwhile to begin introducing how to evaluate sources, summarize, and paraphrase in the early stages of academic writing. This is especially important because these are the types of tasks students must perform in many of their university classes.

One of the hallmarks of good academic writing is clear organization, one of the greatest strengths of this textbook. With its insightful lessons and activities, *Engaging Writing 1* stands out as a comprehensive and engaging guide for students studying English academic writing for the first time. Writing teachers and students alike will much appreciate it.

***Preparing Every Teacher to Reach English Learners (1<sup>st</sup> ed.)***

Joyce W. Nutta, Kouider Mokhtari, and Carine Strebelle (Eds.)

Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2012.

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Today's K-12 classrooms include students with diverse economic backgrounds, varying learning styles, learning disabilities, and an assortment of languages. In 2009, 93.3% of school-aged children who spoke a language other than English at home stated they had difficulty with English, according to the U.S. Department of Education (Aud, 2011, p. 162). While the number of English language specialists is being whittled away along with educational budgets across the country, regular classroom content-area teachers are increasingly bearing the weight of teaching the English language to English language learners (ELLs). As an instructor of teachers who work with ELLs, I continually hear the question, "How can we meet the needs of our students with such a wide range of languages and backgrounds?"

*Preparing Every Teacher to Reach English Learners*, a groundbreaking research-based textbook published by Harvard Education Press, helps answer this question by offering detailed strategies for training in-service teachers whose classrooms include ELLs. This textbook can be a valuable tool for not only teachers but also district leaders as it provides pertinent information regarding the planning, implementation, and assessment of instruction relative



to ELLs in the mainstream classroom. *Preparing Every Teacher to Reach English Learners* also offers a step-by-step guide for implementing the One Plus Model of Infusion, a successful model for applying EL content to mainstream courses, for teacher-preparation programs along with much-needed, detailed curriculum guides for each subject.

Part 1 includes five chapters describing the One Plus Model of EL Infusion. Along with helpful graphics that illustrate the One Plus Model program and course outcomes, Chapter 1 defines the characteristics of EL Infusion as a model program that has the potential to increase the depth of preparation for teaching ELLs and increase the proportion of EL content in program courses. Chapter 2 gives a historical account of teacher preparation and the events leading up to the development of the One Plus Model of EL Infusion. Comparisons to other models, such as the Florida Model of Infusion in Table 2.1, give greater clarity to the embedded components of each infusion model. Chapter 3 describes how the One Plus Model develops teacher candidates' rudimentary knowledge and skills regarding working with ELLs. It offers a framework for designing, implementing, and evaluating the One Plus Infusion Model for institutions interested in adopting the program for their teacher-preparation programs. Chapter 4 is an invaluable resource for how to infuse EL content with teacher-preparation courses. The text describes in detail the process that ELL and teacher-preparation faculty undergo to align their courses with infused ELL standards and objectives. The corresponding appendices include example forms to assist in the transition to an EL Infusion model. Finally, Chapter 5 describes faculty development in EL Infusion programs. In particular, Appendix 5.a refers to the ESOL Tapestry Expert Series, informative videos of ELL experts discussing topics such as sheltered content instruction, experiential language activities, and second language literacy.

The six chapters in Part 2 present real examples of how the One Plus Model has been embedded in teacher-preparation courses at Miami University, University of Central Florida, Iowa State University, and University of South Florida. Chapter 6 includes four sample syllabi prepared for Category 1+ courses. Each sample course includes the course objectives, ELL-focused materials, assignments, and assessments. After his or her course syllabi, each professor has included a detailed reflection—in my view the true highlight of this book because, as a current coordinator and long-time ELL teacher, I know EL Infusion can be a long, grueling process. Educators can use the wisdom gleaned from these pioneers to incorporate content specific to ELLs into their courses. Chapter 7 logically continues with Category 2+ courses and Chapter 8 describes Category 3+ classes, following the same format as that of Chapter 6. Chapter 9 describes how EL Infusion is incorporated in sample course work for school leaders, counselors, and psychologists. Chapter 10 discusses field experiences related to EL prep, including a detailed description of a project titled “English Learner Interlanguage Analysis.” Chapter 11 provides a culturally responsive framework for evaluating EL Infused programs. Here the emphasis is on making all stakeholder voices heard in teacher candidate evaluations.

One thing missing in this textbook was how to enhance English language

learning within content-specific courses. For example, I would have liked to learn how a course in Teaching Literature to Secondary Students would teach a short story to ELLs. In particular, I was left with questions about how a text could be simplified, how content could be made comprehensible, how vocabulary could be taught, and how ELLs could be assessed for older children.

Even so, what differentiates *Preparing Every Teacher to Reach English Learners* from other textbooks is how it empowers teachers with a valuable method for reaching and teaching ELLs. The emphasis this textbook places on examples from actual teacher-training courses makes it the best choice for district leaders, new and veteran teachers, and university teacher-preparation instructors to understand and implement the elements necessary for quality instruction of *all* students, especially the diverse group of ELLs. In doing so, this book helps teachers and their trainers fulfill the promise of U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan: “No matter what your race, national origin, disability, or zip code, every child is entitled to a quality public education and today, more than ever, we acknowledge America’s need—and a public school’s obligation—to teach all students to their full potential” (Duncan, 2010).

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## *Decolonizing Literacy: Mexican Lives in the Era of Global Capitalism*

Gregorio Hernandez-Zamora

Bristol, England: Multilingual Matters, 2010.

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Frustrated with standardized tests and basic skills curriculums that define literacy as an exercise in correctly filling in the right bubble, I found *Decolonizing Literacy* to be an expansive reconception of what constitutes literacy and language learning. Through his case study of marginalized Mexicans, Hernandez-Zamora argues persuasively that their literacy development was less connected to formal education or literacy competencies but rather to access—access to new ideas and ways of thinking, to mentors, communities, and opportunities, and most important, to freedom over their own lives. This book raises challenging and provocative questions, particularly for ESL teachers such as

myself who teach marginalized immigrants. What role, if any, do adult schools have in helping learners become literate? How do oppressive forces affect the literacy practices of our students? How can our teaching practice position our students as powerful agents in relation to their learning and literacy practices?

As the title of his book suggests, Hernandez-Zamora examines literacy through the lens of colonization and its historical consequences, but from the beginning he establishes a close, personal, and political connection to his research. A scholar and professor of education with a PhD from the University of California, Berkeley, Hernandez-Zamora states that he was born and raised in a shantytown on the outskirts of Mexico City. This unique background provides him both an insider (personal) and outsider (academic) perspective on his subjects' lives. And it is the way that he interweaves these two perspectives and two discourses that helps make his writing so fascinating and readable.

In the first two chapters Hernandez-Zamora uses decolonizing theory and social-cultural theories of learning to introduce his theoretical approach, which he illuminates with the words and lives of his subjects, and, occasionally, with details and knowledge from his own life. He draws heavily from a standard line of critical pedagogists, but it is the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and Lev Vygotsky that contribute the most to his analysis. He uses Bakhtin to highlight the way some of his subjects are able to appropriate literacy in order to "self-position themselves ... as learners, citizens and human beings" with a corresponding transformation of identity and agency. Complementary to this process of self-authoring is access, and he cites Vygotsky in arguing that his most empowered subjects also needed to enter "literate dialogues, communities, and practices" that gave them access to powerful discourses and counterdiscourses to resist colonizing forces that reinforce their marginalized positions.

Despite their lack of formal education, all of his subjects carry out literacy demands in their daily lives. The key distinction for Hernandez-Zamora is that some are agents and others are survivors. The agents are those who engage in literacy practices that resist colonizing forces, while the survivors primarily engage in literacy practices that reinforce their marginalized positions. It is precisely the voices and stories of these individuals along with Hernandez-Zamora's analysis that make up the heart of the book.

So, what's the point of finishing middle or high school? No, we would rather document ourselves ... which is what allows us to make our work concrete. We avoid the problem of spending time "studying" and "studying," and at the end DOING NOTHING. ... We're better off DOING something. (Chela)

Hernandez-Zamora contends that the out-of-school discourse practices that his subjects acquired supported their literacy development and helped them move ahead. Though most of his subjects report negative experiences with formal schools, it is primarily the agents, such as Chela cited above, who take critical stances toward schooling. Sofia, with a third-grade education, illustrates this point. She describes her limited experience in adult classes as "listen-

ing to the teacher in front of the blackboard, doing textbook exercises and taking tests.” Yet her entire life has been a blueprint for action. Hernandez-Zamora details her life as an activist, member of a church group, and member of a natural healers group. She reads sophisticated materials on herbal plants and discusses them with her group. The relationship and investment she has with her reading materials stands in stark contrast to the relationship that many beginning ESL students have with the basic reading materials used in their classes. Her engagement with her reading materials is literally doing something, while class engagement so often becomes an exercise for learning that does not lead to anything outside the classroom.

I read *Contenido* [Readers’ Digest type magazine]; I love reading the tragic stories that are in there ... and I think: “hopefully I find the courage to do the same to this asshole [her husband].” But look, I just read and I start crying. (Paula)

Another distinguishing factor among his subjects is the degree to which they have appropriated powerful discourses and counterdiscourses. Hernandez-Zamora argues persuasively that it was Sofia’s participation in community organizations (as an activist, healer, and church member) that brought her into social dialogues and exposed her to critical philosophies that counter hegemonic cultural discourses and traditions such as submitting to an abusive husband. These discourses stand in marked contrast to Paula, cited above, who reads her life like a *telenovela*. Her reading practice serves as a form of escape and refuge reaffirming her social status. Unlike Sofia, who left an abusive husband, Paula remains with hers. While Paula’s reading of romance fiction would seem to indicate her developing literacy skill, her reading practice still positions her as a passive victim, much in the same way that the traditional adult basic skills classroom can position marginalized adults as failed learners and illiterates.

Through their life histories and voices, these individuals in Hernandez-Zamora’s book vividly demonstrate how “the freedom to act, speak, act, and make decisions about their lives” is the real driving force behind learning and using literacy—whether it is organizing, starting your own business, participating in a religion, or making the decision to come to the US. Their stories recall the late Gail Weinstein’s words, “Immigrant learners don’t need survival English; they’ve been surviving since they first got here.” Hernandez-Zamora’s book is a reminder and a challenge to us that classroom teaching must encompass more than just words on paper; it must connect to the hopes, dreams, and inspirations that live within our students.