Introduction

Writing from Experience, Revised Edition, is a writing workbook for adults. Such students are at a transitional stage in which they need to continue their mastery of the basic language skills while they gradually develop the rhetorical skills necessary to write effective compositions in today’s high schools, community colleges, and universities.

This workbook is the result of many years of classroom testing, both in the United States and abroad. During this time I have constantly modified my approach to make the text more useful in the classroom. I have also benefited from the suggestions made by teachers at New York University and elsewhere who have tested the materials.

Like the first edition, this revision is content oriented. It also uses the same kind of guided approach to teaching composition through an outline-discussion procedure. However, some new features, in particular, peer review of compositions, journal writing, and summary writing, have been added to enrich the language learning experiences.

Writing from Experience has great flexibility of use. It may be the only text in a writing class or it may be a supplementary text in a grammar class or a class for combined language skills. Because of the great amount of controlled practice in the text, it may also be used in a writing workshop or in a tutorial program staffed by teaching assistants. The wide variety of language practice in Writing from Experience—speaking, writing, reading, listening, grammatical structure—represents a careful integration of the language skills and is designed to maintain student interest.

Because Writing from Experience is intended for students who are still challenged by problems on the sentence level, the workbook does not require them to explore a composition in depth. Students can write from their own knowledge and experience, without much support from readings or lengthy instructions. The composition topics involve mainly rhetorical patterns that are relatively easy to handle, such as description, narrative, and explanation.

The text contains nine units, each dealing with one particular subject. The topics in these units become progressively more comprehensive, and the level of difficulty increases.

Unique Features

1. Rhetorical Control (of the organization and development of compositions)

Rhetorical control comes essentially from an outline given for the main composition in each unit. This outline guides the two stages that are preliminary to the writing of the composition. The first stage provides for a discussion of each item in the outline. The second stage, introduced in Unit 4 after students have gotten used to working from an outline, requires the completion of an organizational work sheet based on the outline. This work sheet, which offers students the opportunity to make preliminary notes, serves as the basis for the final draft of the composition.
Constant use of such outlines makes students aware of the need for an organic structure to their compositions, a structure required by the rhetorical rules of English, but not necessarily by the writing conventions of other languages. The repeated use of outlines also gives students an awareness of paragraph development within the context of the composition, so students get a better feeling for writing effective paragraphs than if they wrote them in isolation.

While the control offered by the outline serves as a loose model for the main composition of each unit, a later practice activity contains a full model. Also, some contextualized exercises offer partial models.

2. Grammatical Control (of the structures needed to write about a particular subject)

The text sets up the preliminary discussion stage in such a way that the teacher can help the students with any of the grammatical structures needed to discuss the subject of the composition. In addition, the text provides many reinforcement exercises for oral and written practice in these structures.

3. Semantic Control (of the vocabulary needed to write about a particular subject)

The discussion stage also offers an opportunity for the teacher to supply needed vocabulary. Furthermore, vocabulary related to the subject is found throughout the exercises, much of it recycled many times.

In addition, many units give students the opportunity to enlarge the vocabulary needed for describing (geography and scenic views, personal characteristics), giving instructions (including recipes), and writing letters.

4. Communicative Control (of the subject matter)

Each unit consists of a concrete topic that lends itself to discussion. Thus, students can talk and write about subjects that come from their own knowledge and experience. What they want to say is merely channeled through an outline. Each unit helps the students expand their thinking on the subject and increases the range of vocabulary needed to discuss the subject.

The discussion of the subject matter in each unit offers the opportunity for cross-cultural exchanges between student and student as well as between students and teacher. Also, the practice materials throughout the text provide the teacher with information that can help in conveying many aspects of American culture.

Organization of the Units

Each of the nine units is divided into six sections:

1. Discussion and Composition
2. Grammar Practice
3. Extra Speaking and Writing Practice
Discussion and Composition

While each unit is about the subject in general, most of the compositions are specifically geared to the student’s own culture. Obviously, for all students of ESL who do not remember much about their native country or who have spent most of their lives in the United States, these compositions can be about the country in which they are presently living.

This section is set up in two parts.

1. **Discussion: Preliminary outline for the composition**
   **(prewriting stage)**

   The guidance for this stage is presented in two columns. The left column is the outline. The right column suggests guidance that the teacher can give as the students discuss the items on the outline. This guidance includes ideas, grammar and usage, and vocabulary, as well as elements of composition building.

   This outline-discussion format facilitates the integration of all the levels of writing—sentence, paragraph, and full composition—in one process.

2. **Composition (to be done before or after the grammar practice)**

   **A. Organizing the Composition**

   From Unit 4 on, each unit includes an organizational work sheet, which is based on the discussion outline and which requires students to set up the structural framework of their compositions.

   The work sheet requires students to indicate the contents of their introductions and conclusions, to write many of the opening sentences of paragraphs, and to list supporting details in each paragraph. Textual notes for each point on the outline guide the students in the use of their paragraphs. Thus, much of the guidance in rhetorical control that was first given orally during the discussion is noted at the appropriate place on the work sheet.

   **B. Writing the Composition**

   In this stage, instructions are given for writing the composition based on the notes made on the organizational work sheet. Also, instructions for the composition’s format are included as needed as a reminder of the form that is to be followed.

   **C. Correcting/Rewriting the Composition**

   The text sets up a procedure for students to correct their own compositions and to learn from their corrections. A Symbol Chart for Correction for Compositions for use by both the teacher and the student appears in the Appendix.

   For Units 1–3, students are asked merely to make the corrections indicated by the symbols. From Unit 4 on, students first exchange compositions before they turn in their compositions to the teacher. In this peer review, students use a guideline to check for the rhetorical
control of the composition and then for editing problems. All compositions will then need to be revised before being turned in.

**Grammar Practice**

This section includes a variety of oral and written drills on structure and vocabulary, many of which are on the sentence level. The choice of grammatical structures has been determined by the need to communicate about a particular subject matter. (Examples of such structures are: In Biography: prepositions of time; In Instructions: passive for a process, conditions for precautions; In Telling Stories: direct and indirect speech.) For this reason, the structures are not graded for degree of difficulty, nor do they cover all problems of grammatical usage. However, an effort has been made to include as many of the basic structures as possible, as a kind of review (and in some cases, an expansion) of structures students have previously learned. An effort has also been made to keep the explanations short and clear, with a minimum of grammatical terminology but with abundant examples.

The contents of the drills are all related to the subject matter of the unit. The vocabulary represents a mixture of formal and conversational styles appropriate for writing. As in the grammatical structures, the vocabulary is not graded.

Among the types of exercises are two of special note that appear in each of the units. One is on word forms. This type has been included because even advanced students continue to have difficulties with the use of the proper part-of-speech suffixes. The other type of exercise contains strings of lexical items that must be made into full sentences. This exercise serves both as a review of sentence structures already practiced in the unit and as further practice in using the appropriate verb forms and structure words such as articles and prepositions.

**Extra Speaking and Writing Practice**

The exercises in this section provide a variety of language activities that offer speaking and writing practice, or both. Many of them can be done by pairs of students or in larger groups. Some of these exercises begin with oral work based on visual material such as a map, a chart, or a diagram. Other oral practice, often leading to writing, may take the form of dialogues, role playing, or interviews.

This section also contains a provision for journal writing. However, most units require students to carry this work with freely written entries a step further. They are asked to use their journal entries as first drafts for a more carefully written work, often a letter to a teacher, a friend, or a family member.

**Listening-Writing Practice**

Each unit has one selection for *dictation* and one for a *dicto-comp* (dictation-composition), all based on the subject matter of the unit. Dicto-comps are longer selections than dictations; students write summaries from the dicto-comps that their teacher reads to them. Most of the dicto-comps serve as models for the main composition of the unit.
Reading-Writing Practice (summary)

Each unit contains a short selection to be summarized. Students are given instructions on how to write a summary, and model summaries are provided on the Web site.

For Your Information

Different materials are given in this section for students’ information and enjoyment. Some examples are: a poem, a recipe, a student composition, a story, and a letter.

Appendix

- Symbol Chart for Correction of Compositions
- Punctuation Rules
- Spelling Rules
- Irregular Verbs
- Answers to all the reinforcement drills in each unit. These answers are particularly useful for students who are doing any of the exercises on their own.

Additional material helpful to students and teachers can be found on the Web site that accompanies this textbook: www.press.umich.edu/esl/writingfromexp. The following material is available:

- Specific suggestions to teachers for handling the work in each of the units.
- Two forms of a structure test that can be administered before and after the practice work with the text, not only to determine student progress, but also to pinpoint areas for student improvement.
- Model summaries for students.