

Letter to the Instructor

Dear Instructor,

This text is intended for advanced bilingual and second language English students. Some of these students have had many years of formal grammar study. Others have learned English by immersion into an English language setting, with limited academic support for their language learning. Many of these students are able to communicate very well but have trouble with academic writing and lack confidence when confronted with grammar books, grammar rules, and grammar tests. I have tried to write clearly for these students while providing explanations that are based on good linguistic research. Because many of these students have lived most of their lives in the United States, I have avoided any discussion questions based on cultural comparison of “your country” versus “our country.”

Language has both rules and words. My specialty is syntax, and this is a grammar text, but it will also give students support as they work to increase the range of their vocabulary. It is impossible to predict exactly which words any person will need or want to learn, but students can be confident that time spent learning words from the Academic and University word lists will not be wasted. These are all words that appear again and again in academic writing and are well worth a few minutes of study with a dictionary.

When we know a word well, we know its meaning, but we also know a lot about its “friends and relations.” “Relations” are the various forms of the word. “Friends” are the collocations the word often appears in. I have tried to use words from the Academic and University word lists in natural ways with appropriate collocations, so that even if students are not concentrating on vocabulary, they will be exposed to words they will need for their college work and to these words’ “friends and relations.” Where possible, I have also tried to take into account the information that corpus-based studies are now giving us on which words are used most frequently in various grammatical patterns (such as passive voice).

In my own teaching experience, it has not been uncommon to have in the same classroom an eighteen-year-old student who has not had any college classes yet and a visiting professor doing post-doctoral research. Therefore, I have included a wide range of discussion and writing prompts. Choose the ones that are best for your class. Often, writing 100 or 200 words on a topic is a very productive experience, but every chapter also contains prompts that are appropriate for development into longer, polished essays.

I decided long ago that in a language classroom, the students are the Olympic athletes, and we teachers are merely coaches. I hope that this book will help you as you help your students in this amazing process of learning a language.

Nancy Ackles