

# Introduction

Around tables in writing centers, in our offices, and outside our classroom doors, we work with student writers one on one. During these often brief encounters, we listen to their questions, we probe, we model, and sometimes we direct. Although these one-on-one encounters are not scripted around curricular goals or learning outcomes, they probably contribute more to the development of their writing abilities than any of the activities that we plan for them because they are personalized and responsive to individual needs. For these encounters to be truly successful, however, we must be prepared. This means being knowledgeable of what it means to write and the factors that make writing more and less effective. We must also know our students—the issues that are likely to be problematic for them, the experiences that may shape their hypotheses, and their potential goals.

This book recognizes that for many of us—whether we are undergraduate consultants working in a writing center, new first-year composition teachers, or experienced English teachers encountering changing demographics in our classroom—second language writers are a group of students that we simply do not know. We may not have learned to write advanced academic papers in a second language, so we feel uncomfortable generalizing from our experiences. If we learned to write primarily by doing it, we may feel more confident talking about what writing should look like than how you get there. Finally, we may see language as distinct from writing and feel unprepared to teach the former.

This book focuses on the body of knowledge that we need to be able to think on our feet, recognize needs, and steer conversations in productive directions when working with second language writers. The guide provides tips about activities that you might adapt to your own contexts, authentic writing samples to role-play how you would handle, and lists of useful knowledge to refer to.

Chapter 1 proposes a series of questions that can be used to determine where to start. Subsequent chapters progress from macro issues like understanding the writer's background and the task at hand to more technical issues like helping second language students with organization, language choice, syntax, and punctuation. Chapter 8 then returns to the issue of how to manage the interaction and make it as productive as possible for the long run. Although the chapters are sequenced, they are intended to be stand-alone units. So read the book cover to cover, or flip to a chapter that seems especially useful for your situation.

Chapters talk about some of the distinctive factors that may influence the way learners write, the craft of writing, and the details of English sentence and discourse structure that may be causing those words and phrases to get in your way. Each chapter includes consulting tips and examples from student essays. The essays were written by actual language learners and are ones I have collected over more than 15 years of teaching. Because it is impossible to go back and contact all of the writers to ask for permission, I have changed all names of people and places to ensure anonymity. Unless otherwise indicated, the texts are reproduced here as they were submitted.

In preparing these materials, I have written from my own experience as an applied linguist, a researcher, and as someone who has taught and learned from second language writers for more than 20 years. I have tried not to assume, however, that the readers of the book will have extensive training in either composition studies or language and linguistics. I recognize that for many people, working with second language writers seems like a daunting task, and my hope is that this book may give them more confidence to work with a group of individuals who have enriched my life in so many ways.

Because this is a book written from experience, I owe incredible debts to the organizations that have supported my work and the people who have been my colleagues, students, and teachers. This project began while I was teaching at the University of Houston where I benefitted tremendously from discussions with

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