TO THE TEACHER

Thinking Beyond the Text: Critical Reading for Academic Success is aimed at advanced college or college-bound ESL readers, although developing readers at the college level whose native language is English could also profitably use it. It is a theme-based text with an academic focus designed not only to challenge its readers to read closely for understanding, but also to go beyond the literal content of a text and to engage in critical thinking and investigation. Our intention has been to produce a text that will serve as a suitable bridge between most of the ESL reading texts currently available and the texts used in the academic disciplines.

Deciding which themes and readings to include has required us to search, browse, and read extensively to identify compelling themes and associated readings that would balance a number of considerations. First, we have made an effort to select readings that we felt would be interesting and accessible to our readers while at the same time not minimizing challenge. Although we have included several articles from popular press sources, in general, we have strived to find readings more representative of academic media, while trying to avoid writing that we felt would be too technical or overly loaded with academic jargon.

We have also sought to include readings that are somewhat longer than those usually encountered in texts designed for ESL readers, although in some cases it has been necessary for us to abridge a reading when we felt its length was disproportionate to its companion articles. Of course, a number of selections are not self-contained articles at all but excerpts from book-length works. With these excerpts, it has been necessary to find convenient beginning and ending points without compromising the coherence of the excerpt; this was not always easy.

Finally, while not departing entirely from what have become traditional themes in anthologies intended for general education courses, we have nevertheless tried to give this book an original slant. For instance, Unit 2: Language and Being, straddles a number of disciplines, (i.e., artificial intelligence, linguistics, philosophy of mind) not often attempted in books such as this. Unit 4: Thinking About Sport avoids the usual celebrity approach in favor of an intellectually challenging journey into sport from an academic point of view.

We have successfully used many of the materials in this book with students enrolled in the English Language Institute at the University of South Florida and the Intensive English Language Institute at Utah State University. With few exceptions, the topics have generated enthusiasm, and students have found the readings and supporting exercises challenging and thought provoking.
Organization

*Thinking Beyond the Text* is organized into four thematic units consisting of three readings per unit.

- 1—Environmental Issues: a necessarily cursory glimpse of a broad field with global implications
- 2—Language and Being: an inquiry into the boundaries of language and human identity
- 3—Global Health Issues: an overview of some global challenges to public health
- 4—Thinking About Sport: critical reflections on the definition of sport and the excitement of competition

Features

Each unit consists of these components:

- **Overview.** Each unit opens with a brief overview of the general theme.
- **Readings.** The unit theme is developed through three related or topically linked readings.
- **Pre-Reading Questions.** Every reading is preceded by one or more pre-reading questions or activities designed to activate the reader’s prior knowledge of the topic.
- **Vocabulary Glosses.** In an effort to reduce vocabulary-related barriers to fluent reading, glosses are provided for some lower-frequency vocabulary. Vocabulary for glossing was selected with the aid of the Web VP (VocabProfiler) at [www.lextutor.ca/vp/eng](http://www.lextutor.ca/vp/eng). *Thinking Beyond the Text* is intended for the advanced ESL reader, and we assume readers will know the 2000 most frequently occurring English words as measured by a list such as the West List (West, 1953) as well as a high proportion of words in higher frequency bands. In using terms like higher and lower frequency, we do not mean to imply any scientifically rigorous threshold for defining frequency. Lower-frequency means only that glossed words are not among the 2000 most frequently occurring words, and based on our professional

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1 Web VP (maintained by Tom Cobb) code the vocabulary of a text as belonging to one of the following four categories: (1) the first 1,000 most frequent words on the General Service List (West, 1953), (2) the second 1,000 most frequent words, (3) the Academic Word List (AWL) composed of 570 word families found with high-frequency in academic texts (Coxhead, 2000), and (4) off-list words—meaning words that are neither among the 2,000 most frequent words nor among the 570 word families on the AWL. In *Thinking Beyond the Text*, all glossed vocabulary consists of off-list words.
judgment a large percentage of student readers are not likely to be familiar with them.

- **Critical Focus.** Associated with most readings in the first three units is at least one academic reading/critical thinking strategy. Critical Focus boxes, explaining the strategy are usually positioned after the reading. Critical Focus advice is aimed at increasing a reader’s ability to read and think critically about the content of a reading or follow up on it in some way. Unit 4 has only one new Critical Focus section, but several previously introduced skills are recycled.

- **Critical Focus Application.** Critical Focus boxes are followed by application tasks, which provide the reader an opportunity to use what has been presented within the context of the preceding reading selection.

- **Getting at the Matter.** Every reading has a section entitled Getting at the Matter, which consists of questions, tasks, or activities for enhancing comprehension of the main points of the reading.

- **Academic Vocabulary Focus.** Every reading is accompanied by a section that draws the reader’s attention to a selection of vocabulary from Averil Coxhead’s (2000) Academic Word List (AWL). Web VP was used to identify all academic vocabulary in each reading, and we have selected approximately 15 academic vocabulary items in each reading for special attention through a variety of exercises and activities. To select vocabulary items for each unit, we first developed a database of all academic words in each reading. We then used the database to identify overlap in the occurrence of particular items across readings (ignoring the possibility that the same word could be used in different senses) and tried to select items in such a way as to give the widest coverage without exceeding 15 words per reading. We have limited the selection to 15 because in our experience, students tend to feel overwhelmed when confronted with vocabulary lists that are much longer.

- **For Discussion.** Suggestions for discussion, many of which can be carried out either through writing or conversation, accompany each reading. Discussion allows readers to elaborate on content, extend the themes through reflection on personal associations, or work on developing written and oral fluency through response to the readings.

- **For Further Investigation.** Each unit ends with this section; here readers will find suggestions for follow-up tasks and research projects through which they can explore connections between readings or learn more about writers, sources, organizations, or aspects of a topic mentioned in the readings.

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In general, the components are ordered in the same way throughout the book; however, the placement of the Critical Focus section may differ from one reading to another because we have placed it where we feel it best complements the other components of a reading. For instance, in Unit 3, it makes more sense to position Previewing a Text before rather than after the reading. In Unit 2, we have placed the Critical Focus: Comparing Points of View after rather before the Getting at the Matter discussion, a reversal of our usual practice, because it makes sense to discuss singly all points of view that will be involved in a comparison before moving on to compare various points of view. However, in many cases there is no reason why you could not reverse the order of these sections.

The placement of Academic Vocabulary Focus is also somewhat arbitrary. Although we have positioned it after Getting at the Matter and before For Discussion, there is no reason why it could not immediately follow the reading. We invite students and instructors to decide when the right time is to focus on the selected Academic Vocabulary Focus section.

REFERENCES
