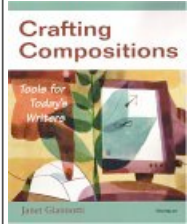


Crafting Compositions: Tools for Today's Writers

Author:	Janet Giannotti (2004)		
Publisher:	Ann Arbor: Michigan Press		
Title	Pages	ISBN	Price
Student Book	Pp. xiii + 245	0-472-08933-1	\$19.95



Crafting Compositions: Tools for Today's Writers is aimed at the beginner ESL student unfamiliar with English language writing conventions and is an excellent tool for any ESL composition teacher. Structured thematically, this textbook is divided into six chapters, with titles such as *Narrating Experiences*, *Giving Examples*, and *Cause and Effect*, to name a few. The writing activities are largely expressivist, (i.e., personal narratives), because, as the author notes "personal writing is the best way to help your students become stronger and more confident writers" (p. ix).

The textbook does not subscribe to the belief that writing should be taught separately from reading. As a result, each chapter begins with an authentic opinion article from a college newspaper, and these articles then become the basis for eliciting reactions from students and developing awareness of rhetorical strategy. Many composition researchers hold the belief that reading and writing have a significant relationship (Shanahan, 1984; Esmaili, 2002; Eisterhold, 1990; Tierney & Shanahan, 1991), thus the two are often taught together, as is the case here.

To deepen understanding of each chapter's article and the rhetorical strategies used, each chapter follows with a series of exercises on content and analysis. These are well-formulated exercises, and usefully illustrate the rhetorical skills and strategies many writers employ. Analysis questions are particularly useful in developing an awareness of writing strategies, and these questions deconstruct topics such as direct and indirect quoting, developing lead-ins to a text, and writing a conclusion. The activities usually culminate in a freewriting activity in which students integrate personal reactions and practice previously studied rhetorical techniques.

In addition to broad composition skills (i.e., brainstorming content, organization, giving examples, quoting, providing background), students also develop their writing at the sentential and inter-sentential level through mini-lessons. These mini-lessons cover topics such as modifying the certitude of a statement, developing transitions between sentences, writing conclusion sentences, giving examples, and demonstrating cause and effect. Each chapter also focuses on a grammatical aspect of writing such as the use of possessives, nominalizations, infinitives, and gerunds.

Crafting Compositions incorporates peer input into many activities. This benefits students by giving them reactions from real readers and developing a real sense of audience (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). Students have opportunities to respond to their classmates drafts in a number of ways. For example, students react to composition length, assess task completion, identify main points, establish clarity of main points, and make determinations about the support those main points receive. The exercises also encourage students to give positive, constructive feedback. This is subtle but important component because positive feedback engenders high self-esteem, and this then makes for better, more confident writers.

To encourage students to reflect on their writing and the process, sections called *Learning Logs* are located throughout the textbook to foster a metacognitive awareness of writing processes. For example, students might be asked to reflect on effectiveness of an essay title, identify differences between *for example* and *such as*, or consider how to organize a cause and effect paper. Although not necessary for achieving a proper understanding of the chapter, the *Learning Logs* are a handy addition for any teacher wanting to cover a particular topic more fully.

The final stage of the writing process is polishing. To develop an editorial disposition, students do exercises at the end of each chapter that offer instruction on proofreading symbols, checking classmate's drafts for grammar mistakes, spelling, and punctuation errors, and learning to identify and shorten overly long sentences.

Crafting Compositions adheres to the process approach (brainstorming, freewriting, selecting ideas, rewriting, proofreading) of writing, and does this by balancing reading, grammar study, and writing. An underlying tenet of the book is that through self-discovery exercises, students learn about the process of writing, and I feel this book is successful in doing this.

Crafting Compositions is an excellent tool for the ESL composition teacher who believes in integrated and balanced approach to the learning of writing. I heartily recommend *Crafting Compositions* for any ESL teacher seeking an effective classroom textbook, a reference tool, or an additional source of composition exercises.

References

- Eisterhold, J. C. (1990). Reading-writing connections: Toward a description for second language learners. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Second language writing: Research insights for the classroom* (pp. 88-101). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Esmaeili, H. (2002). Integrated reading and writing tasks and ESL students' reading and writing performance in an English language test. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 58, 599-622.
- Scarcella, R., & Oxford, R. (1992). *The tapestry of language learning: The individual in the communicative classroom*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Shanahan, T. (1984). Nature of reading-writing relation: An exploratory multivariate analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 76, 466-477.
- Tierney, R. J., & Shanahan, T. (1991). Research on the reading-writing relationship: Interactions, transactions, and outcomes. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, & P. D.

Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 2, pp. 246-280), New York: Longman.

Matthew Currier
University of Northern Iowa
<matthewcurrier@hotmail.com>

© Copyright rests with authors. Please cite TESL-EJ appropriately.

Editor's Note: The HTML version contains no page numbers. Please use the [PDF version](#) of this article for citations.