

## BOOK REVIEW

**Peter G. Beidler. *Writing Matters*.  
Seattle, WA: Coffeetown Press,  
2010.**

Even though there are many books on how to write in English, this one is outstanding in its vivid lecture style. All the author says in this book sounds as if he were speaking directly to the readers, as his students in a writing course. Therefore, the book is never boring. It is easy to understand and the tone is lively. The author says in the preface that this book is designed to help college students learn to write better essays. Indeed in each chapter, there is an important lesson to learn for inexperienced writers. For instance, in Chapters 1 and 2, he tries to convince the reader that everyone has to be able to write. A convincing case he cites is a person who has become an engineer because he thought that being an engineer, he does not have to write. However, in the engineering profession, 25 percent of his responsibility is to write. He also supports his point by a fact that a survey of 120 major American corporations employing nearly 8 million people concludes that in today's workplace, writing is a threshold skill for hiring and promotion among salaried professionals. He says, "Writing is a ticket to professional opportunity, while poorly written job applications are a figurative kiss of death. ....Individual opportunity in the United States depends critically on the ability to present one's thoughts coherently,

cogently, and persuasively on paper." He also argues that writing is not talent, but that everybody can learn to be a good writer. Indeed, his book aims to teach us how to be one.

The content of this book is organized into 26 chapters, as follows:

1. Writing in the Professional World
2. Nervous Grumblings about Writing
3. What is an acceptable essay?
4. Your thesis sentence
5. Finding Your Writing
6. Building a Strong Essay
7. Writing to Discover
8. The Parts of an Essay
9. Introductions Are Not All the Same
10. Something of Substance to Say
11. Speaking of Voice
12. Organizing Your Essay
13. The Chronological Approach
14. Comparing and Contrasting
15. Dealing with the Opposition
16. Look at Your Audience
17. Writing with Others
18. Standing above Our Defenses
19. A Healthy Body Paragraph
20. Doctoring a Sickly Body Paragraph
21. Good Writing is Good Thinking
22. Good Writing is Good Development
23. Finding the Right Word

- 24. Writing Concretely
- 25. Mephobia: An Eye for a Ewe
- 26. Moving out

Chapters 1 and 2, as mentioned above, serve as an introduction in which the author tries to convince how important it is to be able to write well.

In Chapters 3-7, the author gives general advice. For example, he practically suggests that one should at least be able to write an acceptable essay, which he defines as “a bold, clear, and well-developed argument presented in a unified, cohesive, and organized form.” The writer must develop a thesis or topic to argue for, must discover his/her own best writing process step by step, and should finally discover something new.

Chapters 8-12 focus on parts of an essay. Chapter 8 reminds us that an essay is composed of an introduction, body and conclusion and explains how each part is important. Details about introductions are given in Chapter 9. The point that the author emphasizes is that we must announce our point of argument in the introduction. Chapter 10 deals with substance of the essay in the body part, and Chapter 11 focuses on the point to keep in mind that the writer must convey his/her tone, attitude, posture or personality. Chapter 12 should be very useful to all who want to develop their writing skill because the author practically teaches us how to organize our essay

through five methods from the simplest to the most complex; namely, listing, cause and effect, definition, classification, and analysis.

Chapters 13-15 deal with approaches to good writing. In Chapter 13, the author discusses chronological approach. Then in chapter 14, he explains the comparing and contrasting approach. Chapter 15 is about the opposition approach.

Chapter 16-18 concern how to behave as a professional writer. A lot of practical advices are provided concerning how to deal with the audience, the co-authors, and criticisms including our defense mechanisms.

In Chapter 19, the author goes back to how to write a paragraph again. Here step-by-step guidelines are given in terms of developing a topic sentence and supporting details. Then in Chapter 20, he goes on talking about how to correct a bad essay into a good one by giving examples of sentences that we should avoid.

Many more useful advices are given in Chapters 21-25. The author emphasizes clear thought in writing--to cite his actual words: “Good writing is good thinking.” All the rest concerns good development of ideas, finding the right word, writing concretely, and mentioning oneself in writing (using “I” or “we”). This last advice is influenced by

the non-detached style of academic writing in American English.

In the last chapter, the author emphasizes that good writers should not imitate others. On the contrary, they should “trust their own instincts about what works in writing” and “generate their own principles of good writing.”

A few additional parts are added at the end of the book. The most useful part is about editing. This part is long and full of suggestions and concrete examples showing how to turn faulty English to better English. The book ends with a page on proofreader’s marks.

To conclude, this is a very useful and practical book for anyone who dreams to be a good academic writer. The author not only provides clear suggestions, guidelines, and examples for every step of writing, but he also gives convincing reasons and explanations to convince the reader why they should follow him. This is a book written by a truly experienced writer and teacher.

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