



***College Writing Skills With Readings (10th ed.)***

John Langan and Zoe Albright

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ADAM BRAZENAS

*Beijing Foreign Studies University, China*

In a college writing course, students often desire direct instruction on exemplar academic writing. Many teachers of first-year college students are well aware that the first semester involves a bit of a learning curve before students become accustomed to academic essay writing. For L1 English speakers, this learning curve may not be quite as steep and the process of writing may quickly become salient. However, in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), it is helpful to break down the process into more digestible blocks using scaffolding activities and providing high-quality examples for students to model.

*College Writing Skills With Readings* by John Langan and Zoe Albright is a straightforward attempt to simplify the concepts of writing into a step-by-step process that can be easily understood by L2 writers. The textbook itemizes the components of writing in four bases “essential to effective writing”: unity, support, coherence, and sentence skills. Each of these “bases” is first delineated with justifications for its significance and contribution to successful essay writing. Subsequent chapters include exercises and essay examples that place a significant emphasis on the writing process—aiming to empower students to be successful, independent writers of English.

The book is divided into five parts: Essay Writing, Patterns of Essay Development, Special Skills, Handbook of Sentence Skills, and Readings for Writers. Part 1, Essay Writing, starts by introducing some basic concepts of essay writing such as making a point, providing evidence, and structuring an essay. The authors break down essay writing into four steps: writing a thesis, supporting it with adequate details, connecting and organizing paragraphs, and revising sentences.

Part 2, Patterns of Essay Development, outlines and provides examples of the various types of essays that students might be tasked with writing: descriptive, narrative, process, cause-and-effect, and argumentative essays. These authors emphasize that these samples are reflective of “three key

realms of their lives—personal, academic, and workplace.” L2 writers should appreciate the abundance of acceptable writing samples for modeling.

Part 3, Academic Writing, includes examples of three major forms of academic writing: a summary, a report, and a research paper. The progression of this chapter’s activities to increasingly complicated writing makes the content more accessible for L2 students. Teachers of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) will find this section in the book particularly useful, and it should prove handy as a reference for L2 students to bookmark before writing their first research paper in English.

L2 students should find the focus on “grammar rules” in Part 4 of the book familiar. It contains a catalog of common sentence-skill rules as well as activities to help identify and remedy common mistakes. For example, the three sections contain exercises on fragments, run-ons, modifiers, capitalization, the use of numbers and abbreviations, formatting rules, and punctuation.

Finally, Part 5 of the textbook is a collection of professional essays, each of which is accompanied by contextual introductions explaining the author’s background and historical context, reading-comprehension questions, and several writing prompts related to the readings. The essays are aimed at developing reading skills that will serve students as writers, helping them expand their approaches to writing and explore meaningful topics. This section of the book can be used as a supplemental tool used for noticing activities, as the focus here is on reading rather than composition.

Perhaps the greatest strength of this textbook comes in the form of real-life student writing samples, which makes conceptualizing the lessons more accessible. While there may be a case to be made for professional essays’ being used in a classroom of L1 English speakers, it would be a mistake to assume that the same materials should be used exclusively in EFL contexts. *College Writing Skills With Readings* shines in this regard since the students can focus on straightforward samples illustrating key concepts as opposed to sometimes overly complex, professional samples. It should be mentioned, however, that professional essays are not excluded from the textbook, and they do in fact provide a welcome contrast to the more formulaic student writing samples.

One slight weakness of the textbook is that there is not much material dedicated to research-based writing. That being said, the section on writing research papers, although brief, does, at least, cover the main points of selecting a topic, planning and drafting the paper, and using appropriate citations.

*College Writing Skills With Readings* is a useful textbook for L2 writers starting from the basics of writing and working up to more complex structures. Langan and Albright encourage writers to see writing as a process-based skill that can be conquered bit by bit. Each chapter does a noteworthy

job of justifying the importance of each step in the writing process, provides various models of writing, includes activities to check understanding and reinforce concepts, and much more. In addition, the systematic layout by which the textbook explores different methods of organizing essays should make it easy for students to try out diverse approaches to organizing their essays.

Having used *College Writing Skills With Readings* in an EFL first-year writing course in China, I can enthusiastically recommend this textbook. I found the writing prompts both practical and relatable. Students reported satisfaction with the structured approach to writing, particularly the controlled practice exercises and model essays. The process-oriented approach of this book serves as a solid framework helping to guide students in developing their own high-caliber, academic essays.

### ***What Error Correction Can(not) Accomplish for Second Language Writers***

Dana Ferris

The University of Michigan Press (Kindle Ed.), 2018.

**CHRISTINA TORRES**

*University of Central Florida*

Second language (L2) writing instructors must make many choices when treating errors in students' papers. Dana Ferris's *What Error Correction Can(not) Accomplish for Second Language Writers* is a highly relevant and accessible resource for L2 writing teachers, especially at the university or secondary level.

This text, available only as an e-book, provides research-informed recommendations toward treatment of error in L2 writing while maintaining an easy-to-follow format. The e-book is an updated and expanded version of Ferris's contribution to *Writing Myths* (Reid, 2008). The text's format begins with a real-world story, follows with research evidence, and finishes with practical research-based advice.

The introduction begins with a relatable personal anecdote for many writing teachers: diligent error correction of L2 student papers intended to reduce grammar errors in future drafts, only to observe minimal apparent progress on subsequent papers despite this feedback effort. Ferris connects this lesson from early classroom-teaching experiences to a subsequent personal drive to research this area. While noting that grammar will not always be the main criterion for all evaluation of student writing, Ferris acknowledges the very real judgment that grammatical errors may bring to L2 writ-

ing. This segues into the second section of the text—existing research, which includes three main messages:

1. L2 acquisition takes time;
2. L1 and L2 writers' texts are different;
3. "Diligent teacher correction and student editing does not lead to perfect error-free texts" (p. 5).

These three research-related messages are supplemented by sources for further study, but they do not delve into methodology or statistical findings of the research literature. Rather, this section of the text thoughtfully provides a sampling of relevant research findings while emphasizing practitioner applications. Ferris's takeaway message is that achievement of perfect error-free writing within the scope of one L2 writing class is a myth. Understandably, subscribing to this myth can place an unwarranted strain on both students and teachers.

After acknowledging the existing differences between L1 and L2 writers' texts, the section on error correction in the L2 classroom highlights six strategies teachers can use to assist L2 students making progress as writers. Ferris's first two strategies relate to research findings on the importance of allowing time for L2 writing and the revision process. For example, time-constrained L2 writing may reveal errors within students' abilities to correct if given more time. Also, application of mini-deadlines for writing assignments may curb tendencies to procrastinate and lead to higher-quality final products.

The next three strategies on error correction offer multiple avenues for training students to revise their written work, emphasizing the reflective application of feedback and facilitating learner autonomy. These suggestions include teaching self-editing strategies, holding students accountable for self-editing while reflecting on their progress, and providing focused expert feedback targeted to individual needs. Emphasizing autonomy is a helpful reminder to diligent and well-meaning L2 teachers that students will eventually not have access to the same level of feedback possible in an L2 writing class.

Ferris's suggestions on focused expert feedback, highlighting different strategy options for teachers to use with L2 writing, were highly usable. For example, Ferris identifies dynamic written corrective feedback (DWCF) as a valuable feedback method, which combines comprehensive coded feedback from teachers with error-pattern identification by students while maintaining a manageable teacher workload using short student papers. Research also shows positive gains in L2 accuracy for university-level writers using this feedback method (Evans, Hartshorn, & Strong-Krause, 2011). Relevant

sources associated with Ferris's classroom suggestions for feedback are noted for the reader.

The last of the six strategies on error correction suggests bridging gaps in L2 writer knowledge with instructed minilessons and guided self-study. This message reiterates the importance of L2 writing classroom focus on feedback and self-editing strategies rather than "cram[ming] students' heads full of explicit grammar knowledge" (p. 4). Familiarity with error patterns, such as articles and plural nouns, can become part of self-editing practices. Ferris clearly acknowledges the value in short grammar lessons as long as these are explicitly targeted toward classroom writing tasks. A takeaway here is noting that simply completing grammar exercises successfully does not mean grammatical knowledge will automatically transfer to written work.

Before the e-book's conclusion, several principles for L2 writing classrooms are provided. Of these principles, a simple but helpful reminder is that grammar instruction should be directly targeted toward student needs and not take focus away from the main aspect of a writing course: the writing. Suggestions are provided for implementing language-skill minilessons and establishing self-study protocols; these suggestions are supplemented with materials in the appendices, another expansion in the e-book edition. One of my favorite suggestions is the goal-setting activity, which uses different colors to code types of errors. I can easily imagine this activity being useful for my writing students.

Ferris's work is a convenient combination of research-based advice with practical use for writing teachers as they prepare for their next class. I appreciate the readability and acknowledge Ferris's expertise in this area. However, I would have liked to have more scholarship highlighted for further reading in the section of the text that discourages the use of timed writing assessments in L2 writing classes, especially since the book recognizes that timed writing is something L2 writers may encounter in their writing courses.

I greatly enjoyed reading Ferris's work and highly recommend it to colleagues for personal reading and teacher training. Additionally, the work is easy to buy and instantly downloadable to Kindle. For the cost of a cup of coffee, this well-organized and accessible read can be a welcome addition to L2 writing teachers' resources.

## References

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***Social Justice Literacies in the English Classroom:  
Teaching Practice in Action***

Ashley S. Boyd

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XIATINGHAN XU

*University of Southern California*

In the last few decades, the concept of social justice, access to equitable and quality education for all students, has gained significant attention in the field of education, especially in ESL classrooms. How can teachers integrate social-justice approaches into current curriculum required at the local and state levels? What difficulties do teachers face in their roles as equity agents? How can teachers address these difficulties? Ashley Boyd, assistant professor of English Education at Washington State University and a former secondary English language arts teacher, addresses these questions in her book, *Social Justice Literacies in the English Classroom: Teaching Practice in Action*. Boyd suggests that it is the teacher's lived experiences, how he or she has seen social justice enhanced or unachieved, rather than his or her ethnicity or race, that has the greatest influence on teaching practices and attitudes toward social justice.

Overall, Boyd's book is a great resource for teachers who teach students from different backgrounds. The book is divided into three parts: Social Justice and the Teacher, Social Justice and the Classroom, and Social Justice Beyond the Walls of the English Classroom. First, Boyd defines social justice and builds connections between social justice and English teaching. Social justice, Boyd explains, "denotes a commitment to understanding, studying and continuously discerning systems of oppression and to taking action to work against those structures for a better and more equitable society for all individuals" (p. 5). She contends that it is the teacher's responsibility to be critically conscious and help students develop literacies both in and out of class.

In the first part, Boyd takes a "teacher vignette" approach, showcasing the backgrounds, teaching contexts, and philosophies of three teachers who bravely and actively devote themselves to social justice teaching. Boyd emphasizes the importance of personal experiences over race and ethnicity in shaping the teachers' values and teaching philosophy. She suggests that everyone can make his or her own contribution, including White teachers, who make up the majority of American secondary school teachers.

In the second part, Boyd analyzes how these three teachers exemplify the teaching of social justice through their pedagogies. For instance, one teacher, Etta, instills the concept of social justice by building relationships with students and embodying transformative language practices. These lan-

guage practices include: (a) using inclusive language that makes everyone in the classroom feel welcomed and cared for; (b) disrupting language that is harmful, upholds stereotypes, or maintains oppression; and (c) employing nonverbal materials, such as visuals, to create an inclusive atmosphere. She encourages inclusive language such as asking students their preferred gender pronouns and using *team* instead of *class* when referring to a group of students and avoiding the normative masculine pronoun *guys*. Etta also advocates for marginalized students, including one who identifies as transgender, and Etta shares her personal life with her students.

The final section of the book offers some suggestions on how educators can cultivate students as agents of change, transforming the concept of social justice into actions outside of school. This section also presents challenges that educators may encounter when promoting social justice action projects, including resistance from stakeholders and internalized institution pressures.

One strength of the book is the vivid, detailed examples from authentic scenarios of teaching in the English classroom that bridge theoretical and pedagogical foundations of social justice. For example, when explaining the employment of symbolic language, nonverbal utterances, or visual language, Boyd offers detailed depictions of the visuals in Etta's classroom, including "Safe Zone" stickers, posters on the wall, banners on the door reminding everyone of the importance of inclusiveness and diversity, quotes from famous figures, and images of the Global Theater. These examples of symbolic language create a vivid picture for readers of how to integrate social justice practices into the real-world classroom.

The timely nature of the topics makes this book even more significant. Boyd addresses many pressing issues in education today, including the struggle of minoritized students, disruptive student behaviors resulting, at times, in student-teacher conflict, and pressures on teachers from disagreements with parents and backlash from governing institutions. A second timely issue discussed by Boyd is using multimodality to increase students' critical consciousness. According to Hollie (2018), multimodality is an essential skill of 21st-century learners in our current "Age of Information." For example, in each teacher vignette, the author shows how the production of multimodal texts can increase students' engagement and classroom inclusivity.

One small shortcoming of the book is that the suggestions on advancing social justice practices might be too general or abstract for novice teachers, who can feel overwhelmed at the rich information provided and who need more specific guidance in designing and implementing action projects related to social justice, as well as initial steps to establish partnerships with other parties.

Overall, Boyd's clear and organized structure, rich and reflective con-

tent, deep and detailed analysis, and inspiring and thought-provoking nature make this book a pleasure to read. The comprehensive solutions addressing current issues and obstacles would be helpful for teachers who are considering implementing social justice teaching into their classrooms. This book has shaped my own teaching practice—giving me strategies for placing more attention on my students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds and sexual orientations. I have learned to cultivate a more aware classroom space. As Deborah Appleman concludes in the foreword she wrote for this book, “We should admit to ourselves that not only do we want students to become better readers and better writers, but also that we want them to become better people.”

### **Reference**

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