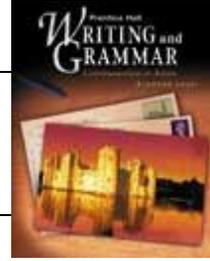# Writing and Grammar
Communication in Action – Diamond Level

I chose this 2004 textbook because I believe it closely matches my teaching philosophy (especially problem solving, performance and collaboration) and provides a solid starting point for the social perspective of teaching. Page 535 of the article "Competing Theories of Process: A critique and a Proposal", by Lester Faigley, summarizes my view of the social perspective best: "human language (including writing) can be understood only from the perspective of a society rather than a single individual."

This textbook stresses practice over process, but not by much. Prewriting, draft, revise, edit/proofread, publish and present become an ordered theme established early in the book and appears throughout the textbook. Studies by Rohman and Wecke have shown that pre-writing activities increase the quality of writing. The article "Teach Writing as a Process Not Product", by Donald M. Murray, estimates that "prewriting usually takes about 85% of the writer's time."

Students often have limited time due to an increasing workload, so the textbook provides a constant flow of information and visuals to the reader including several printable pages readers/teachers can copy/use as learning aids. The textbook clusters subjects in relatively short lengths so readers can easily navigate and read key points. Topics are organized into parts, chapters, sections to help facilitate understanding while fulfilling the goals of the subject matter experts – the three authors: Joyce Carroll, Edward Wilson and Gary Forlini.

The prominent and detailed author biographies (on page iv) include adequate credentials, educational background, past writing project and areas of expertise. The qualified authors are backed by a 15-member national advisory panel and a seven-member grammar review team who "ensure accuracy, clarity and pedagogy."

It seems the advertising/marketing and the accompanying Website (www.phschool.com) of this Prentice Hall series want to define this series by grade level when the textbooks themselves make no reference to grade level at all (not on the book cover or table of contents, only as 'precious stone' levels of copper, bronze, silver, gold, platinum, ruby and diamond levels). The textbook I reviewed had a library code sticker that defined the diamond level as grade 12 which lead to my research that designated each level consecutively with grades 6 through 12.

The practical, affordable textbook usually ranges between $20 and $25. Students will still need complimentary materials, mostly writing guides such as APA, MLA, Chicago Manual of Style, etc., which unfortunately get minimal coverage in the content. The accompanying workbook edition usually ranges between $13 and $18.

This review will focus on three main areas:

- ➢ Content – comprehensive and sometimes overwhelming material on several subjects that's relatable and connective to readers, especially in the social context
- ➢ Layout – creating a decent roadmap allows readers to navigate through the numerous subjects
- ➢ Multimedia/technology – an increasingly popular complimentary component combining on-line/CD-ROM capabilities

All these components create a high volume of guiding material that helps the reader shape and dissiminate their ideas and writing/communication work.

Content

The textbook's content presents a lot of exercises and comprehensive blanket of terms and correlating examples the repeat and reinforce key concepts. There are two tables of content that combine to create a three tiered system for optimal readability and reader manageability. The second table of contents summarizes the three main parts of the book:

Part 1: Writing (sixteen chapters, 229 pages)
Part 2: Grammar, Usage and Mechanics (eleven chapters, 347 pages)
Part 3: Academic and Workplace Skills (five chapters, 98 pages)

The title of the book seems to stress the importance of writing over grammar, but authors devote most of the content to grammar, mainly in exercises which average about 30 for each chapter. The text book's content organization has an excellent pace. The writing section fills the reader with ideas, theologies and concepts, then the grammar section utilizes exercises and academic/workplace examples and finishes with more practical examples.

Authors give the reader some background instead of throwing them into free writing exercises. In Part 1: Writing, the beginning chapter (1 – The Writer in You) helps the reader find their voice, then chapter 2 outline the progression theme of Prewriting, draft, revise, edit/proofread, publish and present that's utilized in chapters (4 through 15) follows the common theme of prewriting, draft, revise, edit/proofread, publish and present and is outlined in the table of contents (pages viii to xx).

The writing section is more content based and does not have any exercise sections. For example, on page 38 the authors describe "shaping your writing" by using examples that include character, dialogue, setting and theme which are inclusive of all writing areas. The authors even foreshadow Part 2: Grammar, Usage and Mechanics in the Writing part on page 39 with a "grammar and the style tip". This technique cues the reader into techniques they must use to understand terms and know when to apply them, which required a lot of careful organization and planning to avoid misleading information.

Authors categorize concepts to give readers the ability to communicate and express themselves about related subjects that include debate, speechwriting, marketing, public relations, political science, linguistics, psychology, cognitive sciences, composition, rhetoric, literature, anthropology, journalism, history, sociology and technical communication. Authors also categorize writing into specific groups. For example, essays are categorized into compare-contrast, cause-effect and problem-solution.

The textbook helps promote a high level of interaction that supports a flexible teaching model that creates a collaborative relationship between the students and teachers. Still, this content is mostly based on exercises and drills, not discussion and open ended questions.

The textbook is flexible enough where the teacher can create questions or even ask the reader what they think about the book (especially important if no one is asking questions about the text). Teachers may have to stress the reader's importance often to keep their motivation level high, otherwise the reader could get lost in a sea of endless exercises and tasks. Teachers can use the academic and workplace example as possible discussion tangents that readers can discuss in class. The textbook examples have the potential to make the student workload overwhelming, but the flexible options allow teachers to balance the workload.

The examples work well, especially because the authors draw the examples from a pool of students with an age that's comparable to the targeted reader (usually listing the name, school and location in the upper right). The examples also give readers a realistic, but general sense of the workplace process. Exercises such as in-basket exercises and student internship journals would've improved Part 3.

The examples include managing time and money/budgets, but set no real limits specifically toward writing such as word limits, an important aspect of writing especially in journalism. If writers don't get the cognitive skills that include setting parameters and meeting specific criteria they can't always controls then the work world could be more of a challenge. I would stress more research activities, which are usually implied (like the "critical viewing" where readers write about a blacksmith's duties). For example, the authors ask students to create a multimedia presentation on page 597, but give no limitations to the time length. The authors could balance the exercises by asking for students to choose one type of media to help them gain problem solving skills they will encounter in the real world. Ideally time length and resources should not be a factor, but writers must learn to adapt and conform while retaining their creativity and process skills.

The authors use meaningful names that include the titles "student work in progress" and "writers in action", but the frequency of terms is often too high and some titles have workplace context that the reader might not understand yet.

Supplementary information near the end of the book doesn't make a large impact because it's organized almost as an afterthought, though the index is fairly thorough. The student publication page on 696 displays limited examples, but, after further research, found

these examples were well-established Web sources that won't go away, so the book seems outdated.

Layout

The textbook has many options and activities for readers, but could use a simpler focus on themes amid the numerous exercises, examples and visuals.

The crowded layout hurts readability when the content requires a high concentration from the reader, but does include enough spacing and white space.

The textbook also lists web codes on page iii. The page lists grammar exercises first, but could've combined both codes egk-1201 (writing) and egk-1202 (grammar) into one table where the audience would see them as equally important.

The layout mainly uses color and white space as the transitional elements between paragraphs and topics. Many of the individual page layouts can support a handout format, usually prompted by colored boxes and table (e.g. pages 681-684 - *style guides*). The layout allows for separate handouts (e.g. page 91, 678 and 696 - *editing and proofreading marks*). The visuals include examples and pictures of readers from many cultures while promoting different perspectives and creativity.

The margins use thin, vertical lines to separate the visuals/call out boxes. The headers display utilizes color along with the left vertical color strip. Special sections and ending chapter summaries/exercises use a color strip on the right margin. The footers include redundant information (e.g. the left side is also listed on the right header), crowd the pages a bit, but help readers find the information easier with mini clusters and boxed colored visuals.

Readers can navigate through the information quickly because of the great color coded themes and organization which stimulates interest and allows for quick reference.

The online content and exercises (e.g. www.phschool.com/atschool/writing_grammar/diamond/grammar_practice_activities) don't follow the same style as the book combined with aggravating navigation and windows that wouldn't resize (making some content unreadable) were major stumbling blocks.

Multimedia/technology

The online/CD-ROM components transition well from textbook to technology and are featured throughout the textbook with prompts, call out boxes and web codes (also featured prominently in the upper right corner of the textbook). The textbook orients the student with the web codes in the beginning pages then repeats the web codes so the student doesn't have to keep going to the first page of the book to find them again. Readers can use the multimedia components as an accessible tool to further their writing

skills and gain experience in another discourse that not only has social implications (e-mail, Websites ,etc.) but practical uses such as adapting to standardized tests like the ACT and GRE that were previously in paper format only.

The online Web page at www.phschool.com/atschool/writing_grammar/for_parents.html states "the Web site provides helpful instruction tips in a non-threatening environment", which demonstrates how even a presumed marketing communication reflects the importance of social discourse and its effect(s) on writing and the reader's environment. Teachers still need to control the on-line/CD-ROM even though the instructions/exercises might be specific. They can't leave the reader to their own devices and might considering initial guidance in the classroom and/or computer lab.

The added value of the multimedia components provides that "anywhere and any time" theme of collaboration that ignites reader interest. Technology and multimedia has become a great promoter of independent learning, but that independent reader has to keep a *consistent* level of interest to continue collaboration/interaction to enhance their learning. Still, if the teacher doesn't exert the proper controls and/or the reader isn't motivated, these components won't get used to their full potential. The multimedia provides extra motivation through self tests with instant answers and other activities where the teacher can check student progress.

The main Website is easily accessible and doesn't seem to require any login information such as a username or password (the top of the screen said "Welcome Mike Edson"). Online content includes rubrics for self-assessment for Part 1: Writing chapters (4 through 15) and the Part 2: Grammar chapters (17 through 27).

Other resources on the Website include state standard lesson plans and the e-rater™, an electronic essay-scoring system. The e-rater™ was hard to find (www.phschool.com/iText/wag), but was worth the effort. Additional elements updated on a daily basis included the "Word of the Day" from the *New York Times*.

The multimedia/technology tools are there, it's up to the teacher to navigate through the badly designed site and make the technology more collaborative not isolated for the reader. The book wisely incorporates technology which stresses independent learning/exploration and specific, detailed tasks at the same time, but hurts usability with some crowded layouts and poor navigation in the online/CD-ROM component.

Final Points

The content, layout and multimedia/technology components create a high volume of guiding material that helps the reader shape and dissiminate their ideas and writing/communication work. Summaries, study guides and other comprehensive learning aids fill this textbook which is definitely worth the purchase price. Readers who want to read the entire text will find constant themes and interesting topics, but also experience a lack of focus and the temptation to go off on tangents.

Readers will encounter the social perspective of teaching deeper in their college education, but teachers should still keep control and always consider the social context during the writing process. The book is based on student and work experience as the authors apparently attempt to balance both worlds together while building on existing knowledge. The combination of these experiences presents a general concept of the social discourse and its effect on writing.

Though the book contains primarily lexical and grammatical exercises, the academic and workplace examples allow the reader to use the process of discovery to learn as well. The textbook allows for exploration and specific, detailed tasks at the same time. I would use this book to teach writing to high school students who are preparing for college writing and/or preparing for ACT tests because they cover writing, grammar and rhetoric comprehensively with essential multimedia/technology elements such as knowledge of technology-based writing/communication, such as web page construction, and other collaborative activities.

The authors' almost overwhelming focus on technology and practice did have some casualties such as minimal coverage of style guides and editing/proofreading marks, which are greatly stressed in college writing.

The authors address the readers with familiar terms that activate their cognition skills while building a comprehensive, flexible work that anticipates the readers' attitudes and expectations. Many of the activities and exercises are geared towards individuals because the textbook rarely instructs and/or prompts group work, so the teacher must step in and make these decisions to add more process driven activities such as peer reviews. This exercise should occur in a controlled setting like the classroom in the beginning with a constant option of student continuing on their own to increase their independent learning.

The frequency of activities that can be referenced by the readers can increase the learning process, but relies on voluntary involvement of the reader. This textbook has problem solving, performance and collaboration challenges for readers and teachers. For example, teachers must adapt the largely individual assignments into a group project when necessary requiring a lot of foresight and organization which can build on collaboration elements complimented by the on-line/CD-ROM.

The teacher can utilize the textbook to guide the student's performance in mastering the materials by combing content (accentuated by the layout) and multimedia/technology. For example, readers can continue to access the Web codes that lead the reader from the book to the complimentary on-line resource and/or CD-ROM.

Readers will gain important ground work that will continue in writing at the college level, especially the concepts that reflect the social perspective that touch on key processes and begin to create "audience invoked" writing. Readers can advance gradually in their life role in society as the textbook progresses moving from theory to practicing these theories in the workplace.