

Intermediary

Reason To

Write

Strategies for Success in Academic Writing



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OXFORD

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cause and effect with *such . . . that / so . . . that*

simple present and simple past verbs in an essay on literature

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REASON TO WRITE

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS IN ACADEMIC WRITING

Introduction

Writing in one's own language is difficult enough. Imagine how much more daunting a task it is for students to write in a second language. If the weight of writer's block does not inhibit their impulse to move forward with a writing assignment, their insecurity with the language and its particular writing culture might make them stare at the blank page with trepidation. ESL/EFL teachers thus have a dual challenge: Not only must they help the most reticent and timid writers overcome a potentially crippling writing phobia, but they must also instill in their students the confidence needed to translate their thoughts into correct and acceptable English. The communicative approach that we use in the *Reason to Write* series will help teachers achieve this end.

Even though the writing product is an expression of one's individuality and personality, it is important to remember that writing is also a social endeavor, a way of communicating with others, informing them, persuading them, and debating with them. In our attempt to provide guidelines, strategies, and practice in writing for university, college, community college, and high school ESL/EFL students who are preparing for the academic demands of all disciplines in higher education, we want them to realize that they are not writing in a vacuum. They have a voice, and what they write will elicit a reaction from others. Therefore, in our books writing is an active communicative/social process that involves discussion, interaction with teachers, group work, pair work, and peer evaluation. Through these collaborative experiences, students come to recognize their unique strengths while cultivating their critical-thinking skills and becoming more effective writers.

Content-based themes that speak to both the hearts and minds of students are the key to realizing our goal. Writing can develop only where there is meaning; it cannot be an empty exercise in form. And meaning cannot be understood unless students are given intellectually challenging and emotionally appealing material that generates their enthusiasm. Because all instruction in grammar, vocabulary, and rhetorical styles is presented in relation to a theme, each unit provides a seamless path from reading to thinking to writing—from the preparatory stages of writing to the completion of a final composition. Working with one theme, the whole class experiences the same problem or issue together so students benefit from the security of shared discussion and exploration. As a result, writers are not left to suffer alone with the blank page. At the same time, students are given several writing options within each theme so that there is ample opportunity for individual expression.

Content-based themes also encourage the kind of critical thinking that students are expected to do across the curriculum in a college or university.

Because many English-language learners may lack some of the analytical skills needed to do academic work, we provide them with experience in analyzing ideas, making inferences, supporting opinions, understanding points of view, and writing for different audiences. As students “reason to write,” they practice the skills and strategies that are vital for academic success, and they have an opportunity to write on a wide variety of themes that reflect the academic curriculum.

There are five main sections in each unit:

I. Fluency Practice: Freewriting

All units begin with an unstructured writing task in which students can freely express their thoughts and share them with a partner, without worrying about grammar or spelling. In this section, students explore the theme of the unit by drawing on their own knowledge and ideas. As a result, they enter subsequent discussions with more self-assurance.

II. Reading for Writing

In order to develop as a writer, one must be a reader. Therefore, each unit contains a provocative reading passage followed by a series of writing activities that culminate in the main writing task of the unit. In this section, students consider the meaning of the reading and they work with the vocabulary and syntactic forms needed for discussing and writing.

III. Prewriting Activities

This section prepares the students for the main writing task by developing their interpretive skills. They must “read between the lines”—infer the motives of individuals in various scenarios and write from different points of view. They are also asked to write short opinions of their own—and learn to summarize group discussions. As they complete these small writing tasks, students give and receive immediate feedback through ongoing dialogue with a partner or group, building confidence for the main writing task in the next section.

IV. Structured Writing Focus

When students reach the main writing task, they realize that all their work in previous sections has prepared them for this central writing assignment. Because we feel that students should be given choices, we have provided an alternative writing task.

In this section of the unit, students are guided through a series of steps that will lead them to the successful completion of the writing task. In the first book of the *Reason to Write* series, students learn the rudiments of writing a well-developed paragraph. In this second book, they acquire the skill needed to write well-developed essays. In Unit 1, students review paragraph unity and coherence. In Units 2 and 3, they write three-paragraph essays. In Units 6 through 10, students write five-paragraph

essays. Students practice writing introductions and conclusions, thesis statements, transitional sentences, and supplying details. They negotiate tasks as varied as writing a personal narrative, interpreting the language of graphs, and writing five-paragraph essays, such as cause and effect, satirical, argumentative, and comparison-contrast. At the end of the second book of this series, students respond to a final challenge: writing a literary analysis of a famous short story. This last writing assignment brings to light the exciting writing opportunities that students can look forward to in their continued study of English.

To give students the support they need to accomplish the writing tasks, we provide a model for them to follow. The model is on a topic that is similar to the writing topic. Students then work through the brainstorming process and do exercises that help them prepare a first draft. After writing their first draft, they read it to a partner or a small group of students. In this way, peer evaluation becomes a regular part of the writing process and the class becomes a "writing workshop" through which the writing process is demystified. This approach also shows students how to look critically at their own work. Our guidelines for peer work ensure that this is a positive experience, a prelude but not a substitute for feedback from the teacher.

After writing a second draft, students are ready to proofread their work. At this point, the unit focuses on grammar. Students work through various editing exercises that focus on at least one grammar point that is central to the particular writing task and on another grammar point that is a general stumbling block for students at this level. After completing these grammar exercises and editing their second draft, students are ready to write their final draft.

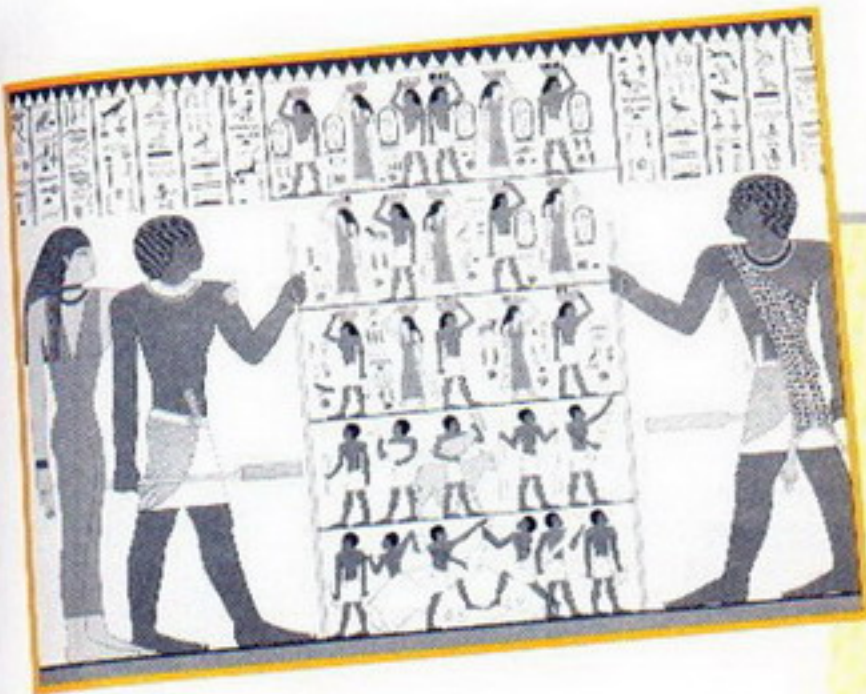
V. Additional Writing Opportunities

We believe that students can perfect their writing skills only by writing a great deal. Therefore, in this section we give them the opportunity to write on a wide variety of additional stimulating topics. However, this time they are writing without our step-by-step guidance. As students learn to avail themselves of this additional writing practice in each unit, they will eventually develop the skills and confidence they need to become independent writers.

In conclusion, the *Reason to Write* series integrates the insights of whole-language learning, writing across the curriculum, and writing workshops. These books were also written with the knowledge that no textbook can come to life and be effective without the creative contributions of the teachers and students who use it. We hope that you and your students will develop a strong connection with the material in this book and thus form a bond with us as you explore the writing process. We would appreciate any suggestions or comments you may have. You can write to us in care of Oxford University Press, ESL Department, 198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016-4314.

Robert F. Cohen and Judy L. Miller

4 THE BEST TIME TO BE ALIVE



WRITING A FIVE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY

In this unit you will practice:

- explaining reasons
- identifying effective thesis statements
- writing topic sentences
- creating coherent paragraph order
- choosing the best conclusion

Editing focus:

- adjective clauses
- present unreal conditionals

I Fluency Practice: Freewriting

If you could choose another time in history to visit, which time period would you choose? What country would you choose? What would you hope to discover?

Write for ten minutes on any of these questions. Try to express yourself as well as you can. Don't worry about mistakes. Share your writing with a partner.

8 FOR AND AGAINST BILINGUAL EDUCATION



WRITING AN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

In this unit you will practice:

- defending your point of view
- refuting opposing views
- conceding to an opposing view and replying
- using the language of concession

Editing focus:

- present unreal conditionals
- connectors: *despite / despite the fact that* and *although / even though*

I

Fluency Practice: Freewriting

When people move to a new country, should they completely assimilate into the culture of that new country or should they keep some aspects of the culture of their old country? Which aspects would be most important for them to keep? their food? clothing? music? entertainment? work habits? religion? language?

Write for ten minutes. Try to express yourself as well as you can. Don't worry about mistakes. Share your writing with a partner.

10 THE TELL-TALE HEART



WRITING AN ESSAY ANALYZING LITERATURE

In this unit you will practice:

- writing about plot, climax, narrative point of view, characters, setting, pace, mood, foreshadowing, irony, and theme
- supporting your interpretation with references and citations

Editing focus:

- cause and effect with *such . . . that / so . . . that*
- simple present and simple past verbs in an essay on literature

I Fluency Practice: Predicting and Freewriting

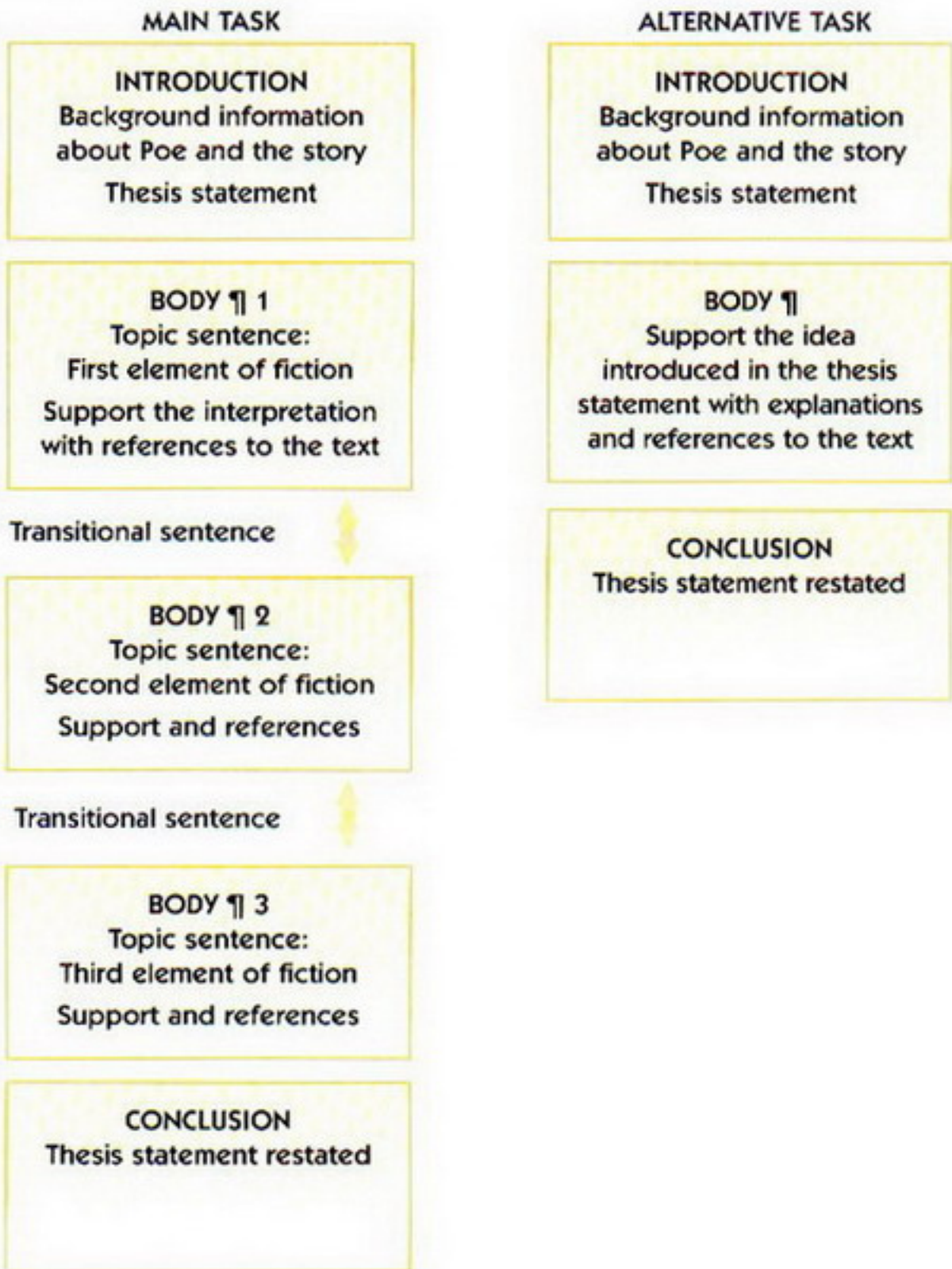
"True!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why *will* you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story."

This is the first paragraph of Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart." What is the narrator (the storyteller and, in this story, the main character) saying to the reader in this first paragraph? What do you think the story is going to be about?

Write for ten minutes in answer to these questions. Then read what you wrote to a partner.

4. Organizing Your Essay

Study these block diagrams to help you write your essay on the main task or on the alternative task. In your notebook, draw your own diagram and write your notes in each of its sections.



Write a *first draft* of your essay. Remember to write in complete sentences and try to use some of the vocabulary and structures that you have practiced in this unit.