Review of *The ESL writer’s handbook*.

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The growing number of international students who come to study at American universities and the over 99,000 students who are specifically enrolled in English language programs (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2013) has revealed the need for well-developed and carefully tailored resources that prepare English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students for academic success. This handbook and workbook combination is one of the resources that has been developed to prepare ESL students for success both in the writing classroom and in their academic careers.

According to the preface, the handbook has two intended audiences: ESL students enrolled in academic content classes, and, when accompanied by the workbook, English-for-academic-purposes (EAP) writing students. Several different features of the text clearly show the intention of this book to serve as a resource for ESL students. For example, the handbook covers a range of topics that are relevant to ESL writers. Within these topics, the range is broad and only relevant details are presented, and this does not overwhelm students with unnecessary information. Additionally, in an attempt to make the text more accessible to and relevant for ESL learners, the handbook uses real examples written by ESL students. Likewise, the workbook uses authentic examples that correspond directly to topics covered in the handbook and it provides further exercises that can be used in class or can be assigned as homework.

The handbook is clearly organized into eight sections. Within each section, there are defined sub-sections that give an overview of the information that follows. This overview is also accompanied by detailed descriptions, examples, and exercises. The book also provides an answer key for all of the exercises provided throughout. Table 1 below is an overview of the content of each of the eight sections.
Table 1  **Content Overview**

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<th>Section</th>
<th>Content</th>
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| Section 1: *The Writing Process* | • Writing process overview  
• Understanding writing assignments  
• Audience  
• Idea Generation | Create an awareness of the writing process and build a foundation of expectation for academic writing. |
| Section 2: *Essay Structure* | • Shaping a paragraph and an essay  
• Revision  
• 10 steps guide to the writing process | Create an awareness of the components and characteristics of an academic essay. |
| Section 3: *Patterns of Essay Organization* | • Narrative, process, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, and argument essays  
• Combining patterns of organization | Create an awareness of purpose and organization of common genres. |
| Section 4: *Research Paper* | • Incorporating sources  
• Drafting  
• Citation styles | Create an awareness of the accepted conventions and guidelines for academic research papers. |
| Section 5: *Grammar and Style* | • Word level grammar  
• Sentence level grammar | Provides intervention for grammatical issues. |
| Section 6: *Punctuation* | • All major punctuation | Describes purpose for and provides intervention in usage of punctuation. |
| Section 7: *Quick Reference* | • Connectors  
• Words often confused  
• Active/passive voice  
• Verb tenses  
• Irregular verb forms  
• Gerunds and infinitives  
• Phrasal verbs | Provides accessible charts for intervention in common writing errors. |
| Section 8: *Special Types of Writing* | • Email guidelines  
• Resumes  
• Cover letters  
• Personal statements | Creates an awareness of professionally-oriented writing. |
This handbook follows a process approach in which the goal is to inform students about the process of writing and to help them learn to write through selected teacher interventions (Susser, 1994). Sections one, two, and four bring awareness to the process of writing, while sections three and eight bring awareness to conventions and guidelines in academia. Sections five, six, and seven provide resources for intervention in terms of specific writing skills. As part of a teacher-lead (or when using this book as a resource, student-initiated) intervention, this handbook’s grammatical section follows a form-focused instruction (FFI) approach. Within a FFI frame, the book implements a present, practice, produce (PPP) structure that explains a grammar point, provides drills or exercises to practice the point, and then expects its readers to apply the point in the student’s own writing.

Though the five-paragraph essay is highly debated, the handbook uses it as a building block for more complex writing. Rather than serving as a model to copy that leads to “formulaic, empty writing” as Macbeth (2002, p. 35) put it, the five-paragraph essay is meant to model the principles of organization that lead students to successfully present ideas in an essay. This approach to writing can be seen in section two (Essay Structure), which outlines important organizational features through the use of a moldable five-paragraph essay. Other models are given in section three (Patterns of Essay Organization), which breaks down the common features of five major essay genres and gives a full-length example essay for each genre. Even though the handbook provides models, it also analyzes the features and functions and explains the complex and dynamic nature of genre, rather than teaching students to copy a static model.

If it were to be used as the sole book for a course, one of the major drawbacks about this text is the lack of free production activities. The majority of the exercises included in the handbook are highly controlled in nature and do not induce free production. Likewise, the biggest concern with the text is that it does not ask students to produce any substantial writing; it merely guides students in the writing process and provides intervention exercises such as error correction tasks, sentence formulation, and vocabulary use.

As mentioned above, the intended audience for this text is EAP writing students. If it is used with the workbook, the author suggests that the handbook can be used as the sole text for an EAP writing class. Having personally used this text for such a class, I would not recommend using it as the only text for a class, primarily because of the lack of substantial writing production discussed above and from a realization that the text offers a broad range of topics at the expense of in-depth explanations. When preparing lessons, I often feel the need to supplement the text with materials that offer more robust explanations and a greater collection of examples of topics covered in the book. This being said, I do believe that the handbook would more appropriately serve
as a true handbook, and should be primarily used for reference. Because it is navigable and accessible, the combination of handbook and textbook could serve as a valuable resource for college students who are enrolled in advanced intensive English programs, in EAP courses, or in non-ESL writing or content courses at the college level. I also find this handbook useful in one-on-one writing sessions with ESL students.

This text has many strengths, namely that is it not a traditional writing textbook, but rather a handbook to be used as a supplement and a resources for students. The workbook increases the usefulness of the book by providing students with additional exercises to implement the skills that are being presented each section. Other features, such as the detailed content section which makes finding information easy, the quick reference which can be referred to while editing a paper, and the many authentic examples, make this handbook a valuable resource for both students and teachers.

References

