*Lesson 1: Critical Thinking,*

*Reading, and Writing Skills*

INTRODUCTION

Understanding basic grammar can help in all parts of your

everyday life, from casual conversation, to emails, to formal

reports. Correct grammar can help you personally, professionally,

and academically.

To become an effective writer, you must first have a strong

understanding of English composition. You should know how

words are pronounced, how they’re spelled, and how they

fit into sentences. Knowing the basics will enable you to be

more comfortable and confident when faced with any

writing task.

The main topics discussed in this section are grammar,

spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and word usage.

OBJECTIVES

When you complete this lesson, you’ll be able to

■ Effectively use your textbook

■ Discuss why writing is an important part of your study

program

■ Understand your unique learning style

■ Use active reading methods to understand and analyze

text

■ Point out the importance of prewriting in developing a

piece of writing

■ Describe the parts of speech and how they work within

sentence structure

Develop effective, structured sentences

■ Use a variety of words in your writing

■ Discuss the need for a strong understanding of English

Composition

ASSIGNMENT 1: GETTING

STARTED

Succeeding in College

People write for two basic reasons. The first is private and

personal. That is, some of us write to express ourselves, to

translate thoughts and feelings into words. One example in

this context is the poet Emily Dickinson. She wrote for herself

and one or two close friends—only a few of her poems

were published during her lifetime. Many people keep personal

journals that express their feelings and sometimes help

them to think through problems or opportunities. Still others

find that writing down ideas and rephrasing concepts helps

them study and learn.

The second reason people write is to convey feelings and

thoughts to others. This purpose covers most other types of

writing, from published novels to advertising, from blogs to

essays for school. By sharing ideas through effective language

skills, we expand our experiences, make personal connections,

and sharpen our communication skills.

For writing to be effective, standard rules must be learned

and applied. You’ll practice using proper grammar, sentence

structure, and organized paragraphs to help you achieve this

purpose.

You can practice good writing by paying close attention while

you’re reading. Pay attention to mistakes, too. If you come

across a sentence or headline in a newspaper that you have

to read several times before you understand it, try rewriting it

to make it clear on the first reading. It may need to be

rearranged, divided into two sentences, or have a comma or

two added. If you can, keep a file of the poor sentences and

your improvements. Note what the problem was and what it

took to fix the sentence. Also, when you write, try reading

aloud from your paper to see if there are any stumbling

places.

The most agile of runners begins with baby steps. Likewise,

all learning proceeds in stages, step by step. For a student of

English composition, here are some of the most important

principles:

Study the rules of effective sentence construction for all

types of sentences, so you’ll be better able to say what

you want to say clearly and concisely.

Learn to make your points directly and effectively. Back

up your statements with evidence that supports your

case and persuades your reader.

Keep your reader’s interest. Even the most boring subjects

can be improved with anecdotes, examples, and

clever word choices.

Approach different kinds of writing and different audiences

in appropriate ways. Letters, memos, academic

essays, instructions, and business reports each require a

different style of writing. Always consider your audience

before you begin writing.

Study the techniques used by skilled writers, including

brainstorming, free association, outlining, organizing,

revision, self-criticism, and editing.

Practical Applications of Writing

As noted earlier, regardless of the career you choose, communication

is a key to success. Virtually all job descriptions

include some kind of paperwork—record keeping, summaries,

analyses—and the higher up the ladder you go, the more

communication will matter. The following examples reveal the

broad range in the types of writing different career fields

require, from using narration to persuasive analysis. Even if

your field of interest isn’t listed, you can see the importance

of writing in a variety of careers.

Early Childhood Education

■ Narration recording weekly observations of playground

behavior among first-grade students

Case study in early-childhood cognitive development

analyzing the concepts of Jean Piaget in light of the

observed behavior of selected subjects

Health Information Technology

■ Process analysis to explain what’s involved in a specific

medical procedure

■ Proposal and illustration of methods by which type-2

diabetes patients may be encouraged to pursue a prescribed

health regimen

Accounting

■ Analytical essay comparing and contrasting the

American double-entry bookkeeping system with the

European five-book system

■ Comparison and analysis of corporate performance in

metals-refining industries based on financial statement

data derived from Moody’s Industrials

Engineering

■ Historical and analytical description of the evolution of

load-bearing theories in bridge construction

■ Process analysis to describe technology and molecular

theory for detecting likely metal stress areas in an aircraft

prototype

ASSIGNMENT 2: WRITING AND

READING TEXT

Introduction

In this chapter, you’ll learn what constitutes academic writing

(as opposed to informal writing). You’ll also learn the

importance of becoming a better writer, and you’ll learn and

develop techniques to improve your writing skills.

Reading Highlights

Pages 21–24

*Academic writing* is distinctive from, say, writing a letter (or

email) to a friend or expressing sentiments in a birthday card

or keeping a personal diary. Here’s a preview of your text’s

view of academic writing:

■ You can expect your writing to shift from personal to less

personal. You’ll use your “left brain” to take an objective—

as opposed to subjective—point of view.

■ Academic writing takes different forms, generally depending

on particular college courses. Lab reports,

critical-analytical essays, book reports, and comparisons

of different cultures will call for different perspectives

and different writing styles. So, put simply, you’ll need to

adopt the language of particular disciplines, such as

world history, labor relations, art appreciation, social

psychology, or organic chemistry.

■ In every case, you’ll be expected to use standard

American English. In many cases you’ll be expected to

properly document sources, conduct online research,

and, quite often, collaborate with fellow students.

■ Expect to read, write, and think critically. Writing essays

allows you to illustrate and apply what you’ve learned in

a course, to prove your points with supporting evidence,

and to defend your positions on various topics.

■ Expect to use and document scholarly sources. Collegelevel

writing requires you to support your reasons with

evidence, so you’ll be required to do research, evaluate

sources, and employ citation and documentation methods

to give credit to the sources you use in your writing.

You’ll review all of the excellent reasons that you should persistently

strive to improve your writing skills. That process

will include developing strategies for writing. To that end, be

assured that you’ll get lots of useful tips, from how to make

the best use of a course syllabus to discovering the virtues of

keeping a writing journal.

Pages 24–25

Writing skills are essential in a world that depends on digital

communication for academics, social networking, and business. In

school, taking notes, outlining, summarizing and annotating help

you to retain information. The ability to write well will also help

you succeed in your future career. Employers look for job candidates

who have not only specialized knowledge in their disciplines,

but also strong oral and written communication skills.

Writing also helps you to think and to solve problems. By

writing about issues, whether they’re personal, academic or

professional, you can gain perspective and decide how to

address them.

Pages 25–30

There are many resources available to support you in your

writing course, but the most important factor is your attitude

toward writing. Writing takes more time than most students

expect, so if you know that before you start, you won’t get

frustrated. Use your time effectively from the start by thinking

of writing as a process. The time you spend planning and

drafting will pay off when it’s time to revise.

Take advantage of the resources your school provides by

reading your syllabus carefully and learning about the services

that are available, such as tutoring. You can find out

more about the student support and online services that

Penn Foster offers by reading the introduction to this study

guide.

Pages 30–39

Discovering your learning style is a crucial part of this

course. Take the “Learning Style Inventory” on pages 32–35,

your text will guide you through the scoring process. You’ll

discover where you stand in terms of five dichotomies:

■ *Independent or Social*. Do you like to work alone, or do

you prefer collaborating within a group?

■ *Pragmatic or Creative*. Do you like to line up your ducks

and follow clear rules or guidelines? Or do you prefer

open-ended problems that allow you to bend the rules in

interesting and innovative ways?

■ *Verbal or Spatial*. Do you rely in language and language

skills to analyze a problem? Or do you prefer gathering

information from photo images, graphs, charts, and

graphic metaphors?

■ *Rational or Emotional*. In writing an essay, do you prefer

a cool and objective weighing of facts and figures? Or do

you prefer finding the right words to express your subjective

intuitions and feelings?

*Concrete or Abstract*. In a critical essay, would you focus

on observable facts and step-by-step analysis? Or are

you inclined to seek out underlying assumptions to

reveal the “big picture”?

After you’ve got a sense of your learning style, your text will

offer you some handy tips for applying your particular learning

style to different kinds of writing challenges.

TIP: Figure 2.3 on page 39, “Your Strengths as a Writer,”

offers you a graphic you can use to assess your learning

style.

Required Journal Entry 1:

Me, A Writer?

Attitude: After reading Chapters 1 and 2 in your textbook, describe

your attitude toward completing this course. As part of the description,

explore how your feelings about being required to take a

composition course may affect your performance in accomplishing

the course objectives. (1 paragraph, 6 sentences)

Inventory: As part of this assignment, you’ll take the Learning

Inventory quiz starting on page 32 in your textbook. Explain what

you learned about yourself as a writer working through the inventory

exercise. Discuss two ways you want to improve as a writer and

why. (1 paragraph, 6 sentences)

ASSIGNMENT 3: WRITING

PROBLEMS AND HOW TO

CORRECT THEM

Introduction

Your textbook includes a complete reference handbook that

covers the parts of speech, sentence construction, punctuation,

and mechanics. Please note that while this lesson covers some

elements of correctness in writing, your instructors expect that

you’ll refer to the handbook to check rules for punctuation, diction,

capitalization, spelling, and other facets of writing. You’re

responsible for revising, editing, and proofreading your writing,

and will be graded on these elements.

Reading Highlights

Pages 721–734

Before you can write a clear and grammatically correct sentence,

you must have a command of the kinds of words you’ll

use for speaking and writing. In this section of your study

unit, you’re going to examine eight different types of words,

or parts of speech. They are nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives,

adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, and interjections.

■ When we’re small children, *nouns* are generally the first

words we learn. Any person, place, or thing is a noun.

Nouns can be broken down into five categories: common,

proper, collective, abstract, and concrete. Understanding

the various types of nouns and how they’re used in sentences

can help you become a stronger writer.

■ *Pronouns* substitute for nouns. Like nouns, pronouns

can serve many purposes in a sentence. There are six

types of pronouns: personal, possessive, demonstrative,

interrogative, relative, and indefinite.

■ *Verbs* express action; they tell what the subject of a sentence

is doing. Depending on the action and when it’s

taking place, a verb can appear in many forms, and it

can be more than one word. Pay special attention to the

figures that give you examples of verbs in various tenses

in both singular and plural forms.

■ *Adjectives* describe nouns and pronouns, and they can

make your speaking and writing more definite. Adjectives

generally help answer a question (What kind? Which

one? How many? How much?), and they can indicate

color, size, or shape.

■ An *adverb* is generally used to modify a verb, but it can

also be used to describe an adjective or other adverb.

Adverbs answer other questions: How? When? Where?

Why? How much? How long? To what extent? In what

direction?

■ A *conjunction* joins words, groups of words, or sentences.

There are three kinds of conjunctions: coordinating conjunctions,

correlative conjunctions, and subjunctive

conjunctions.

■ A *preposition* shows the logical relationship or placement

of a noun or pronoun in relation to another word in a

sentence. Many prepositions show placement, but some

refer to time or a relationship between two things.

■ An *interjection* expresses emotion. It doesn’t relate to the

other words within the sentence, but it’s used to add an

emotional element. A sentence with an interjection often

ends in an exclamation point.

Pages 735–742

The following section examines the various parts of a sentence,

which your textbook defines as a complete thought

about something or someone. Sentences can be simple, com

plex, or compound, depending on the number of elements

included. Complete sentences must include both a subject

and a predicate, and can also contain other grammatical

structures:

■ The part of the sentence that names the person, place, or

thing about which a statement is made is the *subject*.

There are three types of subjects: a *simple subject*, represented

by one noun or pronoun; a *complete subject*,

made up of a noun or pronoun described by other words;

and *compound subjects*, which are made up of two simple

subjects joined by a coordinating conjunction.

■ The *predicate* is the part of the sentence that includes

one or more verbs and modifiers, and tells us what the

subject does, what happens to the subject, or what is

said about the subject. Predicates can be simple, complete,

or compound.

*Objects* are the recipients of actions described by the

verb or predicate. A *direct object* is a noun or pronoun

that is directly affected by the action of a verb or reflects

the result of the action. An *indirect object* is the person

or thing to or for whom the action of the verb is done.

■ *Complements* are groups of words that describe either

the subject or object of a sentence in a way that completes

the meaning of the sentence.

■ A *phrase* is an incomplete thought, lacking either a subject,

a predicate, or both. This section examines several

different kinds of phrases, including prepositional

phrases, verbal phrases, participial phrases, gerund

phrases, infinitive phrases, appositive phrases, and

absolute phrases.

■ A *clause* contains both a subject and a predicate, but

may not always stand as a complete sentence. *Independent*

*clauses*, for example, can stand alone because they express a

complete thought. *Dependent clauses*, while they do include a

subject and predicate, don’t express a complete thought.

Pages 741–742

This section of your textbook describes the four different

types of sentences: simple, compound, complex, and compound-

complex. The types of sentences differ depending on

the type and variety of clauses included in the sentence.

Pages 742–752

Sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and comma splices

are common sentence-structure errors in student writing.

Learning to identify them will help you when you reach the

revision stage and will improve your writing tremendously.

■ A *sentence fragment* is a group of words that can’t stand

alone as a complete sentence (page 742)

■ A *run-on sentence* occurs when two or more independent

clauses are joined without a punctuation mark or coordinating

conjunction (page 747)

■ A *comma splice* occurs when a word other than a coordinating

conjunction is used with a comma to join two or

more independent clauses (page 747).

Pages 752–757

Parts of sentences, such as subjects and verbs, and tenses

and numbers, need to match. Not only is this correct grammar,

but it will help your audience stay focused on your ideas and

not the errors in your writing. In the revision stage, ensure that

your sentences are correct by focusing on *agreement*.

■ Subjects and verbs must agree in person and number.

*Person* refers to the forms—first, second, and third—

while number denotes singular or plural. In a sentence,

subjects and verbs need to be consistent in person and

number for your sentence to flow smoothly (page 752).

■ Use singular verbs with most *collective nouns* (such as

*family* and *committee*) and *indefinite pronouns* (such as

*anyone* and *everybody*) (pages 753–754).