

# Preface

The *In Focus* texts are aimed at high-intermediate to advanced students who would like to sharpen their writing skills. Native and non-native speakers who need a concise guide to effective writing will find the *In Focus* books useful. The purpose of *In Focus* is to offer writers suggestions on how to enjoy the writing process and improve the written product. While teaching both academic and business writing to university students and working professionals for many years, I have developed a practical approach that provides a structure for managing writing as well as strategies for achieving an effective style. The *In Focus* texts assume that students have successfully completed writing books that taught good paragraph writing and the process approach, introduced them to academic writing terms like *coherence* and *voice*, and familiarized them with the grammar and understanding of punctuation that produce good writing. These texts will build on those skills, offering specific practice in aspects of writing that will develop the skills needed to produce more advanced levels of academic and business writing.

*In Focus: Strategies for Academic Writing* incorporates the process approach to writing, with pre-writing analysis to clarify goals and post-writing editing and revision to refine style. The chapters contain short excerpts from professional authors as well as student-written models for the various genres. Most of the models are the final version of a document that has been through a number of drafts, so errors in grammar and mechanics have been corrected. These models give students practice in the critical evaluation of a document's strengths and weaknesses, which helps students become better editors of their own work and better peer editors of their classmates' work. After reading each model, students will discuss and practice specific strategies through a variety of tasks and then apply these strategies to their writing assignment. Students should be warned that the readings contain vocabulary with which they aren't familiar. Applying good vocabulary and reading skills will help students through the new vocabulary.

*In Focus: Strategies for Academic Writers* features academic writing assignments on the **paragraph, summary, essay, critical review, synthesis, argument, and research paper.** The text also encourages **response writing** in which students become accustomed to reacting to an article or idea and putting their reaction in writing, without revision. Thus, they gain confidence in their ability to articulate their ideas in written form.<sup>1</sup>

Chapters 1 and 2 lay the groundwork for the remaining chapters with an explanation of the **Focus Approach** and the **Power Writing Process.** When writers use the Focus Approach, a pre-writing technique, they clarify their thinking about the writing task as they consider these five factors:

- Format
- Organization
- Content
- Understanding
- Style

The **Power Writing Process** enables writers to take control of the writing task by breaking down the project into five discrete steps. This application of a well-known time management technique (the “Swiss Cheese” method described by Alan Lakein<sup>2</sup>) makes any writing assignment manageable and less intimidating because it emphasizes working on one part of the writing project at a time. When doing a writing assignment, writers will find the task easier to complete if they follow these steps:

<u>Prepare</u>	<u>Outline</u>	<u>Write</u>	<u>Edit</u>	<u>Rewrite</u>
Purpose	Thesis	Content	Clarity	Accuracy
Audience	Major points	Organization	Coherence	Readability
Goal	Minor points	Style	Conciseness	
	Supporting data		Precision	

<sup>1</sup> Response writing prepares students for the Next Generation TOEFL® (iBT®), which has two types of writing: a 30-minute opinion or preference (independent) essay and a 20-minute response to a reading and a lecture about the same topic (integrated essay). In 2005, the SAT® added a section called “Raw Writing” in which students submit a first draft without revising it. This section tests the ability to write quickly and concisely about a topic.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Lakein, *How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life* (New York: Signet, 1974).

Of course, even a good textbook on writing may be of little use to those writers, both professional and amateur, who sometimes experience the inability to write, a problem called writer's block, or writing anxiety. Therefore, four techniques that can help students handle their writing anxiety are described and practiced in Chapter 3. These techniques prepare writers to cope with their anxiety in ways that minimize stress and maximize flexibility, thus building confidence and enhancing enjoyment of the writing process.

Chapter 4 addresses editing and proofreading. The act of writing demands the ability not only to think creatively but also to think critically and analytically, as an editor. Advanced grammar and proofreading tasks are included to serve as a reminder that proofreaders should be knowledgeable about the mechanics of writing. Chapter 5 on effective academic style follows the review of grammar since writers can best concentrate on sophisticated stylistic concerns after they have mastered the basics.

Chapters 6 through 12 provide guidelines and strategies for specific forms of academic writing, growing in complexity from the paragraph to the research paper. The final chapter, *Your Authentic Voice*, encourages students to trust their natural abilities, to explore their own authentic voices, and to enjoy the process of writing.

Six appendixes supplement the basic subjects of the text: Appendix A offers definitions of writing terms; Appendix B has examples of writing styles; Appendix C lists sentence connectors; Appendix D contains a step-by-step explanation of the Power Writing Process for each assignment; Appendix E has writing evaluation forms; and Appendix F offers tips on conducting Internet research.

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### A NOTE ON DOCUMENTATION FORMAT

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When writers incorporate another person's words, facts, or ideas into their own writing, they must cite the source of this information. The three most commonly used documentation formats in academic writing are the APA (American Psychological Association), the MLA (Modern Language Association), and the Turabian/*Chicago Manual of Style*. Many of the writing assignments in this text require the use of outside sources and the documentation of these sources. The MLA in-text citation format is suggested for these assignments. However, students may prefer to use the documentation format required in their academic field.

The MLA citation format gives the author's last name and the page number in parentheses in the text. It lists all sources at the end of the paper as Works Cited, arranged alphabetically by the author's last name, or by title if no author is identified. The recommended text is the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: MLA, 2003).

The following websites contain information about the three major documentation formats:

- American Psychological Association: *www.apastyle.org* (contains guidelines and examples)
- Modern Language Association: *www.mla.org* (contains links but no guidelines and examples)
- Turabian/*Chicago Manual of Style*: *www.press.uchicago.edu* (contains FAQs and links but no guidelines and examples)

In addition, Duke University provides a Guide to Library Research with comprehensive information about citation rules under Citing Sources (Citing Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism: Documentation Guidelines) at *www.lib.duke.edu/libguide/*. For the rules on citation of electronic sources, see Citation Styles: Using MLA Style to Cite and Document Sources in Online! at *www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/cite5.html*.

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## ONLINE WRITING RESOURCES

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This textbook contains models of writing assignments and short excerpts from published authors, but students can consult the following online resources for more writing guidelines and examples:

- Purdue University Online Writing Laboratory: *http://owl.english.purdue.edu/*
- The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Writers' Workshop: *www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/writersworkshop/*