

Citation

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***Write Away Right Away: Second Edition* by D.F. Martin (2010), A Book Review**

Michael Mondejar, Teachers College, Columbia University, Tokyo.

The vast majority of English writing textbooks focus on fostering academic writing skills in second-language learners; while the need for academic writing has not diminished, an increasing number of students require instruction in more practical genres of writing. *Write Away Right Away: Second edition* seeks to cater to these students, particularly those situated in Japan.

Write Away Right Away: Second edition is a 12-unit, expanded and updated version of the original 1995 text. It is a process-oriented writing textbook, in that it aims to assist learners in “developing strategies for generating, drafting, and refining ideas” (Hyland, 2003, p. 12). Despite the process emphasis, the author claims that the text “focuses less on academic writing and more on practical, realistic types of writing which students may actually need” (p. iv). To this end, the text features a variety of writing genres that are not normally found in academic writing coursebooks – students will find themselves writing cookbook recipes, restaurant reviews and e-mails instead of opinion or argumentative essays.

Repetition of a core set of tasks in every unit seems to be the bread and butter of this textbook. A typical unit begins with a freewriting warm-up activity, after which learners analyze a model text based on the theme of the unit. Students then engage in a series of tasks based on the writing process – brainstorming, writing planning, drafting and revision. The revision cycle espoused by the textbook follows a certain pattern: Students engage in self-editing as well as peer feedback and receive teacher feedback after the 1st and 2nd drafts respectively, which they utilize to refine their writing. The intent of this repetition is to facilitate the automaticity of the writing process in students, thereby allowing them to devote more cognitive resources to developing the content of their compositions without sacrificing organizational and cohesive features (Gass and Selinker, 2008).

This is not to say that every unit features the same set activities, constantly repeated until



students become bored with them. The text achieves novelty in a variety of ways. The process writing tasks themselves vary from unit to unit because each one deals with a different essay type or genre. New material is also seamlessly interwoven between the steps in the form of vocabulary building, grammar instruction, or essay organization activities. Finally, each unit ends with a different “Fun Writing Activity”, where students can engage in less-structured, more interactive writing tasks.

One of the strengths of *Write Away Right Away* is the ease with which one can understand the directions and tasks in the text. The book utilizes simple language in relatively large font, and there is a lower amount of text compared to other writing coursebooks. The textbook also contains a copious amount of visuals – pictures, charts and diagrams – in order to aid students’ comprehension of the material. Although these visuals lack color, they are hand-drawn in a cartoon style, making them memorable and amusing to text-users. The balance of simple text and plentiful use of visuals make this textbook one of the most user-friendly writing texts I’ve ever seen.

Another strength of this textbook is that it is very context-specific. According to the author, *Write Away Right Away* is suitable for a “low-intermediate level writing course designed specifically for Japanese university students” (p. iv). The author goes on to assert that “the majority of texts claiming to be designed for the Japanese market are, in fact, aimed at a larger Asian/world market. *Write Away Right Away* is able to meet the needs of Japanese students better because it focuses on the needs of a specific population” (p. iv). This claim is well-supported by the content of the book; pictures of Japanese characters, Japanese text, and Japanese cultural references and interest are peppered throughout the book. Of course, the narrow focus of this particular textbook is a double-edge sword – while it may make the text more applicable and accessible to its intended users, the context-specificity also detracts from the book’s usefulness in writing courses outside of the Japanese university setting.

One cannot help but notice the similarity between *Write Away Right Away* and *Talk a Lot Book 2*, a conversation-based text from the same publisher, EFL Press. In fact, the two coursebooks share many of the same materials and activities. The parallels between these texts seem to be intentional: not only are they geared towards the same proficiency level, but the author states that *Write Away Right Away* can function as a supplement for a mixed-skills class, which *Talk a Lot Book 2* seems to be written for. Indeed, the complementary nature of both texts



suggests that the mixed-skills *Talk a Lot Book 2* would serve as an excellent supplement for a writing course based on *Write Away Right Away*.

I am currently using *Write Away Right Away* as a supplementary text in my university freshman writing course. I am finding that the students in the class are generally reacting more positively to this text than the main coursebook of the class, *Paragraph writing: From sentence to paragraph* (Zemach & Islam, 2005). The visuals and simple text are of great aid to the weaker students in the class, and writing in a variety of genres is interesting and enjoyable for the class. The Japanese focus of much of the material makes the text culturally-relevant and engaging. I am planning on switching to *Write Away Right Away* as the main textbook of this writing class next year.

Overall, I find *Write Away Right Away* to be a solid English writing textbook. The repetition of the task types will aid students in internalizing the writing process, while the variety of genres explored in the text will maintain student interest in the material. The simple directions and heavy use of visuals will help weaker students with task comprehension, although the Japanese cultural references that permeate the text limit its usefulness outside of its intended setting. If you are teaching writing at a Japanese university, looking for a fun and easy-to-understand textbook to teach from, and can get past the non-academic nature of several of the writing tasks, then *Write Away Right Away* may be the right textbook for you.

References

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