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**WRITING
BETTER
ENGLISH**

AN ESL WORKBOOK

Develop practical writing skills

Learn essential vocabulary and grammar

Evaluate your progress as you learn

Ed Swick

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Improve Your Writing Skills at Your Own Pace

Writing in any language can be a tricky skill to acquire; writing in a second language can be even more difficult. As an ESL student, you need to have a solid understanding of grammar basics, vocabulary, and tense usage. Now, *Writing Better English* helps you improve your writing skills with a series of easy-to-follow exercises and practical writing activities that allow you to apply what you've learned and keep track of your progress.

You'll begin by assessing your readiness to write, working with basic grammatical structures such as verb tenses, conjunctions, and pronouns. Then you'll move on to sentence writing, where you'll complete sentences with original phrases. You'll practice the various concepts with review exercises, repeating any section until you're comfortable. As you develop and enhance your skills, you'll learn how to:

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- ▲ Write natural-sounding sentences
- ▲ Compose personal and business letters
- ▲ Create original stories
- ▲ Increase your proficiency in vocabulary usage

You can use the answer key not only to check your work but also to find suggestions for writing appropriate sentences for any of the exercises. So whether you're looking to supplement your classroom work or studying on your own, *Writing Better English* has all the tools you need to develop practical writing skills and communicate with confidence.

ED SWICK has taught German, Russian, and ESL for thirty years. During this time, he has written numerous literary and textbook materials on these subjects.

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AN ESL WORKBOOK

Ed Swick

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Introduction

Writing in any language is a difficult skill to acquire. Therefore, as an ESL student you should approach writing in English carefully. In order to write well, you want to first have an understanding of grammatical structures, vocabulary, and tense usage. You practice those concepts until you can use them with relative ease. Then you are ready to practice writing original material.

This book does two things:

1. It gives you an abundant review of basic structures.
2. It provides various forms of writing practice within a controlled program that focuses on improving the skills needed to write accurately.

In Chapter 1 you will have the opportunity to learn or review grammar basics. By checking the Answer Key at the end of this book, you can find the correct or example answers to the exercises. If you have an English-speaking friend, you might ask him or her to check your work.

If you wish, you can follow your progress by using a very simple method. After each exercise, count every word that you have written—even little words like *the*, *a*, *and*, or *but*. Then count every error you have made in spelling, tense, word order, missing words, or any other potential mistake.

Divide the number of words you have written (W) by the number of errors (E) you have made. The result is a number (N) that you can compare after every exercise you write:

$$W \div E = N$$

If you wrote sixty words and made twelve errors, you would come up with:

$$60 \div 12 = 5$$

If the number is getting larger, you are making progress.

After completing the review exercises, you will be ready to begin Chapter 2. In this chapter you will complete sentences with your original phrases, and you will use your own ideas as you write. You will see a sentence similar to this:

John borrowed _____ to get to work.

You might write something like this:

John borrowed his father's new car to get to work.

For each exercise in Chapter 3 you will compose ten short, original sentences while using a phrase as the specific element in each sentence. For example:

Sample phrase: The new car

Used as the subject: The new car is in the garage.

Used as the direct object: Mary loved the new car.

Used after the preposition to: A man came up to the new car.

You may, of course, use dictionaries and grammar books as aids in order to write as correctly as possible. You could give yourself a time limit (fifteen minutes or thirty minutes) for writing the exercise, but use the same number of minutes each time you write.

In Chapter 4 you will fill in the missing phrases or sentences in a story. They can be any phrases or sentences that you wish, but they must conform to the plot of the story. For example:

The Diamond Ring

The robber crept into the hallway of the dark house and turned on the light. On the desk he saw a beautiful silver box holding a diamond ring, which he put in his pocket. Then he opened the window, jumped to the ground, and fled down the street.

Chapter 5 deals with letter writing. Each letter can be written within the same framework of time (fifteen minutes, thirty minutes, or longer). There is a difference between “friendly” letters and “business” letters. This part of the writing program will help you to write both types of letters.

In Chapter 6 you will write original stories. The stories are to be based on the assigned topic, and they should include the grammar structures indicated. For example:

Sample title: Lost in the Desert

Include these structures:

the relative pronoun *which*

to want to in the past perfect tense

the conjunction *if*

You would then write a story about someone lost and roaming the desert. You would probably write of heat and thirst and of the difficulties of finding a way to safety. And somewhere in your story you would have three sentences similar to these (which include the required sample structures):

She believed she saw a lake, **which**, unfortunately, was only a mirage.

She **had** often **wanted to** climb a sand dune.

If she found water, she knew she would survive.

If you feel you have not done well enough in any chapter of this book, do not go on to the next chapter. Instead, repeat the chapter that needs improvement. Set a standard of quality for yourself and conform to it. Use the Answer Key not only to check your work but also to find suggestions for how to write appropriate sentences for any of the exercises.

1

Preparing to Write

In order to write well in English, you should understand the basics of the language. Probably the most difficult area for students learning English is verbs. Although English verbs are used in complicated ways, they do not have complicated conjugations with a different ending for each pronoun like other languages might.

GERMAN

ich fahre
du fährst
er fährt
wir fahren
ihr fahrt
sie fahren

SPANISH

yo hablo
tu hablas
el habla
nosotros hablamos
vosotros habláis
ellos hablan

RUSSIAN

я играю
ты играешь
он играет
мы играем
вы играете
они играют

With most English verbs there is only one ending (-s or -es) in the third person singular of the present tense. The only exception to that rule is the verb *to be*:

TO SPEAK

I speak
you speak
he speaks
we speak
you speak
they speak

TO BE

I am
you are
he is
we are
you are
they are



But English has other complexities. For example, there are three ways to express the present tense:

The simple conjugation of the verb means that the *action of the verb is a habit or is repeated*. For example: “We speak.”

- When the verb is conjugated with a form of *to be* (am, is, are, was, were), the verb will have an *-ing* ending. It means that the action is *continuing or not yet completed*. For example: “We are speaking.”
- The third present tense form uses a conjugation of *to do* (do, does) with the verb and has three uses: (1) It is used to ask a question with most verbs except *to be* or certain auxiliaries (can, must, should, and so on). (2) It is used as an emphatic response. (3) It is used to negate the verb with *not*. Let’s look at some examples with the verb *to speak*:

I speak English. (This is my habit. I speak English all the time.)

I am speaking English. (I usually speak Spanish. At the moment I am speaking English.)

Do you speak English? (A question with the verb *to speak*.)

I do speak English. (This is your emphatic response to someone who has just said, “You don’t speak English.”)

I do not speak English. (Negation of the verb *to speak* with *not*.)

Conjugating English verbs is not difficult. But choosing the correct tense form from the three just described requires practice. The exercises that follow will help you to use English verb forms and tenses with accuracy.

Verb Tenses

Study the following examples, which show how verbs change in the various tenses. Some tenses require a form of *to be* and a present participle. Present participles have an *-ing* ending: *is going, were singing*. Other tenses require a past participle. Regular verbs form the past tense and past participle in the same way—just add *-ed*: *worked, have worked*. Use the appendix of irregular verbs in the past tense and past participle to see how they are formed.

The perfect tenses of both regular and irregular verbs are a combination of a form of *to have* plus a past participle: *I have worked. She has seen. You had broken. Tom will have discovered*.

In the exercises that follow you will be making similar tense changes.

TO SPEAK—a habit or repeated action

Present	She speaks well.
Past	She spoke well.

Present Perfect	She has spoken well.
Past Perfect	She had spoken well.
Future	She will speak well.
Future Perfect	She will have spoken well.



TO BE SPEAKING—a continuous action

Present	Who is speaking?
Past	Who was speaking?
Present Perfect	Who has been speaking?
Past Perfect	Who had been speaking?
Future	Who will be speaking?
Future Perfect	Who will have been speaking?

DO YOU SPEAK?—a question with a form of *to do*

Present	Do you speak Spanish?
Past	Did you speak Spanish?
Present Perfect	Have you spoken Spanish?
Past Perfect	Had you spoken Spanish?
Future	Will you speak Spanish?
Future Perfect	Will you have spoken Spanish?

(Because the perfect and future tenses in the preceding example have an auxiliary verb [have, had, will] in the question, a form of *to do* is not necessary.)

SHE DOESN'T SPEAK—negation of the verb with a form of *to do*

Present	She doesn't speak French.
Past	She didn't speak French.
Present Perfect	She hasn't spoken French.
Past Perfect	She hadn't spoken French.
Future	She won't speak French.
Future Perfect	She won't have spoken French.

(Because the perfect and future tenses in the preceding example have an auxiliary verb [hasn't, hadn't, won't] in the sentence, a form of *to do* is not necessary.)

Exercise 1.1 Rewrite the following sentences in the tenses given. Use the examples given previously to help you maintain accuracy.

1. Present Her brother looks for us.
 Past _____
 Past Perfect _____
 Future _____

2. Present _____
 Past Were you looking for your wallet?
 Present Perfect _____
 Past Perfect _____
 Future _____

3. Present _____
 Past _____
 Present Perfect _____
 Past Perfect _____
 Future Will she help Tom?

4. Present _____
 Past _____
 Present Perfect I haven't filled out the application.
 Past Perfect _____
 Future _____

5. Present Do they play soccer?
 Past _____
 Present Perfect _____
 Past Perfect _____
 Future _____

6. Present _____
 Past _____
 Present Perfect _____
 Past Perfect _____
 Future He will be making a good salary.

7. Present _____
Past _____
Present Perfect _____
Past Perfect *Juan had visited his aunt and uncle.*
Future _____
Future Perfect _____
8. Present _____
Past *She carried the child to her bed.*
Present Perfect _____
Past Perfect _____
Future _____
9. Present *My sister often dates Michael.*
Past _____
Present Perfect _____
Past Perfect _____
Future _____
10. Present _____
Past _____
Present Perfect *They have hired him.*
Past Perfect _____
Future _____

Exercise 1.2 Rewrite the following sentences in the tenses given. Use the examples to help you maintain accuracy.

1. Present *Her brother is very rich.*
Past _____
Past Perfect _____
Future _____
2. Present _____
Past *Were the children good?*
Present Perfect _____
Past Perfect _____
Future _____

3. Present _____
Past _____
Present Perfect _____
Past Perfect _____
Future *Will she be ill?* _____
4. Present _____
Past _____
Present Perfect *I have not been angry at all.* _____
Past Perfect _____
Future _____
5. Present *Do you go there often?* _____
Past _____
Present Perfect _____
Past Perfect _____
Future _____
6. Present _____
Past _____
Present Perfect _____
Past Perfect _____
Future *What will you do?* _____
7. Present _____
Past _____
Present Perfect _____
Past Perfect *The girls had had a bad day.* _____
Future _____
Future Perfect _____
8. Present _____
Past *Maria had ten dollars.* _____
Present Perfect _____
Past Perfect _____
Future _____
9. Present *My brother does nothing all day.* _____
Past _____
Present Perfect _____

Past Perfect _____

Future _____

10. Present _____

Past _____

Present Perfect They haven't gone to the movies.

Past Perfect _____

Future _____

Exercise 1.3 Rewrite the following sentences in the tenses given. Use the examples to help you maintain accuracy. Notice that you will be dealing with a wider variety of verbs here.

1. Present Mark likes the new girl.

Past _____

Past Perfect _____

Future _____

2. Present Her boss is trying to understand.

Past _____

Present Perfect _____

Past Perfect _____

Future _____

3. Present _____

Past The letter carriers went into the office.

Present Perfect _____

Past Perfect _____

Future _____

Future Perfect _____

4. Present _____

Past Were you talking to Richard?

Present Perfect _____

Past Perfect _____

Future _____

5. Present _____

Past _____

Present Perfect His son has broken a window.

Past Perfect _____

Future _____

6. Present _____

Past _____

Present Perfect *The secretary has been writing letters.*

Past Perfect _____

Future _____

7. Present _____

Past _____

Present Perfect _____

Past Perfect _____

Future *Won't you sing, too?*

8. Present _____

Past _____

Present Perfect _____

Past Perfect _____

Future *They won't be going shopping.*

9. Present _____

Past _____

Present Perfect _____

Past Perfect _____

Future _____

Future Perfect *Carlos will have gotten up before dawn.*

10. Present _____

Past _____

Present Perfect _____

Past Perfect _____

Future _____

Future Perfect *By seven-thirty he will have left for home.*

Exercise 1.4 Rewrite the following sentences in the tenses given, but change the subject of each sentence to a different pronoun (I, you, he, she, it, we, they, or who).

Present He sees you.

Past I saw you.

Present Perfect She has seen you.

Past Perfect They had seen you.

Future We will see you.

1. Present Are you on time?
 Past _____
 Present Perfect _____
 Past Perfect _____
 Future _____

2. Present _____
 Past Didn't she like the book?
 Past Perfect _____
 Future _____

3. Present _____
 Past _____
 Present Perfect I have been driving very slowly.
 Past Perfect _____
 Future _____

4. Present _____
 Past _____
 Present Perfect _____
 Past Perfect We had found him just in time.
 Future _____
 Future Perfect _____

5. Present _____
 Past _____
 Present Perfect _____
 Past Perfect _____

Future They will arrange a party for her.

Future Perfect _____

6. Present _____

Past _____

Present Perfect _____

Past Perfect _____

Future _____

Future Perfect He will have brought it home by noon.

7. Present You eat too much.

Past _____

Present Perfect _____

Past Perfect _____

Future _____

8. Present _____

Past I put the tools back before lunch.

Present Perfect _____

Past Perfect _____

Future _____

Future Perfect _____

9. Present She cuts out the dress before bedtime.

Past _____

Present Perfect _____

Past Perfect _____

Future _____

Future Perfect _____

10. Present _____

Past _____

Past Perfect _____

Future _____

Future Perfect He will have stolen the money by midnight.

You have been forming the future tense by using *will* with a verb (I will go, she will sing, they will be taking). The auxiliary *shall* is often used in the first person singular and plural (I and we). But in casual English *will* is used nearly all the time.

FORMAL

I shall visit my uncle.

We shall borrow some money.

CASUAL

I will visit my uncle.

We will borrow some money.

The future tense meaning is also expressed with the phrase *to be going to* (I am going to, you are going to, he is going to). It means the same thing as *will* and can replace it.

WILL

They will buy a new car.

Will you help me?

TO BE GOING TO

They are going to buy a new car.

Are you going to help me?

The phrase *to be going to* can be conjugated in the past tense. Then it means that this *was* something that someone *planned* to do in the future.

They were going to buy a new car.

Were you going to help me?

Exercise 1.5 Rewrite the following future tense sentences by changing *will* to *to be going to*.

1. Will they bring some dessert along?

2. I'll be home at midnight.

3. The janitor will sweep the offices after closing time.

4. He won't return the money he borrowed.

5. This movie will be very exciting.

6. The party will be held at Maria's house.

7. Will Martin apply for a new job?

8. She will probably spend the night at Mary's apartment.

9. Will you order a hamburger or a hot dog?

10. The boys will clean the kitchen for you.

Auxiliaries

It's very common to use *to have* or *to be* as auxiliaries or helping verbs. For example:

- Have you seen that film? (a form of *to have* plus a past participle)
- I haven't had a chance to go to the store today. (a form of *to have* plus a past participle)
- Are you learning a lot of new words? (a form of *to be* plus a present participle)
- She isn't studying for her exams. (a form of *to be* plus a present participle)

But there are other auxiliary verbs that are used with infinitives (to go, to run, to help, to find, and so on).

Note that many of these special verbs *cannot be used in all tenses*. And in some cases, you have to change to a *different* verb to form a specific tense. The examples that follow will be conjugated with the third person pronoun *he*.

	TO BE ABLE TO	TO BE SUPPOSED TO
Present	is able to	is supposed to
Past	was able to	was supposed to
Present Perfect	has been able to	has been supposed to
Past Perfect	had been able to	had been supposed to
Future	will be able to	will be supposed to
Future Perfect	will have been able to	will have been supposed to
	CAN	TO HAVE TO
Present	can	has to
Past	could or was able to	had to
Present Perfect	has been able to	has had to
Past Perfect	had been able to	had had to
Future	will be able to	will have to
Future Perfect	will have been able to	will have had to
	MAY	MUST
Present	may	must
Past	might	had to
Present Perfect	—	has had to
Past Perfect	—	had had to
Future	—	will have to
Future Perfect	—	will have had to
	OUGHT TO	SHOULD
Present	ought to	should
Past	—	—
Present Perfect	—	—
Past Perfect	—	—
Future	—	—
Future Perfect	—	—
	TO WANT	TO NEED TO
Present	wants	needs to
Past	wanted	needed to
Present Perfect	has wanted	has needed to
Past Perfect	had wanted	had needed to
Future	will want	will need to
Future Perfect	will have wanted	will have needed to