

1

Reason to Write (Intermediate)
Strategies for Success in Academic Writing

By Robert F. Cohen and Judy L. Miller

**Correlation with the New York State
ESL Learning Standards**

Correlated by Mercè Pujol

Reason to Write (Intermediate) uses a communicative, content-based theme approach to teach academic English to High School ESL students at advanced and transitional levels. Even though ***Reason to Write*** (Intermediate) mainly focuses on enhancing students' academic writing, it also integrates the four language skills so that students prepare themselves for the demands of all disciplines in high school and college. Writing is viewed not only as an expression of one's opinions and individuality, but also as a way of interacting and communicating with others. Therefore, academic writing becomes a meaningful social endeavor in the ESL classroom that involves prior reading, discussion, reflection, interaction with others, group and pair work, and peer/teacher feedback and evaluation.

What follows is a detailed outline of how ***Reason to Write*** (Intermediate) covers the main performance indicators for each of the five *New York State ESL Learning Standards* at the commencement ESL level. In addition, sample exercises and activities from the textbook illustrate how *the Learning Standards* are met.

Standard 1:

Students will listen, speak, read, and write in English for information and understanding.

The aim of this standard is for ESL students to learn English for everyday use and for mastering and manipulating content information.

Reason to Write (Intermediate) will allow the student to:

- Read, discuss, and analyze information related to content areas such as social sciences, natural sciences, history, and literature.
- Compare, contrast, organize, and synthesize information taken from a variety of sources such as magazines, newspapers, reference books, Internet, fiction and non-fiction books, TV programs, and interviews.

- Learn how to collect information on content material and carry out investigation to present in oral and written forms to different audiences.
- Distinguish between fact and opinion, cause and effect, problem and solution, similarities and differences, general and specific ideas, and relevant and irrelevant information.

For instance, unit 4, *The Best Time to Be Alive*, presents the students with an abridged and adapted interview from the *New York Times Magazine*, in which a famous newspaper columnist, Russell Baker, asks several distinguished professors to describe the ideal time to live. A general understanding chart follows the interview for the students to match the topics discussed with the countries and periods that are described (page 61).

Comprehension questions such as these follow the chart:

- 1- *Russell Baker does not believe that the present is the best time to live. What reasons might he give to explain his opinion?*
- 2- *When Jonathan Spence describes the Ming Dynasty as “ a rich time to live, “ what does he mean?*
- 3- *What attracts Orlando Patterson to the lifestyle of merchants in Tokugawa Japan?*
- 4- *If Ann Douglas were a man, would she still choose 19th century America as the best time to live? Why or why not? (page 61)*

Students compare and contrast the present and the past and write a letter to a great- grandparent explaining how life today is different from the way it was.

Besides, students explore the future through science fiction movies such as *Fahrenheit 451*, *Soylent Green*, and *Gattaca* (page 64). They write personal reactions on what they see and how they feel about them. These reactions guide them to produce a five-paragraph essay describing the best time or the worst time (present, past, or future) to be alive and why. Therefore, the theme in this unit encourages students to research and discuss past historical periods and their legacies.

Standard 2:

Students will listen, speak, read, and write in English for literary response, enjoyment, and expression.

This standard stimulates ESL students to use English to develop their artistic talents, express themselves creatively, and appreciate popular culture.

Reason to Write (Intermediate) will allow the student to:

- Read, discuss, and analyze literary texts, including works of American popular culture, while exploring literary elements such as plot, theme, climax, character, setting, point of view, imagery, and symbolism.
- Identify, explore, and compare and contrast different literary periods, genres, and traditions.
- Describe different levels of meaning of literary works by making predictions and inferences and drawing conclusions.
- Explain, compose, and present personal and formal interpretations of the literary works discussed in class.

- Engage in creative works by writing stories, poems, songs, plays, etc while forming a sense of one’s voice, and having the intended audience and purpose in mind.

For instance, unit 10, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, presents the short story written by Edgar Allan Poe for students to read and discuss. Students not only learn about Poe’s life and literary period, but they also study the numerous literary devices in the story.

In a section entitled Understanding the Plot, this unit presents ESL students with important elements such as **conflict, raising action, climax, falling action, and resolution**. Students draw a diagram in which they identify and explain these elements (page 192). They also discuss **narrative point of view** and compare and contrast **first-person point of view** versus **third-person point of view** (page 193). Once the students have brainstormed the elements of fiction, in pairs they study **the effect of setting and pace on mood** and fill out a chart with specific examples from the story (page 195). Other literary devices that are explored in this unit are **foreshadowing, irony, and theme**.

Furthermore, students produce a five- paragraph interpretative essay showing how three elements of fiction communicate a theme or an idea about Poe’ s story “*The Tell-Tale Heart*.”

Related further readings and other research projects are presented at the end of the textbook in a section entitled Supplementary Activities (page 214). The authors persuade the students to read Poe’ s poems “*Annabel Lee*” or “*The Raven*” and compare and contrast their vocabulary, themes, and literary devices. Finally, students are invited to research other aspects of Poe’ s life and work.

Standard 3:

Students will listen, speak, read, and write in English for critical analysis and evaluation.

This standard is geared to help ESL students express their opinions, judge others’ ideas and points of view, and reflect on their feelings on different perspectives thoughtfully and critically.

Reason to Write (Intermediate) will allow the student to:

- Develop a personal point of view and analysis on a variety of issues and be able to explain, present, and evaluate them clearly to others, both in oral and written forms.
- Recognize, compare and contrast, assess, and interpret multiple points of view within and among diverse groups of people.
- Identify, explore, and recognize how vocabulary choice and the structural features of English affect readers and listeners’ understanding and perception of the issues being discussed.

For example, in unit 1, *The Pathway to Freedom*, students are presented with a narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, who was born into slavery and escaped to freedom at the end of the nineteenth century. In a section entitled Open Discussion, learners form their own opinions by answering the following questions:

- 1- Consider the statement, "Work is freedom." Would Frederick Douglass agree or disagree with this statement? Do you think work is freedom?
 - 2- Did Frederick Douglass think that education is the pathway to freedom? Do you agree? Is education enough to make someone free?
 - 3- How are childhood and slavery similar to or different from each other?
 - 4- Who is made less human by slavery, the master or the slave? Explain your answer.
- (page 9).

As far as vocabulary choice and structural features are concerned, students focus on distinguishing **habitual past** versus **simple past** and on using **pronouns** and **possessive adjectives** well in order to avoid repetition and confusion (page 17).

Finally, in a section entitled Additional Writing Opportunities (page 20), students write personal narratives to let others know who they are, what they desire in life, and what their future goals are. In addition, they narrate personal experiences on lack of freedom and moments of prejudice.

Supplementary activities include reading about *Martin Luther King Jr.* and *the American Civil War*, and watching movies such as *Glory* 1989, *The Civil War* 1991, and *The Long Walk Home*, 1990. Students give reports, comparing and contrasting prominent themes in these movies while forming their own opinions about the many issues raised.

Standard 4:

Students will listen, speak, read, and write in English for classroom and social interaction.

This standard provides the foundation for ESL students to communicate freely and interact with others in classroom settings and social encounters.

Reason to Write (Intermediate) will allow the student to:

- Participate in classroom activities and negotiate and manage interactions to accomplish social and classroom tasks.
- Perform a variety of social and communicative functions such as greeting, thanking, inviting, recommending, requesting and providing information, following oral and written directions, and writing notes and e-mail messages.
- Apply appropriate behavior and discover different ways of saying things in various social situations and classroom settings.

For example, in unit 2, *What 's your Verdict?*, students read, discuss, and write about the case of Leroy Strachan, who pleaded guilty to a single count of manslaughter, done unintentionally, 45 years ago.

Not only do the students learn about the U.S. constitution and the language of court in this unit, but in the supplementary activities (page 209), they stage a mock trial of Leroy Strachan. Students play the roles of Strachan, the prosecuting and defense attorneys, the judge, the witness, and the jury, comprising of fewer than six people. Students are encouraged to pay attention to the choice of words they use in this very formal encounter. Later the class as a whole discusses how well they communicated with each other in this particular situation. The mock trial can also be audio- taped and

video- taped in order for the teacher to comment on students' fluency, pronunciation, grammar, sentence structure, and word choice.

Standard 5:

Students will demonstrate cross-cultural knowledge and understanding.

This standard makes ESL students sensitive to others' background and culture and gives them the cross-cultural knowledge that they need to succeed in a multicultural society.

Reason to Write (Intermediate) will allow the student to:

- Understand and appreciate the cultural patterns of standard American English as well as those of regional variations and non-standard forms.
- Demonstrate an understanding of U.S. main cultural and political institutions, organizations, functions, processes, and procedures.
- Be able to share and appreciate cross-cultural experiences in the U.S. and abroad.
- Compare and contrast traditions, cultural practices, and literary works among cultures and be able to distinguish commonalities and differences among racial and socio- economic groups and generations.

For instance, unit 7, ***How I'll Become an American*** and unit 8, ***For and against Bilingual Education***, are both well equipped with cross- cultural issues for students to read about, discuss, have an opinion, and write about.

“How I'll become an American” written by the Hungarian novelist and playwright, Miklós Vámos, offers a satire of American values. Students identify the humorous techniques the author utilizes. Also, an essay written by a Japanese student (page 128) about Americans who want to become Japanese is used for revising and editing purposes. This essay allows students to explore how different cultures view Americans and incites them to express how they feel about Americans.

In the section Structure Writing Focus, the writing assignment reads this way:

Write a five-paragraph satirical essay telling how an American can become a member of another culture that you know well. Use humor to write about any three of the following topics: interpersonal communication, consumerism, crime, the environment, food, health, media, money, politics, technology, or work. (page 128)

“Bilingual Education: Parents' Views” is the article that opens Unit 8 on bilingual education (page 140). Students read about and discuss the pros and the cons of bilingual education and categorize cultural, economic, and educational arguments for and against bilingual education (page 145). Eventually, they write an argumentative essay for or against bilingual education.

In the section Open for Discussion, (page 145), students discuss the following questions in small groups:

- 1- *Do you speak one language at home and another at school? If so, has this been a problem for you? Do you use different languages in different situations?*

- 2- *If English were made the official language of the United States, signs and official documents would be in English only and would not be translated into other languages as they are now. Would you be in favor of this?*
- 3- *Why does the United States accept so many immigrants? How do immigrants contribute to this country?*
- 4- *Did your family immigrate to the United States? If so, how long ago was that? What kinds of difficulties did you or your family experience in adjusting to life in a new place? (page 145)*

New York State ESL Learning standards promote the development of ESL students' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in an integrated way. Furthermore, ESL students are invited to take an active role in their learning process by reflecting critically on content material, personal experiences, and social and cross- cultural issues. In addition, they are continuously encouraged to:

- Convey information through oral and written language by using appropriate grammar, vocabulary, sentence and paragraph cohesion, and a variety of sentence structures.
- Apply learning strategies such as planning, note- taking, gathering information, drafting, free-writing, revising, proofreading, and editing when engaged in writing.
- Use learning strategies such as drawing graphic organizers, connecting ideas to prior knowledge, questioning, exploring cognates, skimming, scanning, summarizing, paraphrasing, and self-monitoring techniques to improve one's reading and listening comprehension skills.
- Engage in collaborative activities through a variety of student groupings to share, discuss, and present information in meaningful social and academic contexts.

Reason to Write (intermediate) helps ESL students with all of the above. Grammatical structures such as verb tenses, transitive and intransitive verbs, active and passive voice, pronouns and possessive adjectives, conditionals, and adjective and noun clauses are taught in the context of the thematic units. Their practice is embedded in purposeful exercises for student discussion and writing. In addition, ***Reason to Write*** is equipped with prewriting and structured writing focus activities in each unit. These guided activities stimulate students to write first and second drafts of their work and edit their writing for appropriate punctuation, indentation, capitalization, sentence structure, parallel structures, sentence transitions, and paragraph cohesion. Furthermore, ***Reason to Write*** provides opportunities for learners to use learning strategies such as note-taking, summarizing, using diagrams, interpreting graphs, making inferences, using prior knowledge, and creating research notes for better reading and listening comprehension. Finally, ***Reason to Write*** invites students to study collaboratively, take an active role in their learning, and share their work and learning experiences with one another in meaningful and exciting ways.