

Book Review: Integrated Language Skills: Writing

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36832/beltaj.2021.0501.04>

Journal homepage: <https://www.journal.belta-bd.org/>

Book Review

Integrated Language Skills: Writing (1st Ed.)

Naginder Kaur and Noorazalia Izha Haron, Oxford Fajar Sdn. Bhd, 2015, ISBN-1978-983-47-1386-7

Integrated Language Skills: Writing is a resourceful book for learning and teaching of writing skill by Dr. Naginder Kaur and Ms. Noorazalia Izha Haron, two lecturers at the Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). The book is tailor made for students pursuing pre-intermediate or intermediate level English language courses and a practical guide for anyone who wants to teach English writing skill at the pre-intermediate or intermediate level.

Numerous studies establish that writing is the most challenging skill to teach and learn (Hyland, 2019, Latif, 2015; Singh, 2019; Wolsey, 2010). In the preface of *Integrated Language Skills: Writing* the authors expressed similar view that writing skill is often regarded as the most difficult and arduous language skill (Kaur & Haron, 2015). Therefore the authors claimed that their book is an attempt to transform the teaching and learning of writing into an easy and comprehensible process. They also asserted that the contents of the book are organized in such a way that even a self-starter who wants to improve in writing will find it useful. They believed that the fresh perspectives and the step-by-step approach from sentence construction to paragraph building and essay writing will provide useful building blocks to enhance the writing skill. The authors added that their book is targeted at any student who wants to develop their writing skills for any English language proficiency course or for the Malaysian University English Test (MUET)— assessment that is extensively used for university admissions in Malaysia.

Integrated Language Skills: Writing is arranged into three units – Writing, Reading, and Speaking. Each unit is outlined by integrating overview of the areas under discussion and learning outcomes of the respective unit. Each of the topics in individual units is coupled with its learning outcome keeping in line with broader learning goals of the unit. To improve understanding and engagement, contents are presented visually using diagrams. Each segment of the book features concise notes in a lucid, systematic and skill focused manner to support learning. Using the guided strategies students can independently learn

key writing sub-skills for producing organized, effective, and coherent essays. Moreover, the book features adequate activities with precise instructions to inspire students to learn and improve their language skills by practicing.

Each unit of the book is divided into well organized segments. A glance at the table of contents indicates that each of the segments, named as topics in the book, is related to the other. For example, Unit 1 is divided down into seven topics, which are, writing an essay: introduction; writing sentences; pre-writing; developing effective paragraphs; writing the final draft of an essay; revising, refining and editing drafts of essays; writing an evaluative commentary; and analyzing and interpreting information from non-linear texts. In each of the seven titles instructions and activities are made available to activate the students' prior knowledge and to establish connections between their old and new knowledge. For example, the entrance interview exercise in Topic 1.0 (p. 7) reflects on students' previous classroom experiences related to writing an essay, which provides essential cues to their prior knowledge and the learning gaps they will need to fill up. Besides, exercises in the book, such as grammar task of underlining different parts of sentences in Exercise 1 (p. 12), are designed for individual, pair, or group activity to facilitate student-centered learning. Rearranging scrambled words to form correct sentences in Exercise 2 (p. 13) is also appropriate for individual or pair activity. Likewise, Exercise 3 on pages 14 and 15, in which students are asked to choose a picture and describe those by constructing at least one simple, one compound and one complex sentence, can as well be counted as group activity.

Throughout the book, the authors write the instructions in the first person, we, instead of commonly used imperative sentences to make the book more interactive. Any reader will notice this strategy of involving both the reader(s) and the authors in the learning process. However, we know that teaching essay writing necessitates the students to be familiar with the stages of essay writing, different components of writing, and the structure of a paragraph and an essay. This book introduces all these crucial areas along with reflection checklist of previous knowledge in Topic 1.0 from page 3 to page 8 in an interactive style. The same easy and communicative approach to instruction is maintained throughout the book which signals that the authors intend to 'talk to' their readers through the book.

One of the challenges for students aspiring to study in Malaysian universities is obtaining a good band score in the MUET. This book covers both the writing tasks of the MUET that can help them face the challenge. In line with the writing Task 1 of the MUET, the book contains techniques and exercises of interpreting multiple visuals, such as bar or line graphs, tables, charts, or newspaper extracts by analyzing and synthesizing the information, and writing a three-paragraph report with an appropriate title. In the same way, inclusion of guidance on techniques to organize and write a coherent essay by outlining the topic, presenting clear thesis statement, and writing the paragraphs by using evidence, reasoning and scholarship following an appropriate writing style covers the writing task 2. Several examples of good writing and their analyses are presented for users' easy understanding. For every task, a good sample is provided before challenging students with exercises. For example, the book has been provided with samples of well-written introductory paragraphs of two types of essays, namely expository essay and argumentative essay in page 38. In each case, the given samples are followed by identification of their key features in the next page which makes them more easily comprehensible.

In every learning unit the samples are provided first; then guided comments are elicited to sharpen students' analytical and thinking capacity. These are followed by practices for students. Finally independent learning resources are presented through suggested websites that learners can visit to enrich their understanding. Thus, the learner is taken into a progressive journey of autonomous learning which begins with guided practices and ends in independent learning. Along with this carefully prepared step by step presentation, the independent learning activity of online study and practice materials is an added

strength of the book. This feature matches present day learners' interests who are technophiles and more enthusiastic to learn through advanced technology. This quality of the book encourages autonomous and self-regulated learning behaviors among the learners to turn them into confident and independent writers. The addition of blended learning with independent learning activities makes the book useful for both face-to-face and blended learning environment. The development of learner autonomy and the growth of target language proficiency are meaningfully combined following the three fundamental principles, suggested by Little (2007), namely learner involvement, learner reflection and target language use.

In addition, the textbook is accompanied by a companion website for the lecturers and students with an array of teaching and learning materials for one year from the date of registration. The book's distinct cover design, image collection, illustrations, and highlighting texts with colors are also appreciable. These features not only make the book high standard and appropriate for a modern reader but also hold their interest while gently guiding them through the text and the exercises.

However, there are few areas in the contents of the book that could be elaborated to enrich it further. One will find that the resources in Topic 3.1 (Producing Oral Commentaries), the only topic covered in the Unit 3 (Speaking) are quite useful. Adding a few units along with more variations in speaking activities, such as interviews and role plays, would certainly contribute to the book's enrichment.

In sum, *Integrated Language Skills: Writing* is a comprehensive, practical, as well as sound guide for students pursuing English language courses that include all four skills of the language. The book aptly follows the structure of a textbook with its variety of resources, teaching instructions, and self-study materials. Fuchs and Henne (2018) noted that a textbook for skill development is structured by incorporating instruction, study guide and worksheets with tasks and assignments. The authors' insights, clarity and overall arrangement merit a wide audience for their book. If EAP teachers are looking for an effective learning material to recommend for their students pursuing pre-intermediate to intermediate level of English language skills, I would invariably propose this one for consideration.

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