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Refining Composition Skills: Rhetoric and Grammar

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Refining Composition Skills: Rhetoric and Grammar (5th ed.)

Regina L. Smalley, Mary K. Ruetten, and Joanna Rishel Kozyreva (2000)

Boston: Heinle & Heinle

Pp. xvii + 379 + appendices

ISBN 0-8384-0223-2 (paper)

US \$24.00

Refining Composition Skills: Rhetoric and Grammar (5th ed.) aims to develop “academic writing skills” and “critical thinking skills.” This book may also be useful for developmental literacy courses for students whose first language is not English. The video is “available at no charge to teachers who adopt *Refining Composition Skills* Manual and CNN Video. The video is “available at no charge to teachers who adopt *Refining Composition Skills* Manual and CNN Video. These materials were not provided for review. Therefore, this review relates only to the student’s inability to view the teacher’s book or video materials.

Refining Composition Skills was written with high-intermediate to advanced ESL students in mind. For students in countries other than the United States some of the readings need to be replaced or supplemented. With this in mind *Refining Composition Skills* is a useful resource for English language students. However, although the issue of the nature of genre compared with rhetorical patterns needs to be addressed.

The authors claim that *Refining Composition Skills* offers a “developmental, step-by-step” approach to writing. The developmental focus on rhetorical patterns and the writing process appear to support the authors’ theoretical and pedagogical orientation with regards to process versus product. Whilst the authors claim that there is an emphasis on revision, the cyclical nature of the process is not explicit enough in the book. Therefore, the teacher must create student opportunities for peer reviewing and publishing. [-1-]

Refining Composition Skills is divided into three units of work and appendices. Unit 1 addresses the introduction and consists of five chapters. Unit 2 focuses on the essay and has seven chapters. The third unit, which is divided into three units, 1 and 2 are thematically based. These themes are “geared toward the interests of the target audience.” Each chapter (apart from chapters 1, 2, and 6) begins with pre-reading and pre-writing activities based on the CNN video provided with the book. These activities are followed by written texts for each chapter’s theme. These written texts serve as examples of the rhetorical pattern featured in the chapter. Each chapter includes comprehension and discussion questions. In this fifth edition there is a newly added section called “Writing Skills.” This section usually suggests a reading/discussion activity based on a Web search and/or video. These activities complement the readings, although at times there are few apparent connections between the activities and the readings. This section focuses on “relevant composition skills” such as sequencing ideas, using adverbs of place and transition words. Teachers and/or students can decide how they would best like to use these activities. The text-based approach will undoubtedly opt to begin at unit 1. Those teachers who advocate text-based learning will draw on unit 2 from the outset.

The “Getting Started” section of each chapter is designed to introduce students to the goal of the chapter. Pre-writing activities in this section aim to activate students’ schemata through personalization. Topics and/or questions for reflective journal writing are provided. Students can then write a paragraph to support it. There is usually a link between the pre-writing activities and the later writing activities. Teachers can choose to use the activities which best meet their students’ interests and needs. Alternatively they can skip this section and move to the “Readings” section.

The “Readings” section includes topics such as travel, different places, arts, entertainment, science, technology, language, business, and education. Comprehension questions are asked although they do not always focus on reading in a developmental way; that is, focusing on gist, then moving to main ideas and supporting details. Main ideas of the text often need to be devised by the teacher. The texts represent examples of the target genre. Some of these texts make good examples of the target genre. However, the book does not focus on grammatical and lexical features and structure. It is left to the teacher to devise tasks that focus on these features for students.

The final “Writing” section generally includes “Composition Skills and the Internet” and “Writing Skills” with some information about the rhetorical pattern or genre of that chapter. The authors also include linguistic and structural features in these information sections. However, it remains

should effectively plan and organize their writing and how to use the rhetorical patterns d

The use of the Internet as a resource certainly adds variety to the format of the book. The : independently and at their own pace. However, at times, the task's link between the them activities usually involve searching the web for language resources and/or reading and dis web address. The writing activities in this section move from controlled mechanical practi increases sharply in several of the chapters (e.g., 3, 4, 5, 9). The "Assignments from the Dis students needing to write college level assignments. These assignments allow students to college level.

The "Grammar Review" (unit 3) provides a grammatical reference for students. There are Unfortunately, students with more detailed grammar books may prefer to use them, as th This section might be more useful and relevant if it addressed specific linguistic features o with opportunities to analyze text types according to their structure and linguistic features

The "Appendices" include useful checklists, American Psychological Association (APA) cit plurals, punctuation and capitalization rules, subject-verb agreement issues, irregular ver letters.

The book's layout is user friendly and students can write some of their answers in the boo extremely rare and the odd photograph that does appear is of poor quality and is in black address this, depending on their students' motivation, needs, and learning styles.

The authors of *Refining Composition Skills* have used an integrated skills approach by inc writing skills. However, the goals at the beginning of each chapter are not specific enough identifying the skills and knowledge indicators for each chapter will enable students and to teaching and learning in both formal and informal ways.

The book refers to rhetorical patterns at the paragraph and text levels. Whilst it concentrat discussions and explanations of how and why, it does not use the terminology associated little attention to making genres explicit or to highlighting the social processes commonly

Refining Composition Skills is more product-focused than process-focused. In order that developmental there needs to be a movement from less demanding genres to more comp addresses "The Process Analysis Essay." This term could be somewhat confusing for stud to combine two genres as if they were one genre or text type. According to the authors, "T instruct or direct and those that explain or analyze" (p. 224). However, the writing process analysis essay" draw on processes from two different genres and lead to a variety of differ explain "through the process of sequencing phenomena in temporal and/or causal relatio

explanations of why, accounts, elaborations, and so on (Knapp & Watkins, 1994, p. 78). Writing processes of logically sequencing actions or behaviors,” they may produce directions, recommendations, and so on (Knapp & Watkins, 1994, p. 96). It seems then that the “process analysis essay” is a term that addresses the relationship between the explanation text type and the instruction text type. As such it might be easier for students to first write an explanation and then alternatively address their “process analysis essay” after the explanation text type in chapter 4.

Both units 1 and 2 neglect to focus explicitly on the specific grammatical features found within each genre. For example, chapter 4 discusses some of the features expected in a description. However, it fails to mention that to use the simple present tense, relational verbs dominate when classifying appearance, quality, and quantity. This information may well be located in the Instructor’s Manual. However, students would undoubtedly find this information in the Student’s Book. Attention to linguistic features could be developed further, as students first learn to write and then improve their writing skills. Whilst the writing component in each chapter includes references to certain grammatical features (e.g. 3), these grammar references are sometimes not specifically related to the genre being addressed. It would be useful to link as many specific grammatical features of each genre as possible with the “Grammar Review” sections. This integration and raised student awareness of the linguistic features commonly used in specific genres would help students understand the relevance of the “Grammar Review,” and regard it as an integral part of the writing process rather than seeing it merely as an added extra.

The reading topics are adult in content, and with some teacher creativity could generally be adapted to suit the needs of these topics the teacher can create many opportunities for students to practice speaking and writing at different stages of the lesson.

In conclusion, this book offers the student focused and useful classroom writing activities such as journal writing, the Internet, selected readings, and interesting writing topics. However, on its own it probably not enable students to move from paragraph writing to essay writing. The Instructor’s Manual provides a “developmental, step by step” approach referred to by the authors. When using this book teachers need to consider product and process and genre versus rhetorical pattern to determine the most appropriate approach for their students. Determining explicit learning outcomes for each chapter will help make the most of the book to develop their students’ writing.

Reference

Knapp, P. & Watkins, M. (1994). *Context, text, grammar*. Sydney: Text Productions.

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From great paragraphs to great essays, outwash field uniformly attracts elliptical fine.
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