

Textbook Review for *inReview*
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Kennedy, XJ, Dorothy M. Kennedy, Sylvia A. Holladay *The Bedford Guide for College Writers with Reader, Research Manual, and Handbook 6th edition*, Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002 896 pages

Introduction

The Bedford Guide for College Writers (Kennedy, X.J., Kennedy, Dorothy M, and Holladay, Sylvia A. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002) is both an all-purpose first year writing text and a comprehensive reference text for students and instructors. While Bedford/St. Martin's has published the book's sections in various other combinations (three books without a handbook; and as a two book reader and rhetoric), this volume serves as an outstanding writing guide. The text is four publications in one edition: a process-oriented rhetoric, "A Writer's Guide;" a thematically arranged reader, "A Writer's Reader;" a full research manual, "A Writer's Research Manual;" and a comprehensive handbook, "A Writer's Handbook." The attempt is to offer instructors a variety of resources to accomplish writing programs' goals. It also allows for uniform adoption of a book across a department while encouraging individual instructors' choices in approaches and materials.

The outstanding feature of this volume is its comprehensive nature. In addition to combining four previously published writer's books, it has appropriate updates, including suggestions for use of technology (computers in the classroom), color coding of sections, and a revised integration of reading, thinking, and writing activities. Ancillaries are also available to accompany the text (*Teaching Composition: Background Readings* and e-content for on-line learning).

For students, and for faculty, two drawbacks may influence adoption of the text. One major consideration in the text's adoption as a first-year text is its cost, over \$60 new. For

students who are overwhelmed at the costs of texts the first year, the usefulness of this book may become secondary to its price. Additionally, for both student and instructor, the text can only be partially used during a semester or even a year. And keeping one's place in a course that shifts back and forth between sections might be confusing for students. However, its comprehensiveness and subsequent flexibility should outweigh these considerations.

The Sections

Book One--A Writer's Guide

This section, divided into four parts, provides experiences and techniques to address what the editors call "typical" first year writing assignment projects. The chapters in this section are organized to emphasize a process approach.

"A College Writer's Processes," new to this collection, frames essential writing skills for college survival (reading, writing, critical thinking). Part Two, "A Writer's Situations," walks students through assignments aimed at holistic instruction. Students are asked in the various assignments to recall an experience, observe a scene, interview a subject, compare and contrast, take a stand, propose a solution, evaluate, and write from reading critically. These sections follow logically but do not need to be used in the sequence of the section or in totality. These sections seem appropriate for student cohorts and especially useful for weaker writers and for speakers of other languages as writers in first year courses. For students who are "afraid" of college writing, the personal narratives suggested in this section can ease their way into the longer writing assignments often expected in college courses. For students for whom American English is a second or other language, the sharing of stories may be an acceptable common ground to build confidence especially in classrooms when the public nature of writing is part of the instructional strategy.

“Learning From Other Writers” is primarily a heuristic section. Students are guided through writing with probes and activities to generate and frame their ideas. Each section contains two model essays, one by a professional writer and one by a student writer. Additional features are activities for collaborative writing and for writing in professional situations. A recurring feature of this chapter is the checklists; students are given lists for comparing their progress on generating, planning, drafting, developing, and revising their work.

“Special Writing Situations” focuses on student ability to write in situations they may not have linked to their writing class: responding to literature, workplace writing, and writing for assessment. The last two seem important for the contemporary college student. Many students are already working and can use some help in enhancing professional written communication skills. Also, institutions are increasingly interested in the outcome of student learning as expressed in writing. Help with writing better evaluative essays for all their courses can help students and improve the quality of student work used to evaluate student learning.

“A Writer’s Strategies,” the final section of the first part, serves as a generalist approach to writing, providing students with strategies to overcome barriers that slow the process. These are primarily the traditional topics: generating ideas, planning, developing, revising, and editing. However, two additional sections deal with document design and visual representation. These are particularly useful for students more accustomed to visual media and the Internet as a source of communication. The editors refer to this section as the writer’s toolbox.

Book Two—“A Writer’s Reader”

Thirty-three prose passages are provided in this section. They are meant to intrigue students and to present students with models they can identify with and learn from in their own narrative writings. The brief prose selections are organized into five themes: families, men and

women, popular culture, the workplace, and body image. These topics have some staying power, but the instructor might want to use only one section per semester. Some of the themes seem especially useful for students who are first generation and perhaps insecure about their writing. The readings are coordinated with sections and assignments in “A Writer’s Guide,” a useful connection for both student and instructor.

This section serves as an appropriate structure for courses that emphasize writing about literature as their basis. Each reading is followed by probe questions to get students to explore the meanings of the passage and to encourage students to think about the universality of ideas and experiences. Journal prompts and topic suggestions are given in each section. The section promotes critical writing and reflection.

Book Three—“A Writer’s Research Manual”

Some instructors may require this book for this section and then have the option of referring students to other sections as weaknesses in their writing appear. This is an appropriate resource for courses that tend to attract students who completed a writing course some time ago: returning adult students, students who “tested out” of a first-year writing section, etc. This part is heavily cross-referenced to other sections. The section utilizes a project management frame, also appropriate for returning students who might hold part or full-time jobs. Students may learn planning strategies they can translate to other situations, particularly for classes that require an unsupervised research project.

As expected, there is extensive emphasis on MLA and APA documentation styles. There is sufficient guidance on using the Internet, while encouraging use on non-electronic sources. The guidance on appropriate adaptation of sources could be stronger, but provides some models of paraphrasing and summarizing that are sufficient models for most students. Plagiarism is

discussed separately from these models, and, in fact, is given little coverage. While the definition of plagiarism addresses contemporary situations such as musical expressions, a useful addition might be some general scenarios or case studies about plagiarism that students could analyze and discuss. This might be especially useful in the ESL student classroom, where the value of promoting another's word is often culturally appropriate.

Book Four—“A Writer’s Handbook”

While in a tradition handbook format, this section also contains basic guidelines on using and documenting sources. The best sections of this section are the ESL Guidelines, which while are made inviting for speakers of other languages by a colorful international flags logo, are useful for native and first speakers. Many non-traditional students, who have forgotten their basics, will find this section lighter on the jargon than other grammar texts. Parts of speech are clearly defined and then explain in generic terms. For example, the sections on the verbs for ESL students is probably more useful to most contemporary students whose last brush with grammar was fourth grade. The section concludes with a good editing guide that would be useful for students working more independently in their writing and a clear outline/index for easy reference work.

Student Audience Considerations

It is difficult to talk about students as units these days; therefore, it is challenging to select a text that will be adopted for an entire set of course sections. This might be the text if instructors will modify the usage of the text dependant upon the general nature of the particular class. For instance, this text would work well if the class will likely be mixed, perhaps a night section at a community college or urban institutions where both traditional-age students and returning adults are likely to be enrolled in the same section. For other institutions that tend to

attract almost exclusively first-generation students and/or those more at risk, the traditional and comprehensive nature of the text maybe too overwhelming for students and a challenge for novice instructors. The main challenge is getting students to cross reference their won work with sections from the text, forcing them to engage with the learning amterials. For this, the instructor must know or book or be an adapt index user.

Choice of text can also depend upon what learning resources on campus students are likely to employ in their work. This text, for example, does have links to exercises students might use to brush up their skills, but many students do better with face-to-face help in a writing center of learning resource center. Research has shown that students often do not use the bells and whistles of course management systems and web pages behind textbooks. This text as a resource will only earn its keep if the instructor can relate the resources directly to student needs and concerns. For examples, instead of marking a pronoun agreement problem, an instructor can use a correction symbol and then write “see H-14” for Handbook, section 14.

Instructor Considerations

While many instructors do not use instructor’s guides to a selected text, the Instructor’s Annotated edition of this text is helpful. Five margin annotations help the new instructor especially: teaching tips, quick start assignment, vocabulary glosses, cross-references notes, and references to print and electronic resources. This may be more useful than the usual website support structure for some instructors. (There is an extensive web page behind all the Bedford guides).

This edition would be most useful for instructors requiring this book for a full-year sequence of writing. Students might be confused in the transition between writing narrative and doing research if this text were used in conjunction with a text of a different frame; for example,

many first term writing texts are less structured in the topics and options allowed students in their early writing. The same can be true for the research process. *The Writer's Research Manual* employs a more traditional model of the researching process than some instructors follow. It follows a model that speaks to McCrimmon-like persuasion model and a Toulmin (claim/warrant/data). The instructor's decision on which models of research will be more useful for students may be dependent on college or university expectations of the writing program as well as a comprehensive understanding of what models students have been exposed to in their secondary education. This latter point is all but impossible in most ESL sections; the former may be frustrating because of unrealistic expectations. But several models of argument are providing so student can replicate what seems appropriate.

Again, the overall strength of this text is its comprehensive nature. When selecting this text for the first, second, or both sections of first-year writing, instructors will have sufficient materials and resources to carry out the course objectives. The examples are contemporary and intriguing enough to allow for considerable engagement for learning.