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MASTERING PRACTICAL WRITING

S. H. BURTON

M
MACMILLAN
EDUCATION

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CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>			vii
1 From A to B	1.1	Getting things done	1
	1.2	Getting on well together	1
	1.3	Getting the message through	1
		Exercise 1	
	1.4	Writer and reader	4
		Exercise 2	
	1.5	Reader and writer	6
	1.6	Thinking it out	7
	1.7	Good writing: a summary	8
		Exercise 3	
2 If I were you	2.1	Switching round	12
		Exercise 1	
	2.2	Contents, order, style	14
		Exercises 2–4	
	2.3	Consideration, clarity,	
		persuasiveness	18
3 When? What? Why?	3.1	Formal and informal occasions	20
		Exercise 1	
	3.2	The problem of relevance	22
	3.3	The matter in hand	24
	3.4	Directed writing	25
		Exercises 2, 3	
4 How?	4.1	Orderly arrangement	30
		Exercises 1–4	
	4.2	Ends and means	39
5 Finding the right words	5.1	Clear language	43
		Exercises 1–5	
	5.2	Appropriate language	52
		Exercises 6, 7	
	5.3	Concise language	58
		Exercises 8–12	
6 Getting a move on	6.1	Sentences	64
	6.2	Paragraphs	67
		Exercises 1, 2	
7 Notes and suggested answers			70

We may not want to write, but we know we must.

PREFACE

Most of us do as little writing as possible, but there are many jobs we can't escape. Our work and the necessary business transactions of our private life push us into doing them. We may not want to write, but we know we must. If we don't, some practical matter that concerns us won't be attended to. So, however reluctantly, we tackle these pieces of writing because we need to get something done.

Practical writing is regarded as a chore (and it frequently *is*), but it must be done well. Though it is often about humdrum, routine subjects, they always matter. Otherwise, we wouldn't put ourselves to the trouble of writing about them!

Our readers' response to the way we write materially affects our everyday lives. Practical concerns are helped on or held back by the efficiency or inefficiency of our writing.

If you make full use of the help this book offers, it will show you how to improve your practical writing. To make sure that you do use it to best advantage, notice these four special features before you begin:

- 1 It is a *course* in practical writing, and you must work your way through it. Don't sit back, passively reading. Get to grips with all the examples, and work out all the exercises. They are designed to teach you how to write, but you won't learn if you don't do them.
- 2 The notes and answers in Chapter 7 will help you to profit from – even, perhaps, enjoy – the exercises. Work out your own answers before you look at mine. One of the best ways of learning to write is to compare your efforts with someone else's. It is very important to explore various ways of tackling problems, finding out why one way works better than another. (My way won't always be better than yours.)
- 3 As a glance down the list of contents shows, this book is about the bed-rock problems that writing involves. It helps you to understand exactly what you are trying to do when you write. It examines the demands that writing makes. It explores attitudes, approaches and responses.

Correct grammar, punctuation, spelling and layout are important. You can't write well without those skills; but you can still write very badly with them. It's putting the cart before the horse to concentrate on 'the mechanics' before you've thought hard about writing in the ways suggested here.

Help with grammar, punctuation and the other similar matters that I have not attempted to cover here is readily available. *Mastering English*

Grammar and *Mastering English Language* (both published by Macmillan) are reliable guides to these important skills. The help that this book gives you is of a different kind. It is about identifying targets and learning how to hit them. If you take aim at the wrong target, even perfect literacy cannot guide your writing to its proper mark.

- 4 In each chapter, writing is considered 'in the round'. The main emphasis may be on one particular aspect of the writing process – writer/reader relationship, orderly arrangement, appropriate language, and so on – but no attempt is made to isolate the immediate topic by boxing it up inside the boundaries of that one chapter. There is continuous and planned cross-fertilisation between chapter and chapter, reflecting the realities of writing. That is why, for example, the basic issues raised in Chapter 1 are never allowed to drop out of sight, and why the contents of Sections 2.2 and 4.1 are interwoven.

To write well, you have to be able to respond simultaneously to the demands made by a complex set of circumstances. And that is why writing cannot be 'explained' in a series of self-contained 'lessons'.

S.H.B.