

The Writing Cycle—ed. Clela Allphin-Hoggatt. 2nd ed.; Roxbury; 1991; 297 pp. ISBN 0-935732-27-6.

The Writing Cycle, a text for basic writers, is really more of a workbook than a book. It looks like a workbook—soft cover, large (8 1/2 by 11 inches), and lots of blanks to fill in. I suspect that the book is most effective when used as a workbook with extensive verbal comment on the part of the instructor and perhaps with some supplementary handouts.

In the preface for instructors, though, author Clela Allphin-Hoggatt doesn't call it a workbook; rather, she asserts, "The text integrates principles of writing with reading, grammar, and mechanics within each chapter rather than in different sections of the text or separate books" (vii). Indeed, reading, grammar and mechanics are mixed in with discussions of writing; but all the discussions and readings are so brief that it is hard to believe they could really stand alone without accompanying text or explanations. In one short, two-and-a-half page section, for example, Allphin-Hoggatt discusses both topic sentences and support sentences and gives a sample paragraph. Then, she tells students, "You are now ready to begin building your own paragraph" (24); and she gives a nice page with lined blanks where students are to fill in their A-B-C outline of a paragraph. It all looks so simple; but, according to my experience, it is not that simple for students to write paragraphs unless they already know how to do so. When students don't know the difference between a topic sentence and a support sentence, or aren't even sure what a complete sentence is, more instruction is needed before supplying them with nice, neat lines to fill.

Allphin-Hoggatt's book (or workbook) is arranged by modes of discourse that she calls "writing strategies." There are chapters on narrating, explaining a process, classifying and dividing ideas, defining, comparing and contrasting, showing cause and effect, and convincing others. In an attempt not to intimidate students by giving them only essay models written by accomplished writers, she mixes in student paragraphs and essays with ones written by well-known writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Willa Cather. Allphin-Hoggatt may succeed in not intimidating students, but the length and number of readings seem—like the sections having to do with the writing process and exercises—brief.

Initially, the most appealing aspect of this book was the "word processing/tutorial diskette" that accompanied it. I was excited by the idea of a workbook for basic writers that had an accompanying computer tutorial, but I immediately ran into trouble when I tried to use it. First, the program was on a 5 1/4 inch floppy disk, and my computer uses 3 1/2 inch disks. No problem, I thought. I went to the computer center and

copied the program to the size disk I needed. Then, when I returned home and attempted to use it, I received an error message that the disk could only be installed from the original disk. Okay, I'm flexible. I took the disk to the writing center and again followed the directions, only to find that I needed two blank disks, instead of one, to "install" it. And, though the program can be installed on floppy disks, it does demand a computer with a hard disk memory for running the program. These requirements wouldn't be a major drawback in using the tutorial disk so long as the instructor pre-tested the disk and explained the requirements and procedure to students. *The Writing Cycle* text itself does not give any directions regarding the tutorial disk.

Once I did manage to access the tutorial disk, I discovered my original enthusiasm was largely rewarded. The disk offers extensive on-screen instructions and menus, as well as "help" screens. Major menu options include stages of writing, writing strategies, and revision. In the first option, students can work on prewriting exercises or on prewriting for an actual essay. This arrangement is repeated in sections on adding structure and on improving openings and closings. Then the material generated in any of the first three sections can be printed out and/or carried forward into the section on writing a draft. The drafting section makes use of the computer's own word processing program, and, thus, is an aid in helping students master WordPerfect or other standard programs. The writing strategies and revision sections also offer exercises that will supplement *The Writing Cycle* or other written texts.

I can imagine the tutorial text being efficiently used in a classroom situation in which students have access to computers but do not have extensive prior experience using them. This could be either a computer-based classroom or a writing center one-shot group instruction on how to use the tutorial disk. After introductory instruction, students could either use the tutorial disk in additional group sessions or in individual sessions. Exercises and essay drafts could be printed in either situation and turned in to the class instructor.

The strength of both *The Writing Cycle* text and the tutorial seems to lie in their potential for use as flexible supports for the basic writing teacher's own abilities as an instructor. And the tutorial disk would likely be most appropriate for an instructor whose abilities included a moderate experience with IBM-compatible computers.

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