

**Citation**

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***Mastering Skills for the TOEFL iBT 2nd Edition Advanced Writing* by M. Macgillivray, P. Yancey, and J. Zeter (2009), A Book Review**

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*Mastering Skills for the TOEFL iBT, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Advanced Writing* is the highest level textbook in a three-level textbook series that prepares students for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) iBT writing section. The book separates the writing portion of the TOEFL iBT into eight chapters that focus on mastering the essay-writing skills required to excel in that section. It is important to note that this book is not to be confused with *Mastering Skills for the TOEFL iBT, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Advanced Combined Book*, a textbook which focuses on all four TOEFL iBT skills: reading listening, speaking, and writing.

*Mastering Skills for the TOEFL iBT, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Advanced Writing* draws upon two current theories of second language pedagogy. First, the book employs process-based pedagogy, which is “consistent in recognizing the basic cognitive processes as central to writing activity” (Hyland, 2003, p. 10) . It is a “non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning” (Hyland, 2003, p. 11). Before completing any task, students must identify the task, outline, write an essay, and then proofread and revise if time permits. Second, most test preparation books take the approach of “instruction with practice,” whereby students are lectured on theoretical concepts and assigned practice exercises for homework. This book takes the opposite approach of “practice with some instruction,” whereby learning occurs through doing tasks during class hours using a minimal amount of instruction (Folse, 2006). The textbook is designed to maximize student writing time, offering authentic, timed practice that simulates the actual TOEFL iBT writing section.

This textbook begins by clearly stating what the TOEFL iBT writing section is assessing and how the section is structured. The book includes study tips, advice on test management, and an overview on how the test is scored. The book also provides a preview of



the two writing tasks student must take on the day of the test. Lastly, it contains plenty of integrated authentic tasks modeled after the actual TOEFL iBT writing section.

The chapters of *Mastering Skills for the TOEFL iBT, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Advanced Writing* are divided into three parts. Part I includes the first three chapters and deals with the first task of the writing section, which asks students to relate a reading passage to a lecture. Chapter 1 examines how to organize information, including note-taking, synthesizing main ideas, and making an outline. Chapter 2 teaches students how to paraphrase, using their own words to convey essential information and ideas from passages. Chapter 3 discusses how to make connections between paragraphs, in particular transitioning and citing when comparing and contrasting. Part II continues with the next three chapters and focuses on the second task, which asks students to write an essay based on experience or opinion. Chapter 4 focuses on brainstorming ideas for an essay. Chapter 5 continues by having students write thesis statements for their essays and state clear and strong topic sentences to support them. Chapter 6 devotes time to making ideas flow, defining and fine tuning characteristics of good essays. Part III finishes up with the last two chapters and includes exercises for developing writing form. Chapter 7 deals with the proper use of verb forms, and Chapter 8 informs students of correct sentence formation. The three parts are aimed at boosting students' essay writing skills so they can score 100 to 110 on the TOEFL iBT.

The strength of this textbook is seen in its refining of students' writing skills. It promotes two skills necessary for higher level education: integrating ideas between two different sources and forming opinions in written form. Students learn these two skills through the completion of two tasks. The first task supplies a reading passage and an accompanying lecture (on a CD) on a wide range of academic subjects. This gives students the opportunity to experience the various topics they will encounter not only on the test but also in their academic futures. The reading and lecture will usually take opposing viewpoints on the academic topic. The students must summarize the viewpoints and explain how they relate to each other and must avoid taking a position and attempting to support it. The second task provides prompts from which students must take a stance and support it with relevant details or examples. For example, a prompt may ask what qualities a role model should have. Students will brainstorm and construct a thesis statement with topic sentences as well as reasons or examples to support their answers.

One possible caveat is that *Mastering Skills for the TOEFL iBT, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Advanced Writing* is designed for classroom instruction for higher level students. Even *Building Skills*



*for the TOEFL iBT, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Beginning Writing*, the introductory level of the series, is geared toward students with a high intermediate proficiency of English. The large vocabulary required to understand academic texts and the abstract ideas covered in many of the passages make it quite difficult. Therefore, this textbook might not be useful for students who may have to spend more time in building their vocabulary in order to understand the passages rather than pay attention to concepts crucial to essay writing.

In summary, *Mastering Skills for the TOEFL iBT, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Advanced Writing* is a practical and useful textbook for learners who will use English extensively in an academic or professional setting. The book is well-sequenced, allowing writing teachers to utilize this book by itself in their writing classes or as a supplementary text. In fact, the concepts presented in this textbook are focused on building fundamentals in essay writing; therefore teachers will not only find this book useful for English language learners but also for bilingual and native English speaking students.

### References

- Folse, K. (2006). *The art of teaching speaking: Research and pedagogy for the ESL/EFL classroom*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Hyland, K. (2003). *Second Language Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

