

BOOK REVIEW

Samantray, K (2015). *Academic and Research Writing*. Hyderabad. Orient Blackswan. ISBN 9788125060253 (pp 146: price Rs 115/-)

Writing has been a topic of concern at all levels of language teaching. There has been adequate research to find reasons for inherent reluctance to take to writing readily. We spend less than 10% of our communication time for writing and this is abysmally low. Given this situation, the teacher's concern to help learners with good writing skills becomes a daunting one. A teacher not being proficient in writing needs as much help in writing as the learner.

The book under review has a focus on teaching writing at the tertiary level and is appropriately titled *Academic and Research Writing*. However, the subtitle declares that this is a course book for undergraduates and research students. When one reads through this book, one finds that it is better suited to research students than the undergraduates. Though undergraduates are involved in project work and creating reports, the actual research in all its seriousness happens only at the postgraduate level. At this level, what is discussed in the first few chapters may help the learners revise their knowledge and serve as a remedial course before launching on research writing?

The book is well organized in nine chapters. The first chapter which is an introduction provides a panoramic view of the book and helps the learner become familiar with different parts of the book and their uses.

The next two chapters of the book are

devoted to mechanics of writing where the author discusses grammar and vocabulary. A chapter on mechanics could include some aspects of graphology which is unique to English, especially so when compared with Indian languages. For example, Indian languages do not use capital letters; most of the letters have a uniform size; Indian languages have different types of strokes, the spacing between words and compounding of words follow different conventions in Indian languages; traditionally Indian languages had only two punctuation marks the full stop and the comma represented by two vertical lines and a single vertical line respectively. The wide variety of punctuation marks we use have been adopted from the western literature more recently. A word about this would be well in place.

Chapters four to six focus on different aspects of academic writing. What needs to be appreciated here is that the author has paid more attention to aspects of discourse rather than form of writing. She discusses in detail the concept of 'text structure' and 'paragraphs'. The order could have been reversed from point of view of gradation and logic. Focus on discourse is a very happy departure in the days of the computer when templates are readily available for writing letters, reports etc. The form has less importance in comparison with the content. Therefore the author rightly devotes her attention to the content development without harping on the need for a fixed proforma.

The last three chapters are devoted to research writing and cover a wide range of topics. In my considered opinion, this is an important part of the book and the author could have devoted more space for this. The topics covered include form of the research report (here form is essential), the writing style, different sections of writing a research article, formalities to be observed while submitting a paper for publication, reviewing research, quoting from other sources (primary, secondary and tertiary) and providing a bibliography. Each of these topics has been discussed properly with good examples and this needs to be commended.

More than the contents of the book, the manner in which the book is written and organized conveys more than what is intended. The author has put across her ideas in a very lucid style. The language is simple and direct and there are no hurdles in understanding the content. She advocates the advantages of using a simple language without preaching about it. The concepts about writing which are introduced are not simple. Concepts like use of appropriate sentence structure (formal language employed for academic writing as opposed to personal writing - see pp 28-29) in academic writing, paying attention to coherence while developing a paragraph (the basic unit of writing) (see chapter 6), referencing and citation (see pp 79 -84) are not only well explained but are adequately supported by good tasks. Throughout the book there are 47 task types with good rubrics and properly graded items. Each task type has a number of activities and

each one has been well thought of. This makes the book totally self-instructional and learner-friendly. With the help of a teacher the learners get better guidance.

Though the author has provided a number of tasks in the book, the author has chosen not to provide a key to these tasks. I consider this as a minor weakness. As one can see many of the tasks are open-ended and cannot have a definite answer. But there are tasks e.g. Activity 3.3 (pp24-25); Activity 4.4 (pp30-31); Activity 5.1 (pp39-40); Activity 7.2 (pp 70-71); Activity 7.7 (p 86); Activity 9.3 (pp114-115) (these are just a chosen few, there are more activities like these) which have specific answers. A key to such activities will help the learners and also the teachers in a big way. A key is an essential source of verification and has a right of place in any good course book.

The book carries two appendices. The first of the two appendices is highly relevant as it provides a blue print of a dissertation. A word of caution could have been provided here suggesting that the blue print is recommendatory and not mandatory. This is to avoid duplication of the same format dissertation after dissertation. The second of the appendices is a compendium of common errors and is generally helpful to students.

The book is a good addition to the student bookshelf.

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