

## Book Review

# The Writer's Practice: Building Confidence in Your Nonfiction Writing

*Reviewed by Jennifer Morris, ORTESOL Journal*

Warner, J. (2019). *The Writer's Practice: Building Confidence in Your Nonfiction Writing*. Penguin.

The learning is in the doing. That is the simple premise of this engaging book by John Warner. We are all writers in life, and as teachers we are looking for ways to empower our students to develop their understanding of what it means to be a writer. For teachers of second language learners, of course we need them to understand language conventions, but as writers in the world, our students need to move beyond structured examples and explore what it means to write in the native speaking discourse community. Warner, an educator himself, wrote this book to help people approach writing as writers “trying to convey a specific message to a specific audience to fulfill a specific purpose” (p.6). This is not a textbook per se, but it provides wonderful insight into the practice of writing through what Warner calls “experiences.” Students need to understand the purposes of the various types of writing that they are asked to do for classes and beyond. This book can inspire educators to create writing activities that engage students in meta-cognitive processes about what it means to be a (good) writer in the real world.

The first part of the book, called “Getting Started,” is where Warner describes what he means by “experiences” and how they contribute to developing a practice as a writer. He believes that “everyone can learn to write, but to achieve this the writer must be in charge of their own learning” (p.9). The first writing experience for the reader is in “Getting Started,” and Warner asks us to explore who we are as writers — a useful exercise for educators and students alike.

The remainder of the book is divided into six sections, each focused on different types of writing. Warner introduces the writer's practice itself in Section 1 with a focus on the attitudes, skills, habits of mind and knowledge that are necessary to do it well. He describes the writing process, the importance of purpose and audience in writing, and the necessary skill of reading like a writer. This reviewer has used excerpts from this section in an intermediate writing class at the university level in activities where students considered

definitions of good writers and the writing process (in general and for them personally). Students can apply the habits of mind presented in this section when writing for various purposes in college always considering why they are writing and for whom.

The other sections of the book revolve around different types of writing from analytical to argument, each with several writing experiences to practice and explore these genres. Each section has a short introduction that would work well as a meta-cognitive reading task before exploring the writing for each genre. All of the experiences provide a context, audience and purpose for the writing as well as a reflection of the writing task. Some sections also include what Warner calls a remix, which is an opportunity to revise or reconsider the approach that one took to the writing experience. Throughout the book, there are authentic and interesting writing tasks to help us explore and hone our skills while gaining inspiration as teachers of writing. The experiences are adaptable to classrooms of different levels, though they may be most appropriate for intermediate and advanced level language learners. One task, which proved to be especially useful for this reviewer is titled “Why Should I Trust This? (Understanding Sources).” The purpose of this experience is to write a report to determine the accuracy and trustworthiness of an online article for someone who needs help with this skill. Through the experience, the writer must not only determine whether a source is credible, but also help the audience develop their own skills to engage with online content. As we work with emerging academic writers, understanding sources is a key component, and this experience helps them explore source validity and reliability.

Perhaps written for native English speakers but certainly applicable to how we teach second language writing, this book gets to the heart of what it means to be a writer and why we do this. It is invaluable for a practitioner who is devising classroom tasks for writing development at upper levels. I read this book hoping to deepen my own understanding of writing as a practitioner but gained so much more. *The Writer’s Practice* provides practical approaches to moving a writing class beyond a standard 5-paragraph template and helps us understand how good writing adapts to the requirements of each situation.

### **Author**

**Jennifer Morris** is an English language practitioner with 25 years of experience in the field of TESOL. She holds an MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL from the University of Leicester. She has worked in a variety of roles in higher education both abroad and in the U.S. She is the current editor of the ORTESOL Journal.