

BOOK REVIEW

Dykstra, Gerald, project director. *Composition: Guided + Free*, Programs 5-8.

Teachers College Press, Columbia University
New York, 1978.

Paperback \$1.50 each. Kit of five (includes
teacher's manual) \$6.75.

Teachers who have used levels one through four of *Composition: Guided + Free* with success will welcome the arrival of levels five through eight of the same series. Others, who have been in agreement with guided composition theory but who have had misgivings about using the first four books (designed for students in the elementary grades) because of their juvenile character will receive books five through eight with relief.

Originally published in 1974, the first

four levels of *Composition: Guided + Free* were billed as "part of a comprehensive series in twelve levels." The second four levels now available give no indication if or when levels nine through twelve will be published.

Whatever the fate of the upper four levels of *Composition: Guided + Free* levels five through eight are a welcome addition to the series, overcoming many of the objections to the previously available levels. The writing models treat more sophisticated

adult topics and should satisfy the tastes of secondary school and adult education students. There is also a greater variety of writing model topics in levels five through eight than is found in the lower levels. This variety may be due to the variety of authors. Models in the level five book (Carol Jankowski, author) center around the history of the United States. Level six (Lois Morton, author) contains a variety of topics, from tourism and Thomas Edison to Mayan civilization and mountain climbing. Level seven (Hafiz Baghban, author) is made up of traditional style folk tales from Afghanistan. And level eight (Alice Pack, author), like level six, covers a potpourri of topics, from pole vaulting and job seeking to learning a new language and making bread.

Of course, there are also many similarities between the lower and upper level books. The first thing that meets the examiner's eye is their similar format (8" by 5½") and the same brightly colored paper-back binding.

TESL Reporter

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Inside the books' covers, the similarities continue. Levels five through eight are based on the same combination of learning and linguistic theory that supports the first four levels. The emphasis is still on learning to write by writing and on the students' successful, step-by-step attainment of specific, predetermined goals. Several advantages of the theory and its resultant materials are mentioned in the teacher's manual, among them the fact that success in achieving writing goals is possible for students at all levels—even beginners—and that, in spite of the abundance of writing practice provided for students, the teacher's burden of correction work is relatively light.

In essence, each book is a collection of writing models accompanied by a set of sequenced goals presented as tasks or steps. It is considered a "tool for eliciting writing practice controlled in such a way that the student is always capable of writing error-free papers." The steps, including copying, simple substitutions, gender changes, number changes, person changes, tense changes, mood changes, conditional changes, direct and indirect speech, negation, questions, voice changes, combining sentences, lexical changes, expansions, inventions, and—finally—choosing a topic and writing on it, increase in difficulty as control decreases. Upper level books cover the easier tasks in a few steps and then focus on more advanced skills.

Personal experience with the books in the classroom has shown that students still have problems making the final leap (somewhere between steps thirty-five and forty) from loosely controlled to completely free writing. However, in spite of this drawback, *Composition: Guided + Free*—with its large number of gradual steps, variety of models, individualized self-pacing, comprehensible instructions for the students, near-comprehensive coverage of the grammatical features of English, and pleasant packaging—remains definitely superior to the other guided-composition writing texts that have been produced since the guided-composition idea was developed over a decade ago.¹

Lynn E. Henrichsen

¹Gerald Dykstra and Christina Bratt Paulston, "Guided Composition," *English Language Teaching*, January 1967.