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VOYAGES

IN ENGLISH

GRAMMAR AND WRITING



LOYOLAPRESS.



Voyages in English: Steeped in Research and Tradition

Introduction

In this 21st century, globalization and technology have increased the need for effective and efficient communication. People need to know how to communicate not only to experience enjoyable daily interactions and healthy relationships but also to attain success in school and the workplace. Key to effective communication is using correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation to present thoughts and ideas clearly and without misunderstanding. Whenever we speak or write—even in e-mails and social media posts—we are being judged. A 2014 poll by CareerBuilder.com showed that 51 percent of employers check potential job candidates' social media pages, and 32 percent of candidates were not hired due to poor communication skills. A person who uses correct grammar in speech and writing is often seen as educated, determined, and authoritative; such a good impression frequently paves the way for success in life, school, and the workplace.

English is the most widespread language used around the world for international business, government, and scientific communications. For students in the United States to compete nationally and internationally, they must master the knowledge and skills needed for proficient English communication. It is essential that educators and policymakers work together to prepare students to communicate for a variety of purposes and audiences. With this goal in mind, policymakers over the years have enacted laws such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to ensure that every child has access to an education and succeeds academically, and educators have developed national, Common Core, and state-specific educational standards and high-stakes tests to define the desired outcomes of schooling and to measure students' success in terms of these outcomes. However, the 2011 writing assessment conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found that only 24 percent of students in the United States performed at the proficient level, and about 53 percent of students performed at the basic level (The Nation's Report Card, 2012).

Why do many students have difficulty writing effectively? In their article "Evidence-Based Practices for Teaching Writing," Amy Gillespie and Steve Graham explain that writing is a multifaceted task that involves the use and coordination of many cognitive processes. Due to its complexities, many students find writing challenging, and many teachers struggle with teaching the skill effectively. Gillespie and Graham conclude that no single strategy for teaching writing will prove effective for all students. However, in the United States, the trend for years has been to undervalue the importance of

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teaching grammar along with writing. This oversight has taken its toll: “knowing about grammar helps us understand what makes sentences and paragraphs clear and interesting and precise” (Haussamen, 2002).

Loyola Press, the publisher of *Voyages in English*, a comprehensive writing and grammar program, appreciates that every aspect of language instruction has a purpose. When grammar and writing are learned and integrated, students are better prepared to become literate masters of the written and spoken word. When students recognize that what they learn in the classroom has both function and value in the real world, they are more engaged and invested in learning. Teachers must constantly help students understand that what they learn in school has meaning and function beyond the classroom walls. “Public discourse has [its] rules” (Oldenburg, 2006), and students will be judged on how effectively they communicate.

Voyages is organized in two distinct parts: grammar and writing. This design helps teachers tailor lesson plans to student needs and provides the flexibility that teachers need to teach grammar and writing according to their own personalities and informed approaches as well as their school’s and school district’s guidelines. The components and lessons that comprise *Voyages* are the result of decades of research and practice by experts in the fields of grammar, writing, and communication. For more than 75 years, *Voyages* has adapted to the changing educational paradigms in the United States while maintaining its focus of helping students become intelligent communicators who are literate contributors to and leaders in society.

English Language Arts History and Research

In the 1970s, formal grammar instruction was considered an antiquated practice in many educational environments. The preferred approach was “creativity at all costs with the results being ruinous on standard English acquisition” (Bantick, 2006). In the mid-1980s, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) actually discouraged grammar instruction; however, the council has since retreated from that position (*Grammar Is Imperative*, 2004). In the 1990s, some states wrote educational standards outlining what students should know and be able to do. By 2002 the NCLB Act mandated that every state implement educational standards. Then in 2010 most states implemented the Common Core State Standards in an attempt to ensure that the majority of U.S. students learn the same skills and concepts. With the signing of ESSA in 2015, standards-based reform was “thrown into a state of flux,” says Andy Porter, director of the Center on Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning. Porter says “each state now has a lot more freedom and flexibility to go their own route.” Consequently, some states have reverted to their own state standards. Both the

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Common Core and state standards call for students to “identify” or “use” specific grammar concepts.

According to the NCTE’s 2008 Writing Now policy report, “research shows that explicit teaching of grammar using a context-based functional approach, which focuses on how words, phrases, and sentences work together to make meaning, can help basic writers and English-language learners improve their writing.” Grammar, punctuation, and spelling play an important role in the relationship between writers and readers. “Readers expect to see words spelled in a standardized way, for punctuation to be used in predictable ways, for usage and syntax to match that used in texts they already acknowledged as successful” (NCTE, 2016). All aspects of grammar and writing need to be taught consistently and well. “They cannot be absorbed through osmosis and through the act of reading alone” (Bantick).

Unfortunately, the well-intended ESSA, NCLB, and required high-stakes tests have had some undesired outcomes. Educators feel enormous pressure to raise their students’ test scores; this can result in “teaching to the test” by using actual or similar test items in the classroom, instead of directing instruction toward the skills that the test represents. Another unintended consequence is that the focus is too often on meeting minimum proficiency standards rather than providing high-level instruction and practice that challenge students who are most capable and support those who struggle. Six years after implementation of the Common Core, results from the 2016 National Curriculum Survey conducted by ACT, a widely used college entrance exam, showed that only 16 percent of college instructors rated their incoming students as being well prepared for college-level work. These results show a significant decline from the 2009 and 2012 survey results, in which the corresponding result was 26 percent. Policymakers and school administrators must recognize the danger of merely preparing students for tests rather than attending to the need to truly educate them (Sternberg, 2008). Students are lacking the ability to “consistently form complete sentences or to make pronouns agree with their referents” (Oldenburg, 2005). Over the year, the lack of grammar instruction has resulted in adults using poor sentence construction, incorrect spelling, and inappropriate or no punctuation.

The Unyielding Position of *Voyages in English*

Issues in language arts pedagogy and instructional methodology continue to evolve. Criticism leveled against educators who teach grammar, usage, and punctuation is rooted in the misunderstanding that concepts and strategies are simply taught or drilled in isolation of any meaningful language activity. In addition, many people view diagramming as a useless exercise, despite the fact that diagramming requires students

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to analyze the structure of a sentence, a skill they can then apply to their own writing and speaking, thus improving and clarifying their meaning.

Common sense dictates that “to become skilled at almost any activity requires extensive and continual practice” (Allington, 2008). Those teachers who have used *Voyages in English* amidst these pedagogical and methodological controversies know that every aspect of language instruction has a purpose and enables students to grow in their ability and capacity to communicate in speech and writing and to think both analytically and creatively. These teachers have recognized “the injustice of allowing students to continue making basic errors that may prevent them from admittance to the schools of their choice or to meaningful employment opportunities” (Oldenburg).

For more than 75 years, those who have written and published *Voyages in English*, as well as those who have used it for instruction in the classrooms, have never abandoned the belief that exceptional communication skills are crucial for success in the world. An excellent education in the acquisition and application of language has never been exclusively about memorizing parts of speech in isolation or diagramming a sentence as ends in themselves. *Voyages* has always been about helping students become polished, articulate, and intelligent communicators. It has always been focused on the needs of the students and in building their confidence so that when they speak, others listen, and when they write, others understand their message and want to read more. To that end, *Voyages* has advanced the best values of the past to meet the demands of communication in the 21st century with all its new avenues of expression and technologies. Now, as in past editions, the essential mission of *Voyages in English* continues to be

- To uphold the strength and rigor of the original *Voyages* program that enabled hundreds of thousands of students to find their places as fully literate and valued contributors to society
- To provide all students (and teachers) with the tools needed to attain proficiency in writing skills and grammar and to achieve mastery in using appropriate genres to communicate successfully with an audience
- To reintegrate the writing process with the structural underpinnings of grammar so students develop as effective writers and critical thinkers who can achieve their full potential
- To build students’ confidence as effective writers, readers, listeners, and speakers while adapting to the changing educational landscape

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NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts

In the 1990s, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) anticipated the literacy skills and abilities that students would need to succeed in the 21st century. Together the NCTE and IRA established national standards for English language arts learners, and these standards have served as a precursor for changes in literacy education in the United States. The NCTE and IRA reaffirmed these national standards in 2012 and stated that the standards are designed to complement Common Core, state, and local standards and contribute to ongoing discussion about English language arts classroom activities and curriculums.

The focus of *Voyages in English* has always been on helping students master grammar, writing, and the use of the English language while building their confidence as effective writers, readers, listeners, and speakers. To that end, *Voyages* has been aligned to the Common Core State Standards and correlated to the NCTE/IRA and key state standards. The Common Core standards addressed in each lesson of *Voyages* are noted in the corresponding wrap in the Teacher Edition. The state standards correlations for key states may be found at www.voyagesinenglish.com. The NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts have been used to inform the purpose, curriculum content, and development decisions in the production of *Voyages*.

The following graphic organizer illustrates the perspective that informs the NCTE/IRA English language arts standards. The learner is in the center of the diagram to show that the standards are centered on the active process of students' language use and learning. The three intersecting circles identify three primary areas of emphasis and concern in language learning: content, purpose, and development. *Content* represents “what” students should learn in the language arts; *purpose* explains “why” students use the language arts; *development* shows “how” students grow as language users. The surrounding *context* circle represents the social and cultural contexts in which all language learning occurs.

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Interactive model for the NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts

A comparison of this graphic organizer to the *Voyages in English* scope-and-sequence chart in the Teacher Edition and a reading of the following explanations of selected standards as they are applied in *Voyages* will clarify how the publisher, authors, and educational consultants of the program have meticulously attended to the needs of learners and the requirements of the NCTE/IRA English language arts standards pertaining to 21st-century literacies.

Audience

Standard 4: Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. (NCTE/IRA, 1996, reaffirmed 2012)

Every language in the world has five registers, or levels, of formality (Payne, 2008)—frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. With the explosion of digital media and the subsequent use of “text speak” (Bantick), communication is focused on being instantaneous, abbreviated, and set in the casual register. As a result, spelling is reduced to a minimum number of letters, traditional English is truncated, and expression is casual, quick, and often grammatically incorrect. This may be an acceptable level of expression when it occurs between friends; however, school and work environments operate in the formal and consultative registers.

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In the formal register, word choice and sentence structure must be precise, accurate, and articulate. The consultative register is a combination of formal and casual (Payne) with distinctions drawn based on the setting and the participants. What is acceptable and appropriate in the schoolyard with classmates or in another informal setting may not be appropriate in the classroom during discussion or when addressing the teacher or classmates in an instructional environment.

Voyages in English teaches students in kindergarten through grade 8 how to recognize their purpose and audience and to adjust their oral and written communications to attend to what is required, acceptable, and effective. Over time, through consistent instruction and reinforcement, students understand the “social and disciplinary demands of the different forms of writing they encounter” (Applebee).

Strategies and Genres

- **Standard 5:** Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes. (NCTE/IRA, 1996, reaffirmed 2012)
- **Standard 6:** Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts. (NCTE/IRA, 1996, reaffirmed 2012)

Students in grades 1–8 are instructed in the application of the six traits of language necessary for quality writing: idea development, organization, word choice, voice, sentence fluency, and conventions. Grades 3–8 also include a seventh writing trait: presentation. A review of the student models in the writer’s workshops of *Voyages* and the accompanying scoring rubrics will evidence consistent attention to Standards 5 and 6 as they are applied to a variety of writing genres.

Prewriting, drafting, editing, revising, proofreading, and publishing are developed and practiced in an age-appropriate manner in the following writing genres: narration, description, exposition, letters, creative prose and poetry, persuasion, and research. Specific text types within each genre are introduced, taught for mastery, and reinforced over a period of at least two to three years to insure learning for understanding. These text types include personal narratives, descriptions, fables, fantasies, tales, play scripts, realistic fiction, limericks, haiku, ballads, narrative poems, how-to articles, book reports and reviews, friendly and

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business or formal letters, persuasive essays, advertisements, argumentative essays, literary analyses and reflections, and research reports. Each unit begins with an in-depth instruction of a specific genre along with grammar, usage, and mechanics concepts appropriate to that genre that students can immediately apply in the Writer's Workshop for that genre.

Research

- **Standard 7:** Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience. (NCTE/IRA, 1996)
- **Standard 8:** Students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge. (NCTE/IRA, 1996, reaffirmed 2012)

At every level in the *Voyages* series, students are instructed in age-appropriate skills that are needed in research writing, from how to conduct research and read secondary sources (in concert with an adult) in *Voyages in English Kindergarten*, to how to alphabetize in grade 1, to how to research, develop, and compose a complete research report in grade 8.

Careful attention is given to presenting research skills progressively so that students have time to master one skill before moving on to another. The educators responsible for the production of *Voyages* strongly believe that it is too late to wait until middle school to teach important research skills such as gathering data from a variety of sources, composing note cards, properly documenting parenthetical references, and preparing a Works Cited page. By presenting each step of the research process systematically, *Voyages* provides students with the much-needed support and practice to become accomplished researchers and ethical writers. Students learn that good research requires searching multiple reliable sources, selectively choosing the information that supports their topics, and applying the strategies of the writing process to produce well-constructed papers representative of their abilities. The scope-and-sequence chart in the Teacher Edition of *Voyages* presents a clear listing of the skills presented and attended to in each grade.

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The English Language Learner

- **Standard 10:** Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum. (NCTE/IRA, 1996, reaffirmed 2012)

Every student deserves a strong, interesting, challenging curriculum with high-level outcomes. Teachers must “engage students in instruction through different approaches to learning” (Tomlinson, 2014). It is a myth that the English-language learner (ELL) is linguistically deficient. Linguists have known for decades that all languages, “even those considered to be deficient varieties of English dialects and English vernaculars, are highly structured with complex grammatical rules” (Gorski, 2008). The very first editions of *Voyages in English* were intended to meet the needs of an immigrant population and assist them in taking their rightful place in society. *Voyages* has never abandoned its initial goal of meeting the needs of the English-language learner. With the resurgence of immigration, *Voyages* continues to develop a curriculum that teaches to the strengths of English-language learners while supporting them in areas where they may struggle.

It is a core value of *Voyages* that curriculum and instructional materials never stereotype those new to the English language. The ELL teaching options in *Voyages* are based on how students most frequently acquire and develop language skills, such as interacting with more-proficient English speakers, using a student’s native language to support understanding, and using visual aids throughout the lesson. The teaching options in *Voyages* provide many useful ideas that educators may use to reinforce learning objectives with methods that will help English-language learners become proficient readers, writers, listeners, and speakers.

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Application to Real Life

- **Standard 11:** Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities. (NCTE/IRA, 1996, reaffirmed 2012)
- **Standard 12:** Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information). (NCTE/IRA, 1996, reaffirmed 2012)

The development of every part of speech, each element of correct usage, and each writing strategy throughout the *Voyages in English* series is directed toward producing reflective, creative, critical, and articulate communicators. The core values and competencies that fortify this series have always been focused on high-level instruction and practice that challenge the most able of students and support those who struggle. It is impossible to have a short-term view of curriculum and instruction and expect to have a long-term success rate for students. Directors of high school and college admittance or future employers may not ask a candidate to list the parts of speech or to diagram a sentence, but they will look at the quality of writing in a resume, an application, or a required essay. It is the articulate candidate who knows how to draw on and utilize grammar and writing skills in a clear and concise manner who will be recognized and accepted.

“The best teachers never lose sight of their students’ potential. They believe in the brilliance and ability of all of their students” (Landsman, 2006). The best instructional materials support the visions and beliefs of the best teachers. They keep their focus on helping students build on their strengths and improve on their weaknesses. The best teachers and the best instructional materials set the bar high and never settle for mediocrity from any students. Practices that work “establish common, high expectations for all learners with a focus on achievement” and provide for “increasing instruction time in literacy” (Hawkins, 2007).

***Voyages in English* Teaches All Students**

All students have needs. The changing demographics of school populations have led to a steadily increasing linguistic and cultural diversity. English-language learners and students with special needs require a highly structured and organized program that provides appropriate support over time. However, all students benefit from the challenge of a basic curriculum that calls for them to apply critical thinking. Also, all

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students have the right to be “full participants in an excellence-based education. Beginning with high-quality curriculum and instruction is a precursor to excellence for any student” (Tomlinson). Good instruction, with a support system in place, moves children beyond what they believe they are capable of doing. “When in doubt, teach up!” (Tomlinson). To do less would surely disenfranchise those students with poor communication skills and would be unjust to those students able to meet a challenge. High-level curriculum development “as a process, seeks to improve the learning experience of [all] students” (Wiles, 2005).

The content and skills required of articulate communicators have never been sacrificed by those who write or teach *Voyages in English*. However, educators do change when they believe the change is right. Adaptation to the needs of the learner is part of every revision of *Voyages* and is at the heart of what “best teachers” do. The content and instructional methodology of the curriculum presented in *Voyages* is based in research and instructional practices as well as on the learning styles of students.

Conclusion

For more than 75 years, *Voyages in English* has helped teachers differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of all students. When the focus remains on the student and the level of expectation is high, standards and high-stakes tests become ways of assessing student progress rather than goals to be met. A truly excellent instructional language arts series always sets its sight on lifetime communication competence rather than short-term minimum-proficiency test results. *Voyages* has stood the test of time in proving its prowess in preparing students for life in a society that values dignified and effective communication skills and expects high-level performance. Together, *Voyages in English* and teachers can enable all students to become intelligent communicators who are literate contributors to and leaders in this 21st century.

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