

# Reviews

## Visual Grammar (Elementary)

by Jim Scrivener  
Richmond 2013  
978-84-668-1529-1

This very attractive book, aimed at elementary-level students and intended for both self-study and classroom use, addresses the important question of how we can get our students to understand and internalise the grammar that we teach them. Each section is headed by a statement beginning *I can ...*, thereby mirroring the 'can-do' statements of the CEFR, and presenting the learning of grammar in terms of achievement and success, rather than as an uphill struggle. The fact that the sections are short (usually one page, sometimes two) also makes the information 'bite-sized' and easily accessible.

However, where this book really succeeds is in the quality of the illustrations, photographs and diagrams, which give a visual representation of how English grammar works. As the author says in his introductory address to the student: '*Grammar practice doesn't have to be boring!*' This book even gives the impression that it might be fun! The timelines which demonstrate the sequence and meaning of the different tenses are particularly successful, and teachers who have struggled to draw their own timelines on the board will find these invaluable. The text explanations are clear and helpful, too.

Returning to the section headed 'To the student' at the beginning of the book, I think this was a really good idea. Here, the students are given a simple but unpatronising explanation of why grammar is important and what they need to know; it also includes a clear explanation, aided by visuals, of some of the terms that many other textbooks assume that students already know and understand: *collocation, chunks, contractions, third person, comparative*, etc. This section is followed by an explanation of the different features of the book and how it works. Each new section has a selection of the following elements:

**A blue grammar box.** This shows the students how to 'make the grammar'. The boxes contain rules and examples.

**Example sentences.** There are plenty of these, usually accompanied by eye-catching and relevant photos, which help demonstrate the meaning.

**Diagrams.** These show how the language works – for example, where word order changes. They include the timelines for showing the meaning of tenses.

**Exercises.** A range of different exercise types give the students a chance to practise using the language and encourage them to be creative in their use of it.

**About you.** Exercises with this heading require a personal response from the students, using the target language.

**The tough one.** Exercises with this heading are more challenging.

**Internet quiz.** This heading indicates that some online research will be needed to find the answers.

**Wordpool.** In these exercises, the students have to make sentences from a mixture of different words.

The book includes a code, giving access to the Richmond Learning Platform, where the teacher can assign and track activities. A Teacher's Digital Book is also available for use on an Interactive Whiteboard.

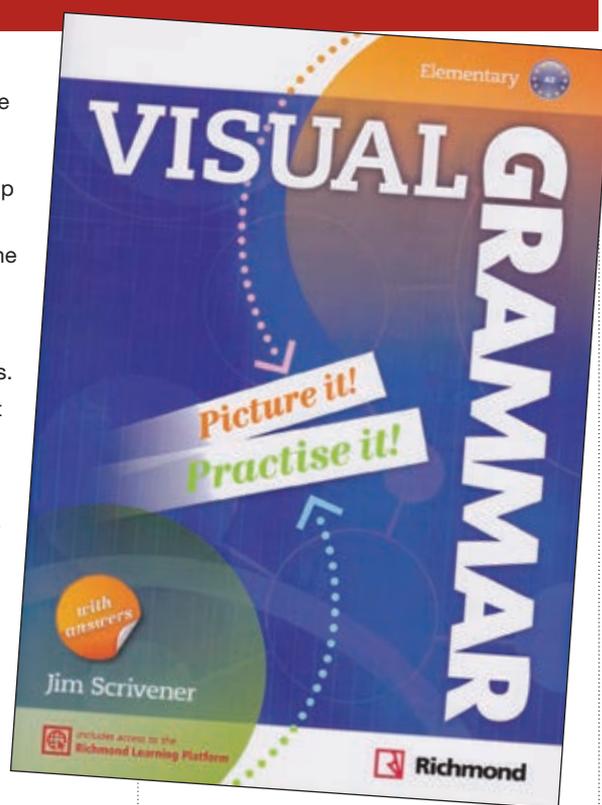
**Louisa Judge**  
Toulouse, France

**Subscribers can get a 12.5% discount on this book. Go to the ETP website and quote ETPQR0314 at the checkout.**

## Writing: Learn to write better academic essays

by Els Van Geyte  
Collins 2013  
978-0-00-750710-8

Part of the Collins *Academic Skills* series, this is essentially a self-study book aimed at international students studying or preparing to study at English-medium colleges or universities, though it could



also be used with a teacher on study skills courses.

Learning to write well-structured essays, reports and case studies in the style expected by academic institutions is probably one of the hardest tasks that such students face. This book takes the students step-by-step through the process of producing an acceptable piece of writing, from the basics of interpreting an essay question or understanding a writing task set by a tutor, through to structuring a piece of writing correctly, getting the register right, referencing sources, avoiding plagiarism and tailoring the writing to the expected reader. Along the way, the book also addresses language issues, such as punctuation, the use of articles and common errors.

Throughout the book, there are examples of good writing style, and poor examples to be corrected. However, examples alone are seldom enough to help students navigate the minefield of academic expectations. They need to know why they are required to present their work in a certain way and why one expression or sentence is better than another. The explanations here are very helpful because they are not only easy to understand, but they also go into the reasons why something is wrong or why

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another way of expressing it would be preferred. The answer key also provides full explanations, rather than simply listing the answers.

The annotated essays in Appendix 1, which is called 'Taking your writing up to the next level', will be extremely useful to academic students. There are both positive comments and negative comments in the margins of these essays, so students can see both what they can use as a model and what they should avoid. There is also help in Appendix 2 on interpreting marking criteria and understanding and responding to feedback received on a piece of writing.

The emphasis is always on making it clear what university staff expect from their students and how the students can make sure that they meet these expectations to the best of their ability. Because of this, I believe that this book will be invaluable in helping international students take on the challenge of academic writing.

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## Reading for Advanced

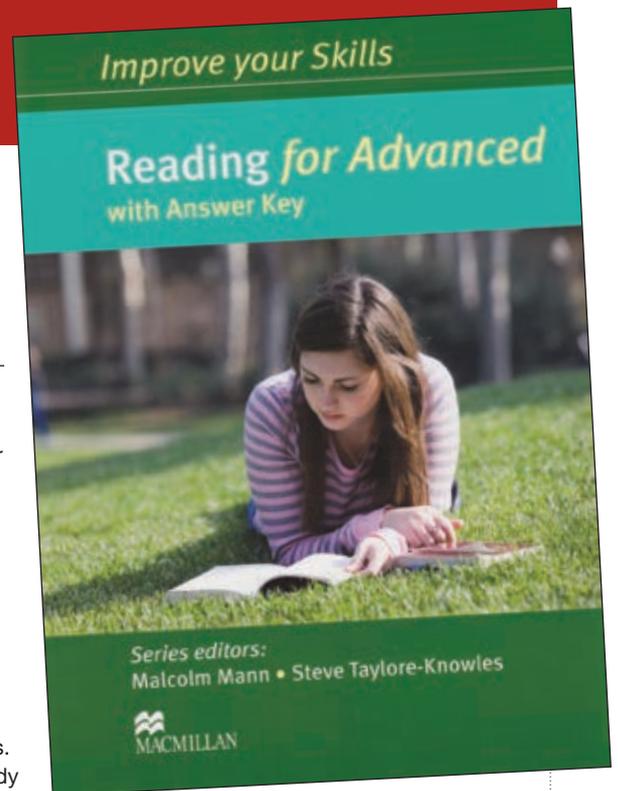
series editors Malcolm Mann  
and Steve Taylore-Knowles  
Macmillan 2014  
978-0-23-046204-5

This is one of the books in the Advanced level series of Macmillan's extensive *Improve your Skills* range, which helps students develop their skills for a number of international exams. The Advanced level series is edited by Malcolm Mann and Steve Taylore-Knowles, and the books are aimed at helping students who are preparing to take the 'Cambridge English: Advanced' exam to develop their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. The books can be used for self-study or with a class, and the units focus on developing particular skills, which are then related to an exam practice exercise. Mastery of the skill in the first part of the unit helps a long way towards accomplishing the final task.

In the course of its 12 units, *Reading for Advanced* teaches reading for gist, distinguishing main ideas from supporting details, understanding attitude and opinion, understanding implication and deducing the meaning of unfamiliar

words, together with a host of other important reading skills that most teachers would acknowledge that their students need to acquire – sometimes without having a very firm grasp of how that acquisition can best be accomplished.

By breaking the learning of each skill down into small manageable chunks and enabling the students to practise on small discrete sections of text first, the book both demonstrates the finer points of how the language works and prepares the students well for the greater challenge of doing the exam practice task which ends each chapter. These tasks have been carefully chosen to provide an opportunity for the target skill to be used, demonstrating clearly how



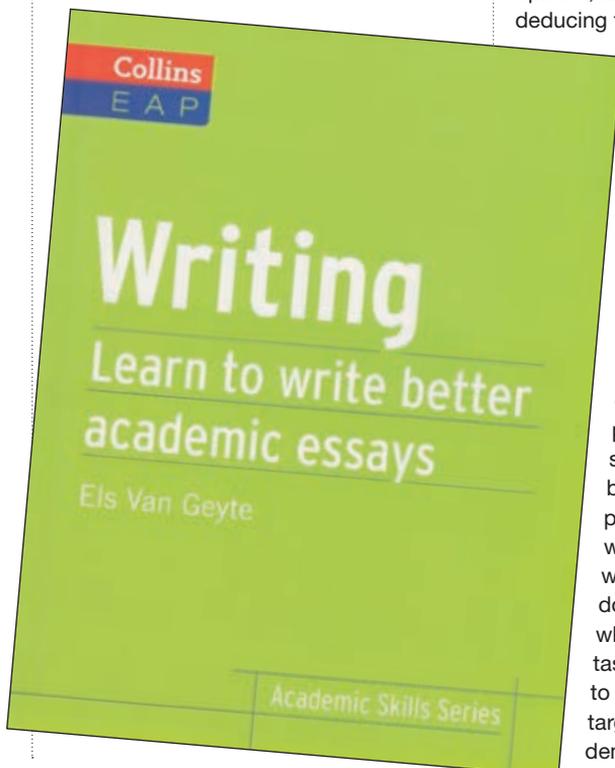
acquisition of that skill has an immediate pay-off in enhancing the student's ability to answer the exam question correctly.

The answer key provides full explanations as to why the answers are correct, something that is particularly useful with gapped-text exercises, where even native speakers like me often struggle to decide which missing paragraph goes where – and why.

At the same time as teaching the various reading skills, this book also exposes the students to vocabulary on a range of topics which they are likely to encounter in the exam. There are also *Skills tip* boxes, giving useful information about the exam and ideas and strategies for approaching the exam reading tasks.

**Andrew Dupré**  
Lancaster, UK

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