

READING YOUR WAY INTO ENGLISH

AND LEARNING ABOUT CANADA

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Essays and Exercises to Improve Reading and Writing Skills

Paragon Testing Enterprises Inc.

Reading Your Way into English and Learning about Canada (Ebook Version)
Essays and Exercises to Improve Reading and Writing Skills

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Preface

Reading Your Way Into English and Learning About Canada is a collection of essays and exercises designed and written to improve skills in reading and writing English. Its major premise is that reading well-written material will improve an individual's written English. A secondary purpose of the book is to help newcomers to Canada become familiar with some of this country's geography, history, culture, and achievements of its people.

This book has been prepared for individuals whose first language is not English but who wish to improve their English language skills. The language in the collection of essays is similar in level and format to the English language found in many college and university texts.

Each chapter in *Reading Your Way Into English and Learning About Canada* has five sections. The first section begins with a vocabulary list made up of words that may be unfamiliar to some readers. The second section points out how the essay that follows illustrates some aspect of written English that should have particular relevance to readers for whom English is a second language.

Section three is the heart of every chapter, providing an interesting and informative essay on some aspect of life in Canada. Each essay is followed by a set of questions (section four) that will help readers to confirm that they have understood what they have been reading. The last section of each chapter provides a suggested activity that invites readers to practice their writing skills.

Readers of this book are encouraged to use the seven strategies outlined in the Introduction. If used regularly, these strategies will help readers improve not only their writing skills but also their speaking skills.

Introduction: The Value of Reading

Vocabulary

Note that the definitions given below are those that fit the context in which each word has been used in this introduction. Some of the words might have a different meaning in a different context.

attentively: carefully

comply with: agree to follow

concluded: ended

context: the words surrounding a word or a phrase that help to

determine: its meaning

employed: used

expressed: in written in

fluently: able to use a language easily

grammatical structures: the way words are used in sentences

idiomatic: using phrases that have special meanings, which cannot be derived from the individual meanings of the words in those phrases

primarily: the main way

proficient: doing something correctly and skillfully

pronunciation: the way a sound is spoken

sophisticated: complex; not simple

strategies: plans of ways of doing something

The Value of Reading

Most students who are learning English as a second language soon learn to speak English well enough to communicate about everyday matters. Primarily, they do this by listening and talking to people for whom English is a first language.

Learning to write English is a somewhat more difficult matter. Though spoken and written English are closely related, written English is, in general, more complex, more correct in its grammatical structures, and less colloquial than spoken English. Also, most of the writing required at post-secondary educational institutions requires a broader and more sophisticated vocabulary than is expected in everyday speech.

For a number of reasons, it is difficult to become a proficient writer of English just from listening to the language being spoken. Because of this, setting aside some time to read on a regular basis is especially important to anyone who wants to write English fluently. There are two main reasons for this. One is that most people do not, on a day-to-day basis, make use of the types of varied and complex sentence structures that are typical of the writing found in newspapers, magazines, and books. In addition, most written English makes use of a much larger vocabulary than does spoken English. It is primarily through reading that sentence structure is learned and a person's vocabulary is increased.

Reading is also necessary because it is difficult for someone whose first language is not English to **hear** the sounds of English well enough to be able to reproduce them correctly in writing. The matter of the past tense of most English verbs is one example. It is correct English to write, "When Judy **moved** to Vancouver, she had to attend a very large high school." But many people learning English, especially those whose first language does not have a past tense, write "When Judy **move** to Vancouver, she had to attend a very large high school." The problem is that the "d" that signifies the past tense is difficult for some people to hear. What they actually hear is **move** and, as a result, they write **move** instead of **moved**.

If you want to improve your written English, it is essential that you spend some time (at least half an hour every day) sitting by yourself and reading something written in English. The more you read, the more attentively you read, and the more you read well-written material, the faster your written English will improve.

In addition to sitting in a quiet place and concentrating on what you are reading, there are other strategies that will, if used regularly, help you improve both your writing and speaking skills.

Seven Strategies to Improve Writing and Speaking

(1) Spend some time (say five minutes a day) reading out loud. This will help you hear both the sound of English words and the rhythm of English sentences.

(2) Spend some time, whenever you can, reading aloud to an English-speaking friend who can help you with the pronunciation of words and with the meaning of any unfamiliar words.

(3) Have an English-speaking friend read a short section of a textbook aloud while you follow in your own copy of the same text. By doing this, you will increase your knowledge of how unfamiliar English words are pronounced and spelled.

(4) Have someone read out loud a short prose passage (such as a well-developed paragraph) slowly enough for you to write down what is being read. When you are finished, you can compare what you have written with what was read to you.

(5) Carefully copy a short passage of English prose. This will help you see how words are spelled, how sentences are punctuated, and how idiomatic phrases are used. Idiomatic phrases are common expressions with special meanings that cannot be understood from the individual meanings of the words in these phrases. Of all the things you can learn from reading (and from employing the above strategies), none is more important than having this opportunity to familiarize yourself with English idioms.

(6) Make a list of English idioms whose meanings you are not sure of and then ask a friend or a teacher to explain their meanings to you.

(7) Make a list of unfamiliar words and look up their meanings in a dictionary, or ask a friend or teacher to explain their meanings to you. Keep these lists (along with the definitions of the words) and go over them from time to time in order to help them become part of your vocabulary.

Some Notes About Using This Book

(1) Throughout *Reading Your Way Into English*, the paragraphs in each of the essays have been numbered. This is not something that you need to do when you write an essay. It has been done here so that, in the question section of each chapter, reference can be made to a particular paragraph.

(2) In some of this book's chapters, five asterisks (*****) have been placed between various

sections of the essays. This occurs in essays that deal with a collection of different, though related, topics. They are used to show that one topic has been concluded and that a new one will be introduced.

(3) The section of each chapter entitled “Some Help With Vocabulary” is designed to help you better understand the text. As is noted before each vocabulary list, “the definitions given ... are those that fit into the context in which each word has been used in the note and/or the essay that follows. Some words might have a different meaning in a different context.”

(4) The questions at the end of each chapter are also meant to be helpful. Through answering them, you can check to see that you have understood the main ideas and facts presented in each essay. You should improve your written English if you comply with the following suggestion that is repeated in every chapter: “Unless the question requires only a word or short phrase as an answer, your answers should be expressed in complete sentences and in your own words. Do not just tie together groups of words taken directly from the reading selection.”

It should be stressed here that there really is value in taking the time to write your answers in complete sentences and in your own words, for in doing this, you will get practice in writing as well as in reading. Obviously, in your answers, you will have to use **some** words that are used in the essay. What you are asked to avoid doing is just copying out long phrases or complete sentences from the essay.

The following is an example of what you should attempt to do when you answer the questions at the end of each chapter. The question used as the example is found at the end of Chapter One.

The Question: In Paragraph 6, the reader is given two new and related facts about recent trends in immigration. What are these two facts?

The Answer: In Paragraph 6, the reader learns that most new immigrants to Canada prefer to live in a city, and that many of them end up living in Montreal, Toronto, or Vancouver.

(5) Among the tasks that will be required in the question section of each chapter will be writing a two-sentence summary of one of the paragraphs found in the essay. The best approach to writing a paragraph summary is to ask the following two questions:

- a) What is the topic of the paragraph?
- b) What does the writer say about that topic?

Read the paragraph found below (it was part of the Introduction you just read), and then see

how these questions can be used to compose a two-sentence summary of the paragraph.

For a number of reasons, it is difficult to become a proficient writer of English just from listening to the language being spoken. Because of this, setting aside some time to read on a regular basis is especially important to anyone who wants to write English fluently. There are two main reasons for this. One is that most people do not, on a day-to-day basis, make use of the types of varied and complex sentence structures that are typical of the writing found in newspapers, magazines, and books. In addition, most written English makes use of a much larger vocabulary than does spoken English. It is primarily through reading that sentence structure is learned and a person's vocabulary is increased.

If we apply the two questions suggested above to the previous paragraph, we would get something like this:

What is the **topic** of the paragraph?

“The importance of reading.”

What does the writer **say about** this topic?

“Reading is important if you want to learn to write well because most written material makes use of more varied sentence structure than does speech. A second reason is that through reading we can build up our vocabulary.”

It should also be noted that in writing a paragraph summary, the principles previously mentioned regarding your answers in the question section apply: you should write complete sentences and, as much as possible, use your own words.

Finally, it can be noted that since most of the answers required in the question sections are found in the essays, this book does not have a complete answer section. However, when an essay does not directly answer a question, you will be directed to a page at the back of the book where you can check your answer.



Chapter One:

Populating Canada

Vocabulary

Note that the definitions given below are those that fit into the context in which each word has been used in the note and/or the essay that follows. Some of the words might have a different meaning in a different context.

chronological: in order of occurrence

consequently: afterward; as a result

dramatically: very noticeably

garment: a piece of clothing

in excess of: more than

Indigenous: the native peoples of Canada (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis)

majority: most

populating: providing a country with people

rural: in the countryside

sixfold: six times as large

straightforward: clear and direct

urban: living in a city

A NOTE ABOUT WRITING: Ending an Essay

The essay that follows has a very simple chronological structure. It moves from the past (before the arrival of the Europeans) to the present. The first five paragraphs give the reader straightforward facts about the people who have immigrated to Canada and when they came. However, Paragraph 6, the concluding paragraph, does something different: it provides some additional information about the most recent period of immigration.

You may have been taught that the way to end an essay was to repeat in your concluding paragraph the two or three ideas you had introduced in the topic sentence of your opening paragraph. This might have been useful advice at an earlier point in your writing career, but it is advice that should be replaced now. Instead of just repeating your initial ideas, your concluding paragraph should add a new and related idea to your essay.

Notice that in “Populating Canada,” the writer does not conclude by saying, “Thus, we have seen how patterns of immigration to Canada have changed between the coming of the Europeans and the year 2001.” Instead, we are given two additional ideas about some recent trends in immigration to Canada.

Populating Canada

(1) Before the arrival of the first Europeans to North America in the 16th century, it was estimated that the Indigenous population in what is now Canada was just over 300,000. The arrival of the first European settlers introduced diseases such as smallpox, tuberculosis, and scarlet fever, and the Indigenous population consequently went into a serious decline in numbers. Fortunately, there has been a population recovery in recent years, and, according to Statistics Canada, the Indigenous population in Canada in 2006 was nearly four times what it had been before the Europeans arrived. Notably, from 1996 to 2006, the Indigenous population grew at a rate of six times that of the rest of the Canadian population.

(2) Before the middle of the 17th century, most of the new immigrants arriving in Canada came from France. Then the pattern changed, and the bulk of the new settlers were from England, Ireland, or Scotland, with smaller numbers coming from other parts of Europe and the United States. By the year 1901, immigration had brought the population of Canada to just over five million.

(3) During the 20th century, the number of people living in Canada increased more than sixfold, growing from five million to its present total of over 31 million. Three and a half million people were added between the years 1901 and 1921. Most of these new immigrants were from Europe. Among them were Germans, Scandinavians, Austrians, Poles, and Ukrainians. The people from Poland and the Ukraine were often referred to as “people in sheepskin coats” because of a garment that many of them wore. These new immigrants were attracted to Canada by the availability of free land on the rural Canadian prairies. Settlement in that vast region was made possible by the existence of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which, after its completion in 1885, extended all the way from Montreal to Vancouver.

(4) Immigration to this country slowed down between the beginning of World War I and the end of World War II (1914 to 1945). Following World War II, Canada opened its doors to many political refugees from all parts of the world including Eastern Europe, the West Indies, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In the 1980s and during the early years of the 1990s, the pattern of immigration once again changed dramatically. During these years, the majority of the newcomers were no longer from France, Britain, and other parts of Europe but now were from Asia, especially Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam.

(5) During the 1980s, an average of 100,000 newcomers entered Canada each year, and, in the 1990s, the number increased to over 200,000. In 1993, a typical year in this period of immigration, 252,137 new immigrants entered Canada from over 40 different countries. The largest number of people came from Hong Kong (36,026) followed by India (20,199), the Philippines (19,417), Taiwan (9797), China (9353), and Sri Lanka (9061). The United States, Vietnam, Great Britain, Poland, Jamaica, and Yugoslavia each had between 5000 and 8000 immigrants come to Canada during this period.

(6) By 2016, the number of people calling Canada home was in excess of 36 million. The settlement of immigrants throughout Canada is now predominantly urban rather than rural. Over one half of the immigrants who came to Canada during the past decade live in one or another of the country’s three largest cities—Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver. The total population of these three cities is over ten million, roughly one-third of the total population of Canada.

Refer to the Essay to Answer the Following Questions

Unless the question requires only a word or a short phrase as an answer, your answers should be expressed in complete sentences and in your own words. Do not just tie together groups of words taken directly from the reading selection.

1. What does the reading selection tell us about the Canadian population in each of the following time periods?
 - a. Before the arrival of the Europeans.
 - b. From the arrival of the Europeans to the middle of the 17th century.
 - c. From the middle of the 17th century to the year 1900.
 - d. The years 1901 to 1921.
 - e. Between the beginning World War I and the end of World War II.
 - f. Between World War II and 1980.
 - g. From about 1980 to 1995.
 - h. In 1993.
2. In Paragraph 6, what new information is the reader given about recent trends in immigration?
3. Write a two-sentence summary of Paragraph 1.

Practice in Writing

Write a well-developed paragraph or a short essay outlining two or three reasons why someone might want to immigrate to Canada. In your conclusion, try to add a new and related idea rather than summarizing the ideas in your introduction.