Rexford Brown’s “Choosing or Creating an Appropriate Writing Test” is a valuable contribution, presenting essential information to anyone considering designing or purchasing a test of basic writing. And Constance Gefvert’s “Training Teachers of Basic Writing” is one of those rare articles in teacher training that doesn’t get lost in itself, but presents a model and an approach that is intelligent, humane, and literate.

These four chapters are outstanding contributions. Perhaps that is all one should expect in a collection of this nature, which apparently had a 1978 deadline, since there are no references beyond 1978 in the rather thin bibliography.

In the other chapters, we learn about using standard grammar, basic grammar, “traditionally taught grammar” (is the method traditional or the grammar?), and grammar as one of the two areas of composition. The chapter by E.D. Hirsch on research on writing seems strangely out of place in this volume, since it never really addresses any issue connected specifically to basic writing, despite the editors’ attempt to make such a tie. Hirsch’s statement that “composition research is probably the most significant intellectual frontier in college English departments today” deserves to be repeated.

All in all, Basic Writing is worth the price if only for the four articles praised above, those by Perl, Hartwell, Brown and Gefvert. The book should not receive a single-sitting reading (the bane of reviewers, I’m afraid) because of the greatly varying quality of teaching approaches and writing styles.

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