Unit 2: Get the Advice Right

About the Genre: Advice Columns

What is it?
An advice column is often part of a newspaper, magazine, or blog. Advice columns include a short letter from a person with a problem, followed by a response from a columnist with opinions or advice on how to solve the problem. The problem might be serious, such as a difficult relationship. The problem might also be more straight-forward, such as questions about manners.

What is the purpose?
The purpose of an advice column is to provide an opinion or solution to a specific problem or question. When a problem is not serious, the columnist will try to calm the fears of the person with the problem and offer insights into what is considered customary in a particular culture. If the problem is serious, the columnist must explain how important it is to the writer so the writer will seek professional help. A columnist will also provide resources for further help if possible.

What is the structure?
An advice column is made of two main parts: 1. the letter containing the problem, and 2. the letter containing the advice.

The letter containing the advice is usually written in an informal style and may have the following components:
- a summary of the problem and its possible causes
- a few sentences to calm the questioner’s concerns, or advice for where to go if the problem is serious
- several sentences with possible solutions
- the opinions of experts

Comprehension Questions
1. Which of the following is NOT included in an advice column?
   a. opinions
   b. gossip
   c. further resources

2. What will an advice column include in response to a very serious problem?
   a. a suggestion to speak to a professional
   b. questions about the details of the situation
   c. advice about manners

3. Where might a reader find an advice column? Choose two.
   a. newspaper
   b. blog
   c. advertisement