
Creating and Adapting Resources and Materials for Teaching Writing

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Abstract

Writing is a very complex process, because it involves the ability to communicate in a language foreign to oneself and the ability to construct a text that expresses the writer's ideas effectively. Writing consists of three steps i.e. **pre-writing, writing and rewriting** and all these three steps are significant. The questions that arise in the minds of everyone including prolific writers are:

- How does one start writing?
- What does one do while writing?
- Does one stop to think and write?

But, what can people, who do not read, write?? This is a question in particular, facing all the learners when they dry up easily because of no knowledge through reading!

Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man says **Francis Bacon**, who underscores the fact that Writing, though a complex process, is frequently considered the last language skill to be acquired. The reading habit has slowly got eroded. Today, institutions have understood the importance of reading and hence have started to resurrect this in the schools. The problem however, continues in colleges.

In a heterogeneous set up, where many learners think in the mother-tongue but have to translate their thoughts into writing in English, one type does not suit all and it is left to the teacher to decide what method will suit which set of learners. Can the teacher use the conventional methods? Should audio-visual aids be used? Will the teacher be able to make the students understand the difference between Academic Writing and Personal writing? Activities ranging from individual to pair to teams can be conducted to create an interest in writing.

We have undertaken a lot of experimentation activities in our classes and have been successful to a great extent in ensuring that the weaker section of students are benefitted. Our paper, highlights the different methods researched and activities devised.

Key expressions: pre-writing, rewriting, evoke sensation, heterogeneous, experimentation.

Creating and Adapting Resources and Materials for Teaching Writing

Writing is one of the best and one of the oldest known forms of communication. In today's age of information and technology, writing has become a lost art. The importance of writing is immense as it

- creates a permanent record
- allows storage of information for future reference
- all recipients receive the same information, and
- necessary for legal and binding documentation

Compared to the other three skills, writing is considered to be the most difficult skill to master. Therefore, teaching writing is not an easy job because teachers might face several problems while teaching how to write well.

Challenges Faced by Teachers

The first set of challenges writing teachers face daily is heterogeneous groups of mixed ability learners, class size, time bound syllabi, shortage of teachers experienced in teaching second language writing.

There is a general consensus among teachers and researchers that reading habits and writing practices are changing, due to the pressures of emerging technologies. Newspapers are on the decline nationally, as advertising revenues migrate to the internet. Even the *New York Times* asks, on its own pages, –How much longer will the newspaper itself exist?|| as citizen-reporter blogs routinely beat print media to breaking news (Dunlap, 2007, p. 5). With the introduction of computers and the internet, language teachers had to deal with diverse modes of reading and writing. A range of studies document the ways in which teenage literacy has changed, no longer exclusively the private book world of the print reader, but now the more social worlds of blogs, e-mail, cell phone text messaging, and on-line gaming (Anstey, 2002; Cruikshank, 2004; Ware & Warschauer, 2005). Scholars argue that the visual is returning to the page (Kress, 2003), that the page is losing ground to the screen (Snyder, 1997), and that new venues for writing, including e-mail, texting, and blogging, ask for new composing skills and mindsets..

Problems Faced by Students

Writing is a very complex process, especially when it involves the ability to communicate in a language foreign to oneself, to construct a text that expresses the writer's ideas effectively is a real challenge. Students have limited vocabulary and also use words inaccurately or inappropriately. The questions that arise in the minds of everyone taking on a writing task are:

□ How do I begin? What is my purpose?

□ Who is my reader?

□ How do I make my point clear?

② How do I create a logical flow?

② How do I say what I mean?

② How do I avoid grammatical errors?

② How can I make my message concise?

② How can I create a visual effect?

One of the questions that many writers confront is – How can I make my writing more interesting, appealing and attractive to my readers?" This is a very crucial question.

Writing assignments or examinations are far from interesting for many learners. The interests of the remaining learners vary. Students and teachers are often reluctant to spend time on writing in class, preferring instead to save writing for homework.

Types of Writing

Students will at some point of time need to write:

- ② E-mails
- ② Letters and Memos
- ② Agendas
- ② Reports
- ② Promotional Material
- ② Academic Documents
- ② Research (scientific) manuscripts

How to Select and Adapt Resources

The following points may be useful to ensure your students participate with enthusiasm:

1. Choose the skills to focus on:

We ask these questions:

- ② What level are my students?

- ② What is their average age?
- ② Why are they taking this course?
- ② Do they need writing skills for specific reasons? (business correspondence, college application letters, etc...)
- ② What do you expect them to produce? (a short email for beginners; an essay for an international exam)

Once we're clear on the skills our students need to develop, we can move on to the next step.

2. Choose our activities or writing exercises

There is a wide variety of writing tasks we may assign our students to help them hone their writing skills, but we need to narrow down our options.

o Business email writing:

This is a skill students require these days as they apply for jobs in international or multinational companies, or move to English-speaking countries. There are several sub-skills that go into effective email communication, like requesting information, replying to emails, responding to conflicts/problems/issues, formal vs. informal email, and even email writing etiquette or netiquette.

To introduce the task, we can provide them with a sample email to read. Then, for practice, we can set up a situation or context: —Write a brief email to all team members to remind them of tomorrow's meeting.||We can correct any mistakes in grammar, as well as tone and style or the teacher can adopt peer correction to help slow and the average learners.

We can create a class facebook account and get everyone to interact on events in college or lectures conducted and direct them to an interesting blog and ask them to post a comment

o Essays/letters/stories for international examinations

Some students preparing to sit for international exams, like the First Certificate in English (Cambridge ESOL) or the TOEFL, require to write essays that meet specific requirement. It's a good idea to provide students with plenty of samples of the different types of written tasks they may be required to complete.

o Online newsletters

Students can be encouraged to bring out online newsletters. Discuss with them what they would find interesting in a newsletter; they can include campus events, current events, stories, poems, cartoons, etc.

o Writing prompts

Writing prompts are tremendously useful, great triggers for a writing task. Here are some examples of some great writing prompts:

1. Who is your favorite actor and why?
2. What are the three things you'd carry to a deserted island and why?
3. Write about one of your favorite movies and why you liked it so much.

4. What is the best gift you've ever received?

o **Journal writing**

We can ask students to bring a blank notebook that will from then on be referred to as their Journal. Assign topics on a weekly basis, or every two weeks, depending on their level. The same writing prompts from above may be used or their thoughts on a recent current event, what items are on their wish list, etc... Journal writing is a great way to get students to write on a regular basis, plus keep track of their progress as far as writing skills are concerned. Sometimes students who are shy to speak can find writing a creative outlet.

3. Choosing the topics

Even if we choose an engaging writing activity, it should be accompanied by a topic, or context, that will motivate your students to write. In a business English course, students will handle all types of business situations. Teens relate to pop stars, sports, HYPERLINK "http://busyteacher.org/classroom_activities-vocabulary/fashion_and_style-worksheets/" fashion, TV, and movies.

Whether it is creative writing, business writing, or guided writing, we teach them by example first, and then let them have free reign in the way they express themselves in writing.

Audio-Visual Aids in Teaching Writing

By audio-visual aids, we mean films, filmstrips, radio and television. In the twentieth century, powerful means of reproduction, associated with radio, cinema and television, have changed the aspect of the problem. Audio and visual 'illustrations' are no longer mere minor complements to thought but they directly influence our thoughts and the very conduct of millions of individuals. It is therefore imperative that this powerful instrument should be mastered to discipline it. There is no doubt that audio-visual aids produce best results when they are used in active teaching methods.

Nothing is learned in vacuum. Moving from the notion of writing as product to writing as process and the notion of integrating skills has caused researchers to integrate some skills or materials with writing skills (Richards and Renandya, 2002). Reading is a kind of visual aid which can be used in writing classes. Specifically, reading improves writing skill. (Boran, 2009). Richards and Renandya (2002) believe some materials such as videos and software can stimulate writing. The three areas of interest are the effects of reading as a visual presentation, listening as an audio presentation, and documentaries as audiovisual presentations.

First, writing is a complex meta-cognitive activity, a difficult skill because it requires writers to have a great deal of lexical and syntactic ease as well as principles of organization in a second language to produce effective writing. Second, learners need to have a certain amount of L2 background knowledge about the rhetorical organizations, appropriate language use or specific lexicon to communicate to their readers. The last point which has been noted by many researchers (Arcario and Stempleski, 1992; Flynn, 1998; Hsu, 2011; Mayer, 2002; Rieber, 1991; Tajima, 2006; Tuttle, 1975) is lack of motivation in writing classes which may be the result of the lack of exposure to authentic language materials such as visuals, audios, or audiovisuals.

In EFL classes, reading (*i.e.*, newspaper articles, poems, stories, formal or informal letters, application forms, critiques, notes, messages, etc.) can be used in teaching writing so that learners can take them as models of written discourse of their target language since they represent the rhetoric, texture, various genres, and styles of written discourse of English (Boran, 2009). Krashen (1987) believes that through reading we have the opportunity of being exposed to well-organized and well-written pieces of writing which help us to improve our language abilities and to build writing schemata. Casanave (2004), states that writing is a social practice which requires deep engagement with reading and with other writers. Even in a writing class, reading a text is important because it will give students many ideas and varied effective writing styles. Escribano (1999) concludes that Text analysis is an important means for building schemata for writing. Owing to the fact that audio materials can be used in EFL classes; it may affect writing skills. Reid (1995) has investigated the use of listening in writing classes. Reid concludes that listening is an input for writers.

Film is one of the visual aids that can be used in a writing class. It makes lessons more fun. It can also be used to create a situation for writing classes in which the students are enthusiastic about learning the process of writing (Harmer, 2001). Besides, authenticity, according to Morrow (1977), is a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer, for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort. Moreover, Hsu (2011) feels that multimedia appears to provide additional channels for exposure to English. As such, reading-to-write may no longer be an exclusive task in a composition classroom. Lin (2004) has found out that audiovisual aids affect vocabulary learning leading to writing improvement.

Writing Involves

Planning- which means keeping objectives in mind and researching the topic. The writer must think about the audience and create an outline that will help organize thoughts. Use the interview approach to supplement the outline (who, what, where, when, how)

Why plan your writing? There are many benefits to planning your writing. It helps you to

- come up with new ideas
- record your ideas
- organise your thoughts and
- check that you have all the information you need

What to think about when planning?

When planning your writing you need to think about **why** you are writing, **what** situation you are in when writing and **who** you are writing to. Think of the three W's

W - Why: Purpose	W - What: Context	W - Who: Audience
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How to plan my writing?

There are different methods of planning. The teacher can choose the method that suits him/her or the situation:

1. Diagrams

Diagrams are a visual way of planning and organising your writing.

- ② With **spider diagrams** and **idea maps** we can jot down lots of ideas in no particular order to help us organise our thoughts.
- ② **Flowcharts** are useful for planning writing that has to follow a step-by-step process, like a recipe.
- ② **Lists** are useful for jotting down and ordering all the different points we want to cover in our writing.
- ② **Bulleted lists** are a common type of list used on the computer.
- ② When we put each idea on a **sticky note** we can then move the different points of our writing around until we are happy with the order.
- ② **Writing frames**

These are a guide we can use when planning our writing. They have frames, or headed boxes, with titles to prompt what to write.. We can use frames as guidance for writing documents which always include the same kind of information, such as a curriculum vitae (CV) or a birthday invitation.

What to do after planning?

Once we planned our writing we come on to the next stage;

2. Writing a draft

A draft is a rough plan of our writing. There are many benefits to writing a draft. It helps us to:

- ② concentrate on the **content**, the writing, rather than the punctuation, spelling or grammar,
- ② check that the writing flows well. (Do you need to move any ideas around? Have you included everything you wanted to say?) and
- ② look at the layout of your writing. (Is it too far up the page? If writing a letter, do you have the address in the correct place?)

Once we've written a draft we can then go back and proofread our writing. This is the time to check our spelling, punctuation etc.

How many drafts should there be?

We need to reread our work. The writer must critically appraise his own work. We can write as many drafts as we like. The number of drafts depends on the situation and time available.

Writing should be concise. — A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.|| — (William Strunk Jr.1919)

Pruning the redundant

We avoid saying the same thing twice

- ② Many uneducated citizens who have never attended school continue to vote for better schools.

A phrase that repeats itself—like "true fact," "twelve noon," "I saw it with my own eyes"—is sometimes called a **pleonasm**.

Brevity of Language

Clauses or phrases can be reduced. A "which clause" can often be shortened to a simple adjective. However, we need to be careful not to lose some needed emphasis by over-pruning.

- ② Smith College, which was founded in 1871, is the premier all-women's college in the United States.
- ② Founded in 1871, Smith College is the premier all-women's college in the United States.

Phrases, too, can sometimes be trimmed, to a single word.

- ② Unencumbered by a sense of responsibility, Jason left his wife with forty-nine kids and a can of beans.
- ② Jason irresponsibly left his wife with forty-nine kids and a can of beans.

Verbosity is considered to be a common failing in Indian writing. We tend towards convoluted sentences and big words. The trick is to balance simple sentences and complex sentences, big and small words to achieve both lucidity and beauty.

Empty intensifiers

We avoid words such as *really, very, quite, extremely, severely, severely* when they are not necessary. It is probably enough to say that the salary increase is *inadequate*. These words needn't be banished from our vocabulary, but they will be used to best effect when used sparingly.

as far as I'm concerned	<p>As far as I'm concerned, there is no need for further protection of woodlands.</p> <p>As far as I'm concerned, there Further protection of woodlands is not needed.</p>
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We handout a sheet with [Brian Murphy's Big List of Clichés](#), for a list of things to avoid saying.
 For e.g: acid test; meaningful dialogue; at loose ends; moving experience.

Conclusion/Tips

Let us sum up the characteristics of good writing

- o **Completeness:** all information needed is provided
- o **Correctness:** relevant and precise information
- o **Accuracy:** grammar, spelling, punctuation
- o **Credibility:** supporting the argument
- o **Clarity:** should not be vague, confusing, ambiguous
- o **Conciseness:** to the point
- o **Consideration:** anticipate the reader's reaction
- o **Vitality:** use the active voice rather than the passive voice

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