

Teaching Writing

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Discussion

- Why do students need to learn writing in class?
- What are the differences between in-class and real-life writing?

Why do Ss write in class?

- For long-term needs, writing is the least important skills for many Ss
- Main purpose of writing:
 - For study purposes and exam skill
 - For long-term needs

The nature of writing in reality

Differences of teaching writing in the classroom and in reality:

- **In ELT classroom**, writing is often seen as a means to consolidate language that is recently studied, as “**writing as language learning**”, and thus is **pseudo writing**.

In reality, most writing is **for communication**, i.e., to convey messages or for self creation, e.g. writing poems.

- **In ELT classrooms**, especially in traditional pedagogy, writing often goes this way: the teacher gives a topic or a selection of topics, a set of requirements, and a time limit. **Accuracy** of the final product is stressed and the process is ignored.
- **In reality**, we may have some ideas long before we put them on paper. We often plan, draft, and rewrite.

- If writing tasks lack authenticity, they do not motivate students.
- If writing tasks focus on the product rather than on the process, they do not help students to develop real writing skills.
- Therefore we should advocate authentic writing, and we should advocate the process approach to writing.

Communicative approach to writing

To motivate students, it is necessary to engage them in some act of communication.

- Either writing for a specific recipient (e.g. a letter to a friend), or:
- Engaging in an act of creative writing where their work is intended to be read by other people.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Controlled writing

Mechanical writing

- Teaching handwriting
 - Teaching individual letters
 - Writing words
 - Copying words
- If Ss's own language uses a different writing system to English, the first task will be to master English handwriting.
 - Earliest activities: copying letters, letter combinations, words and simple sentences

Controlled writing

Moving beyond copying

- Give Ss exercises that require them to think and add something of their own
- Exercises are still controlled so that Ss do not make too many mistakes

Discussion 1: Look at the following activity. What do you think about it? Do you think students will find it interesting?

Activity: Teacher writes this sentence on the board, and asks students to copy it:

Sahiba goes to school by bus.

Discussion 2: How can teachers make the activity more meaningful and more interesting, while still keeping it fairly controlled?

Meaningful writing activities

Gap-filling

A. Gap-filling

Listen to the teacher, and then write out the complete sentences.

Paper.....wood. It..... the Chinese in.....

- i) Teacher reads out these sentences: 'Paper is usually made from wood. It was invented by the Chinese in the first century AD.' Teacher asks students to copy them, filling in the gaps.
- ii) Teacher asks students to read back the complete sentences, and write them on the board.

Meaningful writing activities

Re-ordering words

B. Re-ordering words

Write the sentences correctly.

*We/six o'clock/and/tea/drink/get up/at. Then/the patients/wake/go/and/the wards/we/round.
Sometimes/medicines/injections/them/we/or/give.*

- i) Note that the sentences describe the start of a nurse's working day. Ask students to write out the sentences correctly.
- ii) Ask students to read out the sentences, and write them on the board.

Meaningful writing activities

Substitution

C. Substitution

Write a true sentence like this about yourself.

Samir enjoys playing football and reading adventure stories.

- i) Ask students to write a similar sentence about themselves.
- ii) Correct the sentences orally, e.g.:
 - T: What do you enjoy doing, Juan?
 - S: I enjoy sleeping.
 - T: OK. (*write 'sleeping' on the board*) Who else enjoys sleeping? (*and so on, building up a list of words on the board*)

Meaningful writing activities

Correct the facts

D. Correct the facts

Re-write the sentences so that they match the picture.

*At the market, I saw an old woman sitting in a chair.
She was selling eggs. It was raining.*



i) Ask students to write the sentences, correcting the facts.

ii) Ask students to read out the correct sentences, and write them on the board.

[Note: This activity could be used with any picture in the textbook, and the 'untrue' sentences written on the board.]

Dictation

Discussion: In your group, demonstrate the following short dictation.

- Read the text once through. Then dictate it phrase by phrase.
- Read it through once again.

Important talks have been taking place today / between the Prime minister and Trade Union leaders. / They have agreed to co-operate to find ways of combating inflation / and reducing "" present levels of unemployment in the industrial sector.

- Check the dictation orally, by asking students to read the text back to you sentence by sentence.

After you demonstration, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of dictation as writing exercise.

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of dictation as writing exercise

Making dictation meaningful

An alternative to dictation, which develops both listening and writing skills and focuses on *meaning*, is for the students to listen to a text and then try to *reconstruct* it from prompts.

Discussion: Look at the following demonstration of the technique. Compare it with the 'normal' dictation.

i) Write these prompts on the board:

Giovanni – fishing - friend's house - bus – river - tree – fishing - a few minutes - Giovanni- small fish

ii) Read the text. Ask students to listen but *not* to write anything.

Giovanni decided to spend the day fishing. He went to his friend's house and they took a bus to the river. There, they sat down under a tree and began fishing. After a few minutes, Giovanni caught a small fish.

iii) Ask the students to write a version of the text, using the prompts on the board. (It does not have to be exactly the same as the original; the first sentence could be, e.g. 'Giovanni decided to go fishing'.)

iv) Go through the exercise orally, asking different students to read out sentences.

GUIDED WRITING

Problems of free writing

- Discussion: Imagine giving this writing task to a class of intermediate level students. Discuss what problems might be involved in giving a completely free writing task like this.

Write a paragraph, describing your town or village

Guided writing

- Ss need to progress beyond very controlled writing exercises to freer paragraph writing. T helps them by
 - Giving a short text as a model
 - Doing oral preparation for the writing

Guided writing

Giving a short text as a model

Jopley is a small town in the north of England. It is on the River Ouse, not far from Leeds. The town has a wide main street, with a stone church, the town hall and a cinema. There is a large supermarket in the town centre, and many smaller shops and cafés. Most people in Jopley work in the local factory, which produces farm machinery.

1. Write a similar paragraph about Bexham. Use these notes:
Bexham — small village — south coast.
Harrow street — two shops — church.
Most people - farmers. Grow vegetables, wheat.
2. Now write about your own town or village.

Discuss what difficulties students might have in doing the exercises. What preparation might be necessary?

Guided writing

Giving a short text as a model

- Problems of giving a model text:
 - Ss may lack vocabulary to express themselves
 - Finding suitable model text can be hard

Discuss what difficulties students might have in doing the exercises. What preparation might be necessary?

Guided writing

Doing oral preparation for the writing:

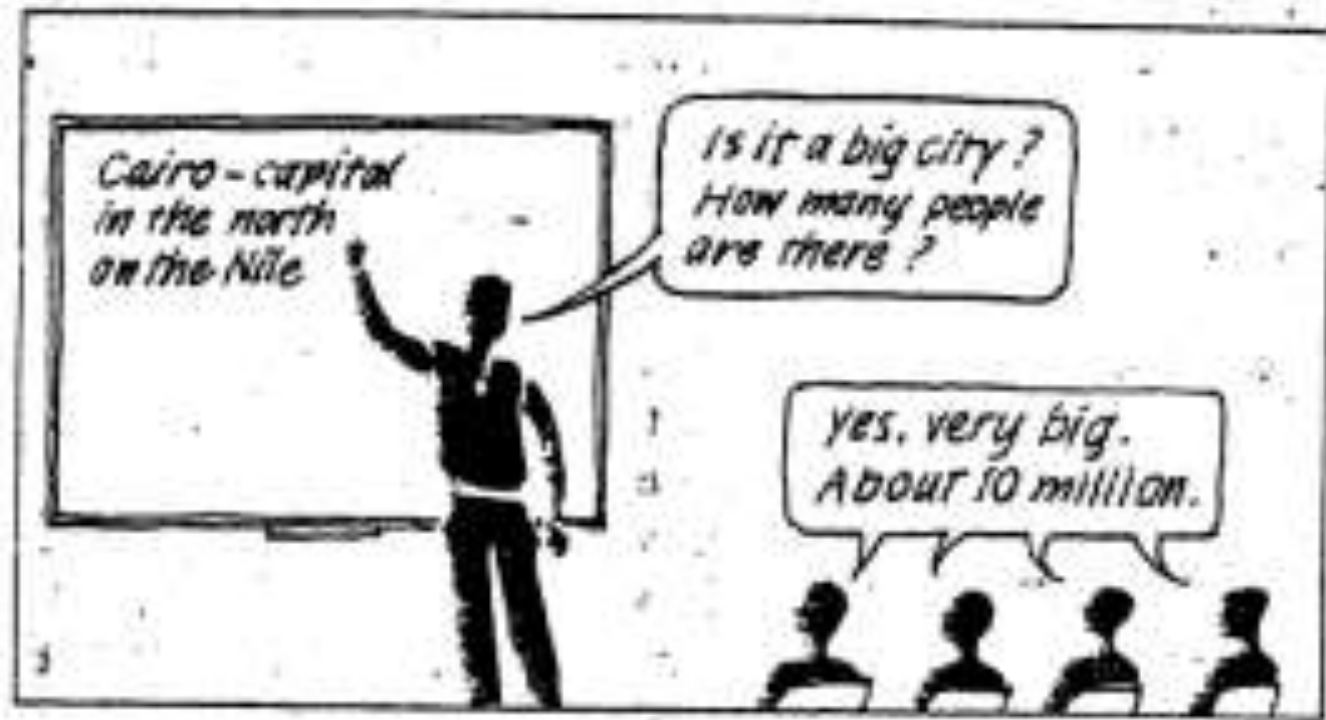
- Ss make suggestions.
- T builds up an outline or a list of key expressions on the board.
- Ss use these suggestions as a basis for their writing

• Advantages

- It's flexible: It can be done in different ways according to the interests and ability of the class
- Ideas about what to write come from students themselves -> more interesting and involving
- It does not require specially-prepared texts or other materials

Guided writing

Doing oral preparation
for the writing:



The teacher wants to elicit these other facts about Cairo, and write them on the board.

Important business centre

- *International hotels*

Tourists:

- *The Pyramids (2500BC)*

- *many famous mosques*

- *market area (gold copper - leather)*

Very crowded-traffic problems

- *new underground railway*

What questions could he ask?

STAGES OF WRITING

Stages of a writing task

Short writing tasks are usually controlled writing activities and done after a grammatical structure has been taught or writing sentences following oral practice.

PRE-TASK:

- Teacher introduces the task and gives clear instructions.
- Teacher presents language input (vocab./structures) for the task.

WHILE- TASK:

- Students write in groups or individually in class.

POST-TASK:

- Teacher gives feedback to the class (orally or by writing key on the board, pointing out good points and common mistakes for the whole class.)

Stages for a forty five-minute lesson

- PRE-WRITING:

- Teacher leads into the lesson.
- Teacher introduces the topic and gives clear instructions.
- Teacher presents language input (vocab./structures/ ideas) for the task by giving cues, helping students brainstorm for ideas, giving a model text or doing oral preparation.

- WHILE- WRITING:

- Students write in groups in class or individually at home.

- POST-WRITING:

- Teacher marks students' papers and gives comments (Paying attention to errors of competence and performance and techniques of correction.)
- Teacher gives feedback: pointing out good points and common mistakes for the whole class to learn from peers.

CORRECTING WRITTEN WORK

Controlled writing

Teacher A:

I collect the books at the end of the lesson, and correct them during the lunch hour. Then I give the books back the next day.

Teacher B:

I just go through the answers and get students to correct their own work. Sometimes I write sentences on the board.

Teacher C:

I ask the students to sit in pairs and correct each other's work, helping each other. Then we all go through the answers together.

Teacher D:

I ask students to exchange books with the person next to them. Then I go through the answers and they correct each other's work.

Which of these techniques would succeed in your class?

Basic procedure for correcting simple written work in class

1. T writes correct answers on the board or gets Ss to come out and write them. If spelling is not important, T can go through answers orally
2. As T gives the answers, Ss correct their own work and T moves around the class to supervise what they are doing; or Ss exchange books and correct each other's work
3. When T notices errors made by a number of Ss, draw attention to these for the whole class

Guided writing: correcting positively and effectively

- The teacher could correct only the errors that seem most important, or only errors of a certain kind (e.g. items that were taught recently, or just problems with verbs)
- The teacher could reduce the amount of underlining and write the corrections in the margin; this would make the page look less heavily corrected.
- The teacher could simply indicate where the student has made important errors, and ask her to try to correct them herself. This would encourage the student to look again at what she has written and think about possible errors:

Deaf-and-dumb people cannot hear the noise even if the accident happens in their back.

For more advanced classes, some teachers develop systems of abbreviations which they regularly write in the margin to indicate different kinds of error, e.g. sp = spelling mistake, g = grammar mistake, WO = word order. This leaves the students to correct all their own mistakes, and gives good training in reading through and checking what they have written.

Class observation

From the demo movie of a writing class at Bui Thi Xuan high school, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the techniques and activities the teacher used.