

A Brief Review on Basic Writing Skills

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ABSTRACT

Most English First Learner teachers are fortunate enough to have students who can already wield a pen and form all the letters of the alphabet in English. You may take this ability for granted. However, if you encounter students who either have a different writing system in their home country or have had no opportunity to learn the English one, or are illiterate in their first language, you need to start teaching writing with the alphabet itself. It could be embarrassing for students to admit that they are having difficulties starting out, so be vigilant. Students who make no effort to write anything down at beginner level may need special attention.

Keywords- Handwriting, Activity, Writing, Formation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Right from the first lesson, give your students opportunities to copy from the board. This allows you to start snooping from the outset. Whether you talk to the students directly about their notes or discreetly lean over their shoulders as they write, make sure that they are all able to copy what you have written legibly and accurately. Point out the errors or else they may become engrained (especially poor spelling) and if a student's handwriting may cause a problem for native English speakers, let the student know. I mention this because national styles vary and the formation of particular letters could be interpreted differently with a foreigner's eye.

II. COMPLETING SENTENCES

The problem for many students is that they don't understand what a sentence actually is. Without a basic grammar rule they tend to come up with sentences like these:

- The blue bag there.

- Chicken, fish and pork, for example.
- It is very nice here.

With the exception of short imperatives, the little action based phrases you tend to yell at people- 'look!' or 'sit!' – A good sentence need a noun and a verb at least. You may have learned this rule as 'subject + predicate' at school, but basically the idea is that there is a person/ thing doing something or being something. Applying this principle, I made complete sentences from the phrases in the first list:

- The blue bag is there.
- I like chicken, fish and pork, for example.
- It is very nice here.

After they know to join a noun and a verb, you need to check that students understand the rules of punctuation. For example, have a lesson or two on using capital letters, not just at the beginning of a sentence but for days of the week, months, place names, people's names and other proper nouns.

When students have the hang of basic sentence construction, they can start working on the content by using a wider range of grammar and vocabulary. They

can incorporate more adjectives and adverbs to create interest. In addition, you can practice various expressions of opinion such as ‘I think’ and ‘in my opinion’ to make their expressions sound more natural. Higher level students have a problem identifying what a sentence is as well as lower level ones and may the mistake of having one ginormous sentence where two or three shorter ones would be far better. (Horwitz, 2008, P.32)

III. MOVING ON TO PARAGRAPHS

Your next task after your students can write a good sentence is to show the class how to build sentences into a paragraph and convey the basic rules and tips for doing so. Each paragraph should contain a separate idea. One sentence sums up what the whole paragraph is about and is generally called the topic sentence. It’s easiest to teach students to put the topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph although in other texts they read they might find it in the middle or at the end. The following sentences should support the idea in the topic sentence.

IV. STRUCTURING A WRITING LESSON

For a writing lesson to be successful, you need to set the writing task up so that students are clear about what they have to do and how best to tackle it. A wide variety of tasks covers various sub- skills too, for example using register, which means the right formal or informal style, and adapting to different kinds of texts. When deciding on a writing task to set, yourself some questions as an initial checklist.

- Is it appropriate for the class in terms of level, relevance and interest?
- Is it clear what the purpose of the task is?
- Is it clear who the imagined reader is?
- Do the students have sufficient information to complete the task (vocabulary, layout, background, examples)? (Peyton, 2011,P.201)

V. ENERGIZING THE CLASS WITH PRE-WRITING TASKS

As writing is often a quiet, solitary activity, a pre-writing task is usually necessary because such tasks energies and prepare the students. They allow for collaboration and help student put together ideas, which will make the actual writing task more successful.

Letter Writing

All letters need an address. Date, opening greeting, paragraphs which each have a main point, a

closing greeting and signature, letters divide into formal and informal, as follows:

Formal Letters

At the top of a formal letter you usually write two addresses. The first is your won address and the second is the address of the person you intend to read the letter. You can’t use contractions (shortened forms of words) in formal letters. That means you need to write do not instead of don’t, for example. The purpose of writing the letter must be clear from the first paragraph and you have to stick to formal language with no slang. At the end, you write yours sincerely (if you mentioned the reader by name) or yours faithfully (if you started with dear sir/madam) and under your signature you print your name and job title (if relevant).

Informal letters

The difference between formal and informal letters is that you only need your address at the top. You can use contractions and informal language. You still need to write in paragraphs, but at the end of the letter, you use friendlier closing expressions like see you and take care. Finally, you sign your name, perhaps just your first name, and you do not need to print it clearly below.

Essays

When students give, their opinions in writing there are different ways to set out the essay. You can state your opinion in the introduction and proceed to explain your view. You could also have a general introduction, explain both sides of the argument and give your opinion in the conclusion. However, there should always be an and introduction, paragraphs highlighting main points in each, along with examples and ideas which support the point and finally a concluding paragraph which sums up the essay. The language should be formal.

Stories

A story requires creative language in the form of descriptive adjectives and adverbs, and direct speech quoting what the characters say. It is not so important for the students to have great plots in their stories, as time is limited in EFL lessons. Rather, they should be able to describe events, people and places well. Usually, students need to be accurate in suing the past simple, continuous and perfect tenses (according to their level) and they also need linking words which show the sequence of events such as and then, after that and finally.

Reports

A report is a formal presentation of information so it requires formal language. There should be clear headings and subheadings including the division of introduction (followed by the purpose of the report), findings and conclusion/recommendation. Students should avoid writing their opinions throughout report and restrict their own ideas to the recommendations section. (Maxim, 2009, 158)

VI. HOW TO START

The trouble with writing starts right at the beginning. There you sit, pencil in hand, a blank sheet of paper before you, and don't know how to start. Maybe you have some ideas you want to express, some words and sentences you want to use, but what have in mind just isn't ready to be put on paper. Somehow you have to change it from a vague thing in your head to something you can take and write down; and you don't know how.

There is nothing the Matter with You

Don't think there is anything unusual the matter with you. That kind of trouble is common among people who haven't done much writing it doesn't matter whether they are 15 or 50. Naturally, if you are a born writer, that's different. Then you will have an urge to write. You will have no trouble getting started. Words and sentences will come to you by themselves. But born writers are few, and the chances are that you're not one of them. Like most people, you will probably have to learn how to write step by step. And, like most people, you will think the first step the hardest.

Don't Just Start

Well, how does one start to write? It will take us a little to tell you about it, but the most important thing is this: don't just start! Don't think the main thing is to get going, and, once you have got something on paper, you will run along nicely. If you do that and put down words and sentences that come to mind at the moment, you have simply postponed the time when you will look down at your paper and not know how to go ahead. Sooner or later probably sooner that moment will come; only this time, instead of a blank page, you will have a beginning that isn't any beginning and doesn't lead you anywhere. (Rudolf, 1996, P.301)

Make a Plan

So don't just start. Don't let that blank white page frighten you into action. Take your time. Slowly work out in your mind what you are going to say. In other words, make a plan. A piece of writing, like everything else you do, has to be planned. Think of a weekend trip, for instance; you can't just blindly go ahead on Saturday morning, not knowing what's going to happen. Instead, during the week, you make plans. You make up your mind when you want to start and when you want to be back; you decide where you want to spend Saturday night and what you want to do on Sunday morning; you get yourself a map and find out which route to take; you spot a place to eat lunch and another to eat dinner; and you work out a different route to go back on Sunday afternoon and evening. When you are through, you have a plan: you know where to start, where to go first, second, and third, and where to end.

Don't Get Lost: Pan Ahead

Writing works the same way. The thing to do is to plan ahead, to map out beforehand that word trip you

are going to take. Know your starting point, your next way station, and the next, and be quite sure you know where you are going to land at the end. In addition, since you are planning for something that is made of words, make sure your plan is in words, not just vague, unclear notions in your mind, which you will have trouble pinning down when you get around to them. It is very easy to believe you have words and sentences in your mind when actually you have only a string of formless or half-formed ideas. For instance, if you want to explain to a friend how to get to your house, you may think you know the way so well that the words you need will be right on tap, but when it comes to telling your friend, you may find that in reminding yourself you thought of the bus stop as "the one before you pass that good bakery," and of the corner where you turn as "the one with the house that stood empty all last year." Therefore, you will have to start all over again really planning your explanation in words and sentences that will make sense to your friend.

Write it out

There is a simple way to avoid this trouble: write your plan out. Put down on paper the start, the main in between stops, and the end. Only in this way can you be quite sure that you have a plan. Then, with your sketch in hand, you can go ahead and work out your piece of writing, step by step and without any danger of losing your way. All speakers, lecturers, and writers work that way. We write the way. This book, the book you are reading now. We spent a long time working out a plan before we started to write. (Tony, 2001, P.189)

How to Get Ideas

We told you that before sitting down to write you must have a plan. If you think of the examples we gave you (giving directions, describing a weekend, telling a joke), that may seem simple to you: you just take the main points of what you want to say, line them up in order and there you are. But if you have to write or tell something a little longer, you'll find that the preparations take a little longer too. What are the main points? Maybe you don't have enough; maybe you have too many. What are you going to say about these points? You don't know: you have to work out a plan for each of these points. What order are you going to use? There seem to be several possible arrangements. Which is best?

The longer the piece of writing (or speaking), the longer and fuller the plan making must be. In fact, the more time and thought you put into your planning, the easier you will find it to write. Professional writers' often spend a month or more in the preparation of an article they write in a day. The authors of the famous play, *Life with Father*, spent two years in working out a plan and then wrote the play in 17 days.

Therefore, in learning how to write, what's most important is learning how to plan before writing. You may have thought that grammar and usage and

punctuation are most important, but that isn't so. If you don't know any grammar, you will have much trouble with your writing; but if you don't know how to plan, you simply can't write. (Stephn, 2006, P.208)

List Your Ideas

Your n is a list of the ideas you are going to use. For a longer job of writing, you have to write them down, otherwise you'll forget half of your ideas before you get around to the actual writing. Your ideas have to be in order, otherwise the list won't help you. (Think of a speaker and his notes. If the notes are in a mess, the speech is ruined.) to put your ideas in order, you have to sort them out first, to hitch up a train, you have to know which is the engine, which are the Pullman cars and the coaches, which is the diner, and which is the observation car. And to sort out your ideas, of course, you have to have enough of them in the first place. You can't make a train out of just the diner and one coach. So the making of your plan consists of three things:

1. Getting ideas.
2. Sorting them out.
3. Putting them in order.

Where Do Ideas Come From?

How does one get ideas? Well, let's see. How do you get ideas for telling a friend how to reach your house? You get these from things you know and have seen that is, from using your own experience. How do you get ideas for telling a joke? Most often from someone who told it to you from listening. And how do you get ideas for a longer piece of writing? Most often from reading. So there are three ways of getting ideas for a longer piece of writing? Most often from reading. So there are three ways of getting ideas: your own experience, listening to others, and reading. Let's look at each one.

Let's say that you frequently visit your sister's family, you have observed that your nephews' favorite activity is to park themselves in front of the television and watch cartoons. You've noticed that there seem to be an awful lot of commercials shown during these cartoons, and for some reason, they irritate you. You're five and seven year old nephews don't seem to mind, but you are bothered. Maybe you'd like to tell your sister how you feel about what her children are watching, but you aren't sure what to say. Or maybe you just have an itch to write down, once and for all, why you are bothered by commercials aimed at children.

Your own Experience

To get ideas, you first use your own experience. You have watched hundreds or even thousands of commercials targeted at children; you know what they are like; you know what's wrong with them. Or do you? In trying to pin down your experience, you find that it's hard to remember exactly or to describe what you remember. You wish now you had paid more attention to them. In short, you haven't been as good an observer as

you thought you were. As you put down what you know from observation, you find it doesn't amount to much. It won't convince anyone else of your point of view.

You see now that if you want to write from your own experience, you have to work at it all the time. You have to go through the world with your eyes and ears wide open and soak up experiences like a sponge. Day and night, you have to be a reporter on the job, and your mind has to take down in shorthand whatever happens around you.

Impossible? No, not quite. There are people like that, men and women who seem to be natural journalists or novelists, born writers whose minds automatically store up what they see and hear. But most of us don't have such minds. If we want to write from our own experience, we piece together whatever scraps of memory we can find. Usually we see that we don't know enough about our subject and decide to find out more. Next time out observation will be much sharper because we know what we are looking for.

So to find out more about the commercials shown during children's programs, you sit down and watch television carefully for a few days. You force yourself to pay close attention to the commercials; you take notes; you fix them in your memory by any means you can think of. After a few days, you really know something about them. You know how long they usually are, how often they come on, the time of day they are shown, and which you especially dislike and why. Maybe you have also seen a few commercials aimed at children that are not particularly objectionable, and one or two you actually like. By observing you subject closely for a set purpose, you have learned much about it; you have gained many new ideas; and even your point of view may have changed. Your experience has helped you to find something to write about.

But while you were gathering that experience, you realized that it wasn't enough for your purpose. You couldn't spend more than a few days on it, and most of each day you were busy with other things; and even when you did watch television you usually tuned in to the same station each time. There is a limit to what you can do by yourself. Also, when it comes to collecting information, you can't rely on yourself alone, because your likes and dislikes get in the way. No matter how sincerely you tried to give the same attention to all the commercials, the fact remains that you probably found out more about those you liked than about the others. (Mareus, Jacqueline and Chaparral, 1990, P.89)

VII. CONCLUSION

Writing is a skill that is required in many contexts throughout life. However, academic writing does many of the things that personal writing does not it has its own set of rules and practices. These rules and

practices may be organized around a formal order or structure in which to present ideas, in addition to ensuring that ideas are supported by author citations in the literature. In contrast to personal writing contexts, academic writing is different because it deals with the underlying theories and causes governing processes and practices in everyday life, as well as exploring alternative explanations for these events.

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