

WRITING TECHNIQUES FOR CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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Writing is not just putting something down on paper. It is part of a process when learning a foreign language. "Learning to communicate with other people: to understand them, talk to them, read what they have written and write to them" (Raimes, 3). In this process the cognitive skills are involved. When writing the intellectual effort is great. It is to put in practice what has been learned in theory.

One important aspect to become a good writer is maybe to be a good reader. Being a good reader can increase your background knowledge. Reading can make it possible for you to compare writing styles, improve vocabulary as well as spelling skills, providing the opportunity of producing good written texts.

Writing well is a process that can be learned and practiced by students of EFL (English as a Foreign Language). Activities such as: taking time to write, doing a lot of reading, thinking, and trying out options are specially valuable to develop this skill. Most writers have to write draft after draft, first to generate and organize their ideas and then to convey those ideas clearly to readers.

Ernest Hemingway, for example, wrote the ending to "A farewell to Arms" thirty-nine times. "Writing is much like ice skating: the more you practice, the better you get. If you are willing to make mistakes, you will want to practice and you will look forward

to new writing challenges" (Fawcett 3).

Students can use different ways to find out what to write about, what to include, and how to organize the ideas they want to express. Students should try all the techniques, then decide which technique they will feel most comfortable with, and find most helpful. These techniques give the students the opportunity to explore a variety of systematic methods of discovery while they read, write and talk, and of course develop their own ideas on a topic. They have two main tasks: to generate ideas in language, and composing these ideas into a written structure adapted to the needs of the reader and the goals of the writer.

Writing then, is "far from being a simple matter of transcribing language into written symbols" (White 3). It should be a means of discovering ideas, sharing opinions, presenting information, arousing a response from the reader, and even entertaining. (White 3-10).

Raimes in her book "Techniques in Teaching Writing" states that learning to write is not just a natural extension of learning to speak a language. We learn how to speak our first language at home, but it is at school where we learn how to write the same language. (Raimes 4).

There are different ways of teaching writing. The purpose of this paper is to present some communicative writing techniques. To teach writing communicatively means that after developing the written work, an audience will be looking forward to knowing about the individual or group results in each writing task. This audience has to do something with the piece of writing, for instance, give a response, rewrite in another form, summarize, or it is allowed to comment the work by stating positive or negative points in order to improve the writing process. (Raimes 8).

1. BRAINSTORMING.

It is an activity that lets one idea lead to another through free association and quick follow-up of related words, thoughts and opinions. Brainstorming should be free will, unstructured and non-judgmental, there should be no censorship other than that dictated by politeness or decency. Attempts to structure or evaluate ideas during brainstorming can be inhibiting and can limit the very creativity and productivity which the technique is designed to promote.

Classroom activity

First ask students to compile, by brainstorming, a list of ideas about any subject, and then as fast as they can, and without stopping, to think about grammar, organization of ideas, or correctness. Write down all the words, phrases, and ideas that come into their head when they think about this subject: for example, under the heading, "office work" the students might brainstorm: typing, pressure, bosses, 8 to 4, money, boring. It is important to have a

good boss, lunch hour is the best time, routine is the worst thing about an office job, lots of jobs are boring, is office work a job or a career? You want to wear a suit to work?

The ideas have been produced by means of brainstorming. They can be grouped and organized to write the first draft. While the students are writing, they must keep rereading what they have written and make changes where necessary. (White 19)

2. ASKING QUESTIONS.

Questions, being the basis of associative dialogues and of problem-solving, are an important prompt to students who want to write. One of the skills of a good writer is to think of interesting questions to ask because these yield interesting answers. As with brainstorming, a topic can be given to students, who then use a series of questions to stimulate thinking, to draw on their experience and to develop and shape their ideas (Raimes, 32).

Classroom activity

To begin with, ask students to choose a topic that may fit best into one category, for example:

- a. Something they can see, hear or touch (a place, person or object).
- b. Something that happened.

Next, the students will ask questions about the topic. The questions should begin with these words: what, who, how, when, where, why. Asking questions about the material helps students in their thinking. The following questions will lend the students to explore their subject matter more fully, but they should also turn their

attention to the formal possibilities of developing a piece of writing, for example, illustrations, or facts, describing, defining, comparing and contrasting, analyzing, classifying, causes or effects and so on. (Raimes 32).

For something you can see, hear or touch.

What does _____ look like?

Where is _____ located?

How was _____ made?

When did _____ first make an appearance, and in what setting?

Who likes _____?

Why do people like or dislike _____?

What does _____ do?

Who uses _____?

How might _____ change?

When _____ is _____ most active?

When _____ is least useful?

What is _____ similar to?

3. USING ROLE/PLAY SIMULATION

This is an activity where students assume roles within a context. In role play students are encouraged to give opinions, show interest and character. In simulations they are required to assume different personages. Since students are working in groups there is a rich source of ideas and viewpoints in a context other than that of the classroom. This activity can be exploited in a subsequent writing task. It is preferable to develop it based on an already known vocabulary and it is up to the teacher to tell the students that the role play or simulation is to be used as a basis for a piece of writing. (White 42)

Classroom Activity

- ❖ A group of four, or according to the number of roles, works on the role play

about a local accident involving a car and a bicycle. Student 1, is the policeman. Student 2, is the driver of the car. Student 3, the cyclist. Student 4, the witness.

- ❖ Give them some time to prepare the role play and help them if they ask so.
- ❖ Carry out the role play. After it is presented ask the other students to write their own viewpoints about the accident and prepare a letter to the insurance company claiming money for the damage and each placing the blame on the other. (Adapted from: White 42-43)

4. KEEPING A JOURNAL.

This is an excellent way to practice writing skills. To start you need to get a notebook, not necessarily a special one. The purpose of writing a journal is to write regularly about things that interest or move the writer, in this case, the student.

Next, you will find some tips to take into consideration when keeping a journal.

- ❖ Write about things that are important to you.
- ❖ List your personal goals and brainstorm possible steps to achieve them.
- ❖ Write about problems, and ways to solve them.
- ❖ Comment on your daily activities and evaluate your English learning progress.
- ❖ Write down impressions you get from magazines, TV talks, radio programs, school, work, etc.
- ❖ Be alert to interesting writing topics all around you.

You will soon find that writing ideas will occur to you all day long. It is just to get the habit of writing. (Taken from: Fawcett 9)

Classroom Activity

First of all, students must have an extra notebook exclusively to develop this writing activity. Ask the students to write at home at least five minutes three times a week. When they get used to it you can increase time and make it everyday. Tell them to give a written report on what they write twice a month. In this way, first, they will develop their imagination when writing everyday, then, they will be practicing what they learn in classroom activities.

5. MUSICALLY INSPIRED.

This consists of bringing to the classroom some extracts of different kinds of music, if possible with special effects, and creating a story, a tale, a song, or just a scene based on the music. Listening to the music a couple of times to get inspired, and start writing what music had inspired you to write. (Taken from: Littlejohn 64-68)

Classroom Activity

Bring five or six recordings of music. You can also ask the students to choose and bring the music. While listening to the extracts, think of the different elements in it and what might be happening as the music changes.

Example:

- Where is the scene taking place?
- In a room in a town in a house in the city in the country
- Who is in the scene?

- Children adult people animals elderly people – When in time is the story developed?
- Past present future
- What is the scene about? .
- A romance a celebration a fight a death a birth

While you are thinking write down key words or make simple drawings. These will help you with the story after listening to the music a couple of times.

As a variation, it could be possible to group the students, compare what they wrote down, and develop the story inside the group.

6. LISTING WORDS.

Based on our own experience as teachers, this technique helps the writing as well as the speaking skill working in groups. The point is first to choose a situation, a place, or a topic. Second, make a list of words related to the chosen topic. Then, create a story using the words listed. Finally act out the story.

Classroom Activity

Give a group of students a list of words after choosing a topic.

Example:

TOPIC: an office

LIST OF WORDS: secretary, books, calculator, suit, schedule, computer, money, boring, boss.

With this vocabulary at least you are able to act out a role-play with four characters: a secretary, a boss, and two possible clients.

After developing the writing task, you

move onto the speaking task by acting it out. In this way, writing and speaking are gathered to improve the language learning.

7. USING CARTOONS.

The purpose of this technique is to use students' creativity through images. Cartoons will generate lots of ideas. The activity will probably be focused on vocabulary enrichment.

Classroom Activity

Take a cartoon sequence of about six frames. Previously, blank out the dialogue in the speech bubbles. Copy the pictures. Cut them up and scramble the order of the cartoon. Then each student writes down the parliament to one of the frames. Read them before showing the cartoon to the class in order to verify the story has a logical sequence. (Adapted from: White 39)

To conclude, all of the written activities will encourage students to develop their own method in writing in English. Therefore, they will learn how to put to paper what they know about any subject and the best way to express it. On the other hand they will become good researchers and at the same time they will be able to build up an extensive vocabulary, which is the tool of a good writer.

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