

**Learning strategies \ 4th Stage \
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Lec. 4
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Teaching Writing

writing is a skill of production of graphic symbols that represent a language one can understand so that one can read these graphic symbols if one knows the language and the graphic representation. Rivers (1981: 248) defines it as an expression of ideas in a consecutive way according to graphic conventions of language.

Some of the writers regard writing skill as a reflection of real-life experience through the subject matter. Warriner et al. (1977:310) consider it 'a kind of shared living' because "most of our writing is done to communicate our ideas and our experiences". Rivers and Temperley (1978:264), on the other hand, argue that early writing consists of the graphic expression of what one wishes to say, moving further away from oral forms as knowledge of the rules of written language advances.

Teaching writing is truly about **helping the writer find his/her voice and then helping to shape that voice in a way that communicates effectively to others**. This can only be done through the kind of intense guidance you recommend and by learning to read like a writer.

Heaton (1975: 135) states that the writing skills are complex and sometimes difficult to teach, requiring mastery not only of grammatical and rhetorical devices but also of conceptual and judgmental elements. The following analysis attempts to group the many and varied skills necessary for writing good prose into five general components or main areas.

1) Language use: the ability to write correct and appropriate sentences;

2) Mechanical skills: the ability to use correctly those conventions peculiar to the written language - e.g. punctuation, spelling;

3) Treatment of content: the ability to think creatively and develop thoughts, excluding all irrelevant information;

4) Stylistic skills: the ability to manipulate sentences and paragraphs, and use language effectively;

5) Judgment skills; the ability to write in an appropriate manner for a particular purpose with a particular audience in mind, together with an ability to select, organize and order relevant information.

Brown (2001: 343) states there are 12 micro skills for writing. They are as follows:

1) Producing graphemes and orthographic patterns of English;

2) Producing writing at an efficient rate of speed to suit the purpose;

3) Producing an acceptable core of words and use appropriate word order patterns;

4) Using acceptable grammatical systems (e.g., tense, agreement, pluralization), patterns, and rules;

5) Expressing a particular meaning in different grammatical forms;

6) Using cohesive devices in written discourse;

7) Using the rhetorical forms and conventions of written discourse;

8) Appropriately accomplishing the communicative functions of written texts according to form and purpose;

9) Conveying links and connections between events and communicate such relations as main idea, supporting idea, new

information, given information, generalization, and exemplification;

10) Distinguishing between literal and implied meaning when writing;

11) Correctly conveying culturally specific references in the context of the written text;

12) Developing and using a battery of writing strategies, such as accurately assessing the audience's interpretation, using prewriting devices, writing with fluency in the first drafts, using paraphrases and synonyms, soliciting peer and instructor feedback, and using feedback for revising and editing.

principles for teaching writing

the following are a few principles that every teacher should consider while planning a course, whether it is a writing course, or a course in which writing with play a part. these principles can (and should) be adapted to the many different learning situations:-

1. understand your students` reasons for writing.
2. provide many opportunities for students to write.
3. Make feedback helpful and meaningful.
4. clarify for yourself, and for your students, how their writing will be evaluated.

The importance of writing

In the area of EFL, writing has many uses and functions. To begin with, the ability to write acceptable scientific English is essential for post-graduate students who must write their dissertations in English. Moreover, writing EFL allows for communication to large numbers of people all over the world. It

also provides students with physical evidence of their achievement. This in turn helps them to determine what they know and what they don't know.

Writing can also enhance students' thinking skills "Writing stimulates thinking, chiefly because it forces us to concentrate and organize. Talking does, too, but writing allows more time for introspection and deliberation". Additionally, writing can enhance students' vocabulary, spelling, and grammar. Finally, writing skills often needed for formal and informal testing.

Writing Process

A process is a sequence of operations or actions by which something is done. In writing, writers are supposed to know the process thoroughly. Then, they divide it into steps or stages. Finally, he needs to explain each step into details so that readers will see how it works. Writing process refers to everything a writer does from the moment he or she starts thinking about what to write until the final copy is completed. This process emphasizes on ideas to write down as well as the form in which the ideas are written down.

Stages of the Writing Process

- 1. Prewriting:* This is the planning phase of the writing process, when students brainstorm, research, gather and outline ideas, often using diagrams for mapping out their thoughts. Audience and purpose should be considered at this point, and for the older students, a working thesis statement needs to be started.

Two popular pre-writing activities are:

- **Brainstorming** where students write down every idea that comes to their head. They then read over all

the ideas that have been written to form a formal topic for writing.

- **Cluster mapping**, also known as concept mapping, involves a series of connected circles spreading out from a main circle in the middle of the map. The middle circle contains the main idea for the writing assignment, and the connected circles contain ideas connected to that main idea. The student may want to write a paragraph or two about each nodule (or circle idea) that is drawn in the map.

Good pre-writing participation can lead to a smooth writing experience. If the students spend a lot of time concentrating on their pre-writing exercises, when it is time to write, all the ideas are already on paper and just need to be formatted and placed in the correct order for the paper. Many teachers say that pre-writing is the most important step in the writing process.

2. **Drafting**: Students create their initial composition by writing down all their ideas in an organized way to convey a particular idea or present an argument. Audience and purpose need to be finalized.

This is where the pre-writing exercise comes in handy. If a student has done a great job of a cluster map, then all the ideas for the paper are already written down and the student need only develop sentences to match each circle on the map. Students can write out each major point first and then connect them all together in their paper, or they can simply start at the beginning and work their way around the cluster map filling out the ideas with full sentences.

When drafting, students do not need to be overly concerned with grammar or errors. There will be time to go back and correct these mistakes later. The drafting stage is used to get initial ideas from the pre-writing phase into more formal sentence structure. It is the first draft (probably of many) for the formal written assignment

3. *Revising:* Students review, modify, and reorganize their work by rearranging, adding, or deleting content, and by making the tone, style, and content appropriate for the intended audience. The goal of this phase of the writing process is to improve the draft.

is the step in the writing process in which students reread their work to see if it makes sense. Sometimes you can think that what you are writing is perfect, and then go back and read it and not understand a word of what you've said. Other times, you can realize that your fingers have not recorded all that your brain was thinking as you note large sections of what you missing from the written work. This is exactly what revision is for. Teaching students to reread their work is important. Students may feel that writing it is all that is required, but they must reread their work and revise areas that just don't work. Students may wish to have someone else read their work at this point to let them know if the ideas work well together.

4. *Editing:* At this point in the writing process, writers proofread and correct errors in grammar and mechanics, and edit to improve style and clarity. Having another writer's feedback in this stage is helpful.

Editing is different from revising because revising is focused on the overall concepts and how they fit together, while editing is focused on the detail of correct grammar and formatting. Up to this point, students can be encouraged to focus on their ideas in the writing process. If a student gets caught up in trying to ensure that every word is spelled correctly and every comma is used correctly, it may interfere with the creative writing process. By encouraging students to wait until near the end of the writing process to focus on spelling, grammar, and formatting, you give them permission to focus on creating the work before perfecting it.

5. *Publishing*: In this last step of the writing process, the final writing is shared with the group. Sharing can be accomplished in a variety of ways, and with the help of computers, it can even be printed or published online.

Factors Affecting Writing Composition

Sarojini (2011:156-58) affirms that in learning a language, especially a second language, the skills in writing are very important. Writing is an art. The students can learn it quite unconsciously. However, skills in writing can also be acquired by constant practice.

Sarojini (ibid) mentions some of the hindrances that come in way of acquiring the skills of writing in a second language.

1. Lack of instruction in writing

Out of the four fundamental skills in learning a language, the skill of writing is not being paid proper attention in the classroom. Some teachers in the schools do not take enough care to develop writing skills among their students. For some teachers, writing composition appears only in mid-year and final examination a defect which should not be exercised by them (ibid).

2. Differences in syntax

The sentence structure in the second language may be different from that in the students' mother tongue. Hence, they find it difficult when writing their ideas in the English language (ibid).

3. Spelling and grammar

Students must learn the correct spelling of words to write good English. One cannot write the words simply as they are spoken. There are words that have the same sounds but have different spellings. Similarly, words with the same spelling differ in their

pronunciation. This has become a great hindrance in developing the writing skill among the students. The sentence structure in English is completely different from that of the mother tongue (ibid).

4. Incompetent teachers

Some of the teachers working in secondary schools are not specially trained to teach language skills, especially 'writing'. Hence, they generally follow the traditional methods of developing language skills among their students. As a result, their students suffer from a number of problems when it comes to free expression of thoughts and facts (ibid).

5. Lack of clear cut-objectives

Most English teachers do not possess clear-cut objectives regarding the development of writing skill among their students. Hence, they fail to develop this skill among their students (ibid).

6. Defective system of examination

The present system of examination at the secondary level does not really aim at testing the language skills. Most examinations are subjected-oriented rather than skill-oriented. Hence, there is much emphasis on developing writing skill at the secondary school level (ibid).

Guided Writing

The Guided writing skill includes handwriting, copying, dictation and spelling. The principal purpose of these aspects which are completely controlled by the teacher is to teach pupils the mechanics of writing, accuracy and readiness for further activities (Al-Mutawa and Kailani, 1989:126).

Mechanical Skills of Guided Writing

Writing is basically a mechanical skill that entails a number of sub skills that determine the efficiency of the process of writing. Mastering of these skills will develop EFL students' performance in writing and will lead to economical writing that saves time and effort. These mechanical skills of guided writing are:

1. Speed

Mastering an economical method of producing single words will definitely contribute to the development of speedy sentence and paragraph writing (Al-Hamash, 1972:57).

2. Economy

Economy is an important skill necessary for effective writing. It makes the writer's task much easier because it contributes to a large extent, to the reduction in time and energy.

3. Legibility

In order to maintain legible handwriting, EFL students have to produce each letter clearly; distinguish between **o** and **a**, **c** and **e**, **p**, etc. Writers must be sure that capital letters differ from lower-case letters. They must use dots, not circles, for periods and make each word a distinct unit. However, there are important conventions and necessary features for maintaining legible handwriting:

a. Spacing of Words

A space between two words should be bigger than the space between two letters of one word, spaces within words should be even and equal. This point is very important since it is distinctive, i.e., it affects meaning. For example, the space that distinguishes *a wake* from *awake*, *a way* from *away*, *in doors* from *indoors* should be carefully considered, because any confusion in spacing results in the confusion of meaning.

b. Spacing of Sentences and Paragraphs

In writing a string of words, the spaces that separate words should be emphasized. They should be equal and even. Accuracy in producing properly separated sentences is very

important, because failure to space words properly will result in illegibility and confusion (Al-Hamash, 1972:57).

4. Alignment

Writing on an imaginary straight line is a feature of good handwriting. It is important in the production of single words, but it is more important in the production of sentences and paragraph.

5. Capitalization

Correct capitalization is a fundamental skill necessary for effective written composition, because its use clarifies and adds meaning (ibid).

6. Correct Spelling

Although spelling is a highly individual problem, Iraq EFL students' performances frequently fail to spell the words according to the established usage as shown by the dictionary (AL-Hamash et al, 1984:98).

7. Dictation

Al-Mutawa and Kailani (1989:129) consider this type of writing skill “an essential activity for the development of spelling consciousness in learners, so it should be given at frequent intervals”.

"When learners write down what they have heard, they make the transfer from spoken to written language. Such writing involves pupils to spell correctly and think more and very carefully about what they are writing".