

## DEALING WITH WRITTEN WORK

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*В данной статье рассматриваются некоторые аспекты формирования академической письменной компетенции у студентов вузов на занятиях по английскому языку. Нами обосновывается важность развития навыка письма, анализируются основные задачи выполнения письменной работы, объясняются некоторые трудности в обучении и овладении навыками письма.*

**Ключевые слова:** коммуникация, компетенция, языковое мастерство, овладение навыками, обучение, письмо.

*This paper deals with some aspects of the formation of academic writing competence in English among university students. In order to give a basic understanding of the issue, first, we discussed the importance of developing the writing skill necessary for every person, regardless of their professional area. After that, the author highlighted the main reasons for doing written work, clarified some of the difficulties in teaching and learning writing skills, and also gave several practical tips and strategies to overcome them in order to write effectively. Finally, various types of activities and tasks to improve learners' writing skill were specified.*

**Keywords:** communication, competence, language skill, learning, note, teaching, writing.

Writing, as one of the abilities to express oneself, is a valuable skill and an essential basis for success, as learners need to write for a variety of practical reasons. When we write something down, such as when we write a note to ourselves to remember something, or write a letter to friend, or write a blog post on the internet, or make notes in lectures and seminars, or complete coursework assignments, project reports and theses, or fill out job application, we are recording a particular utterance or idea for a particular audience. Many people claim that writing reinforces spoken language, some languages learners state that writing helps them to think, some say that they cannot learn a word or phrase unless they write it down.

In all academic subjects students need to express themselves in writing to do well at universities. Due to the fact that writing and thinking are closely related, all students, by improving their writing, will have the opportunity to improve the quality of their thinking and therefore, by submitting better

written work, they should receive a higher grade. All learning depends on the understanding and effective use of language; therefore, all teachers and lecturers in schools and in higher education should encourage their students to develop the ability to think and to express their thoughts clearly and effectively so that their writing is interesting, persuasive, and a pleasure to read.

### **A. Reasons for writing**

Much of what we write is intended for other people to influence their thoughts and actions, however there are other reasons why learners write: to help to remember, to observe, to think, and to communicate.

**1. Writing helps to remember.** Learners first used writing as an aid to remember at school by copying sentences from a book, or later to take notes while a teacher was speaking, while they were reading, and during investigations.

To make good notes:

- write date and title,
- listen carefully; do not record the lecturer's every word,
- note the main points as headings, key words and phrases,
- use abbreviations; record numbers, names, dates and titles,
- write definitions carefully, as they are dictated,
- record the lecturer's conclusions clearly and concisely,
- mark any points that you do not understand, perhaps by a question mark.

Good concise notes help you to remember the essentials of a subject.

**2. Writing helps to observe.** Observation is important in the arts and humanities as well as in the sciences and engineering. A carefully prepared description of an object or event may be part of any investigation.

To make notes in practical work:

- write the date and title,
- record what you do and how you do it,
- write a report on the work, including details of your materials and methods,
- record your observations on data sheets prepared in advance,
- do not make drafts, because you could make mistakes in copying,
- write legible and carefully worded sentences.

### **3. Writing helps to think.**

To capture thoughts:

- make a note of useful thoughts as they come to mind,
- keep a few sheets of notepaper to take notes,
- we may think in words or picture situations in our imagination, so use words to capture thoughts for later consideration,

Writing helps to arrange our thoughts on any subject and to plan work.

**4. Writing helps to communicate.** Before the invention of the telephone and radio, verbal communication with anyone out of earshot was possible only by writing. The development of writing was a great innovation. Nowadays, even though we can communicate with people anywhere in the world, writing remains an important means of communication and important messages are still being prepared in writing:

- to confirm in writing exactly what was agreed so that both parties have a record of the conversation,
- in preparing written communications, there is more time for thought, to check and correct the first draft,
- since the invention of the printing press a great literature has been achieved and science has become a world-wide endeavor [3, p. 20].

Writing is a process of construction and it has been one of the most difficult skills that students have to learn. Moreover, writing is an important part of language learning, because it is an essential activity that requires enough thinking about a specific topic to analyze and classify any background knowledge [5, p. 22].

### **B. Learning to write effectively**

In fiction, writing is subjective – based on imagination. On the contrary, the written work of students in most cases is objective – based on the fact that we can observe with our senses. The goal of students is to convey information and ideas clearly without using their imaginations.

**1. Study the main characteristics of academic writing.** For the reason that we all use instructions in scholarly writing, for example, how to write an essay or scientific article, consider what are the requirements when using the instructions?

- **Explanation.** The purpose of instruction must be made clear in a title. The set of instructions must be a clear explanation of what materials do you need to complete the task and what do you have to do.
- **Order.** The task must be broken into separate steps, arranged in the order in which things have to be done, preferably numbered.
- **Clarity.** Each instruction must be a complete and carefully constructed sentence, so that the action required at each step cannot be misunderstood.
- **Relevance.** Only the information that will help you complete the task should be provided.
- **Simplicity.** Any unnecessary words could be confusing.
- **Completeness.** If an important step were omitted in the instruction, you would be unable to complete the task.
- **Accuracy.** The writer has to work through the instructions while performing the task, to check that there were no mistakes.

**2. Present the results of your thinking.** The written work that learners submit for assessment must be original work, the results of their own thinking.

– **Cheating.** It is unacceptable to represent work done by someone else as your own work.

– **Falsification.** Most scientific writings are objective, not subjective, so the material you present in your written work must be factual; it is unacceptable to include imaginary thoughts.

– **Collusion.** Collaboration in group work can be an important part, encouraging the sharing of ideas and teamwork, but you must decide what to include and how to organize your material, and write a composition by yourself.

– **Plagiarism.** It is inadmissible to copy material from any publication and include it in your own compositions without proper confirmation. If you are summarizing someone's thoughts or opinions, you should include the source in your notes.

**3. Improve your writing.** The following strategies are the guide to improve ability to communicate in writing for students in all subjects.

– **listen and note,** because lecture notes help to remember and are a basis for the further studies,

– **observe and describe,** this provides a basis for discussing the importance of writing as an aid to observation and the reasons for differences between perception and description of one object or event.

– **think and write,** keep sheets of paper and a pen in your pocket, so you can make notes of thoughts that come up.

– **prepare your work carefully:** arrange the parts of your composition in a proper order to suit your purpose; include enough explanation; clarify the whole meaning, so that no sentence could be misunderstood; convey your message as clearly and simply; make sure your work is complete; check your work carefully and try to make sure that every statement is correct.

**4. Read critically.** Learners should develop the ability to think critically, in other words, they should not accept that the author's point of view as the only possible one. Criticizing the others' work can help students to recognize good writing and thus improve their own written work.

**5. Practice writing.** To write well learners must practice their writing skill, for example, through:

– keeping a private diary in which student record his own experiences, conveying thoughts in well-formed sentences, arranged in an appropriate order and organized in paragraphs, so that he can understand his personal notes later,

– writing about things you know best and try to express your thoughts as clearly and simply as you can,

– reading good prose regularly, for example, read books by well-known authors and leading articles in good newspapers and journals [3, p. 30].

The universities need to work in developing writing across the curriculum to develop academic writers. Teachers need to know how to write in order to teach it efficiently. As we mention earlier, written language is not just oral language written down. Teachers need to know how written language contrasts with speech so that they can help their students acquire literacy [8]. Since writing is an important skill, the need for teaching writing becomes critical and teachers must effectively teach it to students.

### **C. Teaching writing efficiently**

Unlike talking, writing is not a natural skill. Reading and writing are social inventions that have to be taught, learned and practiced.

**1. Teaching writing is not easy.** Learning to read and write is difficult for learners, especially for those whose writing system is different from the writing system of the target language. Writing is the most problematic skill to teach and most challenging of the four skills to master.

**2. Difficulties of writing.** Spoken language is much more spontaneous and repetitive than written language. In writing we do not get all the visual suggestions of mime and gesture, or the voice and tone clues that give us hints of meaning. The best way of getting things down on paper or on computer screen is to think of writing as just talking to someone who does not sitting right next to you at the particular moment. That is the best way to get rid of the most troubling aspect – writing anxiety.

**3. Practice improves writing.** It takes a lot of practice to become comfortable with writing. It is difficult but important for learners to write every day, and they have to write a lot every day in every lesson, and teachers should give them that opportunity.

**4. Writing together with others skills.** Writing is necessary not only for its own value, but also for its ability to help us in mastering all four skills. Writing should be combined with the other language skills such as listening, speaking and reading, for the reason that speaking and reading helps students to rethink and formulate ideas, build vocabulary that can be used in their writing. Conversely, getting some ideas down on paper is helpful as a preparation to speaking.

**5. Giving feedback.** When people talk, they hope that someone is listening, also when students write, they want someone to read what they have written. For their part, teachers should give students meaningful feedback. On the other hand, the reader of the produced writing need not always be the teacher, well-trained students make excellent peer reviewers. Nowadays, the computer, cell phone and the internet have turned writing into a communicative activity in

which feedback is an essential part of communication. On email, in chat rooms, on websites, and in interactive classrooms all over the world, people are writing things to one another. And it helps them to make corrections automatically and naturally, by repeating a word using its correct form [6, p. 79].

#### **D. Some activities to develop writing skills**

The following are examples of some activities and tasks for teachers that stimulate the development writing skills and the create conditions to increase the interest and motivation of students to learn a foreign language.

##### **1. The cumulative folder.** Provide a folder for each student.

- students keep all their writing in this folder,
- when the teacher explains the new rule, the students write the grammar rules they - have learned,
- before handling in any written work, students check their folder list to see that they have followed these rules,
- at the end of the lesson, students choose the best examples of their written work and keep them in the folder,
- periodically, check students work for the use of the rules.

##### **2. Wall newspaper.** Assign a large bulletin board in the classroom to be the Wall newspaper.

- after each writing project in your class, read carefully and choose 2-3 most interesting and edit them thoroughly. Invite students whose papers you have chosen and explain why and how you have edited their papers,
- these students rewrite their papers and they are posted on the Wall newspaper,
- occasionally ask groups in the class to read and comment on the Wall newspaper.

##### **3. Peer review.** Ask students to make 2 copies of their compositions, and then they each have 3 copies of their compositions.

- in groups of 3, students give each group member a copy of their composition,
- each group takes 9 review sheets,
- explain the difference between a Reviewer, who reads for content, and an Editor, who reads for structure,
- the 1<sup>st</sup> student in each group reads his composition out loud, groupmates can ask questions or make comments during the reading,
- at the end of reading, each student fills out the reviewer or editor form,
- the process is repeated with each student,
- students receive their peer review or edit forms, read the comments.
- students rewrite compositions making additions and changes.

**4. Change the audience.** Prepare several samples with different styles of writing, for example: the newspaper article, a novel, a magazine, a children's story, the diaries etc.

- read each sample and ask students to notice the differences,
- in small groups, students look for more differences,
- read the paragraph of a newspaper article and note how the wh-questions have been answered,
- in small groups, students rewrite the article as if they were writing it for a children's book,
- groups read their stories and the class comments on how each differs from the original writing.

**5. Writing email.** Establish contact with a teacher in another community that also has access to email, and ask your colleague to provide a list of students with picture and a brief description of each student and do the same for him.

- assign your students an email partner, try to match interests,
- students will correspond at least 3 times a week, and once a week send a teacher a brief summary of ideas covered,
- sometimes, ask volunteers to report on the project,
- if possible, organize a meeting between the groups.

**6. Using chat rooms.** Prepare as many folders as there are students in class, inside each folder insert a paper with an interesting problem.

- each student chooses a folder, and begins to write his comment to the topic,
- return the folder so that it can be picked up by another student,
- as they continue, the process becomes a written discussion,
- when the chat room discussion is over, students are divided in small groups and each group chooses a folder to read and comment.
- in groups, students decide which comment they find most interesting,
- a spokesperson from each group reports to the class.

**7. Writing conference.** Ask students to choose the best of their compositions and give it to teacher. Teacher chooses 3 of them, and students will present their work at the writing conference.

- set a date for the conference,
- appoint a conference moderator, who will introduce the speakers and time the presentations,
- invite students from other classes,
- three authors of chosen compositions present it, they should not just read but rather talk; they could use an overhead projector or provide an outline of their compositions to classmates,

– after each presentation, the moderator invites the volunteers for question or comment,

– the procedure is repeated for each presenter,

– a general discussion led by moderator or teacher may follow.

**8. Using websites.** Create your own website.

– each week choose an interesting piece of student written work,

– edit the paper with the student,

– publish the paper on your website and invite students to write comments and reactions to the composition,

– encourage students to create their own websites and to publish their written work.

To sum up, in this article we have discussed one of the important issues in language learning and teaching – the formation of writing skills of language learners. The importance of developing writing skills is emphasized by the fact that it serves as an important factor for the implementation of various needs in human life, especially it plays a significant role in the formation of person's language competence. Therefore, knowing the reasons and challenges of writing assignments, and following the strategies to overcome them can bring desirable learning outcomes. In addition, language teachers can use suggested activities in order to teach writing in a more effective way. All of the ideas mentioned above allow increasing opportunities for language learning by developing writing skills.

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