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ISBN: 978-2066-48-0

THE USE OF ENGLISH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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BASIC PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE WRITING

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Introduction

Reading makes a full man
Conference, a ready man
And writing, an exact man

— Francis Bacon

Right from the beginning of human history, human beings have always sought to clarify, express and explain themselves. One single faculty that they have mainly relied on in achieving this purpose is language, a most fundamental distinction between human beings and other creatures (Trask, 1995:1). Language is made up of receptive and expressive skills, the primary and secondary skills with which individuals can function as *homo loquens* (talking beings). These skills are listening and speaking, reading and writing. One receives information through listening and reading, deploying the skills of oracy (listening) and literacy (reading) in the process and one conveys one's thoughts to others via the skills of speaking and writing. The primary skills of listening and speaking lay the foundation, on many occasions, for reading and writing, which are the skills of literacy. The proper activation and effective utilisation of these skills determine one's personality and achievements, to a large extent.

Of all language skills, writing is the most enervating, perhaps, the most edifying. It is the tripartite process of an *encoder* giving conventional *codes* to the *decoder* so as to bring about some desired objectives. As entailed in Bacon's quotation above, writing brings out exactitude in a way other skills do not: to write is to be *right*; an author is/becomes an *authority*. Writing is also of various kinds, its major determinants being the audience, subject matter and the purpose of writing. There are such writings as essay writing (descriptive, expository, narrative, argumentative) letter writing, (formal, semi-formal, informal) creative writing, report/research writing, etc. (See Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen) In today's world, everyone must go through the "write of passage" and it is thus crucial to master the skills of effective writing in order to be relevant.

Why Worry About Writing?

In the modern world where human beings have an insatiable appetite for communicating and presenting their own points of view, writing is indispensable. The more one knows how to express oneself clearly and

effectively, the more successful one is in attaining one's goals and desires. Without the mastery of writing skills, one's educational and professional achievements are significantly limited. Yet, writing is both a difficult task and a frustrating work. It is a craft with learnable skills with which one can achieve tangible results. It is, like any other craft, an exercise requiring practice. Many people realise the need for writing, at least everyone wants to be a good writer, but few people ever take the trouble of going the whole hog of practically developing their writing rather than take solace in run-of-the-mill ability to string words together.

According to Elbow (1973:12), the attitude of people to writing is mostly that of helplessness. Most people want to write as it is very rare to find a person who would say, "I don't want to know how to write" in schools, colleges, universities and work places:

People without education say, 'if only I had education I could write'. People with education say, 'if only I had talent, I could write'. People with education and talent say, 'if only I had self-discipline I could write'. People with education, talent and self discipline - and there are plenty of them who can't write - say, 'if only ...' and they don't know what to say next.

Writing tasks cause a lot of trouble to many educated people and most people would not take the trouble to write at all if not that they must. This is mainly because writing has been construed within an isolated context rather than an activity that results from other language skills. Good writing derives from a knack for reading. Good writers are avid readers and the best way to learn how to write is by writing. Also, the most effective way of improving writing is practising free writing, the idea of writing daily or regularly. When basic writing is established, every other type of writing becomes a natural corollary, less challenging or intimidating.

Writing is crucial and there is no escape route from it. What is inevitable is better welcome. In a 1988 research, Lin Greasing reported that 79 per cent of executives surveyed in the United States identified writing as one of the most neglected skills in the world of business despite its being one of the most useful to productivity. In another survey of 402 companies in 1992, as reported by the Associated Press, it was noted that executives identified writing as the most valued skill but said 80 per cent of their employees at all levels need to improve. The number of workers needing improvement in writing skills was up by 20 per cent from the results of the same survey in 1991. Results of a 1993 study by Olsten Corp., a placement agency, were almost identical: 80 per cent of 443 employers surveyed said their workers needed training in writing skills (Hansen and Hansen, 2006).

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The need for graduates and professionals with sufficient writing skills will continue to increase with time. "A 1991 report by the U.S. Labor Department noted that most future jobs will require writing skills". As Hansen and Hansen (2006) further report, the overwhelming majority of the instructors surveyed said that writing skills are critical to academic success. Authors in various fields have succeeded by dint of their linguistic competence especially at the level of writing through which their ideas are documented. As cited in Adedimeji (2005),

The only reason Pythagoras was able to tell us that $a^2 = b^2 + c^2$ is a right angled triangle; Newton, that acceleration is a function of force; Einstein, that $E = mc^2$; Charles Boyle, that volume is a function of temperature, and pressure, a function of volume was because they had the means, the medium of communicating these ideas—language.

The Nature of Writing

As Babatunde (1998) notes, writing is both an interaction and a process. As an interaction, writing is an interface among the readers, the occasions and purpose. If a piece of writing does not serve the purpose for which it is meant, it is useless. To make writing useful, it must be contextualised. In essence, "a good writer must have a firm grasp of the context of every writing challenge and then manipulate the variables for effective communication" (Babatunde, 1998).

Writing as a process concerns the consideration of the writing as a task involving some steps which must be taken in order to achieve a good piece or product. The process of writing thus involves the tripartite stages of pre-writing, writing and post-writing/re-writing, a key component of which is editing.

The Stages of Writing

Writing can be compared to farming, made up of stages. Farming involves pre-planting, planting and post-planting activities/operations. Just as a farmer cultivates the land with a view to achieving harvest, the same way a writer cultivates critical thinking that results eventually in good topics, thesis statements and fine essays. Writing involves three stages: pre-writing, writing and re-writing/post-writing stages.

4.1. Pre-Writing Stage

The first activity at this stage is *brain-storming*. The writer thinks here of what to write by listing, clustering or asking relevant questions regarding an idea. Like bush clearing, the writer prepares his head for an essay or paper and puts bits and pieces together until he *formulates a topic*, usually a phrase. If necessary, the topic can still be narrowed down until it becomes manageable within a research context. For example, it would be too broad to write on "Living Things" but writing on "The life cycle of a mosquito" is more manageable in Biology.

With the focus now on a topic, the researcher *gathers more materials* that relate to his subject of writing, i.e. mosquito, and studies them, making his notes. With this, he prepares his mind with relevant information that will bolster his ideas. He moves subsequently to the fourth stage by which he *formulates a thesis*, a research/writing statement. A sentence like "Mosquitoes are familiar insects that are known to transmit such diseases as yellow fever, malaria and filiriasis" can serve as the thesis of an essay on the life cycle of mosquitoes. As Hacker (2003:10) notes, "it's a good idea to formulate a thesis early in the writing process." With a thesis, a writer is able to *make an outline* of his proposed essay or article, which can be formal or informal. An informal outline is a list of items one would want one's writing (or speech) to cover. A formal outline provides a basic overview, with important details, of a subject, by giving main and subsidiary ideas. A formal outline is systematic and a typical one looks like:

THESIS

I. MAIN IDEA

- A. Subsidiary idea to I
- B. Subsidiary idea to I
 - 1. Subsidiary idea to B
 - 2. Subsidiary idea to B
 - a) Subsidiary idea to 2
 - b) Subsidiary idea to 2

II. MAIN IDEA

- A. Subsidiary idea to II
- B. Subsidiary idea to II
- C. Subsidiary idea to II

III. MAIN IDEA

With the planning that outlining involves, the farmer, having cleared the bush, gathered the weeds and determined the terrain, has now made his ridges. He is set for planting as a writer is set for writing.

Writing Stage

This is the stage of drafting, akin to the farmer planting crops. The gathered materials at the pre-writing stage and the information jotted here and there while reading is being done become handy. The thesis is revised if found necessary and the drafting of introduction, body and conclusion is undertaken. The characteristics of good writing inform, to a large extent, what the writer does at this stage. The three parts of writing here are introduction, body and conclusion.

The introduction is the beginning of an essay or any piece of writing. The introduction sets the mood of the essay by stating the purpose of writing and convincing the reader that the piece is worth reading. In setting the mood of the essay, a writer states the thesis of the article early in the introduction or he defines his concept with a view to making his subsequent ideas clear. In arresting the interest of the reader, different techniques can be used, six of which (Eko:1999:25) gives as (a) relating a pertinent and interesting anecdote (b) beginning with an interesting quotation (c) summarising a commonly held view in the body of the essay (d) explaining the specific occasion that gave rise to the essay and (e) emphasising the importance of the subject matter of the essay. Due attention should be paid to the introduction just as close attention is paid to one's face.

The body is otherwise known as the middle of the essay. This part of the essay highlights and reinforces the thesis. In terms of length, it is the most extensive part of the essay and as such, paragraphs must be arranged in a systematic manner such that each paragraph connects with the one that follows it. More importantly, each paragraph should discuss a specific point that will ultimately justify the thesis statement or persuade the reader to identify with the writer's point of view.

The conclusion is the end of the essay. It is also important to conclude an essay well for the same reason that poor finishing can significantly detract from the quality of a good building project. Eko (1999:25) maintains that the nature of the material being written determines the appropriate conclusion and the techniques that may be used include (a) summary of the basic points (b) ending with the last and climatic point without a formal conclusion (c) pointing out the implications that grow out of the body of the essay (d) leaving the reader with an idea to ponder (e) providing an interesting anecdote (f) ending with a relevant and effective anecdote and (e) a paragraph that incorporates a number of techniques.

In essence, writing involves combining a sequence or series of ideas sewn together till they form a cohesive whole. In all parts of an essay or any type of writing, a writer is guided by the six questions of George Orwell (cited in Kennedy, Kennedy and Aaron, 1997:534):

What am I trying to say?

What words will express it?
 What image or idiom will make it clearer?
 Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?
 Could I put it more shortly?
 Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly?

Re-writing/Post-writing Stage

This stage involves revising, editing and proofreading. Revision concerns aspects of focus, paragraphing, organisation, content, point-of-view, purpose, audience, etc. It aims at ensuring that such aspects are taken care of so that the essay/article is clear, consistent and clearly focused. The process of revision "stimulates thought" to re-arrange, remove, add, separate or merge paragraphs. Editing involves making improvements in sentence structures, diction, grammar and punctuation. Proof-reading is the last stage here, a slow and methodical reading with a view to checking spellings, typographical errors and omitted letters during typing. As Hacker (2003:22) notes, "although proofreading is dull, it is crucial. Errors strewn throughout an essay are distracting and annoying". Listing all the sources or references consulted is also part of the post-writing activities especially in research writing. All reference information should be provided accordingly by painstakingly cross-checking all the cited authors and works.

Passing through the pre-writing and writing stages without devoting attention to the re-writing/post-writing stage is like clearing the soil, preparing the field and planting good crops or plants on it and neglecting such plants thereafter. After planting, a farmer needs to water the plants and unweed the farm so as to allow the growth and health of the crops. Failure to do the post-planting activities may result in losing the labour of pre-planting and planting activities in its entirety.

Writing Well: General Principles

Writing is as important as writing well. A poorly scribbled, haphazardly combined string of words with disjointed paragraphs and ungrammatical expressions makes a nonsense out of writing, even if the ideas presented are good. Writing well entails following the rules or principles of writing and avoiding the pitfalls that underline bad writing. It further concerns writing and writing until writing becomes a second nature in a perpetual nonstop writing.

The principles of effective writing have been explained in detail in the invaluable work of Strunk, White and Kalman (2005) in terms of usage, composition and organisation. Effective writing or writing well in essence involves, but is not limited to, the following 'elementary rules of usage' and 'elementary principles of composition', each constituting half of the list respectively:

1. Form the possessive singular of nouns by adding 's
2. In a series of three or more terms with a single conjunction, use a comma after each term except the last
3. Enclose parenthetical expressions between commas
4. Place a comma before a conjunction introducing an independent clause
5. Do not join an independent clause with a comma
6. Do not break sentences in two
7. Use a colon after an independent clause to introduce a list of particulars, an appositive, an amplification, or an illustrative quotation
8. Use a dash to set off an abrupt break or interruption and to announce a long appositive or a summary
9. The number of the subject determines the number of the verb
10. Use the proper case of pronoun
11. A participial phrase at the beginning of a sentence must refer to the grammatical subject
12. Choose a suitable design and hold to it
13. Make the paragraph the unit of composition
14. Use the active voice
15. Put statements in positive form
16. Use definite, specific, concrete language
17. Omit needless words
18. Avoid a succession of loose sentences
19. Express coordinate ideas in similar form
20. Keep related words together
21. In summaries, keep to one tense
22. Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end. (pp.v-vi)

The understanding and application of the above rules and principles of writing involves a further reading of elements of grammar and English structure (Adedimeji and Alabi, 2003; Adedimeji, 2005; Chapter Nine in this book). Reading is an indispensable activity of a writer through which s/he obtains new ideas, stocks his/her mind with information and has a critical awareness of issues and phenomena. "When you have a well-stocked and girded mental storehouse, you tell truths, even small and ordinary truths, and so write what most readers will find worth reading" (Kennedy, Kennedy and Aaron 1997:2). *Reading* itself may not also be sufficient at a point without *listening* to a teacher doing the *speaking*, explaining the grammatical terms and their functions. This inter-relatedness makes writing a complex process involving the deployment of other language skills, especially reading. As such, writing is by no means a conscious, active process by which the physical, physiological and psychical domains of the writer are tasked. It involves

way process: figuring out one's meaning and putting it into language (Elbow, 1973:14).

Characteristics of Effective Writing

For any writing to be effective, it has to meet some conditions. These characteristic conditions are economy, simplicity, clarity and correctness.

Economy

"The first quality of any good writing is economy" (Eko, 1999:1). Economy is the management of expressions in such a way that unnecessary words are avoided while detailed information is provided. Eko further cites Shrunck and White in their *Elements of Style* as follows:

A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer makes all his sentences short or that he avoids all detail ... but that every word tells.

As the difference between a child and an adult is that a child says it in several words, but an adult's language is more precise, a writer must express himself with the consciousness of the principle of economy. The shorter the expression, the better as that is a mark of maturity.

Simplicity

The choice of language should not be unnecessarily flamboyant or pompous. It is more difficult to write in simple language and as such, simplicity has to be cultivated. Simplicity does not mean that one's expressions should be monotonous, restricted to wishy-washy talk of the street expressions, it rather involves cultivating a good style without being stiff or pretentious. According to Mozart, "simplicity is the true mark of genius". For simplicity and economy, the watchword is KISS: Keep It Short and Simple.

Clarity

In his essay, "Politics and the English Language", Orwell (1946) insists that "the great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and undeclared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms." Clarity involves avoiding obscurity, vagueness, ambiguity, redundancy and long windy expressions. The essence of writing is to communicate and functional communication is marred by unclear language. According to Wittgenstein, "whatever can be said can be

fuss and unnecessary flourish. The advice of Thornton Wilder, poet and novelist, is apt and memorable: "if you write to *impress* it will always be bad, but if you write to *express* it will be good." (Kennedy, Kennedy and Aaron (1997:2).

Correctness

Effective writing is marked by not only the correctness of the information provided, it also covers the avoidance of errors of grammar and mechanics. A piece of writing riddled with grammatical problems is boring and repelling. No effort should be spared in ensuring that correct information is provided in correct language. In this respect, a good writer knows the rules of grammar, from the morphemic to the sentence level, and how they relate and function on the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes.

Paragraph Development

Just as a sentence is made up of one or more clauses, which are also developed from phrases, which are also made up of lower constituents, the paragraph is a group of sentences focusing on a particular idea. Sentences combine to form paragraphs and a paragraph is formally marked by the indentation of five spaces at the first line. In other words, a paragraph is a short composition that consists of a group of sentences dealing with a single topic. Paragraphs combine to form essays and the most important sentence in the paragraph is known as the topic sentence. A topic sentence is the hub around which all other sentences revolve. Topic sentences are usually at the beginning but they need not necessarily be. A topic sentence may be at the beginning, middle or at the end of the paragraph, depending on the type of writing and the effect the writer wants to create.

It is essential to emphasise that there is only one way to write: it is by writing. Actual writing begins from having a main idea to developing it. The main idea constitutes the topic, while development concerns providing supportive ideas. The topic and what is said about it constitute the paragraph, which may typologically be introductory, developing or concluding. But it is important that whatever type a paragraph is, it has to obey four laws: unity, coherence, completeness and emphasis (Asonibare and Atanda, 1994).

The Four Laws

The law of unity stipulates that a paragraph "must deal with one single idea (the main idea) and that each sentence must be related to this idea" (Conlin, 1991:7). To observe the law, any sentence that does not support or relate to the main idea should be discarded from a paragraph.

The law of coherence specifies that the sentences must be arranged according to some logical order (chronological/linear order, cause-effect,

expressed without stumbling or being confused. For instance, whether it is arranged ABCDE or EDCBA, there is a logical order that will be violated if the arrangement is breached.

The law of completeness insists that the main idea is developed fully enough so that the reader would understand and appreciate what is being communicated (Collin, 1991:7; Asonibare and Atanda, 1994: 128). Building shimmering spires of words that leave the main idea communicated hanging in a paragraph is futile.

The law of emphasis is optional. It states that aspects of the idea being communicated may be repeated to create the necessary effect. This is very useful in persuasive essays. This strategy is used, combined with the previous laws, to achieve a most profound effect in Martin Luther King's "Why we can't wait", which partly reads:

We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed towards gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say 'Wait', but when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen the hate-filled policemen curse, kick or even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an air-tight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to coloured children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer to a five-year old son who is asking: 'Daddy, why do white people treat coloured people so mean?'; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you

are humiliated day in day out by nagging signs reading 'white' and 'coloured'; when your first name becomes 'nigger', your middlename becomes 'boy' (however old you are) and your last name becomes 'John', and when you are never given the title 'Mrs'; when your wife and mother are never given the title 'Mrs'; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tip toe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of 'nobodiness' then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.

The Four Strategies

There are four techniques or strategies of developing paragraphs. Each of the strategies serves its own purpose in writing different types of essays. What is important is that the appropriate paragraph development strategy is adopted to serve its appropriate purpose (Are you writing to entertain, to inform, to educate to persuade, to evaluate, to describe, to explore, to analyse, etc.?) audience (classmates, general public, students, workers, etc.) and occasion (celebration, funeral, etc.)

The strategies are: through giving specific examples, through giving specific details, through giving specific illustration and through giving specific reasons.

Paragraph Development through Giving Specific Examples

This strategy involves the exemplification of what has been presented as the main idea. For instance,

Many philosophers have really been troubled by the fate of man. Pascal, a French philosopher, calls man "a bundle of contradictions". Jean-Paul Sartre, on his part, describes man as a being carrying a vacuum, an emptiness within him which makes him always dissatisfied, restless and unhappy. In his "Iliad", Homer expresses it pungently that "of all the creatures that creep and breathe on the earth, there is none wretched than man". For Augustine, a Jewish philosopher, after a youth of seeking pleasure and passion, a personal experience of life made him conclude: "Life is useless, all useless. You spend your life working, labouring and what do you have to show for it?". Nothing, except, of course, death. "If we have to die", Jean-Paul Sartre further claimed, "then our life has no meaning".

Heidegger said, "As soon as a man is born, he is old enough to die."

Paragraph Development through Giving Specific Details

This strategy involves elaborating and expatiating the thesis provided. For instance,

Of all the creatures in the entire creation, man is evidently the most marvellous, in fact, the greatest. Apart from being the most marvellous and greatest, he is also the most unfortunate. He is unfortunate because through out the millions of years we are told he has inhabited the earth, he knows many things but he doesn't know himself. Many a man cannot answer his own questions about himself. One Professor J.I. Omoregbe of the University of Lagos once defined man as "a being who does not understand himself, a being who feels alienated from himself, and puts his own very being into question."

Paragraph Development through Giving Specific Illustrations

This strategy involves illustrating, through anecdotes or brief actual accounts, to buttress the main idea being expressed:

Former President Obasanjo is a man of quick temperament and uncontrollable anger who doesn't spare any opportunity, no matter how inappropriate, to vent his venom and unleash verbal missiles on those who do not share his point of view. At the scene of the bomb blast in Lagos in 2001, people wondered why it took their President so long to come to the scene of tragedy. "You, who said that? You are stupid. I shouldn't even be here!" the former president was reported to have thundered. And at a meeting in Yelwa in Shendam Local Government Area of Plateau State in 2004, Obasanjo launched on the State Chairman of CAN, Rev. Pam Yakubu, "Mr. Chairman of CAN, you are talking absolute nonsense and don't provoke me. When I did invite people to Abuja in April, do you think I invited them there for picnic? CAN my foot!...You are an idiot, a total idiot. And I have no apologies for that."

Paragraph Development through Giving Specific Reasons

As the heading suggests, this involves attributing reasons for a particular thesis or an idea expressed. In "Why we can't wait" by Martin

cited under Section 7.1 above, the writer gave several reasons in the paragraph that would not make the civil movement wait any longer in clamouring for the rights of the African-Americans.

Conclusion

Language is powerful because among other things, it defines humanity, being an endowment only human beings enjoy, among other creatures. In a world where the role of words is becoming increasingly pervasive, language skills remain pre-eminent in facilitating human activities and bridging the gap between knowledge and ignorance. Of the four language skills, writing is the most specialised, the most credible means of transferring ideas from generation to generation. Yet, it has always been the most challenging to grapple with, "like trying to ride a horse which is constantly changing beneath you" (Elbow, 1973: 25). And, as thinking is indispensable to life, writing remains critical to students, teachers, professionals and all workers who must use the medium in solving daily problems.

This chapter has addressed writing as an important language skill that can be further developed by reading and writing. It describes the importance of writing especially in this age of information as well as the general principles of effective writing and highlights what can be summed as follows:

1. Writing is both an interaction and a process
 - (a) as an interaction, it as a tripartite interface among
 - (i) the readers,
 - (ii) the occasion and
 - (iii) the purpose,
 - (b) as a process, it consists of the three stages
 - (i) pre-writing (brainstorming, formulation of a topic, gathering materials, making thesis statement and forming an outline, be it formal or informal)
 - (ii) writing (drafting the introduction, body and conclusion)
 - (iv) post-writing/re-writing (revising, editing and proof-reading.)
2. The four general characteristics of effective writing are:
 - (a) economy
 - (b) simplicity
 - (c) clarity
 - (d) correctness
3. Writing involves developing paragraphs which consist of laws and strategies.
 - (a) The four laws of paragraph development are:
 - (i) the law of unity
 - (ii) the law of coherence

(iii) the law of completeness

(iv) the law of emphasis.

(b) The four strategies of paragraph development are:

(i) development through giving specific examples

(ii) development through giving specific details

(iii) development through giving specific illustrations, and

(iv) development through giving specific reasons

In essence, writing is systematic and methodical. A good writer would need to pass through the "(w)rite of passage" to make his/her writing effective. Like a farmer, the more a writer puts into his/her art, the more s/he benefits from it during harvest. The more a writer invests in reading and absorbing information, the more s/he is able to carry out effective writing.

Exercises

(a) Write your responses to the following questions:

1. What are the skills of language and why is it necessary to learn writing?
2. Can one progress in modern times without writing? Why?
3. What factors will you put into consideration before you begin writing?
4. Develop five outlines based on the format provided under "Pre-Writing Stage"
5. What strategies will you use in writing (a) a letter (b) a story (c) a report (d) a description? Why would you use the strategies mentioned?

(b) Carry out the following tasks:

1. Study ten passages from ten different sources (newspapers, books, magazines, etc.) and identify the thesis statement of each of them.
2. Study ten paragraphs from ten different sources (newspapers, books, magazines, etc.) and identify the topic sentence of each of them.
3. Write ten topics related to the state of Education in Nigeria.
4. Write an essay on any of the topics you have written.
5. To what extent does each of your paragraph observe the laws of paragraph development?

(c) Read the following passages and attempt the questions which follow.

Gongo so: The Day Oniyan met Olobe

An Egungun enthusiast's point-of-view

Every August in Iwo, all roads lead to the market square. That is where the grand finale of the annual Egungun (masquerade) festival takes place. The Egungun are a powerful aspect of African belief. It is not only a Yoruba festival as variations of the Egungun cult exist in other cultures. For the Igbo people, for instance, they call it "Egwugwu". They are the connection between the

world of the people and that of the spirits. That is why every "true" son and daughter of the community that has not been brainwashed by the prevalent foreign religions (Islam and Christianity) does not take the ceremony with levity.

The morning and evening sessions cannot be missed by ardent believers in Traditionalism like me. I still maintain that those who talk of miracles have not seen anything until they witness the last leg of Egungun festival. They are a powerful statement on the efficacy of African Traditional Religion. There are various Egungun cults and each cult demonstrates its power and superiority. There are scores of Egungun cults and each cult has its ancestral family.

On this fateful morning, it appeared that it would rain. The sky wore a heavy look and one could see that the heavens wanted to shed their tears. But it mustn't rain that day. How would rains dare disturb the festival of the "people of the heaven" themselves? This is because as soon as a person put on the costume of Egungun, he ceased to be "ara aye" (a person of the world) as he would transmogrify to "ara orun" (a person of the heaven). The Egungun are the ones who hold communion with the spirits.

It was Sokoti, a powerful Egungun who did it. He ascended the *Kobaope* Rock. He took with him some hot ash and *Odan* leaves. While on the peak of the rock, he mixed his hot ash with some powdery substance from camwood and sea-shell. They were mixed on *Odan* leaves, they mustn't come in contact with the bare ground. Sokoti began his incantations, those miraculous words of power, and blew the contents into the open face of the bleary-eyed horizons. He blew it up with one breath and quickly turned his back with further incantations. Before he went back to his compound, the sky had cleared. Everyone knew the threatening rainfall had been defeated. One could see the clouds drifting to the direction of Ibadan.

When two masquerades met either on the way to or even at the market square, one must salute the other or pay obeisance. If this was not voluntarily done, there would be a fight to determine the winner or the superior. On this particular occasion, two rival Egunguns who always avoided each other for good met at the immediate junction before the market square. They were "Oniyan" (bearer of pounded yam) and "Olobe" (bearer of soup). People started trooping to the scene. Incantations rent the air such that one could feel the presence of the spirits and ancestors whose names were conjured to assist in defeating the rivals. But Oniyan and Olobe seemed to be of the same match. As much as one tried to hypnotise the other so as to make him do his bidding, the more the other launched a counter-offensive, rending his rival's incantations ineffectual. The situation was tense. Both parties had their fans. Mine was Olobe, the cult of my paternal uncle.

After a goalless draw, to use a soccer metaphor, the two parties were tired and there was a need for penalty kicks. What a penalty! The two adversaries sat

down out of exhaustion and put down what they had on their heads. Of course, Oniyan had a small black pot that symbolically contained iyan (pounded yam). Though the normal iyan should be white, the one that Oniyan had was brown, a product of spiritual processing and colouring. The same thing was applicable to Olobe who also put down his black pot of obe (soup), a very special soup. They both challenged each other to eat from what they both had. It was Olobe that first ate a few morsels of Oniyan's pounded yam, dipping each in his soup before he swallowed each morsel. Oniyan also did the same, he dipped his hands into Olobe's soup and ate pounded yam with it.

Ah, what happened next was spectacular. Oniyan first coughed, and he coughed again, and again. Then his mouth was ajar and his tongue began to come out. I never knew a tongue was that long for Oniyan's tongue was about twelve inches. He winced in pains as the tongue kept colling out. His fellow comrades started to beg Olobe who had sprung to his feet dancing hysterically to the admiration of us fans. Well, he listened to their appeal after giving them a condition: a handsome ransom of two cows, two goats, and five baskets of kola nuts, five gallons of palm oil and eleven cocks. They agreed and he soon put some herbs in the open mouth of the writhing Oniyan. And as simple as that, the tongue started to withdraw until it became its normal size. Oniyan prostrated before Olobe and the latter patted his head, as a father would do to his son.

At the market square, there was dancing galore and acrobatic display. Then people prayed at a point for children, for good harvest, for triumph over enemies and other personal problems. Sacrifice was offered to the gods and spirits of the land by the Chief Priest of Egungun and as libations were sprinkled on the shrine, all was happy. I knew since I was able to attend and I made my supplications, I would get all I desired. The rituals had been performed according to how the ancestors did it and all would be well, with the participants and the community. The gods are not asleep.

A non-Egungun enthusiast's point-of-view

It is simply amazing how steep in ignorance many people are. It beats my imagination to know that in the 21st century, many African tribes still believe in some wooden gods and some dead and rotten so-called ancestors who they still think have control over their lives. In my roots in Iwo in Osun State of Nigeria, I was simply "impressed" by the folly of some people who have refused to give their lives to Allah, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. For how long will people believe in the created (ancestors, gods, spirits, rivers, etc.) rather than the uncreated Creator, the Omnipresent and the Omniscient?

Much as I believe that this pagan ideology is partly responsible for African backwardness, my friend, Seyi, believes quite the opposite: the imposition of "foreign" religions is a form of colonialism that is responsible for the

underdevelopment of Africa. To him, Islam and Christianity are foreign to Africa, though he wears "foreign" clothes, speaks a "foreign" language and eats "foreign" food, it is only in religion that he believes he is truly African. On several occasions, I would point out the absurdity of his argument but he would still stick to his gun. Anyway, it was he who invited me to come and see African power in the Egungun festival last August and I obliged him.

Truly it appeared as if it would rain on the last day of the Egungun festival. I told him that the day's programme would be marred. He told me it had never rained on the last day of the festival and last year would not be the first, in fact such would never be. His confidence in his African religion so much amused me; such a wishful thinking: it can never rain. Out of curiosity, I decided to follow him to join those who followed Sokoti, a kind of a local traditionalist, a masquerade cult himself, to *Kobaope* Rock. Sokoti was said to be an expert at "stopping the rain". When he got to the top of the Rock, the man really brought out some dirty stuff like leaves and ash and other stupid things. I watched him as he paced front and back, left and right masticating some incomprehensible Yoruba verbiage. They sounded like some classical poetry and I didn't understand it much, though I speak Yoruba. After some childish display, he blew what he had gathered away and people dispersed. Coincidentally, by the time we arrived home, there was no cloud in the sky again. This was deemed as the handiwork of Sokoti. I didn't listen to the weather's forecast of the day prior till then, yet I impressed it on Seyi that it is not every time that the sky is cloudy that it rains.

Later, we were on our way to the market square after some rest. I could see many Egungun. They had different costumes that amounted to a colour riot. Black, white, yellow, purple, green, all conceivable colours adorned by the same person. I was told the person inside the mask was no longer a person; he was a spirit from the heaven or "ara orun" (a person of the heaven). This is quite ridiculous because the person too would make guttural sounds though the family members and friends would know the name of the so-called "ara orun". Why were people deceiving themselves? And they extorted money from people while harassing them with some unsolicited prayers!

I remember a true story I heard about one no-nonsense Imam (a Muslim religious leader) from the same community. Seyi wouldn't tell me such a story. One Egungun had chased the Imam's wife who refused to give him money. Brandishing his whip, he flogged the Imam's wife right to her husband's compound. Madness must have its limit, you don't beat another man's wife. The Imam brought out a club and let it descend on the Egungun's head. He didn't expect the consequence. The man fell and lost consciousness. He never regained it. The Egungun association sued the Imam for murder in a celebrated case. The Imam asked the court to ask them who he killed. They said the Imam had killed their "ara orun" during the festival. The Imam said as

heard, he had sent "ara orun" to where he belonged. As the court did not deal with metaphors, the judge dismissed the case and wouldn't know why someone from heaven or hell shouldn't be sent back to his place. The case was complicated because out of deference, the Egungun would maintain that their kin was "ara orun" since he was in full Egungun costume when it happened. When I heard the story, I agreed with the judge who was not a Yoruba man.

The market-place was a bedlam of feet and voices. If anything, I wondered why such a fetish festival should pull such a huge crowd. Did that suggest that people were relapsing to pagan beliefs again, like my radical friend, Seyi? I doubted it. It appeared many people had come for the entertainment value it offered rather than its religious significance. Such was the sordid entertainment, a sort of horror movie, that I saw just before we got to the market centre. I could see that people were gathered and there were loud cheers and jabs. I decided to catch the fun. Two dirty-looking masquerades were in superiority struggle, a battle of supremacy. As these people had so much faith in magic and voodooism, each of the two rivals put all vent to his talismanic prowess. It was a long duel reminiscent of the historic "Thrilla in Manila" between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier, in which case the day eventually belonged to Ali, though it almost didn't, just as the day belonged to "Olobe" (the soup bearer).

It was the pounded-yam bearer and the soup-bearer that engaged each other. The quarrel was who should salute the other. When all incantations, magic and talisman failed to wreck havoc on both, they decided on eating their own food, which everyone knew contained potent poison. Expectedly, each was immune from the poison he had prepared. I saw with my own eyes how Oniyan's (pounded yam bearer) tongue came out as he recoiled in pains. The tongue kept coming out of his mouth till it was almost the size of a student's ruler. Some ransom was agreed on and Oniyan was treated by Olobe and the former accepted defeat. It was a spectacular sight and I felt these unbelievers would suffer first here before they suffer in the after-life. After a lot of dancing and acrobatics, sacrifices were made and prayers were said. To me, what they thought was a religious activity was no more that a pagan rite. It was "much ado about nothing" as everything they did and the suffering they underwent would not save them from the punishment of rejecting the True One God.

1. Identify the similarities and differences between the two points-of-view.
2. Whose point-of-view would consider more effective and why?
3. Identify the strategies employed in the development of each of the paragraphs of the passages.
4. Evaluate the two passages using the criteria of economy, simplicity, clarity and correctness.

5. Examine how each of the two passages has upheld or/and flouted the 'general principles of effective writing.'

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