

CHAPTER 43

TEACHING AND TESTING WRITING SKILL

**Afsat SANNI-SULEIMAN,
Folakemi O. ADENIYIEGBEOLA &
Yekeen BELLO**

INTRODUCTION

Generally, language teachers find it challenging to develop their learners' writing competence. This is because of the complex nature of writing as a communicative skill. It becomes necessary therefore to adequately sensitise teachers to the pedagogical issues involved in teaching writing successfully to the learners. In this chapter, therefore, we are going to be considering the concept of writing, nature and process of writing, basic principles of teaching writing, types of writing, and techniques of teaching writing skills.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to explain:

1. the concept of writing;
2. nature and process of writing;
3. basic principles of teaching writing;
4. type of writing; and
5. techniques of teaching writing.

THE CONCEPT OF WRITING

Writing as one of the four major language skills is not only an attempt to use symbols or marks to express feelings or emotions, opinions, or suggestions on a particular issue but also putting together appropriately these marks and symbols as they appear in words, phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs. Therefore, it is a productivity skill and indeed a difficult language skill even for native speakers. The following are some of the skills involved in writing which language teachers should develop in their students:

- a. The appropriate use of orthography
- b. Punctuation conventions
- c. Correct usage of vocabulary
- d. Correct word order
- e. Correct placement of French accent
- f. Appropriate sentence constituent order (e.g. subject, verb and object)
- g. Ability to make the main idea distinct from the supporting ideas or information
- h. Ability to make the text coherent so that readers can follow the development of the ideas
- i. Ability to judge how much background knowledge the audience has on the subject and make clear what is assumed they don't know.
- J. Ability to vary sentence and paragraph length, ensure correct sentence agreement and avoid over-use of word, redundancy and verbosity.

NATURE AND PROCESS OF WRITING

Writing has two major characteristics. It is interactive and it is a process. It is interactive because it involves the writer and intended reader(s). The major purpose of writing is to communicate ideas from the writer to his or her audience though the audience is not physically present. The writer must be able to define his or her audience, i.e., who is going to read the piece? Are they familiar (informal) recipient (i.e. friends, family, peers), or semi formal recipients (i.e.

the writer's principal, vice chancellor or head of community) or formal recipients (i.e. Head of an organisation, student body, local media and other publications)? The knowledge of the nature of the audience would enable him to choose the appropriate style and language (i.e. the language must not be too complex or too simple for the intended audience).

Writing is a process because it moves from one stage to the other. The process starts from the pre-writing stage to the writing stage and to the post-writing stage. The pre-writing stage involves choosing a topic, especially the one learners are familiar with (if they have a choice), it also involves planning by brainstorming and jotting down relevant ideas which are arranged in a logical and sequential order to produce an outline for the write-up.

The writing stage involves drafting. Students must be taught how to organise their ideas into sentences, and paragraphs each with a topic sentence either at the beginning, middle or end of the paragraph. The topic sentence is the sentence that carries the main idea expressed in the paragraph with the other sentences supporting it. Students must also be taught how to use linking words such as moreover, however, then, next, but, and etc. to indicate continuity or contrast in the ideas being discussed. Also, students must be able to organise these ideas into sections, or paragraphs that must indicate the introduction, the body, and the conclusion.

The last stage of the writing process is called post-writing or editing stage. Students should be taught how to go through their write-ups to either add more points or delete some, rework or reorganise their points. They must also check the technical correctness of grammar, flow of expression, spelling and punctuation.

Therefore, composition is largely a matter of deciding what to say, and saying it as clearly and interestingly as possible. Practice helps a great deal in this, as it does in most other crafts (Daniel, 2013). A teacher of essay writing should groom the learners to consider the following when writing a composition:

1. choosing the subject
2. collecting and sorting out ideas
3. grafting the essay
4. editing the essay

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING WRITING

There are four developmental stages in the teaching of writing. Copying training in the mechanics of writing (training in handwriting, punctuation, structure, etc.).

Benefits of Copying Writing

1. New frameworks: It is really easy to read about how something works, but it is a lot harder to find the specific examples of how it was put in practical action. Copying helps to do this, especially when you reflect on what was done. Similarly, it enables you to identify key parts that make copywriting works. This will help in fiction or essays by highlighting or marking where the conflict is or how a certain scene plays out.
2. New Words: For this, you need new words, new vocabulary, you need to know how other writers describe some technical issues. So, after re-writing using some vocabulary, you will need to circle or underline words and phrases that you did not think of before. Go through the write-up, look up new words and how they were used and then internalise them.
3. New Styles: Similar to above, you also need to mark where the writer uses questions or sets up certain phrases such as "Do you " or "the result?" It might sound funny. but just note that those styles change the clause alternations and really open up new possibilities

for things the writer is trying to describe. As a draft, you could then plug in your own ideas and change the relevant details to suit your own subject, but in the same paragraph or line style as the one you have copied in this process, you can get tons of new ideas from this about the actual writing and ideas (<https://copymedium.com>).

4. It helps learners to remember new information.
5. It helps clear learners' errors.
6. It increases learners' knowledge of sight words through words copied on index cards.

Controlled Writing: the elements to be controlled in writing include **language, ideas and organisation**. Controlled writing is sequential, and students are first given sentence exercises, then paragraph to copy or manipulate grammatically, for instance, changing questions to statements, present to past, or plural to singular, and vice versa (Nunam, 2012). Controlled writing provides three steps: to rewrite a passage, to make change and to correct errors. It can be a good method in reinforcing grammar and vocabulary.

Examples of controlled writing are:

- The teacher gives a short reading extract to the students.
- The teacher gives several short sentences, while the students are asked to link the sentences.
- Completing given compositions by writing several sentences from subjective writing.
- Asking students to answer some guiding questions after watching a story. After that, the students write a story based on the questions asked.
- A "dicto-comp" writing This is when a paragraph is read at normal speed, usually two or three times, after which the teacher asks the students to write the paragraph. The keywords from the paragraph are often written on the board for the students (Brown, 2001).

Benefits of Controlled Writing

1. It focuses on establishing grammatical patterns, sentence structures, punctuation and word order.
2. It helps students to learn how to express themselves effectively in proper English.
3. Learners are able to build their own vocabulary.

Guided Writing: removing some elements of control (i.e., either ideas, language or organisation), and supporting learners with materials such as pictures and captions which produce cues for language, ideas and/or organisation.

Benefits of Guided Writing

1. Teachers are able to provide instant instructional support and immediate feedback to students in a small group environment.
2. Students would be able to work at their own level with the teacher's strong support that facilitates successful, independent writing.
3. It increases learners' confidence levels and encourages them to keep on trying.

Free Writing: is only for expert writers and veterans such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and J.P. Clark The writers need not be either controlled or guided. This is a last stage in which veterans write freely without hindrance. This is sometimes called "expressive writing" and it depends on spontaneity and sincerity. On the other hand, free writing is a technique writers use to generate ideas and make connections and free themselves from what is known as "writer's block" which refers to the situation when professional writers run out of ideas while writing. How can you write something informative or entertaining if you cannot think of anything to say

on paper? For student writers, too, writer's block can happen to make you struggle to write an essay or a research paper, losing your peace of mind, enthusiasm for your project, and even some much needed sleep. Whether you are a young student or a seasoned professional, new ideas are the backbone of the writing process (Goldberg, 1986).

Free Writing Techniques

- Clear your mind, relax and forget all of the rules concerning grammar.
- Set a time limit for yourself.
- After you have set a limit, write, do not stop, and if you spell any word wrongly, do not go back to edit until you have finished writing.
- If ideas fade, keep writing (even if you have nothing on your mind, keep writing "I have nothing on my mind, I have nothing on my mind, I have nothing on my mind") this is right because what you are doing is freeing your mind, and after a while some ideas will surface.
- When the time limit is finished, stop. Then go back to the page and read it slowly, dot all 'i's and cross all 't's, then underline all the ideas that surfaced during the session that pertain to the theme on which you are writing.

Benefits of Free Writing

1. It helps you to develop your abilities as a writer.
2. It builds confidence in you.
3. It helps you derive inspiration.
4. It helps you excavate emotional themes and barriers.
5. It helps you discover just how committed you are as a writer.
6. It generates honesty in your writing.

TYPES OF WRITING

There are four main types of writing, namely expository, persuasive, descriptive, and narrative and each has a specific goal and style.

Exposition: writing in which author's purpose is to inform or explain the subject to the reader.

Persuasive: writing that states the opinion of the writer and attempts to influence the reader.

Descriptive: a type of writing that appeals to the five senses in painting vivid pictures for the reader through the use of imagery and specific details.

Narrative: writing in which the author tells the story. The story could be factual or imaginary

Letter Writing: is a special type of writing with different sub-types:

- a. informal or personal letter - letters to friends and family members
- b. formal/official letters - letters of complaints, requests, job application letters, letter to the editor, etc.
- c. Articles to be published in a newspaper, or magazine to inform, persuade, or entertain
- d. Speech-e.g. welcome, farewell ceremony or other types of addresses.
- e. Report minutes of report by a committee, report of findings, etc.
- f. Memo a form of communication within and outside the organization.

TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING WRITING

The following techniques can be used to teach writing skills:

- a. **Outlining:** students can be asked to prepare a list (outline) that will cover the selected topic, prompt them along if they dry up, ask them to go through the list and organise and then encourage them to develop the point on their own into a full blown essay.

- b. **Create a written dialogue:** the teacher can ask students to create an imaginary situation and write a dialogue among themselves.
- c. **Paraphrasing:** students can be asked to rewrite a story in a shorter form.
- d. **Give direction:** students may be asked to give a direction to a popular place.
- e. **The use of questions:** the teacher can technically prepare well-organised questions that the students can answer, this will form a coherent essay.
- f. **Introduce a wide range of reading materials into your classroom:** the more they read the more they acquire vocabulary for effective writing.
- g. Read out the bare outline of a story and encourage students to add description, adjectives, adverbs, relative clauses, conjunctions, etc.
- h. Introduce collaborative writing tasks and encourage peer correction of work.
- i. Base the writing activities on social issues important to students and use real world examples to reinforce writing convention.
- j. Ask students to experiment with sentence length and build new vocabulary by working with words relevant to their lives.
- k. Give the students texts containing errors and ask them to correct them
- 1. Teach other language skills, especially reading, alongside writing as writing is an extension of other skills.
- m. Expose the language learners to the target language by immersing them in it, ie speak to them always to expand their vocabulary.
- n. Expose them to appropriate choices and challenges to increase their confidence and encourage them to read a lot.
- o. Support writing tasks with authentic materials, pictures, concrete objects, charts, diagrams, video and audio clips.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, attempt has been made to explain the concept of writing, nature and process of writing, basic principles of teaching writing, types of writing and techniques for teaching writing. Language teachers need to skillfully take their students through the process of writing in order to develop in them the requisite skills and build their self-confidence.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain vividly the concept of writing.
2. Mention and explain the major processes involved in effective writing
3. Mention different types of writing and identify two essay forms and two letter forms to depict the writing types.
4. Mention and explain five techniques of teaching writing

REFERENCES

- Adetugbo, A. (1997). *Communicative English and study skills*. Lagos: University press.
- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language Pedagogy*. (2nd Editor) New York: Longman.
- Byne, D. (1988). *Teaching writing skills*. London: Longman
- Daniel, J.M. (2013). *Essentials of English grammar and languages*. Kraft Books Ltd. Ibadan: Nigeria.