

STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE WRITING SKILLS

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Abstract

Writing is a crucial linguistic competency essential for students and professionals across various occupations. Given that writing is a crucial mode of communication, it is essential to instruct individuals in effective writing techniques. Without a fundamental comprehension of the principles of effective writing, it is challenging, if not unfeasible, to write proficiently. Effective writing articulates the writer's intent with clarity and comprehensibility. Conversely, poor writing is inelegant and distracts the reader's focus. This article primarily addresses the process of writing and ways for instructing writing skills to English language learners.

Keywords: written communication proficiency, writing conventions, clarity, pedagogical approaches to teaching writing skills, etc.

Writing as a Process

Writing is a structured process that involves several key steps. Initially, the writer engages in a preparatory phase, where they plan and organize their ideas. This phase helps determine the focus of the writing and outlines the approach to take. The next step is drafting, where the writer creates a preliminary version of the work. During this stage, the emphasis is on getting ideas onto paper without worrying about perfection. Once the draft is completed, the writer revises the content. This stage involves reviewing and improving the text by adding more detail, clarifying points, and adjusting the structure for better coherence. Following revision, the writer moves on to editing, which focuses on correcting errors. This includes refining grammar, fixing spelling mistakes, and ensuring the clarity and flow of the sentences. Finally, rewriting may be necessary if substantial changes are required. This step involves reworking sections of the draft to enhance clarity, coherence, and overall quality. Thus, writing is a process that requires careful planning, drafting, revising, editing, and sometimes rewriting. Each step contributes to the creation of a well-organized and polished document.

Planning is the initial step in any endeavour, whether academic or otherwise. Inadequate planning may fail in any endeavour. Before composing any content, it is essential to establish an effective approach. A writer must organise their composition before

commencing; failing to do so may result in an inability to effectively convey their views. (Alo & Ogunsiji, 2004, p. 248). In the planning phase, the writer needs to select a topic that aligns with their objectives and captivates their interest. In addition to selecting an engaging topic, the writer must consider their audience. The writer should prioritise their relationship with the audience for whom they are writing. The following are some minor responsibilities in the planning phase:

Occasionally, instead of receiving a predetermined topic from the instructor, the learner should be motivated to select a topic of their preference. Multiple factors must be considered in this process. The writer must first ensure a sufficient level of interest in the chosen topic. The subsequent consideration is the potential to uncover adequate resources on the selected subject. The writer must gather essential facts for writing, including interviews and personal observations (Adegbiya, 1989, p. 262), and it is equally crucial for the writer to engage in discussions with peers regarding the subject matter. Upon selecting a topic, it is essential to refine it to attain a more precise focus. The students' struggle to refine their concepts for a more pertinent and focused approach is a significant challenge, particularly when choosing research topics for extensive essays.

Upon selecting a topic, the writer must produce ideas about that subject. Brainstorming involves vigorously exploring one's mind until innovative ideas emerge effortlessly. It entails contemplating the selected problem, analysing it, scrutinising its many aspects, and pondering the perspectives of others regarding it. During brainstorming, learners rapidly develop numerous ideas before thoroughly evaluating select ones. Brainstorming enables us to examine the topic, record any thoughts that arise spontaneously, and eventually distinguish between relevant and irrelevant concepts.

Reading Passage and Note-Making

To write effectively and efficiently, a writer must read extensively to get pertinent information on the topic. Information can be found on the internet, as well as in textbooks and publications. While the learners diligently absorb diverse content, they should concurrently take important notes. Notes provide them with a summary of the texts they have reviewed. Therefore, the notes must be succinct, precise, and systematically arranged.

Preparation is essential for a great and impactful piece of writing. At the outset of the writing process, an outline is an essential instrument for achieving the intended goal. Creating an overview is essential before doing the actual writing (Alo & Ogunsiji 2004, p. 253). It serves as a structural foundation for the essay, ensuring it remains focused. There are two styles of outlining: Scratch or Informal Outline and Formal Outline.

A scratch outline is a concise collection of details, composed of words or phrases, produced through brainstorming. Before composing, it is advisable to outline the key points, thoughts, and ideas that will be elaborated upon to achieve the objectives of the writing project. Before commencing writing, certain ideas or points are developed through reflection

and

brainstorming. Upon recording these concepts, the student should arrange them in a coherent structure. This logical organisation reveals the primary themes and subthemes, functioning as a practical guide for the author.

Formal-Outline

This illustrates the hierarchy and relative significance of concepts. It employs a standard technique of indented letters and numerals (Chinwe & Ifeyinwa 2011, p. 58). A formal outline consists of complete sentences, each of which may function as the principal idea of a paragraph. However, the latter does not encompass complete phrases.

Drafting

Document creation entails a series of steps. This is attributable to the necessity of composing the initial draft, revising and proofreading it, followed by producing the amended or final draft. Draughting involves recording our immediate thoughts and ideas around a certain subject. During the composition of the initial draft, the student should not concern themselves with exact grammar and spelling; these aspects can be rectified after. During the composition of the initial draft, relinquish all preconceived notions that the learner has been nurturing. Consequently, one should write with maximum fluidity and freedom. The previously specified notes and outline are beneficial during the composition of the initial draft; therefore, the student should consult them when writing the first draft.

Process of Revising

Revision entails the process of altering an essay to enhance its substance and style (Kathleen 2003, p. 156). Revision is essential for all writing tasks, since it significantly impacts the effectiveness of a piece in achieving its purpose and conveying ideas to the target audience. Comprehensive revision may be a formidable task, although it is invaluable as it enhances the article's quality. Revision is crucial in the writing process, as it allows for the addition, elimination, rearrangement, or rephrasing of ideas. Revision in the writing process is not limited to rectifying grammatical and mechanical errors; it may also entail the addition, removal, or reorganisation of essential elements within the essay.

Editing

Students frequently see papers with exceptional ideas that ultimately falter, especially when their sentences lack clarity and precision or when their language conveys an inappropriate tone and diction. Effective writing necessitates meticulous editing, involving the analysis of specific words and linguistic elements to ensure accurate, precise, and engaging communication of the intended message. Editing aims to improve the paper by employing clear, accurate sentences, suitable word choice, and an appropriate tone. Rewriting and proofreading constitute the final stages of the writing process; thus, they warrant particular attention.

Preparing the Final Draft

Following the editing and amendment of the first document, the revised section must be

conclusively drafted. Development opportunities remain at this juncture. Regardless of the quality of the initial draft of the essay, it is always subject to enhancement, particularly during the editing phase. Special emphasis must be placed on incidental problems in spelling, punctuation, grammar, logic, and style during the document revision process. The student should print a clean copy of the essay for editing if utilising a word processor or computer. Refrain from using a previously annotated copy or the version seen on a computer screen. Producing a pristine copy can significantly enhance the efficacy of revision and proofreading.

Documenting the Written Script

Documenting our writing with footnotes, endnotes, and internal citations is essential in academic writing. Effective writing cannot occur in isolation. When utilised successfully, the pertinent concepts of other authors provide a foundation for a student's thinking and enhance the work's depth. The learner must honestly attribute credit when incorporating the ideas of others into their work, irrespective of the format. It is imperative to reference all sources utilised in an essay or paper, either internally or in the bibliography at the end. A footnote is generally located at the bottom of the page containing the reference, but an endnote is usually positioned at the end of the paper or chapter. The formats for footnotes and bibliographies vary by discipline. It is essential to ascertain the standard practice within the specific field. The department's Research Methodology course will comprehensively examine this topic. Upon completion of the revising and proofreading processes, ensuring the essay is devoid of typographical and keyboarding errors, provide it in a suitable manuscript format.

Specific Strategies to Improve Writing

It is imperative to acknowledge that both micro and macro techniques are necessary for effective writing. Consequently, as academic or professional writers, we must aim to master these approaches to differentiate ourselves in our writing pursuits. The subsequent content examines many micro-strategies that influence the final product, namely the text.

Sentence construction

Proficient writing necessitates the utilisation of impactful sentences. Four fundamental components constitute successful sentences. Firstly, sentences must be accurate and brief; secondly, they should exhibit diversity and avoid uniformity in structure; and thirdly, they should incorporate parallel aspects and components. Finally, sentences should incorporate strong active verbs (Kathleen2003, p. 181) Concise writing conveys the intended message in the fewest words possible. To achieve conciseness, one should avoid verbose expressions, redundancy, unnecessary introductory phrases, superfluous adverbs, and redundant clauses or phrases. For example, verbose expressions such as "Another revolution in the transformation of herbs will arrive shortly" add little value to the sentence. The phrase

"Another revolution in herbal transformation is forthcoming" removes the excess and is clearer.

Eliminating redundancy is another crucial step. Redundancy occurs when the same idea is repeated unnecessarily, either with the same words or synonyms. For instance, "Choosing law as a career would result in a stable, pleasant job" is redundant because it conveys the same message twice. A more concise version would be: "Pursuing a profession in law will yield consistent and fulfilling employment." Similarly, some sentences begin with unnecessary introductory phrases or words, which can complicate the message. Instead of saying, "I assert that every cybercafé must ensure security for its patrons," it is more effective to rephrase it as, "Each cybercafé should ensure security for its patrons." This version removes the redundant introductory phrase and delivers the message directly.

Unnecessary adverbs can also affect the clarity and flow of writing. Words like "unbelievably," "really," "so," and "too" often do not add significant meaning and can weaken the words they modify. For example, "The athlete was elated to discover he had triumphed in the race" can be simplified to, "Upon discovering his victory in the race, the athlete was elated," removing the redundant adverb "really" and improving clarity. Finally, redundant phrases and clauses should be eliminated to keep the writing focused and clear. For example, the sentence "Student grievances on campus compelled the vice chancellor to construct additional worship places within the institution" is wordy and could be more direct. A revised version would be: "The vice chancellor was compelled by the students' grievances to construct additional worship centres." This revised sentence is simpler and more to the point.

Alternating our sentences

Diversity enhances life; a writer should utilise an array of phrase forms in their compositions. To attain diversity in the final composition, one should integrate simple sentences with compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. Moreover, sentence length has specific influences on writing. When modifying sentence kinds in writing, one should also diversify their lengths. Concise sentences are incisive and forceful; they propel ideas swiftly, culminating in an essay with a brisk pace (Kathleen 2003, p. 187). Altering sentence forms is crucial in writing. The student should alter the pattern or structure of sentences by repositioning restrictive modifiers. This significantly improves the efficacy of our writing.

Parallelism in Sentence Structure

To achieve parallelism, words, phrases, and clauses must be structured consistently. This technique improves the flow of the sentence and aids in understanding.

For example, consider the sentence: "She enjoys reading, writing, and to paint." This sentence is not parallel because the last item, "to paint," doesn't follow the same grammatical structure as the others.

A revised version would be:

"She enjoys reading, writing, and painting." The revised sentence maintains a consistent structure, improving clarity and making it easier to follow.

The use of robust and dynamic verbs

For effective writing, learners must utilize strong and active verbs. Powerful and vigorous verbs elevate the quality of writing, making it more engaging and dynamic. This contrasts with the use of linking verbs, which can make the writing feel static and uninteresting. For example, consider the sentence,

"Upon encountering the lion, the youth displayed a scared demeanor."

A more vigorous alternative would be,

"Upon seeing the lion, the child was filled with terror and clung to his father."

In the second sentence, the verbs "filled with terror" and "clung" create a more vivid and dynamic image, adding energy to the writing.

The tone and word selection also play a crucial role in effective writing. Tone refers to the writer's attitude towards the audience and the subject matter. The choice of vocabulary must reflect the intended tone. According to Kathleen, there are three main levels of diction: formal, prevalent, and informal. Formal diction is serious and authoritative, often using complex phrases and polysyllabic words. It avoids contractions and maintains a consistent, rhythmic cadence. This tone is commonly found in academic papers and official documents. On the other hand, prevalent or colloquial language is more conversational and intimate, commonly used in periodicals and newspapers. It involves contractions, simpler sentence structures, and a more casual style. Informal language is often found in daily conversations and uses slang or acronyms. While this tone can be suitable in some contexts, it should generally be avoided in academic essays, except when quoting directly or in dialogue. Another essential element in writing is the use of imagery. Whether the concept is specific or abstract, readers create mental images from the words they read. To maintain the reader's interest, writers should strive to incorporate vivid and symbolic expressions. Effective imagery not only makes writing more engaging but also helps to convey complex ideas in a more accessible and compelling way.

Thus, figurative language enhances writing by offering creative ways to express ideas. This form of language extends beyond literary works and can be found in any context where language is used creatively to convey meaning. Figures of speech such as metaphors, similes, idioms, and proverbs help writers present ideas in an imaginative way. In academic writing, the thoughtful use of figurative language can set a paper apart from others, offering fresh perspectives and leaving a lasting impression on the reader. To make an impact, it is important to use figurative language effectively, ensuring it complements the overall message and enhances the clarity and depth of the writing.

Paragraph Development

Words unite to build phrases, phrases amalgamate to form clauses, clauses merge to produce diverse sentence variations, and sentences converge to construct discourse segments. The combinatorial choices from the word level to the discourse level require a certain proficiency. In structuring paragraphs, which consist of extended discourse, the capacity to produce suitable sentences, particularly in diverse formats, is essential. Paragraph development is a crucial competency for both professional and academic writing tasks. This section will analyse the paragraph and its sentence connections. A paragraph consists of a collection of sentences centred around a singular topic sentence (Alo and Ogunsiji 2003, p. 258). Conversely, in linguistic analysis, a paragraph may be seen as the unit superior to the sentence. Egbe (1996, p.51) delineated the following components: a) composite parts within the paragraph; b) inter-sentential connections; c) the introductory segment of the paragraph; d) the central portion encompassing examples and interpretations; and e) the concluding segment of the paragraph. Egbe thinks that further factors encompass the transition between paragraphs, the sequence of paragraphs in an extensive discourse, and the comprehension of a paragraph's role within a text.

A network of relationships can be identified as a component of discourse. For example, word-to-word interactions lead to the creation of phrases, whereas clause-to-clause relationships result in the building of complex sentences. A comprehension of these relational levels is essential for crafting a robust paragraph and for producing successful writing. When managed proficiently, the components of words and phrase structures, clause structures, agreement between phrases and clauses, sequential organisation of sentences, and semantic connections within paragraphs enhance paragraph comprehension. (Egbe, 1996, p. 55)

The Organising of a Paragraph

The structure of a paragraph pertains to the parts typically associated with the paragraph as a complete entity. The text comprises the topic sentence and its elaboration, the exposition of concepts, and the conclusion. If there had been further space, each section would have been thoroughly examined and exemplified. The topic sentence emphasises the paragraph's main concept. All other elements are contingent upon that. It may be positioned at the beginning, centre, or conclusion of a paragraph. If the purpose statement is positioned at the paragraph's outset, it should be succinctly elucidated before further elaboration. Elaboration is crucial for assisting in paragraph construction. Instances, events, or narratives may be employed to substantiate the topic sentence. This form of assistance facilitates the efficient construction of paragraphs.

Every paragraph of the essay must be devoid of spelling and grammatical errors. It is essential to ensure that each paragraph incorporates the necessary cohesive devices. The appropriate application of linking devices inside a paragraph enhances both cohesiveness and coherence, essential components of the paragraph and the whole essay.

Characteristics of a Paragraph

A paragraph is characterised by coherence, emphasis, and cohesion. These three elements are essential to a paragraph's effectiveness. A paragraph exhibits unity when each sentence directly reinforces the topic statement. A paragraph is deemed lacking in unity if it has one or two sentences that do not pertain to the topic sentence. A vital element of a paragraph is its cohesion. It pertains to the harmonious integration of the diverse elements inside phrases. Focus or emphasis pertains to the ability of a sentence's structure to underscore its principal idea.

When evaluating the efficacy of sentences in a particular essay, the logical connection between phrases inside a paragraph is equally important. Inter-sentential interconnections within a paragraph denote the syntactic and semantic relationships among sentences. To attain this purpose, it is essential to examine both English phraseological limitations and how the language constrains the expression of concepts (Egbe 1996, p. 56). Egbe delineates the subsequent elements in the inter-sentential presentation of an individual's thoughts within a text: a) The logic of causation or action-reaction dynamics; b) The methodologies employed in the unfolding of events through coherent parameters, such as chronology or geographical context, enabling the recognition of logical progression; and c) The preservation of a natural order in the development of ideas. According to Egbe, all of them can be highly beneficial not only in establishing the sequence of words but also in ascertaining the appropriate subsequent information.

Effective Paragraph Building

The capacity to compose grammatically accurate and punctuation-free sentences is inadequate for crafting excellent paragraphs. The capacity to compose well-structured supporting paragraphs in the body of the essay is essential. An effectively constructed supporting paragraph includes a topic sentence along with definitions, explanations, illustrations, or additional information that reinforces the thesis of the essay. Furthermore, it should employ transitions and repeats to demonstrate the relationship between concepts (Kathleen 2003, p. 126). A paragraph possessing the aforementioned characteristics is both effective and well-developed. A badly constructed paragraph consists solely of numerous opinion statements. It offers no evidence to substantiate these assertions. It lacks clearly defined topic sentences and cohesive, thorough supporting evidence, transitions, and reiterations to illustrate the connections between the ideas.

In coherent writing, the transition between paragraphs is customary. This is because, especially in extended discourse, a paragraph generally functions as part of a collective. The transition between paragraphs is facilitated by numerous paragraph elements. The coherence between paragraphs is essential, irrespective of its form. This enhances coherence and, thus, aids the reader in understanding the writer's concepts as presented in the essay.

Consequently, one should consistently endeavour to achieve equilibrium between intra-paragraph interactions and inter-paragraph transitions.

Conclusion

In academic environments, writing is a skill that requires instruction and cultivation. Effective communication via written media requires a specialist skill, specifically, proficient writing. This chapter has thus far examined the particulars of exemplary writing skills in a manner that is comprehensible to the average reader. We examined the definition of writing, the writing process, and both general and specialised strategies for effective writing. Effective writing skills can be acquired by dedicating considerable effort to diverse writing practices. Consistent practice culminates in expertise; the most effective approach to becoming a proficient writer is to persist in writing. To optimise the likelihood of becoming proficient and effective writers, learners should integrate writing abilities with other beneficial competencies.

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