



PECULIARITIES ON BUILDING THE WRITING HABIT

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According to Jeremy Harmer, when thinking about writing, it is helpful to make a distinction between writing-for learning and writing-for-writing. In the case of the former, writing is used as an aide-memoire or practice tool to help students practice and work with language they have been studying. We might, for example, ask a class to write five sentences using a given structure, or using five of the new words or phrases they have been learning. Writing activities like this are designed to give reinforcement to students. This is particularly useful for those who need a mix of visual and kinesthetic activity. Another kind of writing-for-learning occurs when we have students write sentences in preparation for some other activity. Here, writing is an enabling activity.

ABSTRACT

This article is about modifying materials on building the writing habit also methods of developing speaking skills in English.

When students are writing-for-writing, we will want to involve them in the process of writing. In the 'real world', this typically involves planning what we are going to write, drafting it, reviewing and editing what we have written and then producing a final (and satisfactory) version. Many people have thought that this is a linear process, but a closer examination of how writers of all different kinds are involved in the writing process suggests that we do all of these things again and again, sometimes in a chaotic order. Thus we may plan, draft, re-plan, draft, edit, re-edit, re-plan, etc before we produce our final version. We will need to encourage students to plan, draft and edit in this way, even though this may be time-consuming and may meet, initially, with some resistance on their part. By doing so, we will help them to be better writers both in exams, for example,



and in their post-class English lives. Jeremy Harmer also mentions that there are many reasons for getting students to write, both in and outside class. Firstly, writing gives them more 'thinking time' than they get when they attempt spontaneous conversation. This allows them more opportunity for language processing - that is thinking about the language - whether they are involved in study or activation. Writing-for-writing, on the other hand, is directed at developing the students' skills as writers. In other words, the main purpose for activities of this type is that students should become better at writing, whatever kind of writing that might be. There are good 'real-life' reasons for getting students to write such things as emails, letters and reports. And whereas in writing-for-learning activities it is usually the language itself that is the main focus of attention, in writing-for-writing we look at the whole text. This will include not just appropriate language use, but also text construction, layout, style and effectiveness. It is clear that the way we organize our students' writing - and the way we offer advice and correction - will be different, depending on what kind of writing they are involved in. One other issue, which we can refer to as building the writing habit, deserves mention here. Many students either think or say that they cannot, or do not want to write. This may be because they lack confidence, think it's boring or believe they have 'nothing to say'. We need to engage them, from early levels, with activities which are easy and enjoyable to take part in, so that writing activities not only become a normal part of classroom life but also present opportunities for students to achieve

almost instant success. It is when students have acquired this writing habit that they are able to look at written genres and involve themselves in the writing process with enthusiasm. The following report-writing sequence is detailed, and will take some time. As the sequence progresses, students analyse the report genre, look at some language points, gather information, draft their report, check it and produce a final version (thus immersing themselves not only in the writing product, but in the process of writing).

Stage 1: Students are asked to choose one from a list of topics such as the benefits/dangers of mass tourism, whether banning things ever works (such as gangster rap lyrics, etc), answers to world poverty, freedom to choose (e.g. smoking, gun ownership, etc) or whether parents should be liable for the actions of their children. Alternatively, they can choose a topic of their own.

Stage 2: Students are asked to gather information from a variety of sources including - in the case of the example above - the module of the coursebook the text occurs in, a library, the Internet (the teacher can give students lists of websites - rather as happened in the webquest on page 105), CD-ROM encyclopedias, magazine articles, TV and radio programmes, and anyone they would like to interview.

Stage 3: Students plan their reports. They should decide what to include, what order to put it in (after looking back at the report they studied) and what their conclusions will be.



Stage 4: Students write a draft of their report.

Stage 5: Students check through the report in order to decide how effective it is and correct any language mistakes.

Stage 6: Students write their final report (they may have repeated stages 4 and 5 more than once).

During stages 4 and 5, it is important for the teacher to be on hand to suggest changes, question parts of the report and be a useful resource for students so that they can improve their writing as they continue. When the reports are finished, the teacher can collect them for correction, or they can be assembled on a class noticeboard or put up on a class website. Using music and pictures: music and pictures are excellent stimuli for both writing and speaking. For example, we can play a piece of music and the students have to imagine and then write out the film scene they think it could accompany (this can be done after they have looked at a film script model). We can dictate the first sentence of a story and then have the students complete the story, based on the music we play them. We can then dictate the first sentence again and have them written a different story (because the music they hear is very different). They can then read out one of their stories and the class has to guess which music excerpt inspired it. As prof. J.Jalolov mentioned in his book "English language teaching methodology" that, learners should master a foreign language (FL) as a means of communication, they should know how to use it in oral and written forms. So it will be useful to use pictures in writing activities. Pictures offer a wealth of

possibilities. We can ask students to write descriptions of one of a group of pictures; their classmates then have to guess which one it is. They can write postcards based on pictures we give them. We can get them to look at portraits and write the inner thoughts of the characters or their diaries, or an article about them. All of these activities are designed to get students writing freely, in an engaging way. Brochures and guides: we can get students to look at a variety of brochures (e.g. for a town, entertainment venue, health club or leisure complex) to analyse how they are put together. They can then write their own brochure or town guide, using this analysis to help them. Younger learners may enjoy writing brochures and guides for their areas which give completely wrong information (e.g. 'Sending postcards home: Look for the bins marked "Rubbish" or "Litter" and your postcards will be delivered next day; Travelling by bus: The buses in London are similar to taxis. Tell the drivers where you want to go and they'll drive you home!'). This is potentially just as engaging for children and teenagers as writing serious pieces of work. Besides that, in APTIS practice tests they suggest four parts in The Writing test and they are also useful to practice both in individual and in group work activities. The types of tasks are as followings:

1. Word-level writing: In this first part, you are a member of a club and must respond to five messages. This part does not involve writing sentences, but just individual words or phrases. You should take no more than three minutes to complete this part.
2. Short text writing: This part is about form filling as well, but this time you will have to write sentences. You should take



no more than seven minutes to complete this part.

3. Three written parts of the text, all of which require responses: Here, you will have a social network type of interaction, and receive three questions to respond to. You should spend a maximum of ten minutes on this part.

4. Formal and informal writing: In this final part, you have to write an informal email to a friend and a more formal email to an unknown person. Both emails are in response to information about a change. You should spend no more than 20 minutes on this part. If we practice our students this practice tests it would open doors to global opportunities for English skills for the students and professionals alike.

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