TRINITY
COLLEGE LONDON

DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS: A GUIDE FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS

Contents

USING THIS GUIDE

▶ This guide aims to provide a resource for teachers looking to explore and develop writing skills with their language learners.

▶ Definitions of terms marked with an asterisk (*) can be found in the Glossary of terms.

▶ Look out for the Top tips boxes.

Top Tips

These boxes give extra ideas, resources and commentary related to developing this skill.

Trinity's approach to language skills

Trinity believes that authentic communication is fundamental in language learning and assessment. As such, a collaborative, dynamic approach to learning and teaching is central to developing learners' language skills, reflecting how language is used beyond the classroom. This includes exploring not only each of the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) in isolation, but also how the skills relate to and are used in combination with the others.

Understanding writing

When exploring writing with our learners, it's important for both teachers and learners to be aware of the processes and sub-skills this involves, as well as the impact the purpose and audience has on the planning and execution of the text.

1. We usually write with a specific audience/reader in mind, so texts need to be written in the appropriate style (register, tone and following genre* conventions).

2. In our day-to-day life, we often write in response to something we've read or heard. For example, someone writing an email to summarise the conversations in a meeting, a learner writing a report on research findings, a friend messaging another about a social media post they've just seen.

3. Our message needs to be easily understood by a reader, so we have to consider the language we use, the length of the text, and how we organise our ideas.

4. We often go through different stages when we write (eg planning, drafting and re-drafting), and that process has an impact on the final text.

5. Sometimes it is necessary to include quotes and references to add depth and legitimacy to a text.

Top Tips

Audience or reader

Providing an audience or reader for a text will determine many of its elements such as style (register, tone and genre*), language (grammar and lexis) and structure. You can choose an imaginary audience for some tasks (eg write a letter to a famous person), while peers could be the audience for certain others (eg write a review of a film you think your classmates might enjoy).

Classroom techniques

There are many approaches to developing writing skills. Whichever you take, the following techniques will help address the key points noted above.

1. Give learners example texts, where possible from authentic sources, and help them notice and analyse the key features of the genre*. Consider language (grammar and lexis), the overall structure, cohesive devices, etc.

2. Explore different techniques to generate ideas. This could include reading online materials, creating mind maps, conducting surveys, sharing opinions, asking peers, etc.

3. Plan writing activities so learners have time to generate ideas, write, receive formative feedback* and re-draft their texts. While it may seem like a good idea to set writing as homework, learners can benefit from teacher/peer support if these stages are done in class.

4. Train learners to give and receive peer feedback. Tell them what to focus on and how to give constructive feedback. For example, they can point out two strengths and offer one suggestion on what the writer could do to get their ideas across more clearly.

5. At all stages of the writing process, remember to comment on the content of your learners' writing, their ideas, the strength of their argument, etc, as well as their use of language.

6. Make writing tasks more authentic and communicative by ensuring learners know who their reader is. Publishing learner work (on noticeboards, online forums, etc) can also be very motivating.

Adapting and creating writing resources

Finding or creating writing resources and example texts to use in the classroom can be a rewarding and engaging experience for both the teacher and learners. This is particularly the case when the interests and needs of a particular set of learners has been taken into consideration.

When searching for example texts to use for genre* analysis (ie to highlight and analyse typical use of language, organisation, style, etc according to the type and purpose of the text), the internet can provide a wide variety of authentic sources, from shorter social media posts and comments, through to longer online reviews and articles. Coursebooks and classroom resource sites also provide models of texts like essays and reports designed for a particular language learning context and proficiency level. With their permission, you could also use or adapt written work produced by previous learners. This can be especially useful in exam preparation classes when the learner in question went on to achieve a good result.

Writing tasks can be set up in such a way that learners focus on sentence, paragraph, or whole text level. For example, rewriting sentences to fit a particular context, composing a suitable conclusion for a partially completed essay, or transposing information from one text type to another (eg a report into a short email).

The table on the following page provides some example tasks ideas that focus on developing particular writing sub-skills. These could be completed individually or set up as collaborative writing and reviewing tasks.

FOCUS ON	CAN DO	EXAMPLE TASKS
Content & organisation	The writer can: • answer a question with relevant supporting detail • organise ideas into a coherent whole • use textual organisation features to support the message	Complete a personal statement in an application form which links personal traits or experience with the position applied for, eg *I used my organisational skills to manage the project.* Reorder paragraphs of a 'for and against' essay to follow typical genre* conventions, eg introduction, body (for and against), conclusion. Complete the gaps in film review extracts to show contrasting ideas, eg *but, however, despite.*
Language	The writer can use a range of grammar and vocabulary effectively.	Compose a short online review about a stay at a hotel, which includes recommendations for future improvements.
Style	The writer can adjust the style to the demands of the context, audience and purpose. The style features relevant for this task are: • register • tone • following conventions of the genre*	A two-text task: write an email to a senior colleague about a work issue, and a short online message to a friend about the same problem.
Use of sources	The writer can select relevant information from different sources and reuse this for a different purpose.	Write a proposal, recommending local environment initiatives, based on a short video presentation about national energy-saving policy and an article on the benefits of recycling.

Assessing writing

Regular formative assessment* of written work provides the opportunity for teachers to give feedback on learners' strengths and areas for improvement. This plays an essential role in the development of writing skills.

To provide a targeted focus for learning, it is often a good idea to focus on one aspect of writing subskills (eg organisation). This can help avoid overcorrecting, which can be demotivating for the learner and time-consuming for the teacher.

Following a communicative approach, it is also beneficial to react to the content of the text. For example, if the learner has written a book review, leave a comment stating if you would enjoy reading it, based on their text. This shows you have engaged with what your learner has produced and understood their message.

Another good idea is to encourage and develop peer and self-assessment amongst your learners. This may require some training, with guidance on how to provide constructive feedback. A checklist or feedback prompts, which focus on the writing objective of the lesson, can often be of use to support this.

When preparing learners for language exams with an assessed written component, such as Trinity's ISE: Integrated Skills in English, it is important for both the teachers and learners to understand both the format of the test (ie tasks and timings) and the official assessment criteria (eg what is being assessed). The ensures that everyone knows how to meet expectations on the day of the exam.

Trinity language support resources

Trinity offers a wide range of free English language resources and teaching materials. These support our qualifications, which cover every stage of learning, from beginner to advanced. We offer two-skill oral assessments (GESE: Graded Examinations in Spoken English) and four-skill assessments (ISE: Integrated Skills in English).

Visit trinitycollege.com/English-resources to find these.

Top Tips

Learner training

The more you encourage learner autonomy, the more learners will be able to think critically, learn independently and reflect on their progress. Encourage them to use and develop these strategies and skills beyond the classroom.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CEFR

The Common European Framework of Reference for languages. An international standard for describing language proficiency.

Formative assessment

Assessment at different stages during a task, lesson or course that results in feedback that can inform learners of their progress and gives guidance in helping them develop their knowledge and skills.

Genre analysis

The main focus of this approach to writing is the purpose of the written text and the conventions surrounding that purpose. This includes language, structure, style, etc.

Process writing

The main focus of this approach to writing is the way in which a text is created and put together. This involves generating ideas, drafting, redrafting and publishing a final product (eg sending it, or posting it on a shared platform).

Product writing

The main focus of this approach to writing is on the end product (the written text). This includes ensuring the grammar, lexis, structure, spelling etc of the text is suitable for the reader.