



## ***THE INGENUITY OF APPROACHING THE BASIC OF WRITING SKILLS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING***

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Teaching writing skills to beginner learners remains one of the most challenging skill in the kingdom of teaching. Indeed, the majority of teachers find great difficulties teaching such vital skill. They struggle continuously about where to start and what to do whenever they are compelled to teach writing. Plus, the majority of language learners all levels combined find the writing skills so exacting and challenging to the point that they are often scared to write and if they write, learners rarely feel engaged nor see any progress in their writing skills. Now, if such dilemma is true in the native language teaching and learning, just imagine how the situation of writing is in foreign language teaching and learning .

Actually, the situation of teaching writing skills in foreign language learning is even worse due to the fact that it is approached not only with a first language teaching mindset but also rushed through without any prior preparation to the basic of the target language. Meaning that learners are not provided with the proper components that allow them to build a solid foundation on which writing can be set to blossom and take off on its own later on.

Consider this : How can any foreign language teacher find it logical asking a first year student in his first few months of foreign language learning to write a whole paragraph on his own while he can barely decipher to read a simple sentence in the target language? How can a student in 4AM whose foreign language skills have been neglected since 1AM, be persuaded to generate any writing passage on his own? How can such a student be asked to fly in writing where he was never given the time to grow his own language wings to write?

In fact, anybody who tries to fly in any field without having the proper wings is simply asking him to dig his own grave to die. Similarly in teaching writing, if teachers push students to write while missing to provide them with the language basic, it is highly likely that students will feel overwhelmed and submerged which will certainly lead them to give up promptly.

Such result is predicted when the majority of students in our schools suffer already from vocabulary shortage in their language bag and insufficiency in basic understanding to the thought formation with language structure and function as well as their lack of mastering the basic outline of writing process in a paragraph that includes the three sections going from introduction through body to conclusion. All these language deficiencies are like roadblocks that would certainly put both teachers and students alike in a very difficult situation. As a result, it will be hard for a teacher to motivate students to write and even harder for students to produce anything decent in writing without receiving the proper help to remedy the above issues.

Foreign languages teachers who do not think deeply to lay the language foundation in writing steadily and consistently going from simple letters to clear words to elementary sentences and passages, will have great hurdles keeping the majority of students interested in writing the new language. In fact, psychologically speaking, humans often tend to give up on anything when they don't feel or see that they are making any apparent progress in it. Therefore, if teachers teach new language skills using scattered and superficial approaches with no tangible and obvious

path and ongoing consistency in building those skills to be seen and felt by students, these same students would surely lose interest in no time.

In this article, I will try to provide some teaching tips that I used myself years ago to develop students writing skills from scratch. It is a lot of work that became part of teaching writing in my classroom where students were often engaged and eager to compete and dig deeper. My teaching of writing started with letters. Indeed, letters of any language are meant to be the pillars of the language. Making sure that students know them in sound and script is indispensable to the success of what is coming next. Once the letters are fully mastered, teachers can move to put those letters in action where they are gathered to shape short and long words. Basic words and their formation in context are meant to be the cement that holds those pillars together. This is where the spelling of words comes handy in which students learn the significance of spelling in writing and teachers empower learners with a variety of ongoing tasks.

To learn and retain words, teachers can do short dictation of few words a day in less than 5 minutes. Moreover, teachers can present a list of scrambled words or suggest words with missing letters or add words spelled wrongly inviting students to rewrite them correctly. To enrich the vocabulary, teachers need always to think of synonyms and antonyms of any words they introduce during the lessons. The more, the better. Playing words game of all kinds will reinforce learners' retention to their language. The same goes for words connectors where teachers evoke them with very short and simple sentences. Naturally, when teachers start teaching the writing skills in simple and small portions using simple facts that interest the learner's world, it triggers a certain inner desire for the learners to write more about what they like.

Besides, using simple definitions of words that students already know would bring the meaning of the new language closer. Relating an item, a place or a job to its action verb would help as an introduction. For instance, when teachers introduce the word "A PEN", adding to the word "a pen" the action verb "WRITE" is only logical for students to make the connection. Now, as teachers, think how many verbs students would have gained if every item introduced to them in the classroom is followed by its action verb. Likewise, encouraging students to use a dictionary (if available) to find definitions of words that they have studied previously will open a huge door for them to learn how to use a dictionary as well as how to create their own definition in defining places, objects, animals, people and ideas. Those definitions can be used later in crossword game activities that can be devised by students themselves to motivate them and challenge their peers in a classroom contest.

Furthermore, foreign language learners as beginners are in urgent need to work sufficiently with simple written sentences from a variety of angles (affirmative, negative and interrogative) before they are able to produce their own sentences. Teachers can provide students with a group of sentences, some wrong and some correct and students have to identify which is which. Plus, they can have simple sentences full of mistakes either in terms of wordings, spelling or coordination and invite students to detect the language mistakes and rewrite the sentences correctly. Teachers can also scramble letters in words or/and words in sentences while leading students to rewrite them in a way they make sense as a tool of communication.

Later on, teachers can encourage students to connect non-complex sentences using connectors that denote cause and effect, comparison, contrast in comparison,

contrast in expectation, emphasis, reason, result, additional Information, example and ordering. Understanding connectors and their might within sentences will empower students in the way they express themselves either in speaking or writing. When students are given the opportunity to interact amply with simple sentences that evolve to compound sentences thanks to connectors, their thought formation will find its way to generate itself through the process sooner or later.

While teachers may provide students with two simple sentences to create one compound sentence using one suitable connector, they can also give merely one sentence with the connector and students have to pick the sentence from a group of separated sentences or produce the second sentence on their own. Once teachers see that students feel comfortable with simple and compound sentences, they can move to work with short passages that go from five(5) to (10) sentences where teachers can put words in the wrong place within the passage and invite students to detect them. Additionally, teachers can scramble sentences within one coordinated passage and request students to rewrite the passage the right way. To make it more challenging, teachers can add one or two irrelevant sentences within a passage and then invite students to identify those unrelated sentences before rewriting the passage.

Subsequently, teachers can present a passage about a person, a place , an animal or an object and invite students to read the passage and then produce the same passage but about a different person, place, animal or object. Teachers can start always small and add some challenges through the process. Teachers can suggest the features to help them or let them choose on their own. The passage can be about the topic that they studied in the lesson with some new ideas to reinforce the language in writing. This can be done individually, in pairs or in groups. If one would follow the process from letters to words, to small and compound sentences to small passages, it is likely that one sees the path of progress in writing that can be felt by students who will be asking for more challenge to come in terms of language in general and writing in particular.

Finally, I must say that if teachers are consistent in approaching the teaching of writing skills with these short, moderate and significant activities early on in language learning and students feel the ongoing progress every time they are interacting with these kind of tasks, students are likely to end up hooked to the idea of writing not only to learn the new language but also to express their own ideas using their own words in writing.

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