

Teaching Reading and Writing

Preparing to write

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Learning outcomes

This module of teaching reading and writing focuses on helping learners to get started with writing. By the end of the module you will be able to:

- explain how pre-writing tasks support students in writing full texts
- identify a number of different pre-writing activities that establish the purpose for writing, generate ideas for content, and activate vocabulary and relevant language structures
- explain how writing models and frames can be used to support students in writing a full text
- consider how to apply the teaching techniques shown in the films to your own teaching.

1 Before you watch

a. In the skill of writing, what are the main challenges your learners face?

b. How do you overcome these challenges?

Try to compare your answers with a partner.

2 Watch

2.1 Pre-writing tasks

Watch and listen to the commentary at the beginning of the video **Preparing to write: Part 1** (00:00 to 01:05). Then pause the video and answer the following questions.

a. According to the trainer, are the following statements true or false? If they are false, explain why.

i. Having been given a task, learners find it easy to start writing immediately. **True False**

•

ii. Pre-writing tasks should only help learners with content. **True False**

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iii. Spelling and punctuation are important for writing **True False**

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iv. Teachers shouldn't spend time focusing directly on spelling and punctuation. They should be integrated into other activities **True False**

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2.2 Other preparation

Before you continue watching, think about these questions.

a. How do you teach spelling and punctuation?

b. What kind of pre-writing activities do you do to stimulate ideas and activate vocabulary and grammar?

2.3 Pre-writing and writing tasks

Watch the rest of **Preparing to write: Part 1**. (01:25 to 12:30) As you watch answer the two questions.

a. What writing task are learners preparing for?

b. What pre-writing tasks are used?

c. Watch the other two videos **Preparing to write: Part 2** and **3**. Answer questions a. and b.

Part 2 (00:00 to 09:00)	Part 3 (00:00 to 12:40)
a. What writing task are learners preparing for?	a. What writing task are learners preparing for?
b. What pre-writing tasks are used?	b. What pre-writing tasks are used?

d. Did the teachers in parts 1, 2 and 3 use any similar techniques to the ones you listed in activity 2.2?

2.4 Example pre-writing activity

a. Look at the three-part activity below and carry out the tasks. This activity could be used as a pre-writing activity to stimulate ideas for a writing task and to practise grammar.

i. Identify examples of the comparative ('...er') form in the text below.

In my family we have two pets: a dog and a cat. The dog is much larger and fatter than the cat. The cat is much thinner and has a longer tail. Also the cat's fur is much softer and redder in colour. The cat is easy to look after, much easier than the dog.

In the garden the dog likes to lie on the grass, in the sun, where it is hotter. The cat likes to be higher. She likes to sit on the wall. But our wall is lower than our next door neighbour's so sometimes she jumps up and lies on their bigger wall.

ii. Divide the examples into two lists as below

Double consonants

- fatter
-
-
-
-

Single consonants

- longer
-
-
-
-
-

iii. Can you work out any rules for doubling consonants in comparative and superlative forms?

b. Could you do this kind of activity with your learners?

2.5 Writing models and frames

- a. Look at the model text and writing frame below. How could you use these with your classes?

Model text for personal profile

Name: Sally

Gender: Female

E-mail: sallyt1998@hotmail.com

Hello I'm Sally. I'm 13 and I live in a small town in the South of the UK. I have two sisters, a brother and a dog.

I like swimming, drawing, listening to music and Facebook. My favourite TV show is 'Glee' and I'm a big fan of Lady Gaga.

I'm looking for a pen pal from another country aged between 12 to 14. I can speak some French and a little Spanish.

So email me if you want to chat :)

Your new friend

Sally

Writing frame for a postcard

1. Where are you and who are you with?
2. Where are you staying?
3. What is the weather like?
4. What have you been doing?
5. When are you coming back?

Watch and listen to the commentary at the beginning of **Preparing to write: Part 4** (00:00 to 01:00). Then pause the video and answer question b.

b. According to the trainer, how are writing frames and model texts used?

Watch the rest of **Preparing to write: Part 4** (01:00 to 06:00) and answer question c.

c. What are the stages of using the model text?

d. How could you stretch stronger learners to go beyond the frames and models?

3 Controlled writing and freer writing

- a. Look at the definitions of controlled and freer practice below.
Are model texts and writing frames examples of controlled writing or freer writing?

Controlled practice is practice of the target language in restricted situations in which students have little or no choice of what language they use.

Freer practice is when they practise the target language more freely, with more choice of what they say and what language they use

Source: British Council TKT Glossary.

- b. Learners need both controlled and free practice to improve their writing. Here are some short writing tasks. Rank them on the continuum below according to how controlled or free each practice is.

- A. Write one or two sentences on a specific topic.
- B. Complete the sentences.
For example, *The best place I've ever My favourite dish is I really dislike*
- C. Rewrite sentences to reflect the view of the class.
For example, the class is shown the sentence *Boys like football*. Together or in groups they discuss the sentence and rewrite it reflect their own group: *Most boys like football as well as a lot of girls*.
- D. Write your thoughts in a daily journal (diary).
- E. Expand sentences by adding more details, adjectives and adverbs.
For example, *The man followed the woman*, can be expanded to *The man in the dark suit followed the woman he'd seen earlier*.
- F. Write instructions . This involves groups of learners writing a set of instructions for another group. Examples include a set of directions, how to send an email or make a good cup of tea. The reading group follow the instructions to see how effective they are, correcting anything that is wrong.
- G. The Consequences activity in section 8 Reflect.

Activities C, E and F are all adapted from Harmer, J., (2004), *How to Teach Writing*, Pearson.



4 Reflection

Look at a writing activity from one of your coursebooks. What kind of pre-writing activities are there? Is this enough for your learners? How could you supplement the activities to provide more support for your learners?

If you don't have any coursebooks available try to answer the same questions using the activity below.

Consequences

This is a group writing activity for any age. The items in the 'frame' can be adapted for appropriacy and level. You need at least six groups.

Each group starts with a blank sheet of paper. At the top they write the name of famous man. Next they fold the paper at the top to cover the name. Each group then passes their paper to the next group in a clockwise manner. Groups must never unfold the paper to look at what has been written. They now write the word 'met' under the fold followed by the name of a famous woman. Then they fold the paper over what they have written and pass it on to the next group in the same way. This time each group writes the word 'while' and then a sentence, then folds and passes their paper on. This continues for the following items in the frame.

- Name of famous man
- Met Name of famous woman
- While
- He said to her "....."
- She said to him "...."
- The consequence was ...

After writing the last item, groups pass on their papers for the final time. Each group unfolds their paper and reads out the story.

Transcripts and answers

Transcripts of trainer's talk

2.1 Pre-writing tasks

Students often don't know what to write and how to write it. We can help them to get started by doing pre-writing tasks. We can stimulate their imaginations with pictures, sounds or objects. We can put them in groups to brainstorm ideas and we can do activities that revise vocabulary and grammar to express these ideas.

We also need to focus on spelling and punctuation - this is best done in short but regular sessions.

Let's look now at how teachers in Turkey, Argentina and the UK use different pre-writing activities to help their students prepare for writing tasks. As you watch, make notes to answer the questions in the viewing task. The answers will appear at the end of the sequence.

2.5 Writing models and frames

Another way to help students with content and language is to provide them with a writing model or frame. A writing model gives students an example of a specific written text that they can use as a guide to help them write their own version. Writing frames guide students through the process of writing. Frames vary, but can be, as in the example of a writing frame for a postcard, a series of questions. Students answer these questions, which builds up the writing text.

Let's look now at how the teacher from Turkey uses a writing model to support his students in writing their own text for a personal profile. Watch the film and answer the questions in the viewing task.

Answers

2.1 Pre-writing tasks

- i. Having been given a task, students find it easy to start writing immediately. **False**
Learners have difficulty with what to write and how to write it.
- ii. Pre-writing tasks should only help students with content. **False**
They should also help learners remember vocabulary and grammar to express their ideas.
- iii. Spelling and punctuation are important for writing **True**
- iv. Teachers shouldn't spend time focusing directly on spelling and punctuation. **False**
They should be integrated into other activities
Teachers focus on spelling and punctuation in short but regular sessions.

2.3 Pre-writing and writing tasks

Part 1	Part 2	Part 3
Pre-writing tasks A miming / guessing activity to generate ideas for content. A class discussion to establish purpose of writing task. Pairwork discussion to stimulate ideas for personal profile content.	Using pictures to generate interest in writing task. Class discussion about films to stimulate vocabulary for task. Class brainstorming activity to generate vocabulary for review. Worksheet activity to consolidate and record target vocabulary. Class discussion to develop longer phrases and language for the film review.	Analysing different parts of the exam question. Using pictures and class discussion to stimulate ideas and vocabulary. Recording ideas on a mind map worksheet. Pairwork discussion to generate more ideas.
Writing tasks A personal profile for an e-pal or pen pal..	A film review.	An IELTS exam question a discursive essay (250 words)

2.4 Example pre-writing activity

i. Underline examples of the comparative ('...er') form in the text below.

In my family we have two pets: a dog and a cat. The dog is much larger and fatter than the cat. The cat is much thinner and has a longer tail. Also the cat's fur is much softer and redder in colour. The cat is easy to look after, much easier than the dog.

In the garden the dog likes to lie on the grass, in the sun, where it is hotter. The cat likes to be higher. She likes to sit on the wall. But our wall is lower than our next door neighbour's so sometimes she jumps up and lies on their bigger wall.

ii. Divide the examples into two lists as below

Double consonants

- fatter
- thinner
- bigger
- redder
- hotter

Single consonants

- longer
- larger
- softer
- easier
- higher
- lower

iii. Can you work out any rules for doubling consonants in comparative and superlative forms?

If the last 3 letters of the adjective starting from the end of the word are consonant vowel consonant (cvc) then you double the last consonant. For example, **fat** the last letter is a consonant 't', the next last a vowel 'a' and the next a consonant 'f' so the comparative is **fatter** and superlative **fattest**. However for **long** the last letter is 'g' consonant, then 'n' another consonant and then 'o' vowel. Since the sequence is not cvc you do not double the last consonant – **longer** and **longest**.

There are two exceptions – adjectives ending in w do not double the consonant, for example, **lower** and **lowest** and 'y' changes to 'i' before –er –est, for example, **easier** and **easiest**.

2.5 Writing models and frames

b. Model texts and writing frames are used to help students with content and language. They help to build confidence. Frames guide students through the process of writing, for example, with a series of questions, the answers to which build up the text. (Additional) Models can exemplify genres and be analysed and then ultimately imitated by students.

c. Stages of using model text

- 1, Analyse the content of the model.
- 2, Compare the model with learners' own ideas.
- 3, Examining the language in the model text.
- 4, Learners use the model to write their own text.

d. Stronger learners can be stretched when using frames or models by asking them to:

- add at least two or three more sentences
- expand sentences with adjectives, adverbs and clauses
- replace sentences with similar but different structures
- change the frame/model to a different target audience
- read the frame/model but then not look at it again.

3. Controlled writing and freer writing

- a. Frames and model texts are examples of controlled practice
- b. Here are some suggested answers. However, some activities depend on how the teacher conducts the task.



- A. Write one or two sentences on a specific topic.
– **Free practice.**
- B. Complete the sentences.
For example, *The best place I've ever ... My favourite dish is ... I really dislike ...*
– **Fairly controlled practice.**
- C. Rewrite sentences to reflect the view of the class.
For example, the class is shown the sentence *Boys like football*. Together or in groups they discuss the sentence and rewrite it reflect their own group: *Most boys like football as well as a lot of girls*.
– **Quite controlled practice but can become less controlled.**
- D. Write your thoughts in a daily journal (diary).
– **Free practice.**
- E. Expand sentences by adding more details, adjectives and adverbs.
For example, *The man followed the woman*, can be expanded to *The man in the dark suit followed the woman he'd seen earlier*.
– **Quite controlled practice, but can become more free as sentences are expanded.**
- F. Write instructions . This involves groups of learners writing a set of instructions for another group. Examples include a set of directions, how to send an email or make a good cup of tea. The reading group follow the instructions to see how effective they are, correcting anything that is wrong.
– **Depends on the kinds of instructions but there is control of language.**
- G. The Consequences activity in section 8 Reflect.
– **Frame gives fairly controlled practice of language.**

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