

Writing

I'd like you to scan your memory and think of a time when you had a great idea but, although it was on the tip of your tongue, you just could not put it into words... Have you got it..? What exactly were you trying to do..?

I would guess that you were probably making a great effort to explain something or draft it on paper, that is, you were either speaking or writing. I didn't have much trouble guessing because the fundamental characteristic of the Writing and Speaking skills is precisely that: putting pictures, sounds, feelings, into words.

The strategies inculcated in these Writing activities are particularly adapted to describing and narrating.

Pre-writing:

- Planning of written work is especially useful. In particular you use visualising content as a specific planning strategy. This is based on the perception that writing consists basically of putting words to your inner pictures, sounds and feelings.
- Vocabulary recall - an important qualitative element.

Writing:

- The strategy of paying attention to structure encourages the student to avoid quantitative mistakes.

Post writing:

- checking
- learning from errors.

1 All my own

Level Any

Time 15 mins.

Materials None

Focus To give students self-confidence in their own written work.

State

Lead students into a visual mood by breathing high in the chest and speaking in a flat voice. Keep still while speaking.

Future-pacing

Announce that you are going to tell them a story*. Make sure everyone is comfortable before beginning:

‘Jim was ___(age of your students). He was a rather indifferent student at school and did not always like to do his homework because he spent his free time doing other things. He often arrived at school without his homework and sometimes when he brought it it was full of mistakes.

One morning Jim brought his homework and his language teacher was looking at it. He noticed that Jim had written a very original composition, well planned and with really excellent vocabulary. Naturally the teacher was surprised and he called Jim to his room to ask him about it. "This is a marvellous composition, Jim," said the teacher. "Tell me how you did it. Did you father help you last night?"

Usually Jim's father helped him with his homework but last night he had been out, so Jim replied, "No, my father couldn't do my homework last night, so I did it myself." ‘

*(This story is loosely based on a similar one taken from L. A. Hill's Stories for Reproduction OUP)

2 Music

Level Any

Time 1 hour

Materials Relaxing music

Focus To introduce the planning aspects of a description and to build confidence by providing a private sanctuary.

State

It would be suitable to play relaxing music(e.g.`Cosmos' theme tune) to establish a quiet mood. After matching their particular mood that day you can lead the class into a visual state by speaking slowly in a high, flat voice and breathing in the upper chest.

Future Pacing

Ask students to think of the last dream they had. Talk of everyone's ability to dream. Then remind them how everyone daydreams from time to time.(Think of how you drifted off during an unexciting class last week!) In this class you'll learn how to turn daydreaming to your advantage while drifting off and having a wonderful, uninterrupted daydream. There's even music to help you phase out.

Presentation

As we are going to do some writing we will run over a scheme which will help you write better.

Write the following up plainly on the board, explaining it orally at the same time:

<u>Plan</u>	<u>Vocabulary</u>	<u>Basic sentence structure</u>
SEE	Write during	Subj. + verb + object + Adv.
HEAR	visualisation	
FEEL		

Plan: Instruct student that while listening to the music they create a detailed picture of their favourite place in their heads filling in visual aspects, sounds and feelings about the place.

Vocabulary: While listening to the music they can jot down any words which describe their vision. Draw their attention to the fact that four or five appropriate words of infrequent vocabulary automatically lifts the quality of a text.

Structure: Tell students to construct their sentences around the basic sentence structure scheme shown when writing.

Explain: Each person has a favourite place. Today we are going to take an imaginary trip to that place. Observe it well and you'll be able to describe it well later. Listening to this music will help recreate that place in your mind.

Practice

Play some instrumental music that you like. I have found that a melodious piece of music incorporating a guitar is acceptable to teenagers (e.g. from the soundtrack of The Princess Bride film).

Students visualise with the music then write their descriptions. As they start to write be available, for a set time, to help out with vocabulary difficulties.

Debrief

If some students finish before others encourage them to check some specific grammar and expression points, like the main verb tenses or the variety of vocabulary.

Read out some anonymous creations with the permission of the authors.

Discussion of the topics may not be a good idea because the written material tends to be sensitive and very personal.

Celebration

I have found that, without exception, the written results of this exercise have produced many imaginative pieces of writing. The most eye-catching quality of them for me as an EFL teacher was their unusually high degree of grammatical correctness and rich vocabulary. If this is the case in your class then congratulate them congruently on their proficiency.

3. Fiesta

Level Any

Time 1 hour

Materials Festive music

Focus To provide suggestive input for an essay.

State

Induce students into a resourceful mood by playing background festive music at the outset of class.

Future pacing

Suggest to them that they have competent writing skills and they'll easily be able to cope with today's straightforward work: Daydreaming ... of preparing for the Mardi Gras celebrations.

Presentation

Get one student to remind the class about how to go about telling a story (introduced in earlier lesson) and write the scheme on the board:

<u>Plan</u>	<u>Basic sentence structure</u>	<u>Vocabulary</u>
Intro.	Subject + verb + object.	Write during
Middle		visualisation
End		

Announce to students that you are going to help them daydream about the carnival to prepare for writing. Translate and write up this vocabulary: dressed up, character

Everyone should get into a comfortable position. They can close their eyes while listening if they like. Read this extract slowly:

"You are at home ... tomorrow is Mardi gras ... everyone goes to school dressed up ... you must look for something to put on ... you remember other times when you dressed up ... you think about the clothes you put on ... you talk to your friends ... do they have any ideas? ... you remember an unusual character that you saw and liked ... you have decided to dress up ... describe your character's clothes ... is there a hat? ... do you need something for your hands? ... will you wear a mask? ... do you need to paint your face? ... which

colours? ... you are with your friends now ... how do you feel? ... What do you talk about? ... Now the carnival has ended and you have had a good time ... you feel relaxed and ready to write about your experience ... you return to class here and now."

Practice

Students write out their fantasy.

Remind them to check some specific grammar points after writing.

Debrief

Ask round the class for the points students checked after writing.

Celebration

Read out student creations.

Here is an authentic example of one 15-year-old's daydream, written during the class :

Carnival Time

I am dressed up as a christmas tree. I made the dress with green cardboard that I cut it in the shape of a tree. Then I fixed on the cardboard some christmas balls made of cardboard too. I fixed the two cardboards with a rubber band. Then I put it on. Under the tree dress I wore a green jersey, brown trousers and brown shoes. I painted my nails in green, and with a green lip-stick I made up my lips. I painted my eyes with green colours too. I put stardust in my face too.

When I went to the high school I felt a little ridiculous, but then I felt very proud of my dress because everybody said that it was very original and I was the only christmas tree in all the high school. But I saw other dresses that were fantastic, like a crisp bag.

When I arrived home I had a shower and I spent a lot of time because I had to take off all the make-up. But the effort was worthwhile.

Variation

This daydream can be used for any festive occasion in the local calendar. It is advisable to dream of a future event rather than a past one.

4. Something from Nothing

Level Any

Time One hour

Materials New Age music.

Focus Creative writing through revision.

State

Play some ethereal New Age music as students settle. Pace your students and lead them into a relaxed and resourceful mood by deep breathing low in the stomach.

Future-pacing

Ask students if they have ever experienced the blank page syndrome during an exam: when they just can't think of anything to say or write. Talk about the episode. Announce to your pupils that you have good news for them: after today's lesson they will know how to overcome this syndrome.

Presentation

Present this strategy:

1. Have students remind each other out loud of the general plan for writing either a narrative(3.6) or a description (3.2).
2. Students write for three minutes. They are to write without thinking or revising, whatever comes into their minds.
3. They exchange papers with their partner who comments on one aspect they like and one they dislike, then return the paper. They now add something and delete something.
4. They rearrange the structure, for example by exchanging the introduction and the end, or the middle and the end.
5. They check the grammatical correction of their writing.
6. They rewrite the whole piece.

Practice

Pupils get out pen and paper and follow the instructions.

Debrief

Talk about the new experience.

Completion

Read a few creations out loud. Remind students that they can use this strategy anytime they have to create something from nothing.

Here is an authentic example written during a class:

Words

When I'm in the English class I hear the teacher, I practice the exercises and I sometimes speak with my neighbour.

Sometimes I think about the words of the teacher, they are clear words for me to understand the sentences. Sometimes I don't understand the sentences, then I think about it and I know that my vocabulary isn't enough. Then, when I arrive at home I take the dictionary and read some words that I don't know their meaning.

After my mother enters into my room and she talks with me some things, sometimes she makes me angry and I speak a lot, then I realise that I use many words in my language, then I understand that English is an easy language but I still need practice.

5. Movie-making

Level Any

Time One hour

Materials Film music

Focus To learn to manipulate your own imagination creatively.

State

Play some upbeat music on low volume as students are settling. The soundtrack of a hit film would be appropriate.

Future-pacing

Ask students about the last film they saw on video, on TV or at the cinema. Ask about the scenes, the sounds and about feelings evoked by the film. Tell them that today they will be making a film in their imagination. You will then allow them to write about it.

Presentation

Elicit the plan for story-telling.(cf.3.6)

Students run through this procedure:

1. Imagine the responses you would like from your reader. Determine what images would summon that response. Structure the images into End /Intro /Middle
2. Listen for sounds connected with the images.
3. Sift through the feelings associated with the images and retain the most powerful ones.
4. Talk to yourself about words or dialogue which could accompany the images.

Practice

Have students note down vocabulary from their creations. Be available at the start, for a set time, to help or translate unknown words directly.

Recommend using a few words of infrequent vocabulary appropriate to the theme.

Remind students to keep to the basic English sentence structure: S + V + O + Adv.+ connector + S + V + O + Adv ...

Debrief

Direct students who finish first to check for typical grammar mistakes.

Celebration

Read out student creations.

Here is an example of what 15-year-old Elena wrote:

I was in a deep forest. I didn't know why I was there. All the elements of the landscape were so peaceful, so quiet and so green. I didn't remember anything that had happened before I was there. I was walking, but I didn't know why. It seemed like the set of a sweet fairytale of my childhood. And I wasn't the main character. I only was a light butterfly of the atmosphere. But, suddenly, I began to fall, I was going down, down and I couldn't stop. I opened my eyes and I realized I was in a dirty street. An empty syringe was on the ground.