Building interest in students to write creatively with Creative Resources

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Origin of the Art of Writing

The actual manifestation of any language is only by means of writing. Our present ‘alphabetic writing’ emerged in about 3000 years ago by the Greeks who also used the ‘vowel’ and ‘consonant’ sounds. Later, this alphabetic writing was taken by the Western Europe (Parker, Riley 1997 and Yule 2010)

Major Issues Involved in Writing Skills

Conventional Issues

Harmer (2001 & 2007) describes conventional issues related to English writing skills. These issues are related to the use of lexical items, punctuation, text format, spellings and syntax. A lot of practice can enable the learners overcome these issues.

Primary Issues

Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill and Pincas (2003) point out the following four kinds of problems related to developing English writing skills. These include: “(i) Mechanical problems with the script of English; (ii) Problems of accuracy of English grammar and lexis; (iii) Problems relating the style of writing
to the demands of a particular situation; (iv) Problems of developing ease and comfort in expressing what needs to be said.” (p. 116). These problematic areas can be overcome through effective planning and guided writing.

Students at advanced level or intermediate level feel difficulties in developing coherent sentences and knitting them in a larger text. At this stage, students also face problems in developing formal or informal piece of writing.

**Multicultural, Multilingual and Psychological Factors**

Anees and Raazia (2007) point out some social and psychological factors which affect L2 writing skills. Social factors include social status, family background etc. and psychological factors include motivational level, age etc. Lantolf (1999) mentions effects of multicultural and multilingual background on the learners’ writing skills. Lave and Wenger (1991) also emphasize that the entire teaching process must be compatible with social set up and cultural background, which they termed as ‘situated cognition’ (as cited in Hyland, 2004).

Hanson (2009) describes that teaching becomes more productive if the learners are provided stress free environment. Dr. Robert Sylwester (1995) supporting the issue also says that mind works at its best when the environment is secure, and disciplined (as cited in Hanson, 2009).

Today’s world is growing towards complete digitalization. Young learners are tech savvy and know how to handle gadgets without any difficulty. However, when it comes to writing by hand there are several issues that the learners face. Handwriting is still important in the digital age, though technology has become increasingly integrated into our daily life.

However, the act of writing is still less restrictive than its digital counterpart and has advantages both functionally and creatively. Handwriting has many cognitive benefits: Whilst it has been argued that typing notes at the time may allow us to focus more on what we are actually listening to research has suggested that rewriting our notes by hand means that we are more likely to remember them. It also allows you time
to re-evaluate what you have written and digest your notes, adding extra thoughts and observations to what you have written.

**Handwriting has many benefits for creative writing**

The physical act of writing can also have other benefits in particular with creative writing. Patrick McClean (2010) argued that writing with pen and paper helps to rid you of the distractions of the digital world. He said that when typing there can be a tendency to edit as you go along rather than letting your ideas flow. This can be counterproductive for the creative process. With a blank piece of paper, you tend to just write, get your ideas onto paper and leave the editing process until later. **Moreover,** writing forms a unique and irreplaceable part of our culture. Handwriting styles are unique to the individual and something which simply cannot be replicated with a keyboard.

Gwen Dorman feels that handwriting important because “The ability to write is traditionally closely linked with the ability to read in the development of literacy in children, the one fostering the other. This means that despite the incorporation of technology such as iPads into the classroom, focus should still be placed on students’ ability to write without the help of technology introduced with a computer or tablet can often interrupt your creative flow.

This paper is an attempt to examine how the teacher can create interest in the current generation of learners on how to improve their communication through Writing and handwriting. Here the teacher has to don the role of a researcher and creator, researching and creating interesting tasks that will motivate participation from the students thus resulting in learning.

Writing is one of the best and one of the oldest known forms of communication. In today’s age of information and technology, writing has become a lost art. The importance of writing is immense as it

- creates a permanent record
- allows storage of information for future reference
- all recipients receive the same information, and
necessary for legal and binding documentation

is unique to an individual

Compared to the other three skills, writing is considered to be the most difficult skill to master. Therefore, teaching writing is not an easy job because teachers might face several problems while teaching how to write well.

**The barriers faced**

English not being the mother tongue of many, it requires extra patience when teaching second generation learners and non-native speakers to connect their thoughts in English with the writing. When compared with speaking (S), writing (W) is far from it in importance. While in mother tongue, S is acquired, W is learned. → → Writing - hard enough even in mother tongue, so rather daunting a task in a foreign language. Thus, helping students to develop writing skills is a demanding enterprise for teachers. This is the first set of challenges teachers face daily when dealing with heterogeneous groups of mixed ability learners besides the class size, time bound syllabus, shortage of teachers experienced in teaching second language writing.

Besides, the fact today is that on the one hand with digital learning platforms, students are lured away from the habit of using a pen to write, on the other hand there are a few students who still prefer the traditional method of writing for exams etc.

There is a general consensus among teachers and researchers that reading habits and writing practices are changing, due to the pressures of emerging technologies. Newspapers are on the decline nationally, as advertising revenues migrate to the internet. Even the *New York Times* asks, on its own pages, —How much longer will the newspaper itself exist as citizen-reporter blogs routinely beat print media to breaking news (Dunlap, 2007, p. 5). With the introduction of computers and the internet, language teachers had to deal with diverse modes of reading and writing. A range of studies document the ways in which teenage literacy has changed, no longer exclusively the private book world of the print reader, but now the more social worlds of blogs, e-mail, cell phone text messaging, and on-line gaming (Anstey, 2002; Cruikshank, 2004; Ware & Warschauer, 2005). Scholars argue that the visual is returning to the page (Kress, 2003),...
that the page is losing ground to the screen (Snyder, 1997), and that new venues for writing, including e-mail, texting, and blogging, ask for new composing skills and mindsets.

**Issues faced by Students**

Writing is a very complex process, especially when it involves the ability to communicate in a language foreign to oneself, to construct a text that expresses the writer’s ideas effectively is a real challenge. Students have limited vocabulary and also use words inaccurately or inappropriately. The questions that arise in the minds of everyone taking on a writing task are:

- How do I begin?
- What is my purpose?
- Who is my reader?
- How do I make my point clear?
- How do I create a logical flow?
- How do I say what I mean?
- How do I avoid grammatical errors?
- How can I make my message concise?
- How can I create a visual effect?

One of the questions that many writers confront is—How can I make my writing more interesting, appealing and attractive to my readers?” This is a very crucial question. Writing assignments or examinations are far from interesting for many learners. The interests of the remaining learners vary. Students and teachers are often reluctant to spend time on writing in class, preferring instead to save writing for homework.
Types of Writing

Students will at some point of time need to write:

- E-mails
- Letters and Memos
- Agendas
- Reports
- Promotional Material
- Academic Documents
- Research (scientific) manuscripts

How to Select and Adapt Resources

The following points may be useful to ensure your students participate with enthusiasm:

1. **Choose the skills to focus on** - Ask these questions:
   - What level are my students?
   - What is their average age?
   - Why are they taking this course?
   - Do they need writing skills for specific reasons? (business correspondence, college application letters, etc.)

   - What do you expect them to produce? (a short email for beginners; an essay for an international exam)

   Once you are clear on the skills our students need to develop, you can move on to the next step.

2. **Choose activities or writing exercises**

There is a wide variety of writing tasks that can be assigned to students to help them hone their writing skills, but we teachers need to narrow down our options.
Business email writing:

This is a skill students require these days as they apply for jobs in international or multinational companies, or move to English-speaking countries. There are several sub-skills that go into effective email communication, like requesting information, replying to emails, responding to conflicts/problems/issues, formal vs. informal email, and even email writing etiquette or netiquette.

To introduce the task, the teacher can provide them with a sample email to read. Then, for practice, set up a situation or context: —Write a brief email to all team members to remind them of tomorrow’s meeting.

Correct any mistakes in grammar, as well as tone and style or the teacher can adopt peer correction to help slow and the average learners.

Language Teachers can create a class Facebook/WhatsApp account and get everyone to interact on events in college or lectures conducted and direct them to an interesting blog and ask them to post a comment.

Essays/letters/stories for international examinations

Some students preparing to sit for international exams, like the First Certificate in English (Cambridge ESOL) or the TOEFL, require to write essays that meet specific requirement. It’s a good idea to provide students with plenty of samples of the different types of written tasks they may be required to complete.

Online newsletters

Students can be encouraged to bring out online newsletters. Discuss with them what they would find interesting in a newsletter; they can include campus events, current events, stories, poems, cartoons, etc.

Writing prompts

Writing prompts are tremendously useful, great triggers for a writing task. Here are some examples of some great writing prompts:

1. Who is your favorite actor and why?
2. What are the three things you’d carry to a deserted island and why?
3. Write about one of your favorite movies and why you liked it so much.
4. What is the best gift you’ve ever received?
Journal writing

Students can be instructed to bring a blank notebook, that will from then on be referred to as their Journal. Assign topics on a weekly basis, or every two weeks, depending on their level. The same writing prompts from above may be used or their thoughts on a recent current event, what items are on their wish list, etc…

Journal writing is a great way to get students to write on a regular basis, plus keep track of their progress as far as writing skills are concerned. Sometimes students who are shy to speak can find writing a creative outlet.

3. Choosing the topics

Even if teachers choose an engaging writing activity, it should be accompanied by a topic, or context, that will motivate your students to write. In a business English course, students will handle all types of business situations. Teens relate to pop stars, sports, fashion, TV, and movies.

Whether it is creative writing, business writing, or guided writing, we teach them by example first, and then let them have free reign in the way they express themselves in writing.

Audio-Visual Aids in Teaching Writing

By audio-visual aids, we mean films, filmstrips, radio and television. In the twentieth century, powerful means of reproduction, associated with radio, cinema and television, have changed the aspect of the problem. Audio and visual illustrations ‘are no longer mere minor complements to thought but they directly influence our thoughts and the very conduct of millions of individuals. It is therefore imperative that this powerful instrument should be mastered to discipline it. There is no doubt that audio-visual aids produce best results when they are used in active teaching methods.

Nothing is learned in vacuum. Moving from the notion of writing as product to writing as process and the notion of integrating skills has caused researchers to integrate some skills or materials with writing skills (Richards and Renandya, 2002). Reading is a kind of visual aid which can be used in writing classes. Specifically, reading improves writing skill. (Boran, 2009).
Richards and Renandya (2002) believe some materials such as videos and software can stimulate writing. The three areas of interest are the effects of reading as a visual presentation, listening as an audio presentation, and documentaries as audiovisual presentations.

First, writing is a complex meta-cognitive activity, a difficult skill because it requires writers to have a great deal of lexical and syntactic ease as well as principles of organization in a second language to produce effective writing. Second, learners need to have a certain amount of L2 background knowledge about the rhetorical organizations, appropriate language use or specific lexicon to communicate to their readers. The last point which has been noted by many researchers (Arcario and Stempleski, 1992; Flynn, 1998; Hsu, 2011; Mayer, 2002; Rieber, 1991; Tajima, 2006; Tuttle, 1975) is lack of motivation in writing classes which may be the result of the lack of exposure to authentic language materials such as visuals, audios, or audiovisuals.

In EFL classes, reading (i.e., newspaper articles, poems, stories, formal or informal letters, application forms, critiques, notes, messages, etc.) can be used in teaching writing so that learners can take them as models of written discourse of their target language since they represent the rhetoric, texture, various genres, and styles of written discourse of English (Boran, 2009). Krashen (1987) believes that through reading we have the opportunity of being exposed to well-organized and well-written pieces of writing which help us to improve our language abilities and to build writing schemata. Casanave (2004), states that writing is a social practice which requires deep engagement with reading and with other writers. Even in a writing class, reading a text is important because it will give students many ideas and varied effective writing styles. Escribano (1999) concludes that Text analysis is an important means for building schemata for writing. Owing to the fact that audio materials can be used in EFL classes; it may affect writing skills. Reid (1995) has investigated the use of listening in writing classes. Reid concludes that listening is an input for writers.

Film is one of the visual aids that can be used in a writing class. It makes lessons more fun. It can also be used to create a situation for writing classes in which the students are enthusiastic about learning the process of writing (Harmer, 2001). Besides, authenticity, according to Morrow (1977), is a stretch of real language,
produced by a real speaker or writer, for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort. Moreover, Hsu (2011) feels that multimedia appears to provide additional channels for exposure to English. As such, reading-to-write may no longer be an exclusive task in a composition classroom. Lin (2004) has found out that audiovisual aids affect vocabulary learning leading to writing improvement.

**What Writing Involves**

**Planning** - which means keeping objectives in mind and researching the topic. The writer must think about the audience and create an outline that will help organize thoughts. Use the interview approach to supplement the outline (who, what, where, when, how)

**Why plan your writing?** There are many benefits to planning your writing. It helps you to

- come up with new ideas
- record your ideas
- organise your thoughts and
- check that you have all the information you need

**What to think about when planning?**

When planning your writing you need to think about **why** you are writing, **what** situation you are in when writing and **who** you are writing to. Think of the three W's

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**How students should plan their writing?**

Before planning the writing, the teacher must help students in the following areas:

- Correctly identifying the parts of a sentence
• Understanding complex sentences
• Learning subject-verb agreement
• Differentiating between plural and possessive nouns
• Using pronouns, adjectives and adverbs in sentences
• Identifying and spelling words that often confuse writers
• Correctly using commas, semicolons, and other punctuation
• Proofreading their writing for errors

As William Strunk Jr (1919) states describes the elementary rules of usage:

1. Form the possessive singular of nouns with 's. Follow this rule whatever the final consonant. Thus write,

   • Charles's friend
   • Burns's poems

Exceptions are the possessives of ancient proper names in -es and -is, the possessive Jesus', and such forms as for conscience' sake, for righteousness' sake. But such forms as Achilles' heel, Moses' laws, Isis' temple are commonly replaced by the heel of Achilles.

The pronominal possessives hers, its, theirs, yours, and oneself have no apostrophe.

2. In a series of three or more terms with a single conjunction, use a comma after each term except the last. Write,

   red, white, and blue

In the names of business firms the last comma is omitted, as

   Brown, Shipley and Company

Planning

There are different methods of planning. The teacher can choose the method that suits him/her or the situation:
1. **Diagrams**

Diagrams are a visual way of planning and organizing your writing.

- **With spider diagrams and idea maps** we can jot down lots of ideas in no particular order to help us organize our thoughts.
- **Flow charts** are useful for planning writing that has to follow a step-by-step process, like a recipe.

**Lists**

Lists are useful for jotting down and ordering all the different points we want to cover in our writing.

- **Bulleted lists** are a common type of list used on the computer.
- When each idea is put on a **sticky note** then one can move the different points of writing around until satisfied with the order.

**Writing frames**

These are a guide we can use when planning our writing. They have frames, or headed boxes, with titles to prompt what to write. We can use frames as guidance for writing documents which always include the same kind of information, such as a curriculum vitae (CV) or a birthday invitation.

**What to do after planning?**

Once we planned our writing we come on to the next stage:

2. **Writing a draft.**

A draft is a rough plan of our writing. There are many benefits to writing a draft. It helps us to:

- concentrate on the **content**, the writing, rather than the punctuation, spelling or grammar,
- check that the writing flows well. (Do you need to move any ideas around? Have you included everything you wanted to say?) and
- look at the layout of your writing. (Is it too far up the page? If writing a letter, do you have the address in the correct place?)
Once the draft is ready, students can then go back and proofread their writing. This is the time to check for spelling, punctuation etc.

**How many drafts should there be?**

Students need to reread their work. The writer must critically appraise his own work. One can write as many drafts as possible. The number of drafts depends on the situation and time available.

Writing should be concise. — A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell. — (William Strunk Jr.1919)

**Pruning the redundant**

Inform students to avoid saying the same thing twice

- Many uneducated citizens who have never attended school continue to vote for better schools.
- A phrase that repeats itself—like "true fact," "twelve noon," "I saw it with my own eyes"—is sometimes called a pleonasm.

**Brevity of Language**

Clauses or phrases can be reduced. A "which clause" can often be shortened to a simple adjective. However, we need to be careful not to lose some needed emphasis by over-pruning.

- *Smith College, which was founded in 1871, is the premier all-women's college in the United States.*
- *Founded in 1871, Smith College is the premier all-women's college in the United States.*

Phrases, too, can sometimes be trimmed, to a single word.

- *Unencumbered by a sense of responsibility, Jason left his wife with forty-nine kids and a can of beans.*
- *Jason irresponsibly left his wife with forty-nine kids and a can of beans.*
Verbosity is considered to be a common failing in Indian writing. We tend towards convoluted sentences and big words. The trick is to balance simple sentences and complex sentences, big and small words to achieve both lucidity and beauty.

**Empty Intensifiers**

Avoid words such as *really, very, quite, extremely, severely* when they are not necessary. It is probably enough to say that the salary increase is *inadequate*. These words needn't be banished from our vocabulary, but they will be used to best effect when used sparingly.

| as a matter of fact | As a matter of fact, there are more woodlands in Connecticut now than there were in 1898 |
| as a matter of fact | There are more woodlands in Connecticut now than there were in 1898 |
| as far as I'm concerned | As far as I'm concerned, there is no need for further protection of woodlands. |

Handout a sheet with Brian Murphy's Big List of Clichés, for a list of things to avoid saying.

For e.g: acid test; meaningful dialogue; at loose ends; moving experience.

**Conclusion/Tips**

It is the teachers job to guide the students on how they should be ready to take on the task of editing and critically evaluating their own writing after which a feedback on the draft should be collected.

1. Brush up on the basic principles of writing, grammar and spelling.
2. Write like it’s your job and practice regularly.
3. Read more so you develop an eye for what effective writing looks like.
4. Find a partner. Ask them to read your writing and provide feedback.
5. Join a workshop.
6. Imitate writers you admire.

7. Outline your writing.

8. Edit your writing.

9. Accept that first drafts are often bad and revise.

10. Find an editor who demonstrates patience.

11. Eliminate unnecessary words from your writing.

12. Review your earlier work and see how you’ve grown.

13. Don’t be afraid to say what you mean in what you write.

14. Make sure you do adequate research on your topic.

15. Don’t delay writing.

Let us sum up the characteristics of good writing

- **Completeness**: Check that all information needed is provided
- **Correctness**: Whatever information is provided is relevant and precise.
- **Accurate**: Check for accuracy in grammar, spelling, punctuation
- **Credibility**: The argument dealt with is properly supported.
- **Consideration**: As the writer the student must anticipate the reader’s reaction
- **Vitality**: use the active voice rather than the passive voice
- **Clarity**: The writing should not be vague, confusing or ambiguous as ambiguity will result in poor comprehension and more confusion.

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