

~ PRACTICAL, DETAILED AND
ILLUMINATING GUIDE ~

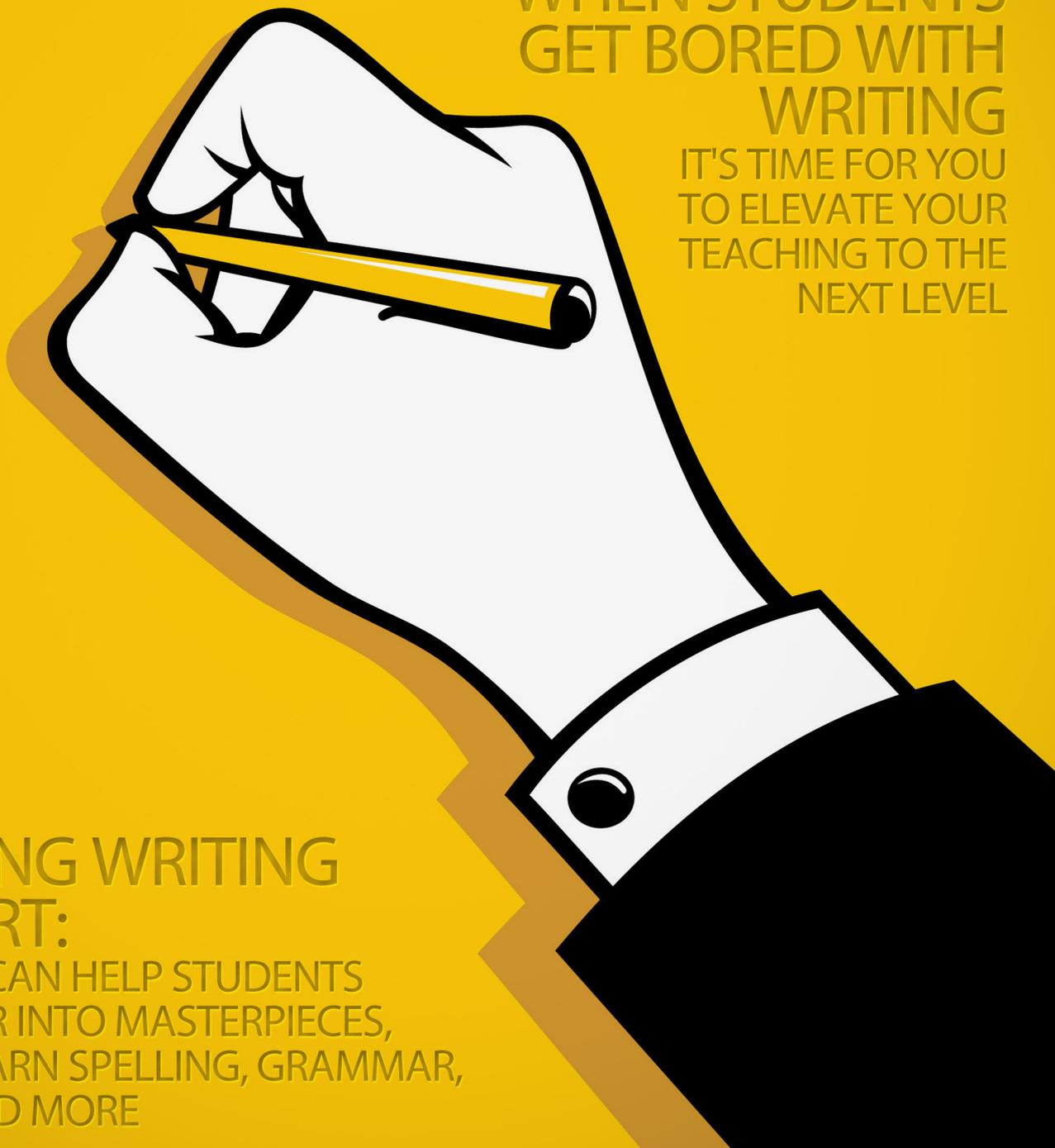
THE
ART OF

TEACHING WRITING

46 GUIDES WITH HOW-TO'S, CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES, LESSON PLANS AND MORE

WHEN STUDENTS
GET BORED WITH
WRITING

IT'S TIME FOR YOU
TO ELEVATE YOUR
TEACHING TO THE
NEXT LEVEL



TEACHING WRITING
IS AN ART:

ONLY YOU CAN HELP STUDENTS
TURN PAPER INTO MASTERPIECES,
AS THEY LEARN SPELLING, GRAMMAR,
EDITING AND MORE



TO BE THE BEST WRITING TEACHER, YOU NEED THE RIGHT LESSONS, TOOLS, AND PASSION

CONTENTS

- 3 **MUST READ:** 7 ESL Writing Tools You Would Never Have Imagined
- 4 **MUST READ:** Short, Sweet & Sticky: Get Students Writing With These 6 Writing Activities
- 5 **MUST READ:** How to Teach Writing Skills: 6 Best Practices
- 6 **MUST READ:** Write ON! Writing Strategies for the ESL Classroom
- 7 **MUST READ:** The Write Stuff - Top 10 Writing Tasks
- 8-9 **MUST READ:** From Conversational to Academic: Moving from “He Was All Like...” to “According to the Author...”
- 10-11 **MUST READ:** Are Your Students Bored with Black and White? 12 Top Tps for Making Writing Fun
- 12-13 **BEGINNERS:** Getting to the Point: 6 Short Writing Activities for Beginning ESL Students
- 14 **YOUNG LEARNERS:** Not Too Young to Write! 7 Writing Tasks for Young ESL Learners
- 15-16 **LEARNING CENTERS:** 10 Fantastic Learning Centers for Writing Class
- 17 **STORY GENERATING IDEAS:** Brown Bag The Final Word! 5 Super Inspiring Story Generating Ideas You’ve Never Tried Before
- 18-19 **CREATIVE WRITING:** Use Your Creativity: 10 Ways to Bring Creative Writing into the ESL Classroom
- 20-21 **COMPOSITION:** Teaching Composition to Students without Them (and You) Dying of Boredom
- 22-23 **DRAFTING:** Teaching the Art of Drafting in Composition
- 24-25 **WRITER’S BLOCK:** Teacher, I’m “Blocked”! Dealing with “Writer’s Block” in the Classroom
- 26-27 **OUTLINING:** Teaching the Art of Outlining in Composition
- 28-29 **DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS:** Teaching the Art of Development of Ideas in Composition
- 30-31 **PREWRITING:** Teaching the Art of Prewriting in Composition
- 32-33 **REVISION:** Teaching the Art of Revision in Composition
- 34-35 **REVISION:** What Do You Mean You Can’t Understand It? Teaching Students Revision and Self-Editing Skills
- 36 **PARAPHRASING:** In Your Own Words: 5 Ideas for Teaching Paraphrasing
- 37-38 **EDITING:** Up, Down and All Around: 3 Editing Strategies
- 39-40 **ERROR CORRECTION:** 10 Most Common Writing Mistakes and How to Bust Them
- 41-42 **ERROR CORRECTION:** Correct Me if I’m Wrong: Error Correction in Writing & Speech
- 43 **PROOFREADING:** How to Teach Proofreading Skills: 6 Best Practices
- 44-45 **SPELLING:** Top 4 spelling tricks for ESL learners
- 46 **CLAIMS:** We’re A Bazillion Dollars In Debt - I Read It On The Internet: Teaching Students To Support Claims
- 47 **PLAGIARISM:** Plagiarism No More: 5 Strategies for Helping Students to Understand Academic Integrity
- 48 **PUNCTUATION:** How to Teach Punctuation Skills: 5 Best Practices
- 49-50 **SPELLING:** 10 Fun English Spelling Games
- 51 **SPELLING:** What’s the Buzz About? 5 Steps to Planning a Spelling Bee for ESL Students
- 52 **EMAIL WRITING:** How to Use Email Writing in the Classroom
- 53 **INTERACTIVE WRITING:** 7 Ways to Get Students to Collaborate in Interactive Writing
- 54-55 **SUPPORT:** Be Reasonable: How to Help Your Students Write Using Good Support
- 56-57 **FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE:** Figure Friendly: How to Teach Your ESL Students About Figurative Language
- 58 **ALPHABETICAL ORDER:** As Easy as ABC: 9 Hands On Activities for Teaching Alphabetical Order
- 59-60 **SUMMARY WRITING:** Scaffolding Summary Writing
- 61 **SUMMARY WRITING:** The Summary Response Essay: 5 Essential Components
- 62 **NOTE-TAKING:** Note-Taking During Lectures: 7 Ways to Help Students Prepare
- 63 **JORNALING:** Make them Want to Write: 6 Journaling Activities that Teens Will Love
- 64 **ESSAY WRITING:** Falling Asleep Over Student Essays? Shhh - We Won’t Tell Anyone! But Here’s How Their Essays Can Come To Life Through Details
- 65-66 **TIMED WRITING:** To Timed Write or Not to Timed Write: How to Answer the Question for Yourself
- 67-68 **NOTEBOOKS:** Two Sides to Every Page: 4 Fantastic ESL Resources in One Notebook
- 69-70 **NOTEBOOKS:** What IS a Writer’s Notebook? And Why Should my ESL Students Have One?
- 71-72 **RUBRICS:** How To Design A Rubric That Teachers Can Use And Students Can Understand
- 73 **LITERACY BIOGRAPHY:** Key Reading and Writing Experiences: Getting a Literacy Biography
eltshop.ir

7 ESL Writing Tools You Would Never Have Imagined

ENGLISH WRITING SKILLS ARE ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL IN TODAY'S WORLD. THE PROBLEM IS...WRITING PRACTICE IS BORING!

By the time you finish saying, "Take out a sheet of paper and a pen", half your class is already asleep. Besides, in today's world... who still writes with paper and pen? Computer literacy goes hand in hand with learning to read and write: students are expected to master all kinds of electronic communication and online publishing tools. So the big question is: how can we assign writing tasks that help students develop the writing and online publishing skills they need in today's world? That's easy! Try any of these 7 writing tools you would never have imagined using in your ESL classroom.

7 ONLINE WRITING TOOLS FOR THE ESL CLASSROOM

1 TRY... EMAIL!

This should come as no surprise, as I have been writing about the advantages of email writing in the ESL classroom for a while now. But some ESL teachers are still reluctant to use email for writing practice. Chances are, our students will need to write emails in English some time in the near future, so why not prepare them for it? Email writing is an area that encompasses a whole lot more than simple letter writing. Students need to learn how to convey the right tone and use the appropriate email etiquette. And there is no better way to practice than online, by sending real emails to you and the rest of the class.

2 TRY... BLOGS!

Blogging is no longer for individuals with tons of free time on their hands. Company websites often have blogs where they report the latest industry trends, and inform customers about services and products. Blogging requires a specific set of skills, and blog writing is different from story writing or journaling. Blogging is a skill your students could really use in today's world. There are numerous free blogging platforms you can

use with your class, from Wordpress to Pen.io, a website that allows students to create their own custom URL, write a blog post and publish it immediately.

3 TRY... MURALS!

Murals or online corkboards are wonderful collaborative tools where students can not only share images but also write about them. I absolutely love Mural.ly, and I really recommend it because it gives you a variety of text options, from sticky notes you can add to describe an image, to titles and bigger text boxes. Murals are the perfect way to combine writing with multimedia.

4 TRY... FORUMS!

Forums allow students to practice their writing skills but also their communication skills, by giving them the opportunity to interact with other ESL students. You need to make sure you find the right forum for your students, though: it needs to be moderated for appropriate content and safe for students to use. Dave's ESL Café offers a great student forum where students can ask others for recommendations and share information on topics that interest them. If you want a more controlled environment, you might want to consider starting a closed Facebook group as a space for more informal interactions. Students from other ESL classes in your school could join, thus expanding the network.

5 TRY... JOURNALS!

Journal writing is also a big favorite with ESL teachers, but have you ever tried an online journal? Penzu offers exactly that, an online diary your students can access from any mobile device. Students have the option to insert photos and comments, and while the journal is completely private by default, students may share individual entries with you via email. ESL teachers may also create a "classroom" and provide students with a code that allows them to share their entries as a collection.

6 TRY... STORIES!

Sometimes ESL students need a little something extra to write a story. Storybird is an online publishing platform that not only engages students with cool tools, but also lets them pair their writing with beautiful art. Once you've tried Storybird, your learners' stories will never be the same!

7 TRY... DISCUSSION PLATFORMS!

Discussions are great speaking activities in the ESL classroom, but they pose some problems. A handful of students might dominate the conversation while others sit quietly and don't respond. Some feel confident speaking out loud, while others have plenty to share but are too self-conscious to chime in. CollaborizeClassroom is a free collaborative platform where students and teachers can interact. It may look and feel like a forum, but what you get is actually your own free site to share with your students. Simply add a discussion topic and let students write in their responses. You can attach videos, documents or images to spark the conversation. Finally, you can also track student participation.

I'm not telling anyone to put aside the paper and pen, and make all writing online. All I'm saying is, whether we like it or not, our students need to have online literacy: they need to be able to communicate in English through a variety of platforms and tools. Choose one, or several, but I definitely recommend you add at least one to the mix. And the beauty of keeping at least some of these writing activities online is that you'll have fewer notebooks, files or papers scattered around your desk!

HOW DO I CHOOSE THE RIGHT ONE?

As always, you'll need to consider your students' needs. Business English students will definitely make the most out of email writing, while a group of introverted teens may really connect with an online journal. But by choosing at least one online tool, you'll be giving your students a lot more than English writing skills. You'll be giving them skills they can use in the globalized, digital world.

Short, Sweet & Sticky: Get Students Writing With Six Writing Activities

JUST HOW MUCH CAN A PERSON WRITE ON A POST-IT NOTE?

When you are using them in the classroom, it's not how much you write but what you write. You can use these simple sticky notes to get your students started on all kinds of writing projects. Keeping the planning simple makes the writing assignments less intimidating, and this can be extremely important for students of English as a second language.

HOW TO GET YOUR STUDENTS WRITING WITH THESE 6 POST-IT NOTE ACTIVITIES

1 PERSONAL NOTES

Part of being a good teacher is having good relationships with your students, but that is not always easy to do when you teach a big class. You can use this simple note writing technique with your students to create one on one dialogue and get them to practice their writing skills at the same time. A few minutes before the school day is over, give each person a post-it note to stick on his or her desk. On the note, encourage your student to tell you something about their experiences that day. You might ask what activity they found particularly interesting or what they may not have understood during the day. If you like, have a ready list of questions posted in your classroom so your students can refer to it each day when they write their notes. Then, once the class has left, go through the class and read these notes. Make notes back to your students (on additional post-its) so they know you have heard what they said. You will feel closer to your students, and you may find out some interesting facts that your students may have been too shy to share during class!

2 ELEMENTS OF STORY

Every story has four essential pieces – the character, setting, conflict and resolution. To make sure your ESL students are including all of these essentials in their next story, do this activity before you write. Give each student four post-it notes (four different colors if possible) and explain the four elements that each story should contain. Keeping it simple is best. Character is who is in the story. Setting is where the story hap-

pens. Conflict is the main problem in the story, and the resolution is how that problem gets fixed. Then, have your students write the character, setting, conflict and resolution for the story they will be writing on their four post-its. Now when they go to write their stories, they will have a physical reminder of everything they need to include to make sure their stories are complete.

3 THE NARRATIVE ARC

I often use a six panel comic strip to teach my students about narrative arc when they are writing stories, and the activity easy translates to using post-its in the classroom. Give each student six post-it notes and have her arrange them in a line on her desk. On the first post-it, have your students draw a picture of the main character. On the second, she should draw the setting. On the third note, she draws the problem that the main character encounters. Then, on notes four and five, she draws the problem getting worse and worse. On the last note, the student draws her main character solving her own problem. Once each student has these six pictures, she can use these as a guideline as she writes her story. When she does, her story will come out with a strong narrative arc. Drawing the pictures also helps students who might otherwise be intimidated in a foreign language writing class.

4 STAMP OF APPROVAL

Using small post-it notes, have each person in your class design a stamp that they would like to see printed. The stamp should feature a person, and your students will have to explain why they think that person should have their own official postage. After the stamps are designed, have each person write a letter to the U.S. Post Office explaining why this person should be featured on a stamp. Your students should give three or four good reasons in their letter as well as a short biography of the person. Your students should then include the picture they drew on the post-it and close their letters appropriately. If you like, extend the activity by creating the stamps your students proposed. Several websites let you print your own U.S. postal stamps from an image you upload from your computer.

5 CLASSROOM OPINIONS

How do opinions vary among your students? Is there a majority and a minority when it comes to popular issues? To see what your students are really thinking, have a post-it poll in your classroom! Write a question that touches on a popular issue on your board, and give each student a post-it on which to write his answer. Once everyone's answers are written, have them stick their post-its to the board to form a bar graph which shows the possible answers to the question. Once students can see where their classmates' opinions fall, have each person write an essay about the issue. In the essay, he should identify whether his opinion came in line with the majority or the minority, why he chose that side of the issue, and what he would say to sway someone from the opposition.

6 STICKY DIALOGUE

You can use post-its in your classroom to create a conversation with a paper trail. Give each student several post-it notes. On the first, have him answer a question. Any question will work, but you might want to tie the question into a unit you are studying in class or have students share information that will help them get to know one another better. Make sure everyone has written his name on the note, and then have your class stick their notes on an open bulletin board. Give your class a chance to read what their classmates have written, and then have them respond to one of the notes on their second post-its. Again, students should write their names on the notes and then stick them below the note they responded to. Repeat this activity with a third and fourth post-it. Now that the conversations are finished, review with your students the differences between quoted and reported speech. Each student should then choose one of the conversations and write it using correct grammar and punctuation in both quoted and reported styles.

A BIG, BLANK PAGE CAN BE INTIMIDATING TO ANYONE, AND ESL STUDENTS ARE CERTAINLY NO EXCEPTION.

Using simple little sticky notes can do so much to put your students at ease when it comes to writing, and the little notes can also be used to teach beg concepts in writing class.

How to Teach Writing Skills:

6 Best Practices

WHEN TOLD YOU'RE GOING TO TEACH ESL COMPOSITION (AGAIN) YOU MAY INWARDLY GROAN. NOT AGAIN!

Not another semester of hauling home 30 drafts of papers filled with mangled verb tense and dropped articles. Not again - teaching the same model essays of comparison and contrast and cause and effect (which in no way resemble the kind of writing done anywhere outside a composition class. In fact, I don't think I've seen a pure compare-contrast essay in an authentic setting.) Teaching composition, however, is a reality for most ESL teachers — with budget cuts, writing is seen as the most important skill that ESL students need in order to pass exams such as proficiency tests now often required for graduation or admission to graduate school. Often it seems, in fact, that we are teaching a kind of academic writing tailored very specifically to these tests. Hardly the curriculum that leads to inspired teaching or learning. There are, however, ways that the teacher can develop the curriculum and methods to go beyond teaching to the test and still meet course objectives.

STRATEGIES TO INSPIRE STUDENTS TO WRITE WELL DESPITE AN UNINSPIRING CURRICULUM

1 EMPHASIZE WRITING IS AN ACT OF COMMUNICATION FOREMOST

People write for a particular purpose in mind, for the most part, and to communicate a specific point — not to show they know how to write a compare-contrast paper. Discuss types of writing we might do to communicate a specific message: the kind of writing I'd use to a business to inform the management of how unhappy I am with the service I received, for example, is very different than the type of writing done to get out of a parking ticket, or express my love to my significant other. Teachers should discuss the power of writing: writing has inspired love, righted social ills, and moved people revolution. While we won't necessarily adopt these as our goals, a discussion on the power of writing demonstrates that it is much more than an empty exercise to show bureaucrats I should graduate.

2 GIVE OUT INSPIRING TOPICS

People write for a particular purpose in the “real world”: see above. They write to express outrage at the carnage that gun ownership causes, to show how the education system in the U.S. differs from their first country and the problems that might cause, to right a social ill such as the treatment of undocumented immigrants. In writing toward a topic and with a purpose, students generally must develop some mastery of several rhetorical modes, such as exemplification and persuasion, and the language that goes with them, if they want their message to be communicated.

3 DEVELOP A SENSE OF AUDIENCE

Few things cause more a sense of futility than talking to oneself — there's a reason that most people in solitary confinement lose their minds in a short period of time. Students should work in a community to share their ideas and their work. Working with a peer group, reading aloud their work, and responding holistically to each other, such as “I understand your main point, but I'm not sure if the tone is going to help you achieve your purpose,” helps students develop a sense of audience. And once they have worked together a few times, this sense of audience becomes internalized: as they compose the essays at home, students are likely to consider if their peer group will understand and react favorably to their message.

4 EMPHASIZE GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION AS CONVENTION: IMPORTANT BUT NOT THE HIGHEST IMPORTANCE

Something else that discourages student writers is for them to labor over a paper and communicate what they see as an important message, and which is in fact an important issue — students pay too much for textbooks, we are too addicted to social media — and then have the teacher focus on their comma splices or nonstandard capitalization before even addressing the main point. Do we worry about our grammar and punctuation when we write a letter to our congressmen or to a business because we think the rules of formal writing are more important than our message? No. We worry about using correct

grammar and punctuation because incorrect conventions may detract in some way from our message or credibility. This is how conventions should be treated in the classroom: of importance but not of the first importance of writing, something to be addressed in a second draft after the main ideas of the writing have been addressed.

5 RECOGNIZE STUDENT WORK

Writers need to feel their writing does not occur in a vacuum, that someone is reading it and responding to it. Otherwise, why do it? In order to give students this recognition, consider developing a class newsletter that is student-driven, composed of student writing on student concerns, and put together by classmates in a desktop publishing program. In addition, reading bits of student essays in front of the class, with permission, to exemplify a good thesis statement or example, is a simple way to give recognition to student work.

6 RECOGNIZE PROGRESS

Writing is developmental. People don't generally “cram” for a writing exam and then improve exponentially overnight. It takes continue practice over time, much like mastering an instrument or foreign language or sport — analogies I like to emphasize to students. This nature of writing can be discouraging as it is slow and often seems as if no progress is taking place. Therefore, calling students' attention to the progress they've made and rewarding it becomes important. Implementing the portfolio method, in which each student's exemplary work is placed in a separate folder is a great method to use as students can actually see the progress they've made, from first essay to last, over a term. They teacher may also choose to reward such progress.

TEACHING A STANDARDIZED WRITING CLASS CAN BE DIFFICULT BECAUSE THE SYLLABUS AND CURRICULUM SEEM CONTRARY TO GOOD WRITING PRACTICES IN TEACHING TOWARD EXAMS AND NOT RECOGNIZING THE COMMUNICATIVE NATURE OF WRITING.

However, by emphasizing writing as a powerful act of communication, developing a sense of audience and purpose, and recognizing student work, students will no longer dread writing class but see it as enjoyable and a challenge!

Write ON! Writing Strategies for the ESL Classroom

ALL OF YOUR ESL STUDENTS CAN WRITE WORDS IN ENGLISH.

Most of them can even write complete sentences. But they can't really write. Writing, and I mean good writing, whether it is in your native or second language is not easy. And it's not something we do intuitively, naturally. Good writing has to be taught.

Let's face the facts. Students want to speak English. They rarely want to write (and if they do, it's email writing for business purposes). But it is absolutely essential for ESL students to learn solid writing strategies. Good writing skills, in any language, are a big advantage in the job market and vital for academic success. So, let's look at the writing strategies you should be teaching – today!

HOW TO TEACH WRITING STRATEGIES

1 CHOOSE A STRATEGY

Consider your students' level of English but also what they are struggling with. Do they need to learn to organize their writing? Do they need to get their point across more clearly? Do they simply need to write more? First, consider your goal and choose the strategy that will help you achieve it.

2 MODEL IT

Give them samples of the type of writing they are expected to achieve. Read them in class. Write something together, as a class or in small groups. Guide them step by step. For example, if you're teaching them to write an email, instruct them to write the greeting, the purpose of the email and the closing.

3 LET THEM TRY IT ON THEIR OWN - WITH YOUR ASSISTANCE

The next logical step is to instruct them to write on their own, but walk around the classroom and offer support and guidance to those who need it.

4 INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

There's no better way to improve writing than by practicing and then practicing some more. Give them writing assignments they must complete on their own and then turn in. Make sure to give the kind of feedback that will encourage them to keep writing. Of course, you have to correct mistakes but focus on how well they have used a particular writing strategy. Maybe their text is plagued with spelling mistakes, but the text is clear and well-organized.

THE WRITING PROCESS

Students should be familiar with the basic writing process:

1. Generate ideas
2. Organize and develop ideas
3. Edit

You can ask students to generate ideas on their own, or you can do it as a class. But they must know what they will write about before they put pen to paper. The way they organize their thoughts will depend on the writing strategy you are teaching. Editing and revision should be left for last.

SOME WRITING STRATEGIES FOR THE ESL CLASSROOM

1 FAST AND FURIOUS WRITING

Say you're trying to foster creative writing. Nothing kills creativity faster than agonizing over every single word and how it's spelled. This exercise is great for when you want to get those creative juices flowing. Remember and remind students that this is not a grammar or spelling exercise. The main objective is to get some writing done! Give them a topic to write about – make it easy, something that will flow easily, like a narrative: Write about the best summer vacation you ever had.

Tell them they will have a time limit (say 10-15 minutes). They must write as fast as they can, just letting the words flow.

No erasing or pausing. Give them a one minute warning before time is up. Once they're done, they will have produced what they should consider a raw material, not the final piece of writing. Help them polish this raw material for grammar, spelling and structure. They should start the revision process on their own and submit it to you for a final revision.

2 GETTING GRAPHIC

Graphic organizers are excellent tools for organizing writing. Word clusters or Topic Wheels are great for brainstorming ideas they will cover in their topic. Story Maps are perfect for students who are learning to write a story.

3 USING TEMPLATES

Nothing inhibits writing more than a blank sheet of paper. Similar to graphic organizers, templates are forms that have blanks or questions students can complete, or samples they can model. Typical templates used for ESL students are email, CVs or resumes, and reviews. Young learners in particular need templates more than adult learners. For example, this template helps them write about their holidays by giving them prompts.

4 ADDRESSING THE READER

One aspect of good writing that students need to know is that they must always address the reader. What does the reader need to know? What questions can they expect the reader to ask? For example, if you're writing an email to invite people to a special event, you can expect them to want to know when and where it will be held.

BEAR IN MIND THAT ESL STUDENTS NEED SPECIFIC TYPES OF WRITING STRATEGIES.

They may rarely have to write lengthy essays or reports (or they might have to, particularly students who will sit for international examinations). Give them the type of writing they will need. And give them the tools to get it done.

The Write Stuff - Top 10 Writing Tasks for the ESL Class

HOW DO ESL STUDENTS COMMUNICATE MOST OF THE TIME? IN SPOKEN LANGUAGE.

Most ESL students (particularly adults) will recognize the importance of improving speaking skills. But what about writing skills? Umm...not so much.

In my experience, most of the students who want to communicate better in writing are those who need to do so for work. But all ESL students must learn to improve their writing, and here's why: writing is an important form of communication. Students who can communicate well in writing will have a distinct advantage over those who don't. Moreover, the thought processes that go into writing are different from those needed to speak. Students learn more about structure and how to organize texts – it's a great way to build their language skills, whether they have to do a great deal of writing outside the classroom or not.

Before moving on to the top ten writing tasks for the ESL class, let's look at the four basic types of writing, shall we?

4 BASIC TYPES OF WRITING

1 EXPOSITORY WRITING

Focuses on the facts. The goal is to provide explanations, information or definitions. There are no opinions, just clear, hard facts. Example: a Wikipedia entry.

2 NARRATIVE WRITING

Tells a story. It usually follows a sequence of events and is written in the first person. It can be fiction or non-fiction. Example: a What I Did Last Summer writing assignment.

3 PERSUASIVE WRITING

Expresses an opinion. It provides arguments as to why this opinion is correct and tries to convince the reader. It often mentions the opposing view but provides statistics, facts or proof that supports the opinion held. Example: an essay about Why Uniforms Are Good (or Why Uniforms Are Bad).

4 DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

Provides a vivid picture. The goal is to help the reader picture in their mind's eye that which is being described. It's like painting a picture with words. This

is why descriptive language is very detailed. Example: describing a photo.

Good! Now let's see the top ten writing tasks for the ESL class and which categories they fall under. It's a good idea to give your ESL students a variety of writing tasks, keeping the four types of writing in mind.

TOP 10 WRITING TASKS FOR THE ESL CLASS

1 CORRESPONDENCE

Whether it is email or personal correspondence, we often ask ESL students to "write a letter". The great thing about this particular writing task is that it is very versatile. You can assign a letter that is descriptive, persuasive or narrative. Business emails can be expository if they, for example, provide information about the company's product. They're also typically shorter, making it easier to focus on the particular type of writing you want to teach.

2 REPORTS

Reports tend to be expository – imagine a book report, for example. You may ask students to summarize who the main characters are and cover the main plot points. Reports may also be short research papers about an animal, technological gadget or issue. You may also adjust the length and topic of the report to suit your students' level.

3 ESSAYS

Essays are typically persuasive. You ask students to adopt a certain point of view, to pick a side, so to speak. Think of the type of essays students must write for international examinations like the Cambridge exams. Because they are more difficult, essays are usually assigned and practiced in ESL classes aimed at exam preparation.

4 STORIES

Naturally, stories use narrative writing. Don't think that only advanced or older students are capable of writing stories – encourage young learners to write them, too, even if it's only a few lines.

5 ARTICLES

Articles are typically expository.

Think of newspaper articles. They are not biased and merely present the facts. Students can have a go at this type of writing by creating their own newspaper articles.

6 PRESENTATIONS

Writing assignments don't necessarily have to be long or written on a single sheet of paper. Let students create PowerPoint slides for either expository or persuasive writing tasks.

7 PRODUCT DESCRIPTIONS

A great way to practice descriptive writing is through product descriptions. Give students images of products you've cut from magazines or catalogues, and have them write a descriptive paragraph for each.

8 PROCEDURES

These are typically how to articles, which is why this is largely expository writing. You can ask students to write a wide variety of how to articles, from how to make a kite to how to cook something.

9 DIARY/JOURNAL ENTRIES

You might think that keeping a diary or journal in a second language is hard, and it can be, but I highly recommend this form of writing in most ESL levels. It's a wonderful opportunity for students to practice narrative or descriptive writing. You may choose to assign a one-time, stand alone entry, or ask them to write in a journal on a weekly basis.

10 BIOGRAPHIES

Have students write about their favorite celebrity, writer or inventor. They can practice narrative or expository writing, while they do research about someone they admire or look up to.

WHEN I TELL PEOPLE THAT I WRITE, THEY IMMEDIATELY JUMP TO THE CONCLUSION THAT I WRITE FICTION, IN OTHER WORDS, NARRATIVES.

And that's what students often think of when you mention writing assignments. But that's just one type of writing. Not everyone is good at narrative writing. Expose them to a variety of writing tasks, and they may come to realize they're good at one particular type. But they won't find out unless you show them.

Moving from “He Was All Like...” to “According to the Author...”

I am sometimes, while reading student essays, moving along fairly smoothly, and then I'll be hit with something like “He was all like... And then I was all like...” (to be “all like,” for the uninformed, is “to say” in some dialects).

Other big offenders are “totally” and “sort of” and “kind of” and “hella.”

It can be difficult determining what the source of the problem is in using language like this in an academic essay: do students just lack other language for terms like “angry” than “pissed off”? Or do they actually have other language resources but don't fully understand these highly conversational forms' inappropriateness in academic writing? Or perhaps they think that conversational usage is more expressive and effective?

The problem probably has a number of origins, but there are some ways that the instructor can address highly conversational language in student essays, moving students toward using the more academic register, or situation- appropriate language.

Following is a list of the kind of non-academic, conversational language I've seen in student papers this term, with examples and their approximate translations into Standard English:

CHECK CONVERSATIONAL VOCABULARY

1 ALL LIKE

to say. It's not uncommon to hear young adults in California (and probably the larger U.S. by this time) engaged in a conversation such as this: “He was all like... and then I was all like...” In conversational language, “all like means simply “said.”

2 HELLA/HECKA

“My new dress is hecca cute.”
Very much so, extremely.

3 TOTALLY

very much so, extremely, completely. Can be used with verbs, unlike “hecka/hella”: “I totally want to go.”

4 HEY/LIKE HEY

Really, an emphatic. “He said the food was bad, and I was like hey...”

5 KIND OF/KINDA WAY

“He asked me in a rude kinda way.” Manner.

6 TO GET A KICK OUT OF

“We went to the new James Bond movie and got a real kick out of it.” To enjoy.

7 CHILL/LAID BACK

“My professor is a chill/laid back kinda guy, so he took my late paper.” Calm, relaxed. “Chill” also can be used as a verb: “I'm busy, so just sit here and chill for a minute, okay?”

8 TO SORT OF CREEP OUT

“He gave me this smile that sort of creeped me out.” To rather frighten/scare.

9 TO KIND OF JUST ROLL WITH

“The teacher was all like ‘the assignment's due tomorrow,’ but whatever... we just rolled with it.” To accept.

10 TO GET PUNKED ON

“I have a sorta weird name, so I'm always getting punked on.” To be disrespected.

CONVERSATIONAL GRAMMAR

Run-ons and fragments are common to developmental writing, mainly because students write the way they speak, without regard to sentence

boundaries, and this tendency creeps into academic writing. Similarly, students make use of the narrative past, which is use of present verb tenses to discuss past events: “So anyway, I'm standing in the cafeteria, and this guy comes up behind me and bumps into me, and I'm all like...”

Moving students from this kind of highly conversational usage into a more academic register may seem like an impossible task, however, there are several steps an instructor can take to move students toward adopting the academic register.

CHECK OUT WAYS TO TEACH MORE ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

1 RAISE CONSCIOUSNESS

Sometimes I'll present students either a paragraph I've written myself or a past student's paper which uses highly conversational language, and students usually are quick to point out something doesn't “sound” right, although they may not be able to pinpoint it. This can then lead to a discussion of more appropriate language.

2 HAVE STUDENTS READ THEIR OWN WORK ALOUD

Because many students, native speakers of English as well as long-term immigrants, have often developed this sense of what “sounds” right, just reading their own work aloud can give them insight into problems with it, when they begin stumbling or hesitating in certain places, for example—insight they wouldn't necessarily get from just reviewing their work silently.

3 READ EACH OTHER'S WORK

Because students have more distance from their peers' work than their own, they are more likely to see problems with it. The reader can then circle

potential problem areas and discuss them with the paper's author.

4 DISCUSS MORE ACADEMIC CHOICES FOR CONVERSATIONAL LANGUAGE

Once students have developed a sense of the differences in “register,” or situational appropriateness, of language use, the instructor can then begin to teach the academic alternates to the conversational usage they are more used to: not “all like” but simply “said,” “wrote,” or “according to.” -- not “hella” or “hecka” but “completely” or “extremely.”

5 ENGAGE IN CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF TEXT

It can actually be more difficult to analyze an academic text using the conversational register: for example, “In the second paragraph, the author is all like...” sounds unnatural and may actually be a more difficult structure to form, taking conscious effort, just as it might take conscious effort to use the casual language you might use with peers with older family members or employers. Students, actually, already have some practice switching between registers, so when discussing an academic text, they often without much consideration move from “He’s all like--” to “According to the author--”

If the instructor finds students persist in using conversational language, then she might pass out a worksheet of conversational language/phrases with their more academic equivalents, modeling the academic usage and then having students consciously practice their use until it becomes more “natural.”

6 PRACTICE ACADEMIC DISCUSSION

As noted above (not “like I already said”), use of academic language is not something that always comes “naturally,” without conscious consideration, so some practice may be needed. After directly teaching students some of the academic words and phrases they might use in discussion, some strategies should be employed to get students to actually use this academic language in class.

The choice of academic/current topics

for discussion, such as the right to bear arms or the right of same sex couples to marry, often leads to the analysis of the Second and First Amendments, which can be difficult to discuss without the use of the academic register because those texts are written in the academic register. To use the conversational register when discussing them would then actually require the students to “translate” them into the conversational register, a conscious effort rather than the more straightforward process of just using the language already in the text.

7 SET UP A SYSTEM OF REWARDS

Although it may be too simplistic and behaviorist for some classes, as well as requiring careful monitoring by the teacher, setting up a system of rewarding points for the use of academic language during discussion will encourage its use. Also, points can be added if the academic register is used in short writing assignments and subtracted when the conversational creeps in.

MOVING STUDENTS FROM ACADEMIC LANGUAGE TO THE MORE APPROPRIATE ACADEMIC REGISTER CAN BE A CHALLENGE BECAUSE IT ULTIMATELY IS A FIRST STEP OF ENTERING AN ACADEMIC COMMUNITY OF ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION, AND WRITING CRITICALLY.

However, the first steps can be taken by raising student consciousness of this new manner of communicating, helping them enter the academic world.

Are your students bored? 12 top tips for making writing fun

If your students are struggling to write or they just lack inspiration, maybe it's time to inject your writing lessons with a little fun. These activities are great for getting students excited about writing and then helping them get the words on the page. How many of them have you tried with your students?

TRY THESE 12 TOP TIPS TO MAKE WRITING FUN

1 USE STICKERS

You don't have to limit your sticker use to marking a job well done. Use stickers to inspire your students to write while they have fun decorating the page. Gather a variety of stickers – people, animals, places, props, etc. – and cut them into individual pieces. Then throw all the stickers in a bag and shake it up. Let your students choose between three and five stickers (depending on their language level – more stickers for more advanced writers) and then have them incorporate those people or objects into a story of their own creation.

2 DO IT AS A CLASS

Do you write communal stories with your ESL students? If not, you should. Working together gets individual creativity flowing, and what we create with others is often far more than we could do ourselves. There are lots of ways to write with other people. Put several notebooks in a writing center. Have one person start a story or start it yourself, and then allow your students to add to a story of their choosing during free learning periods. Have one student choose the characters and another student the conflict, and then have them work together to write the final piece. Have one student write a sentence on a piece of paper and pass it to the person next to him. Then that person adds a sentence. Continue until everyone in class has had a chance to add their own line to the story.

3 READ

Reading is one of the greatest ways to inspire writers in your class. Choose a poem or a short piece of literature to read as a class. Then have students use that selection as a model for their own compositions. They can either follow the structure and style of what you read or just write about the same content. Either way, the great writers will come out among you when you give them great things to read.

4 GIVE CREATIVE INSPIRATION

When you take time and effort to inspire your writers, it is sure to show in their writing. Create a scene, draw a picture, collect interesting photos, or teach them appealing vocabulary. Then ask your students to use what you have prepared as inspiration for their own compositions. If you have never tried setting up a classroom crime scene to inspire your students, you might want to give it a try. Then let your students write and see how the creativity flows.

5 LET MISTAKES GO

Letting students make mistakes and not correcting them may go against the nature of the ESL teacher, but sometimes not saying something is the best policy. When students are overcorrected, they can become discouraged or fearful of writing. Try some freewriting or give your students permission to write freely in a journal. Make sure they know you won't be correcting for grammar or spelling. Then have students use what they wrote as a starting point for a more formal piece of writing which you will then correct.

6 SHOW THEM OFF

Recognize good writing in your students in front of their peers to inspire the writers among you. You might want to read particularly good writing to the rest of the class (with the

author's permission, of course). Try "publishing" books of your students' writing and then putting them on display in your classroom. Your bragging might be something as simple as stapling what your students have written to a bulletin board in your class, or displaying them in the hallway of your school. When your students feel proud of what they have written, it will inspire and encourage them to write more.

7 GIVE THEM INSPIRING TOOLS

Did you ever have a pen that wrote in four different colors? If you had one as a kid, you might have done what just about every other kid did. Write one line with each of the colors and rotate through the page. You can give your students creative inspiration in a writing center of your classroom even if you don't have four-colored pens for the entire class. On a spare desk, set out several different colors and types of paper with colored pens and pencils. Include pencils and markers that are scented as well. You may find that your students write just so they can use a different type of paper or color pen.

8 ILLUSTRATE

Some students become discouraged when they write because they just can't get their ideas across. Give them another avenue to communicate by asking them to illustrate their story or nonfiction piece. When students know they can include a picture to share their thoughts, their inability to express exactly what they want in writing becomes less of an obstacle. Your struggling writers know that they can include important information in their picture, and it won't be a total loss if they can't find the right words to put their ideas into writing.

9 MAKE IT REAL LIFE

Some students get frustrated when they are writing for writing's

sake. Help these students by giving them a purpose for what they are writing. Have them write letters, thank you cards, e-mails, or other pieces they will have a use for in real life. If you like, let them “mail” the letters and cards to their classmates in a classroom mail center or through the U.S. mail.

10 BE A MODEL

If you want your students to have fun while writing, be sure to model your own writing for them. Let them see you write while they do, and share what you have written with them. Students who write well usually have teachers who write well, also.

11 KEEP A WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

A writer's notebook is a great place for your students to collect ideas and get creative. You can direct students to particular exercises in their writer's notebook or let them come up with the ideas on their own. Then, when it's time to write, students will have a notebook full of ideas from which they can draw ideas and inspiration.

12 HAVE FUN TEACHING WRITING

The most effective tool you have for bringing fun to writing for your students is to have fun while teaching it. If you appreciate the value of what you are teaching and are enthusiastic about it, your students will be, too.

Getting to the Point: 6 Writing Activities for Beginning Students

WHEN YOU ARE TEACHING BEGINNING ESL, ENGLISH LITERACY, OR ANY LOW LEVEL ENGLISH COURSES, YOU MAY FIND YOUR STUDENTS ARE NOT QUITE READY FOR STANDARD WRITING CLASS ASSIGNMENTS.

It makes sense. Students who are near the start of their English studies are not going to have the tools to write a five paragraph essay or take an essay exam. But completely eliminating writing assignments for beginning students doesn't help them in the long run. For these students, short writing assignments are best. When they can write a few sentences that serve a practical purpose, they will see the progress they have made in English as well as the practical applications of that knowledge. When you have a class of beginners and are looking for some interesting short writing assignments for your students, here are some ideas.

TRY THESE 6 SHORT WRITING ACTIVITIES WITH YOUR BEGINNING ESL STUDENTS

1 THE SIMPLE PARAGRAPH

One of the first writing assignments any student receives is writing a composed paragraph. Just about any topic you are teaching in class can be the subject of a paragraph. When you break the paragraph into smaller elements, your students will see that four to six sentences do not have to be overwhelming. The first element of a paragraph is the topic sentence. This sentence gives the reader the main point of the paragraph. The last sentence of a paragraph, when it stands alone, is a concluding sentence. It gives some final thoughts about the topic. In between are two to four sentences that expand the idea, give examples, or argue a point. For example, a simple paragraph about fall might look like this. Note the use of color words and fall vocabulary.

Fall is a beautiful season. (**introduc-**

tory sentence) Green leaves change to red, orange and yellow. People use brightly colored pumpkins and gourds as decorations. The sky is blue, and the wind is soft. (**supporting sentences**) I enjoy fall in the U.S. (**concluding sentence**)

2 POSTCARDS

For so many students, studying English means travelling overseas. For these students, every day is a chance to experience something new. They can share their experiences with others with a simple postcard written in English. Postcards follow a standard format that can give your students practice with the simple past or present progressive tenses. They are also a great way to apply vocabulary about vacation or geography. Standard postcards have five simple parts.

1. The greeting
2. A sentence about where you are
3. One or two sentences about what you are doing or have done
4. A closing
5. A signature

When students follow this formula, their postcard will look like the following.

Dear _____,
I am in _____. We are
having a great time. Yesterday
we _____. Monday we
_____. Wish you were
here.
Love, _____

3 EMAILS

Today we live in a world filled with technology, and no technology is more popular than email. In the past, people wrote letters to each other, but email has almost entirely replaced written correspondence. What makes emails easier to write than letters and therefore less intimidating for ESL students? They are shorter and more informal than writing personal let-

ters. If your students have email addresses either through the school or personal ones, have them write you a short email for homework or to ask questions before the next test. You can also email your students a simple question and have them answer it as part of their homework. The topic doesn't have to be special or complicated. Just getting a few sentences on the screen will be enough for many beginning students.

4 MEMO

Many students study English to further their business careers, but not all business English students have advanced language skills. To keep their writing practical but still keep its goals attainable, have your students write a memo. Memos follow a certain format: they must include lines for to, from, date and subject. Memo bodies are often very short -- even two or three sentences is enough for a memo. Review the standard memo format with your students, and if you like show them how to use a template via their word processing program. Then have students write a memo announcing a team meeting, alerting their coworkers of an audit, describing a new product or any other subject that could be related to their business. When your students have completed this assignment, they will find that even beginning language studies can have practical applications in the workplace.

5 PERSONAL AD

Whether your students are interested in the dating game or not, a personal ad is a simple and practical way to practice writing in English. Show your students some personal ads either from the paper or on a website like Craig's List. Have them notice what type of information these ads contain. Then have your students write an ad of their own. Using the simple present, your students should be able to communicate enough information about themselves to attract the right person. They might include

a sentence about how they look, a sentence on what they like to do, and a sentence on what they want in a match. If your students are up to it, have them submit their personal ad for publication or just post them in your classroom and have the class try to match each ad to a classmate.

6 A THANK YOU NOTE

Hand written notes are few and far between in today's culture, but almost everyone appreciates receiving one. And if we think for just a few minutes, most of us can name something and someone we are thankful for. Your beginning students should be able to write a simple thank you note, and you can teach them this pattern to do it. It only takes familiarity with the simple present and the simple future to write this type of note.

*Dear _____,
Thank you for the _____.
Insert a sentence saying what you like about it. Insert a saying how you will use it. I appreciate your thoughtfulness (or generosity).
Sincerely,*

WHETHER YOUR STUDENTS ARE NEARLY FLUENT IN ENGLISH OR THEY ARE JUST BEGINNING THEIR ENGLISH STUDIES, THEY WANT TO SEE THAT WHAT THEY ARE LEARNING HAS PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS.

These simple writing assignments might be just enough to challenge your beginning level students and at the same time prevent them from becoming overwhelmed. An added bonus is they are also practical and have real life applications. If you use them, you may see your students' confidence increase and their motivation to learn English continue to be strong.

Not Too Young to Write! 7 Writing Tasks for Young ESL Learners

PICTURE THE PERFECT ESL CLASSROOM WITH YOUNG LEARNERS, IF YOU WILL.

You are probably imagining a happy, smiling group of children who are dancing and singing. Or probably playing with flashcards or toys. They could also be drawing, painting or creating marvelous crafts. But you are probably not picturing them writing.

It makes sense, right? Maybe you teach preeschoolers – they can barely write their own names! At best, they can copy a few isolated words from the board. Children who are a little older are struggling to write well in their own language -- how can they write in a second one? But young ESL learners can do a lot more writing than you give them credit for. It's true they can't do what most people consider "writing", i.e., letters, stories or reports. Yet, it's a good idea to get them started on writing as early as you can. They'll be better equipped to tackle those lengthy writing tasks later. So, here are 7 writing tasks you can use in your ESL class. Some are perfect for introducing writing to your youngest learners. Others are useful for young learners who can write, but still need extra prompting or encouragement.

TRY THESE 7 WRITING TASKS FOR YOUNG ESL LEARNERS

1 WORD JUMBLE

This activity is useful for those who have just started writing in English. Since writing whole sentences on their own can be rather challenging, this activity can help students understand word order, and yet, it gives them the support they need.

Divide students into small groups of three or four, or into pairs. Give each group a set of cards containing words that can be used to form a sentence. These words are clearly jumbled, in other words, in the wrong order. Students have to put them in order to make the sentence, and then copy the sentence onto their notebook or separate worksheet.

You may be tempted to give them a worksheet with a list of sentences where the words are in the wrong order, but with very young learners, it is essential for them to have cards they can manipulate and move around.

2 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Give students the first sentence or beginning of a story, and ask them to complete the story. To make it fun, they can be given funny or even ridiculous sentences/situations (*It was a clear, starry night when the cow jumped over the moon or Michael opened his sock drawer, and all his socks had disappeared.*)

This helps students use their creativity and understand how sentences relate to one another to make a cohesive text.

3 WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THIS PICTURE?

This is a simple writing activity where you show students an illustration and ask them to write about what they see. Illustrations that show a lot of things happening at the same time are great for this activity: students can choose or even create a small story that revolves around the whole scene.

Most often, if we ask students to "write" they have no idea where to begin. You can give them a visual prompt to get them started and to guide them in terms of content so that they won't stray too far from the topic.

4 STORY WITH A TWIST

This is a great post-reading writing activity. After the reading, ask your students to change the ending. You can read a well-known classic or a story that is completely new to them. They can change a few details or change the outcome altogether. They will need to get creative here but they will be using a story they are familiar with and have that extra, needed support.

5 LET'S WRITE TOGETHER

This is a classic writing activity

when you have a large group of young ESL students who don't feel confident enough to write an entire story on their own. One student writes a sentence (or you can get the ball rolling yourself), and the next has to write the sentence that follows and so on till the story is complete. And it doesn't have to be a "story" -- they can write a news article or a journal entry.

This is a great task to promote cooperation and collaboration among students. Also, since each one will be completing a part of the text, they will have to make choices regarding text structure, i.e, decide if they need to start a new paragraph.

6 YUMMY WRITING

Give or show students a series of pictures that illustrate how a dish is prepared. The pictures should show the series of steps involved in a recipe but students have to write the instructions that go with each picture.

This is a great activity to practice imperatives and also how to give instructions.

7 WHAT'S MISSING?

Give students a text: it can be an e-mail, a report, a newspaper article or even a story. A part is taken out and students have to complete it with the missing information. Of course, they will completely make up what is missing. The important thing is not for the information to be accurate (for example, the time or day something happened) but coherent with the rest of the text.

WRITING CAN BE HARD FOR YOUNG ESL LEARNERS – IT'S HARD ENOUGH IN THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE.

But don't make the mistake of discounting it as "too hard". Instead, give them a nudge, a prompt and a little support, whether it is through the first words or images that go with the text. You will boost their confidence and make them happy little writers!

10 Fantastic Learning Centers for Writing Class

WRITING CENTERS ARE A GREAT ADDITION TO ANY ESL CLASSROOM.

They give students some control over their own learning, increase student motivation, and give you a chance to work one on one with individuals as the rest of your class uses the centers. Here are ten learning centers you can easily set up for your writing class that will challenge your students and allow them to have fun as well.

USE WRITING CENTERS FOR TEACHING EFFECTIVELY

1 WHOLE CLASS ONGOING STORY

Give your students a chance to share their creativity with each other in an ongoing story. All you need is a notebook and some imagination. Start a story yourself or write a story starter on the first page of the notebook. Students who use this center should read what other students have written and then continue the same story in the notebook. Students should not finish the story at any time. As the year progresses, the story will become longer and longer and more and more complicated. Your students will have fun trying to top each other's imaginations in page after page, and you will all enjoy hearing the saga at the end of the year.

2 WRITE A POSTCARD

Writing a postcard is a short and simple writing exercise almost any ESL student can do on his own. For your center, provide students with blank card stock and crayons or blank postcards. Also display a completed postcard as a model for them to follow. Students using the center will choose a blank postcard or draw their own and then write a note to someone they love. They should also address the postcard appropriately. If you like, encourage your students to mail the postcards to friends and family after writing them.

3 MAIL CENTER

A mail center is a great writing center for younger English learners. After you have taught your students the basics of writing a letter, give them the supplies they will need to keep in touch with their classmates. Provide paper, envelopes, cards, and mailboxes (shoeboxes make great mailboxes, and you allow students to decorate them as well) for each student in your class. Invite your students to write notes to each other and then address the envelopes and put them in a classroom postal box. If you give your students daily jobs, you might even want to have a student play mail carrier each day and deliver the letters to the classroom mailboxes.

4 WRITING PROMPTS

Don't underestimate the value of writing prompts at a learning center. Students who are planning academic futures in English speaking schools will benefit from essay writing practice. For the center, provide several writing prompts. Simply give students a list, or present the prompts in a creative way. Write them on index cards, Popsicle sticks, or any seasonal cut-out. You can limit your prompts to nonfiction essay questions or include creative writing questions as well. (If you are looking for some great writing prompts, we have lots of resources here on Busy Teacher.) Also include a timer at your station. During free learning periods, students can time themselves as they write from a prompt chosen at random.

5 STORY CUBES

Creative writing and creative thinking are of great value in the language classroom. You can encourage both in your students with a story cube learning center. This learning center requires nothing more than a set of dice and a great imagination. (You can purchase story cubes like Rory's Story Cubes or make your own. Simply take nine blank dice and

use stickers or your artistic abilities to draw thirty-six different objects on the cubes.) Students roll all nine dice and then must write a story that includes each of the nine objects they rolled. Students will have to get creative when they roll a set including, for example, a decorative fountain, an ant and an ax.

6 CLASSMATE ADVICE COLUMN

Learning English isn't easy, and neither is studying in a foreign country. If you have students in your class from different parts of the world or who have been in the U.S. for different lengths of time, they probably have great advice to offer their classmates. Give them a chance to share it with this advice giving learning center. In classic Dear Abby style, have students write letters which explain a difficult situation they are facing or which ask for advice about a particular problem. Students should sign their letter with a pen name (such as Struggling Student, Frustrated Classmate, etc.) Once an advice asking letter is written, the writer should punch holes in it and place it in a three ring binder. You might want students to write these letters on a piece of colored paper so they are easy to locate. Students who have good advice to share can then answer the letter at the learning center. These students read the letters their classmates have written, and choose one or more to answer. Then they write a reply to the letter that gives advice for the troublesome situation. After their advice letter is complete, students punch holes in it and place it in the binder after the advice asking letter. Multiple students can answer the same letters, and they should all place them after the original letter in the notebook. Students can check back at the writing center to see if their classmates have answered their letters or have any good advice for them.

7 BUILDING INSTRUCTIONS

If you have students who like to work with their hands, they might enjoy this double duty instruction writing and reading comprehension exercise. At your center place a general assortment of Lego style building blocks. Students will use these blocks to build an object – either realistic or abstract. As they build, they should write out a set of instructions that tell a reader how to build an identical creation. When the object and its instructions are complete, take a picture of the creation, print it, and place it in an envelope that is taped to the back of the instructions. Students then place their instructions in a binder which stays at the center. Students who want a reading comprehension challenge then select a set of instructions and follow the directions, building the same object his classmate built. Once it is complete, he removes the photo from the envelope and checks his work.

8 PICTURE PROMPT

Have your students write a creative short story using a random picture as inspiration. Display a handful of pictures at your learning center. They can be pictures of anything or anyone. Students at the center start by making observations about the picture. They should make notes about what they see and what it makes them think of. Then, using their notes and the picture for inspiration, students should write a short story (you may want to designate length based on the level of your students) that goes along with the picture. If you like, have students keep their stories in a folder under each of the pictures and encourage other students to read them.

9 21 CLUES

The classic game 21 Questions is great for use in the ESL classroom. This writing center takes its inspiration from that game. Students should choose an object and write 21 clues about that object. Their goal is to describe their object so that a classmate can guess what it is. Once their clues are complete, students write the object on the back of their paper. Keep a collection of the 21 lists at the center for your students to attempt or to use for inspiration as they write their own clues.

10 THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

If you have space in your classroom, set up a fake crime scene at this learning center. Challenge your students to use the clues they see to solve a crime. They should write a police report that tells what happened at the fictional crime scene. You should keep a supply of blank police reports at the center for your students to use. You might want to include sections on the report for perpetrator, victim, crime, and recommended punishment.

5 Super Inspiring Story Generating Ideas You've Never Tried Before

DO YOU HAVE TEACHER'S BLOCK WHEN IT COMES TO INSPIRING YOUR STUDENTS TO WRITE?

After all, you can only write so many essays about your family, how you got to the U.S., or what you did last summer. If you are looking for a new way to get your students' pens to the paper, and would like to read some not so ordinary pieces of writing to boot, you might want to try one of these not so typical means of inspiration. Most of them take almost no preparation, and all will have your students thinking in ways they might not have thought before. Try one, and you'll find they not only make writing fun, but they make reading fun, too.

INSPIRE YOUR STUDENTS TO WRITE WITH THESE SIMPLE BUT EFFECTIVE IDEAS

1 STICK IT TO THEM

If you are trying to get your students to think creatively, this out of the bag writing activity is a great way to push them in that direction. It takes almost no preparation on your part, too. Simply grab a brown bag and some stickers, and you have all you need to get those creative juices flowing. Cut the stickers apart, leaving them on their backing. Put the stickers in the bag, shake them up, and you are ready to generate some great stories. Pass the bag to each student, and have them draw between three and six stickers. These stickers represent the characters, events, or settings they must include in their stories. Students place the stickers on their pages wherever they please and start writing. You can make the activity easier for students by keeping your stickers to one theme, such as zoo animals, or you can make it more difficult by including more unrelated stickers (for example, princesses and Mine Craft). Once students have finished their stories, display them on a free bulletin board so your class can read the creative compositions of their classmates and admire their sticky inspirations.

2 STORY STONES

If you haven't tried them in your classroom, story stones are a great resource that can be used many different ways. Story stones are smooth landscaping rocks that have target words painted

on them. You can make your own with any words you want your students to use in class. Simply purchase some rocks and use a paint pen or acrylic paint to write your target words on them. To give the stones a longer life, seal them with Mod Podge or varnish to keep the words from chipping off. You can even use permanent marker to make your stones, and you don't need to seal them. Then throw your stones into a bag or basket and they are ready for your students. Have students pull stones from the bag and then use those words somewhere in their story. For an easier challenge, keep the number of stones for each story on the low side, three to five. For more of a challenge, have students choose up to ten stones or more. You can have students copy their words before putting the stones back in the bag and passing it to the next student. As students write their stories, they should either underline or highlight the words as they use them.

3 STORY CUBES

One of my great writing class finds was a set of Rory's Story Cubes. I came across them when I was looking for a way to encourage creativity in my writing students. The story cubes are very simple, six white dice, each with six sides and six random pictures. To use the dice, a player rolls them and then must generate a story which uses the six objects in one way or another. The pictures range from an arrow to a fountain to an insect. I have used these cubes for both oral and written stories with my students, and they always have fun with the challenge of connecting seemingly unconnected pictures. It's especially fun to see the different ways students interpret the simple line drawings. A set of Rory's Story Cubes costs around ten dollars, but you could just as easily make your own with blank dice. Your students are bound to love the challenge, too, and they might even surprise themselves with how creative they can be.

4 I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER

You can get double duty out of this story generating idea since students will be writing one nonfiction piece and another fictional one, but keep in mind it works best with intermediate to advanced students. Start by having students think of a story from their childhood. Asking them

to start by thinking of an emotion might help bring up the memories faster. When did you feel scared? Happy? Angry? Etc. Students then take a few minutes to write about that experience. Once students have written their nonfiction piece, have them exchange papers with someone in the class. The second student reads what the first has written, and then uses that experience as inspiration for a fictional piece. If you really want to challenge your students, have them write the fictional piece in the present tense. Either way, the fictional piece should not be just a retelling of the first story, but it should use an idea, person, setting, or some other story element to inspire their original fictional piece. If you like, display each fictional piece with the nonfiction that inspired it. Students will enjoy reading how their classmates found inspiration from their experiences.

5 START WITH A WRITER

Another inspiring source for writing is the work of other writers. If you teach reading as well as writing, this is a way to bring the two together. After you have read a fictional piece or while you are reading it, ask students to underline or highlight any phrase, description, or sentence that stands out to them. It can be anything from one interesting word to an entire sentence, something they thought was funny, vivid, or interesting. Students will then use that phrase as inspiration for their own writing. They can either try to incorporate the exact phrase into what they are writing or just use it to give them an idea. For example, one student might like the word onomatopoeia and use that to inspire a story about a dog who sounds like a cat. Another student might like the way a particular character is described and use that person as the main character for his own piece. If it seems like this might be too much of a challenge for your students, make it a little easier on them by collecting phrases and descriptions for them. Then give each person an interesting phrase that you have chosen and see what inspiration comes from it.

ULTIMATELY, INSPIRATION FOR WRITING CAN COME FROM JUST ABOUT ANYWHERE. Give students a prop or a word, take a walk, or start with something someone else has written. No matter where your students get their literary ideas, as long as they are writing they are learning.

10 Ways to Bring Creative Writing into the ESL Classroom

STUDENTS ARE OFTEN DAUNTED BY THE THOUGHT OF HAVING TO WRITE CREATIVELY HOWEVER IF THEY ARE GIVEN GOOD DIRECTION AND PROMPTS THEY OFTEN RISE TO THE CHALLENGE.

Giving clear instructions is vital and with good preparation and lead in exercises you will be surprised by the results. Having a clear objective in mind is essential for the students but the opportunities presented by creative writing for widening vocabulary is immense.

APPLY SOME FRESH IDEAS FOR QUALITY WRITING LESSONS

1 MAKE IT PERSONAL

To engage students with any subject it is always a good idea to personalise it and a great way to do this for a creative writing lesson is to turn the table and find out what the students like to read. Give them a Reading Habits Questionnaire to complete for themselves and then ask them to interview two or three other students to find out about their habits. The students can then get together in groups to discuss the results of the questionnaire. This can also be helpful for the teacher to find out about the students' preferences for future lesson planning but the main aim is to get the students talking about books.

2 STORY TELLING WARMER

Write a first line on the White Board. E.g. It was a dark and stormy night ... Ask the first student to continue the line and so on until every student has participated in making a story. You may find that some students are reluctant but start with a stronger student and they will soon be in full flow.

3 SPEED WRITING WARMER

Write a prompt on the White Board. For example "It was raining cats and dogs." Give the students

three minutes to write anything that comes into their head. It's a great way to get a writing class started and also to introduce new vocabulary such as idioms. Be strict with the timing and when the time is up they should compare what they have written with other students.

4 WRITING PROMPTS

Write several prompts on slips of papers and give them out to the students either individually or in pairs. These prompts could be geared towards practising certain vocabulary or grammar points. For example:

"You buy a newspaper from your local newsagent and see that it is dated one week in the future. There is an article in it which makes it clear that you have to take action now to prevent a catastrophe."

"You go to an antique market and buy a box of bric-a-brac. On looking through the box you find a photo of a young girl/boy in period clothing from 100 years ago and written on the back is your name. You have to find out what the connection is between the girl/boy in the photo and yourself."

The students then either individually or in pairs write a short story connected to their prompt. The stories should be kept at around 150-250 words. When they have written their stories they should join up with another student/pair and read and discuss their stories.

5 CREATING CHARACTER

Ask the students to create their own characters by first of all deciding the following: Age, name, appearance including eye colour, hair colour, distinguishing facial features etc., hobbies/studies/job. Then give them a questionnaire to complete. It could include questions like: What makes your character angry? What makes them laugh? What is their biggest fear? Do they have a secret? For

higher level classes you could expand this even more by adding more complex questions such as: Is there anything that makes your character feel safe? Something comforting? Describe what it is and why it makes them feel safe? Your character is being lectured by someone in a position of authority, how do they react? These prompts can be adjusted to level but the aim is that the student ends up with a rounded character profile.

6 WRITING MONOLOGUES

The aim of this lesson is for the students to use a character that they have previously created and write a monologue. It is a good idea to show the students examples of monologues from literature in order for them to see how it is done. You should choose examples based on the age/level of your students. Stress that monologue writing is writing your character's thoughts in the first person as if they were thinking out loud.

7 CREATING DIALOGUE

Give out an example of a short dialogue. Ask your students what their observations are. Elicit: Naturalness, length of sentences, tension/mood, dialect – speaking habits. What is important about writing a dialogue? Ask your students to form pairs: they should pair up with someone that they are not already sitting with. They should tell each other about the characters they have created and discuss their similarities/differences. Ask them to imagine a situation in which their characters might meet and write a short dialogue about what happens. Stress that they should try and include some conflict in their dialogue. Role-play the dialogue.

8 FUN WITH POETRY

Many students have an aversion to poetry but it can be used in a fun way. Haikus are a good form to use. Give out some examples and ask the students to count the syllables in each line. They should see that there is a

pattern: 5-7-5. In pairs ask them to create a Haiku about what they can see out of the window sticking to this pattern.

9 FUN WITH POETRY 2

Use acrostics to create a poem. Ask the students to write their surname in acrostic form. For each letter they should write a short line about their observations of the place they are staying in. Then in pairs ask them to read the lines as a poem.

10 FUN WITH POETRY 3

Write some prompts on the White Board. These could include 'Getting lost', 'The house where you were born', 'The shapes of the clouds'. Ask the students to write a short poem based on these prompts.

USING CREATIVE WRITING IN THE CLASSROOM WILL GIVE YOUR STUDENTS THE CHANCE TO HAVE FUN WHILST PRACTISING GRAMMAR POINTS AND EXPANDING THEIR VOCABULARY.

It also gives the teacher the opportunity to create fun lessons with tangible results.

Teaching Composition to Students without Them Dying of Boredom

OFTEN COMPOSITION CLASSES ARE BOOOORING.

The students are bored, the teacher is bored. The curriculum is boring: predictably a series of readings on predictable issues with predictable written responses and standard points of grammar instruction. There is an occasional attempt to shake things up with a film, perhaps, or a different type of assessment, but these minor alterations don't change the essential nature and overall structure of the course as a series of readings and writings in response. Some different strategies, or even perhaps an entirely new methodology and way of looking at writing instruction, have to be employed to engage students in a composition class.

ADOPT THESE SMART WAYS TO ENGAGE COMPOSITION STUDENTS

1 GET TO KNOW STUDENTS

From the first day, the instructor should start getting to know students and what is relevant to them and their lives. For example, I taught composition to two radically different classes this term, one to a group of mostly Latino students in a rural and poor area on the edges of Sacramento County. The other was to a class of relatively well-off students in suburban Sacramento. The two classes had entirely different perspectives on such topics as the right to bear arms: because the ownership and use of guns is often a regular part of life in rural America, the former class was much more engaged with this topic than the latter class, who couldn't relate to it--they and their families did not own guns and therefore the topic was not of importance to them. Knowing information like this about the classes helped me in making key decisions in shaping the curricula.

2 MAKE THE CLASS RELEVANT AND INTERACTIVE

One of the reasons students respond skeptically to writing classes, or even

despise them, is that they have lost sight or have never even been introduced to writing as a means of communication between a writer and reader. For example, a colleague recently laughed at the title of one of my presentations at staff in-service, "Writing: An Act of Communication," seeing that title as going without saying, but too often it's a revelation to students. Students, in fact, often see writing as somehow "dead," an inorganic and rote exercise of regurgitating various reflections related to barely comprehensible essays that were often written in a cultural context far removed from their own. Does it have to be this way? No, absolutely not -- the instructor can choose readings related to students' environment and concerns, such as prison reform, right to bear arms, and causes and effects of terrorism. Students can, with topics such as these, engage in authentic acts of communication through discussion and writing within the class.

3 READINGS AND TOPICS RELEVANT TO STUDENTS

George Orwell's classic essay "Shooting an Elephant" about his experiences as a British military police officer in India is a great meditation on the nature of power. But its context of the last days of the British Empire is far removed from students' lives. A contemporary essay on our failing prison system, written by a prisoner, accomplishes the same goal of discussion of social status and power in a context that students relate to and results in more engaged discussions. Students should have some input into choosing readings and topics for discussion and writing. I therefore in the first days of class hand out a list of about ten possible class topics and have students in groups number them in relevance. By the end of class, we are able to achieve group and then whole class consensus on about five topics we will discuss during the term.

4 ENGAGED DISCUSSION

Foremost in creating engaged discussion is providing a safe environment where basic rules of courtesy are in op-

eration so that students have a comfort level to express ideas that might normally be frowned on in an academic context: e.g., that higher education may not be worth the price tag, that gang members may not in fact be "bad people" by nature but simply navigating the social context into which they were born. Also important in creating productive discussions, besides the comfort level to express ideas, is having something to express. The discussions and readings will emerge from the topics that students have already decided on as relevant to their lives.

5 ONLINE DISCUSSION

Some of the discussion can move to the online discussion threads, if the course has an accompanying website. Often students, especially more introverted students who need more time to reflect, find it easier to express themselves in an online discussion. Students can in this way, also, get more of a sense of their peers' ideas. For example, on hearing about in class discussion one of her classmate's research regarding costs of higher education and student debt, a hot topic in the U.S. right now, a student was motivated enough to go look up this peer's work on the online forum, where works had been posted for review, because the topic was personally relevant to her.

6 THE CLASS DEBATE

After relatively informal discussion on relevant topics, students are now prepared to engage in the more formal debate. The students are at this point may have radically different notions of the worth of extending our gun control laws or of how the nation should handle its immigration policy, for example. They can now begin to form tentative teams that will settle on one issue to discuss. From there, they will then divide into pro and con sides with the intent of making a better case for their team than the opposing side. In doing this, students have to go out and find relevant research to support their position. It is impossible or at least inadvisable, for example, to argue either side of the issue of gun con-

trol in the U.S. without researching the exact wording of the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which first addressed this concern within U.S. culture. The team should as well be aware of major subsequent laws that have either limited or broadened the Second Amendment's scope. If the team has not done this research, then their presentation will not be as good.

7 INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PROJECTS AND RELEVANT WRITING STUDENTS ARE INVESTED IN

At some point students are no longer writing so much for the grade but because they have something to say. The returning veteran has something to say on the high cost and relevance (or lack thereof) of higher education, the owner of a poultry farm has something he wants to express on the topic of the health and ethical benefits of vegetarianism. These, again, are topics that students have themselves chosen, have been discussing and reading about much of the term, have debated, and are now invested enough in to further research on their own. At this point, students can choose topics that are--usually--related to material they have been interacting with all term and begin to write their research projects. A couple of students have gone so far as to submit their work to forums outside of the class: letters to the editor, for example, or writing competitions.

8 CREATION OF ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

On the last day of class, one of my students exclaimed, looking around at his peers with whom had formed a collegial relationship, "I can't believe it's all over!" He was now part of a writing community that had engaged in sharing ideas all term.

CREATING AN ACADEMIC COMMUNITY IN WHICH STUDENTS DISCUSS, RESEARCH, AND WRITE ABOUT TOPICS VALUABLE TO THEM IS HARD WORK, INVOLVING KNOWLEDGE OF STUDENTS AND THE ISSUES THAT IMPORTANT TO THEM.

But by investing time in getting to know students and their concerns, the writing teacher can create a community that engages in authentic research, writing, and discussion.

Teaching the Art of Drafting in Composition

BEGINNINGS ARE HARD, ESPECIALLY WITH A NEW PROCESS.

Even knowing where to begin can be difficult, especially when dealing with the unfamiliar. In writing, fortunately, there are some strategies that can help in the difficult “birthing” process.

START WRITING USING THESE SIMPLE IDEAS

1 JUST PICK UP THE PEN OR SIT IN FRONT OF THE COMPUTER

Just committing time to writing the paper is the first step. Turning off the phone, shutting the door, avoiding your email box, and deciding to spend this block of time, whether it's fifteen minutes or two hours, on your writing is the first step.

2 TAKE NOTES

Pour out everything you know on the topic. Use abbreviations. For example, in a recent short story, a mystery about a missing person's investigation, I started with some dialogue, description, and some basic plot points regarding the investigation. I just threw everything I had into a word document. This same technique can also be used for essay writing—everything the writer knows or has to say on the topic should be jotted down as a beginning step. Complete sentences or even complete words are not necessary (as long as the writer can read her notes later).

3 DO SOME RESEARCH

While writing the short story about police investigations, I realized I knew little about how private investigators actually conduct such work. So I did some basic research on how private investigators manage a missing person's case, took some notes, and actually learned enough to get further ideas about how to develop the story. Researching any topic for fiction or

nonfiction will create additional ideas for development of the current and future project, but it's important not to get too sidetracked into doing research, just enough to develop your work. This is a writing, not research, project.

4 USE OF ARROWS, QUESTION MARKS, AND NUMBERS

During the course of drafting, it is important to keep up momentum. So in the places where I was not sure if a plot point, such as whether a private investigator ever works along with police on a case, I'd put a question mark at points I would look up later. Similarly, if I got an idea for further developing a scene, I'd write it in the margins, and draw arrows to where it should go. I also wrote scenes as they came to me, such as the private investigator finally finding and confronting the missing person. I knew this scene would have to occur somewhere near the end, but wasn't quite sure where, so I used numbers to put scenes in the approximate order.

5 TURN OFF SPELL CHECK AND GRAMMAR CHECK, BOTH INTERNAL & EXTERNAL

Just as the writer should not get held up with research and the finer elements of organization and transitions, the first draft is not the time to get hung up running to the dictionary or thesaurus. Question marks with “sp” for possible spelling errors work fine in a first draft as no one but the writer, in most cases, will see it. So the writer should turn off, as much as possible, her internal “monitor” as well as external ones for word choice, grammar, and spelling, to revisit these issues in later drafts.

6 PUTTING ORDER TO CHAOS. A RUDIMENTARY OUTLINE

Eventually it will be time to impose

some structure on your notes. It is time for an outline. An extensive outline becomes a kind of draft in itself, a blueprint of the story or essay. Cut and paste works very well here, allowing the writer to move text around, paragraphs, scenes, dialogue, description, exposition, etc., in the rough order it should occur in the work. This will then become an actual draft.

7 PUT THE DRAFT AWAY

The writer now has her draft, so it is time to let it ferment. Put the draft away for a few days if possible, or don't open its folder on the desktop, and return with fresh eyes and new ideas having let the writing percolate for a couple of days. The writer can now see the “holes” in the narrative or exposition that need to be filled in, the masterful transition needed, the need for more development, the more precise word, etc., to work on for the next draft.

8 RETYPE IT

Just the physical act of retyping can bring a fresh perspective, as a friend found when he failed to save his work and was forced to begin again. This unfortunate circumstance, potentially devastating to the writer, actually turned out to be advantageous as just the act of typing the work, from beginning to end, brought a more objective perspective the writer, allowing him to see where it needed further work, what parts he could cut (especially since he was retyping it), or what parts could be developed more.

9 HAVE A FRIEND LOOK AT IT

A trusted friend or peer, especially if the individual is not so close to you that she worries excessively about damaging her relationship with you, can be invaluable, and even more so if she has writing experience. Where can you find such a person? A writer's group or writing class is full of such critics, who will be supportive while

still pointing out where your work needs additional polishing. Another technique, if a supportive peer is not available, is reading the work out loud, which allows the writer to hear awkwardness in phrasing, for example, or the wrong word, or unnecessary development and redundancy.

10 NOW TIME TO MOVE FORWARD WHILE GOING BACK

Now is the time to go back and clean up missing information, gaps in research, rename characters or vary vocabulary, clean up the spelling and grammar. Use of spell check and the thesaurus function in your word processing program can be helpful as well as the traditional paper dictionary and thesaurus. When doing the final draft, and I come across questionable spelling that is highlighted, I make a conscious effort to correct the spelling accurately myself, relying on memory and knowledge of spelling rules. If this fails, then I move to spell-check and note the correct spelling. I am more likely to remember it as I've consciously studied it after attempting to correct it: for example, I now won't forget that "accommodate" is spelled with two "c's" and two "m's" having gone through this process: having worked with the spelling, consciously, several times and then looked up the correct spelling and noted it, the spelling has now moved to my long-term memory, and I won't misspell it again.

DRAFTING IS NOT ONLY A CHANCE OF TO GET YOUR IDEAS DOWN BEFORE RUSHING TO THE FINAL PRODUCT, BUT ALSO AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN MORE ON A TOPIC, DO RESEARCH, AND DEVELOP UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONVENTIONS OF LANGUAGE.

Teacher, I'm "Blocked"! Dealing with "Writer's Block" in the Class

THE MYTH OF BEING "BLOCKED" IS ONE OF THE MOST ENDURING OF WRITER'S LORE, SUMMONING IMAGES OF THE REPORTER SITTING AT HIS MANUAL TYPEWRITER, SLEEVES ROLLED UP, TAKING GULPS FROM A BOTTLE OF WHISKEY (PERHAPS EXPLAINING THE "BLOCKAGE") BEFORE THE INSPIRATION MYSTERIOUSLY RESURFACES AND HE CAN POUND OUT HIS ARTICLE.

The myth of writer's block is so persistent in fact that it has filtered its way down to freshman and developmental writers, who have no other artistic pretensions related to writing. The first few times students made this claim of "writer's block" in class, I was so dumbfounded that I bought into it and suggested a couple of alternate exercises for the students to engage in until inspiration returned--which they promptly took advantage of by spending the session chatting with their classmates on topics related to anything but writing, leading me of course to question this "blockage." Persistent myths take a long time to die -- however, there are some ways to assist in their demise.

ASSIST YOUR STUDENTS USING THE WAYS TO ADDRESS "BLOCKAGE"

1 DISCUSS THE NATURE OF BEING "BLOCKED"

When students make claims of having this disorder of being "blocked", challenge the diagnosis. What exactly is "blockage"? What are its symptoms, and why does the student think she has it? Sometimes by analyzing the syndrome, the fallacy of writer's block can be exposed.

2 POINT OUT WRITER RESPONSIBILITY IN THE MATTER

Even given this myth has some factual basis, and the student is indeed blocked, this does not relieve her of responsibility of addressing the problem.

Math students do not suffer from calculus block, plumbers who stay home from work because of plumbing block would probably lose their jobs. Similarly, writers should be expected to address their "writer's block" on their own if they want to keep their grade point average or their jobs.

3 PROVIDE WRITING PROMPTS

Providing a list of writing topics/prompts/things to write about can serve as a treatment for being "blocked." Pull out the topics when students claim to be blocked and challenge them to choose one of the topics and develop at least one paragraph in response. The topics should be related to whatever assignment the student is working on. The notes on the prompt can then be used as a basis for the writing assignment.

4 HAVE STUDENTS BRAINSTORM A LIST OF TOPICS/PROMPTS

If blocked students claim not to like the writing prompts you brought in, challenge them to come up with their own topics--ideas, topics, and issues that interest them. If they claim not to have any such ideas--an entirely predictable course of events, taking us back to the entire problem--then tell them to return to the topics you brought in: they may either write their own prompts, respond to the ones you brought in, or lose points for that day. Faced with this list of choices, the writer's block often mysteriously evaporates and the student is able to come up with her own ideas

5 ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION--ON THE TOPIC / WRITING PROMPT

Blocked students who don't want to or can't write often do like to talk to their peers--so work with this tendency. Students may talk with their peers, as long as the discussion is related to the writing topic. Have them take notes

on the discussion as part of the condition of engaging in the discussion. The student at this point may very well become unblocked and find something she really does want to write about and use the notes from the discussion.

6 BRING IN THE NEWSPAPER/ SHOW A NEWS REPORT

The news is full of interesting ideas: crime, current events and issues at both a national and local level as well as human interest items. Have students look through the newspaper, discuss it, and come up with at least one idea to develop from the newspaper. Similarly, a typical news broadcast will be full of topics and events for both discussion and writing.

7 TAKE A WALK OUTSIDE

Along with exposure to the news, just taking a walk outside will open students to the broader world: landscape, people, and conversations outside the classroom. They can then come back to the classroom and discuss what they experienced, again taking notes on it. For example, they may have seen a couple in heated discussion and come up with some ideas regarding gender roles and relationships. Seeing the sprinklers going full blast across a carefully kept and unnaturally green lawn at the height of a California summer (when grass not meticulously tended turns brown) can lead to some considerations about appropriate allocation of water resources. Often just a change of environment like this will shift attitudes and give a fresh perspective that students can take some notes on for writing after discussion with peers. Engaging in discussion and writing related to the walk outside should be a condition of the assignment, however, with resulting loss of credit if this step is not taken.

8 DO SOME FREEWITING ON A TOPIC

Once students have read some articles/prompts, gone out into the wide

world, and discussed what they have found, it's time to do some free writing, their response to some of these stimuli, which will serve as the basis for an academic essay.

9 TEACH STUDENTS TO SYNTHESIZE MATERIAL

Students now have some material, some notes, and some freewriting to work with from news articles, observations of the environment, discussion and so forth. They may now be concerned with synthesizing the material, putting it together into a coherent whole on a topic. The teacher can at this point suggest some methods of organization and of paraphrasing and summarizing the raw material into development for an essay assignment.

10 TEACH STUDENTS TO MODIFY MATERIAL

Especially for fiction, but also for nonfiction, students can be taught to modify the material, shortening it, for example. Rather than summarizing a whole news article, the student should just use a few sentences of paraphrasing or short summary as support for a point the student wants to make in her essay. For fiction, the report of a crime can be changed around, with names, dates, and the actual crime altered slightly or a lot depending on the purpose of telling the story because at this point the story is fiction, with the actual event just providing the seed of an idea.

ADDRESSING THE PERSISTENT MYTH OF "WRITER'S BLOCK" CAN BE DIFFICULT BECAUSE IT IS A DEEPLY ENGRAINED BELIEF.

However, with persistence and use of some strategies, the instructor can work toward dispelling the myth and assist students in becoming independent writers.

Teaching the Art of Outlining in Composition

OUTLINING IS AN OFTEN A STEP IN WRITING THAT STUDENTS FEEL THEY CAN SKIP.

After all, they have their notes and their research, -- why not just jump without further delay into the essay introduction and first draft? On the contrary, however, outlining is a critical step in composition that not only puts order to a jumble of ideas but also advances understanding of the individual work and its written genre itself.

DISCOVER IMPORTANT REASONS TO TEACH OUTLINING

1 PUTTING ORDER TO THE CHAOS

Starting an essay or story can be overwhelming for the novice, or not so novice, writer. At the beginning stage, students may have bits of description, dialogue, facts and statistics, supporting details and positions, as well as various note cards and relevant research. How on earth can this mass of information ever be put into coherent form? Just writing out a standard outline of Introduction, Body Paragraph 1, 2, 3, and Conclusion can help students begin to order their ideas, to visualize where they might plug in their beginning notes.

2 TEACHES THE FORM

In this very act of ordering their ideas, students begin to advance their knowledge of the genre, of how to structure a story or essay. In writing the outline, students are able to strengthen their understanding of typical form: the need for an introduction of broad comments on the topic, then a position and support of increasing specificity in the body, and a conclusion that summarizes, etc. In creating the outline, students will notice if any of these pieces are missing or underdeveloped. Students learn or are reminded by outlining how to group ideas: where ideas go together by topic, or by chronology, for example.

3 HIGHLIGHTS AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

As students further outline and take notes and the form begins to emerge, they begin to see places they need to fill in the gaps, to develop more: where they need more support, for example, or where to develop the conclusion. Just by looking at the outline, students can see at the imbalance or absence of the typical parts, and gain awareness of not only the form as a whole but areas they need to extend this specific writing.

4 CREATES AWARENESS OF THE TOPIC

Also in developing an outline, students become aware not only of their gaps in the organization and development of the essay, but also of gaps in their knowledge and need for further research. For example, in outlining my essay on the student debt crisis in the United States, I became aware that I needed to pin down exact figures on the total overall amount owed on student loans in the U.S. as well as individually, on average. I also saw the need to be able to write about exactly how these loans are typically made (e.g., with or without a cosigner, terms of repayment, etc.) In outlining, in other words, I became aware of my own need for information and further research.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE METHOD OF TEACHING OUTLINING

1 EMPHASIZE FLEXIBILITY IN EARLY STAGES; THERE IS NO ONE "RIGHT" WAY

Sometimes students get so hung up on the form of the outline itself they forget that its real purpose is a stage in the development of the essay, to organize the essay. It is therefore important for the instructor to emphasize it matters not a bit whether the students

use Roman numerals, or lowercase or uppercase letters, etc.--or if they use numbers and letters at all, as long as the outline can be used to demonstrate the structure and direction of the final product. Then students can focus on getting their ideas for the essay on paper in an organized fashion rather than getting hung up on Roman or Arabic numbers.

2 REVIEW THE BASIC PARTS OF THE GENRE. DISCUSS WHICH IDEAS SHOULD BE PLUGGED IN WHERE

Teaching the outline is actually a good way to teach or review the different elements of an essay or story. In nonfiction writing, for example, students, while generally aware that an essay requires an introduction, body, and conclusion, might be somewhat hazy on how to structure the body: that ideas fit together by chronological order, for example, or by cause and effect, or from the general to specific. Often also students learn how to structure an introduction, introducing the topic and its related issues, its historic perspective and background, perhaps quoting experts on the topic, etc.

3 TEACH DIFFERENT KINDS OF OUTLINES

While emphasizing the point of "no one right way" to outline or even to develop a formal outline at all, the instructor can still teach several different ways to outline a piece of writing that students may choose to use, from the more formal Roman numerals and capital letters combined with regular numbers and small letters for a variety of points and supporting points, etc., to the more relaxed "beginning," "middle" and "end." Learning these different forms of outlines helps the student find the outline which works best for her, which is the important point, as these outlines are mostly "writer-based," for the writer only, not an audience of readers.

4 SHOW MODELS

Recently I posted an outline of a short story in progress for a writing class, complete with the rough story outline, notes, questions, and bits of dialogue, filled into roughly their correct places, to show students what an outline/early draft might look like: somewhat disorderly, but also a clear guide to where I'm going with the story from beginning to end, showing where missing scenes, plot points, dialogue, etc., need to be plugged in.

5 REVERSE THE PROCESS

Have the students outline one or more of the essays in their texts or their peers' essays. This helps develop a sense of the form, how an essay should be structured, as well as teaches the process of outlining.

6 PEER REVIEW

Have students read each other's outlines and offer suggestions on what needs to be added or deleted before further drafting.

FAR FROM BEING A PREDICTABLE, ROTE, AND LARGELY USELESS PART OF THE WRITING PROCESS, DEVELOPING THE OUTLINE CAN ACTUALLY HELP STUDENTS STRUCTURE AND DEVELOP THEIR BEGINNING IDEAS AND RESEARCH WHILE ADVANCING THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE FORM AND TOPIC.

Teaching the Art of Development of Ideas in Composition

ONE OF THE FIRST QUESTIONS A COMPOSITION TEACHER GETS WHEN ASSIGNING A NEW ESSAY, ONE THAT CAUSES THE TEETH TO GRIND, IS “HOW LONG DOES IT HAVE TO BE?”

I usually answer “Until you’re finished.” This may seem facile, but it really is the correct answer: say what you have to say, and then stop. The problem is students often feel they have nothing to say.” Feel” is the operative word: they actually do, invariably, have something to say on almost any topic, but they just don’t know it yet.

A good essay to assign to model developing a simple idea is William F. Buckley’s “Why Don’t We Complain?” Although I may disagree with his starting premise that Americans have trouble complaining, the essay demonstrates developing an idea. Buckley takes this basic premise, the difficulty in speaking up against intolerable conditions, starting with a simple anecdote of an overheated and overcrowded railway car (overheated on a freezing day by a malfunctioning furnace) that no one took the initiative to complain to the train staff about. He then develops the notion of unwillingness to complain from cultural, societal, historical, and future predictive perspectives. Throughout the essay, Buckley analyzes our culture’s background of self-reliant immigrants and pioneers and how we went from that to a compliant people who won’t even raise their voices about an overheated room to its logical conclusion of weak, oppressed individuals completely reliant on a centralized and technical authority.

William F. Buckley is, of course, a skilled writer. But students can be taught to use the same strategies Buckley employs to develop their own work, adding enough of their own material that the concern with length will be the essay getting too long--not just from padded repetition but with relevant details and analysis.

KEEP HANDY THE STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP ESSAYS

1 RELATE TO YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE

This is a reliable method. Buckley starts with his own experience of the railway car and adds several other personal examples, such as not being served in a timely manner in restaurants and stores. The use of personal examples makes a potentially abstract, removed topic concrete and relevant--most readers will have had similar experiences.

2 REFLECT ON WHAT THE EXPERIENCE MEANT TO YOU

There must be some reason the event stayed with you. Analyze it: what do you think about the event, why was it important, why did it stick with you? What struck Buckley about the train event, he relates, is that a careful of presumably free-willed adults were so passive that they sat silently as the car grew hotter and hotter and then seemed to resent Buckley when he finally said something to the conductor. This in turn spoke to Buckley about an apparent important cultural change.

3 FIND DIFFERENT EXAMPLES OF THE SAME PHENOMENON

Throughout the essay, Buckley offers different examples of the failure to complain when complaining is due: in the train coach, in a movie theater, once in a ski shop when he did choose to speak up and then found it was a mistake, and so forth. Adding relevant personal examples on a topic inevitably develops the writing, not only in length, but in making the topic personal and real in a way that it wouldn’t be if Buckley had just discussed “complaining” in general.

4 ANALYZE THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF THE ISSUE

A good essay, of course, goes beyond just telling stories and also offers some analysis. Why don’t people speak up under intolerable conditions? What are the causes and effects of failing to complain? Throughout the essay, Buckley offers causes of the increasing passivity of the American public, such as increased dependence on technology as well as a more removed central authority impossible to complain to. He also addresses effects--the passivity of the individual, the silencing of our collective voice, and by implication the danger to the democracy itself.

5 ANALYZE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TOPIC BEYOND YOUR WORLD AND EXPERIENCES

Without this analysis of the importance of the event beyond your universe, the anecdote of the train car would stay just that, Buckley’s unfortunate experience in a train with its insensitive staff and passive passengers. But he takes the experience and analysis many steps further: not complaining because we’ve gotten used to others doing things for us, expecting others to complain, fear of public censure for complaining, feeling helpless in an age of technology and centralized power. Buckley then relates this passivity to different areas of life, from the personal to the political. Students can do the same by analyzing what their personal anecdote means to others, what it says about society in general, what it will mean for the future of the society as well as cross-cultural and historical analysis. For example, Buckley compares how Americans would have reacted to an overheated train car in the past and what the silencing of complaining might do to our future, -- students can do the same in analyzing their experience as well as how people in other cultures would

react in similar situations or how they might have in the past or will in the future.

6 DEVELOPMENT OF THEME

In looking at the topic from a variety of angles and perspectives, a theme or thesis emerges in the Buckley work that the American public has abandoned its hearty immigrant and pioneer roots and transformed into an increasingly dependent and passive people and that this threatens the core of the society. As students analyze their experience from a variety of perspectives, they are likely to see related issues emerge that will combine to create a theme that can be highlighted throughout the work.

7 STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING DEVELOPMENT

A visual organizer can be used to prompt students of ways to develop their essays: different balloons, for example, branching from the core inciting example and prompting students to consider causes, effects, past and future related issues, and so forth. Or students can be encouraged to fill in columns related to the topic: rows for causes, effects, future implications, and so forth, to develop ideas on the topic. They should also discuss these graphic organizers with peers to further develop ideas.

DEVELOPING AN ESSAY CAN SEEM LIKE AN ONEROUS, IMPOSSIBLE TASK.

Does it have to be? Absolutely not. By teaching students to analyze an issue and/or experience from a variety of perspectives, they will soon be “complaining” about having too much, rather than too little, to say on topic.

Teaching the Art of Prewriting in Composition

OFTEN STUDENTS DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY ON A GIVEN TOPIC, OR THINK THEY DON'T.

The conventional remedy has been to teach a series of “brainstorming strategies” such as “clustering,” which include elaborate diagrams and networks of ideas. I know few actual writers who use these strategies, however. To me, at any rate, these conventional “prewriting” exercises prove distracting--causing me to focus more on the diagram itself than on the ideas I am supposed to be coming up with.

IMPROVE CHECKING SEVERAL ALTERNATIVES

1 BRAIN DUMP

Just dump everything you know on the topic on the page. If it's only two things, write those down. Then study them, and consider what they make you think of. Write that down, too. If the writer keeps doing this, a series of ideas will be recorded, some of which will certainly be discarded, but also there will be a few that can be kept and developed.

2 FREEWRTING

Do some free association. Write ideas as they come to you: use free association, starting with the topic but perhaps ending up elsewhere. This can lead to some valuable material that can be used in a later draft.

3 OWN EXPERIENCE

Consider your own experience on the topic. You have none? Are you sure? If you have not been the victim of a crime, for example, you probably know someone who has or have read about it in the paper.

4 RESEARCH

Prewriting is the perfect time to do some research on a topic. For example, I recently wrote a story in-

volving pyramid schemes, something I knew “two things” about when I started off. However, by investing a couple hours by visiting a several websites, such as the FBI's, I developed some working expertise on the topic, enough to write the story. This research also developed my knowledge base in general and gave me additional information and ideas for the story and well as future stories and essays.

5 INTERVIEWS

Interviewing experts on a topic can not only help you with developing your current essay or story but also give you ideas for future stories. In interviewing a police officer, for example, about a murder mystery I was writing that suicides, even if they are almost certainly suicides, are initially investigated as homicides--that “homicide” is the default assumption on arriving at a crime scene in which someone has died, even it is an apparent suicide--a host of new story ideas came up. Similarly, in researching topics of winemaking and pyramid schemes for fiction, I was given ideas for nonfiction works as well.

6 RECYCLING MATERIAL

Have you written about this topic before? Can you use the material again, with a different slant?

I have written numerous works, but fiction and nonfiction, on the topic of immigrating and the immigrant experience. It is such a broad topic, it can be approached in such a number of ways: psychologically, socially, legally, in both fiction and nonfiction, that any number of works can come out of it, both fiction and nonfiction, without danger of staleness and repetition.

CONSIDER SEVERAL WAYS TO TEACH PREWRITING

1 SKIP THE CONFUSING DIAGRAMS

Teaching students to “cluster” and so forth just creates confusion and focus on just the format of the diagram instead of the ideas that go into it. I would encourage students to just freewrite, to just put down on paper everything they know, think they know, and feel about a topic, without a focus on form or filling in little bubbles and boxes.

2 GIVE OUT PROMPTS

Written prompts, pictures, and interesting objects all create ideas for nonfiction and fiction works. A simple prompt such as “Write about Rule Number One” brings about such diverse responses about what should be “rule number one” that many different essays and stories can come out of this.

3 DISCUSSION IDEAS WITH PEERS

Just the act of getting “out of their heads” and interacting with someone else can give students ideas on a topic, a new perspective or expertise/knowledge base, that she did not have before. For example, discussing such topics of gender relations and roles, or treatment of children and the elderly within a family or society, will introduce to the writer diverse experiences and opinions to inform her writing.

4 RESEARCH THE TOPIC

Doing some basic preliminary research on a topic can also help in developing ideas: reliable websites such as the Mayo Clinic's will give out information on the course of and treatment of a disease like diabetes, which the writer can use to develop her work. Teaching students how to

locate and judge important and reliable websites will help them in their research of a topic.

5 INTERVIEW AN EXPERT

I am lucky enough to live on the same street as a retired homicide detective and interviewed him about how a homicide investigation is conducted and took extensive notes. I didn't use them all on the story I was writing at the time but will use them on various pieces in the future. I also got a feel for the everyday life and routine work of a police officer, which is just as important. Arrange for students, if possible, to meet with and talk to community members or other faculty with areas of expertise related to their writing.

6 "FIELD TRIPS"

Field trips or a trip to a place relevant to the writing topic is also important. For example, in writing a story about California's wine country, I made several trips to actual wineries to get information and an understanding of the day to day life at a winery. Arranging for students to visit places to inform their writing--local job sites, for example -- can give them exposure to the larger world and material to write about. It is hard to write in a vacuum.

IN SHORT, WE TEND TO THINK OF, OR HAVE BEEN TAUGHT, THAT "PRE-WRITING" IS AN ISOLATED PROCESS OF DRAWING LITTLE DIAGRAMS AND WRACKING OUR BRAINS FOR NONEXISTENT IDEAS.

That's why many novice writers rush through or ignore this stage, seeing it as waste of time. However, ideas do not, of course, form out of a vacuum but rather through interaction with the larger world--the world of building information and ideas not only through introspection but also through interacting and interviewing others and researching the topic.

Teaching the Art of Revision in Composition

OFTEN WHEN A WRITING INSTRUCTOR SUGGESTS REVISING A WORK, A COLLECTIVE GROAN GOES UP.

“You’re making us write it again? Why?” Or alternately the teacher is met with a blank stare and essentially the same question: “Why would I write it again?” And if students decide to write their paper “again,” they seem to believe that revision involves moving a comma or two. Revision is punishment, one of those incomprehensible exercises teachers put students through. Actually, there are a number of reasons a writer should write something again. Revision, of course, goes far beyond writing something “again” or playing with punctuation but goes to the very heart of the writing process itself.

CHECK WHY REVISION IS BEYOND WRITING AGAIN

1 SUPPORT

The element of student papers most in need of revision, from both teachers and student opinion, is in support. There are a number of ways students can support a claim.

Examples:

Examples may be drawn from student or friends’ experience. When writing about different marriage customs, for example, I might give the example of attending a wedding in a culture not my own. However, less is more: longer “examples” run the danger of turning into narratives that threaten to take over the whole essay. I would not tell the story of this wedding from the beginning of the day until the end, for example, but rather highlight a couple of traditions that were new to me before moving on to the next point in the essay.

Details:

Specific details are needed to fully develop an essay: if something or an area or landscape is “beautiful,” what exactly does that entail? Readers may have different ideas of beauty

than the writer, so giving some details about the beauty of a place, whether its stark, desert terrain, lush green lawns, pristine snow, etc., will not only develop your writing but create mental images for the reader, pulling her into the piece.

2 RESEARCH

Quotes, paraphrases, facts, and statistics are also needed to support claims about such issues as the divorce rate, the number of college graduates versus non-graduates who get jobs in their field, or the depth of the water crisis currently facing California. It’s really not enough to say the water crisis is a crisis indeed and affects a lot of people: rather expert testimony as to the depth of the crisis is needed, specific statistics on how this drought compares to droughts in the past, and figures on how far down rainfall is, for example, are needed. Students need to do their research on the topic, in other words, not only to add to their knowledge base but to develop their essays.

3 MORE PRECISE WORD CHOICE

Some words are an anathema to academic writing: “nice,” “good,” “bad,” etc. More specific word choice/academic word choice is called for: when the water crisis in California is “bad,” what exactly does that entail? Is it “tragic,” “frightening,” or maybe “critical”? Students should highlight these vague words in their writing and consider what they really mean by the word, try to replace it with a more specific word, and use a print or electronic thesaurus as necessary. This exercise will not only develop student writing but also increase student vocabulary.

4 ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERNS AND STRUCTURES

While we often see the need for more support in student writing, readers often fail to mention organization, which

is less obvious a problem but just as important. When I feel my attention drifting while reading an essay, it is often because the organization is nonobvious, the connection between ideas questionable or not apparent at all. Discussing with students possibilities for the overall structure of their essay, such as narrative followed by analysis of that narrative, or addressing first causes then effects of an issue, can greatly improve student writing. Also important is the more “micro” organization: how the ideas should follow within an introduction, for example, first introducing and defining a topic, then limiting its scope for the purpose of the essay, and then finally stating the position of the essay, is a typical method of introducing an essay.

5 MORE MASTERFUL TRANSITIONS

As important as organization is, it is the transitions or connections that make that organization explicit. If the transitions are missing or incorrect, then again, the reader may find her attention wandering or find herself struggling to make connections on her own. For example, in telling the story of immigrating to the United States, one student started out with her waking up in bed on the first day followed by travel on bus. I suggested she start with the bus trip as it was more relevant. The student replied that the bus trip was the actual start of the story, that it had happened before waking up in bed the next day, something not at all apparent due to the lack of connections/transitions.

6 SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Relevant to organization of an essay is the issue of sentence structure. If all sentences are simple declarative sentences, then again, the reader may find herself struggling to see the connections: “California has a drought. The drought has gone on a long time. We must conserve water” is fairly clear, but better is “Cali-

fornia's drought has gone on for a several years, and the time has come for Californians to conserve water" is improved.

7 ELIMINATE EMPTY OBSERVATIONS AND LANGUAGE

"Marriage has existed in the world for a long time." This goes without saying on a literal basis. The writer can strike this sentence and continue with whatever position or purpose he has for discussing marriage and the paper will not be harmed at all and maybe improved. In revision, be merciless in striking material that adds nothing to your piece.

8 ANALYSIS

At the college level -- even high school level -- it is no longer acceptable for students to stop at the end of the story of "what I did on my summer vacation." They must go on beyond this to actually analyzing the experience: what did the summer vacation mean to you, how were you changed by the experience? What do summer vacations mean to your family? Then the analysis can extend to the more cultural and cross-cultural: What do vacations mean to Americans in general? What is the effect on the culture? How do American vacations differ from the vacations in other cultures? What does that mean? There are a number of methods and perspectives that can be used to analyze almost any given topic and extend it beyond the individual student's experience.

9 THEME

As students analyze an experience, they will likely find that certain repeated themes will emerge: in analyzing the topic of "vacations," for example, students might find the repeated theme of mishaps related to vacations coming up: the stolen wallet or passport, the lost luggage, the missed flight, and might then conclude that vacations, rather than the time of relaxation they are meant to be, are really related more to a lot of extra work and anxiety. This theme then can be deliberately highlighted throughout the piece.

REASON BECOMES APPARENT: MUCH IMPROVED WRITING WITH MORE SPECIFICITY, MORE CONNECTED ORGANIZATION, BETTER WORD CHOICE, AND MORE APPARENT PURPOSE.

AFTER GOING THROUGH THESE STEPS TOWARD REVISION, STUDENTS NO LONGER ASK WHY THEY NEED TO WRITE IT AGAIN AS THE

Teaching Students Revision and Self-Editing Skills

OCCASIONALLY A STUDENT WILL TURN IN A PAPER THAT THE TEACHER, NO MATTER HOW SHE TRIES, JUST CAN'T UNDERSTAND.

The instructor will try to focus on it in different ways, puzzle over it, read parts out loud, and perhaps give it to another teacher for a second opinion. Finally, the teacher will probably sit down with student in her office and take about a half an hour sorting out what the student was trying to say so that she can give some suggestions for revision and editing so that the student can turn in a second draft that is at least a little more comprehensible.

EDITING PROBLEMS THAT CREATE CONCERNS WITH COMPREHENDING STUDENT WORK

Below are some examples of editing problems that can cause comprehension concerns. (Author's note: a number of these examples were taken from a recent set of student papers in my developmental composition class at the college level, the topic was on the importance of names, culturally and personally, explaining why there are so many references to names in the examples.)

RECOGNIZE POPULAR PITFALLS OF STUDENTS' WRITING

1 OBSCURE REFERENCES

One large problem with novice writers in particular is the use of obscure references, such as acronyms (WCC), personal or local references (going to the Market on Thursday), or cultural references (a McMansion). Novice writers, especially young novice writers, have not yet necessarily developed the perspective to know that their audience may not recognize that WCC is Woodland Community College, that in the student's city a large public event is the Thursday Farmer's Market, when vendors from surrounding farms sell their products

directly to the public, and that a McMansion is the kind of large, sprawling, standardized home purchased by newly rich people in California, especially, taking its name from McDonald's and the idea of mass production. To avoid this problem of use of obscure or cultural references, students should be taught to be aware of their audience, that English today is a global language, with speakers all over the world, and to consider what readers outside their immediate circle of associates will understand.

2 CONVERSATIONAL USAGE

Young or novice students are just entering the academic world, and there often is a tendency to lapse into conversational usage as the student has not yet learned academic usage well. This usually, although it can be startling (e.g., use of "yeah," and "last time I checked"), does not present a problem. However, at times conversational usage, such as the historical present, or use of present tense verbs to discuss a past tense event (e.g., "It's the first day of school, you know, and the teacher walks in and starts to take attendance...") While this use of the historical present does not create a comprehension problem, usually, in a face-to-face discussion, it can be a concern in a written form due to the reduced context and the inability of the audience, the reader, to ask for clarification on what the time frame of the narrative is when the student slips between tenses.

3 POOR WORD CHOICE

Related to the issue of conversational usage in academic writing is the concern of word choice. Again, many students are just learning the academic register, or academic usage, and are just trying out its structures and vocabulary. This in itself is a positive development, this desire to stretch and grow their academic usage. It can, however, create some sentences that are a challenge to read: e.g. "I strive for my name to be known..." (What "strive" means here

is not exactly clear), "If someone has just met me and calls me 'sweetheart,' I get taken back..." (rather than "taken aback," a different meaning).

4 GARBLED SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Just as new writers are just beginning to be exposed to a new academic vocabulary, they are also just learning more advanced and complex sentence structures than the ones they likely are exposed to in everyday conversation. Again, this is a positive development overall, but it can lead to some pretty tangled sentences: "I remember a time that I was young in school in Los Angeles that I was called a wrong name that I didn't like so that..." While not technically wrong, some sentences have so many dependent clauses piled up, for example, that they become very hard to follow.

5 LACK OF TRANSITIONS AND CONNECTIONS BETWEEN IDEAS

"I am a young lady. And I feel like it's important to know someone's name..." What is the connection between being a young lady, specifically (rather than an older man, for example), and knowing another's name? Sometimes a brief conversation or querying the student in the margins of the paper is called for to ferret out these connections that students see that the reader doesn't, necessarily.

However, as it is neither practical nor desirable for the instructor to hold conferences with students regarding every obscure reference or poorly chosen word or snarled grammatical structure, students must learn to edit their own work.

TEACH YOUR STUDENTS TO SELF EDIT EFFECTIVELY

Because students are learning a new kind of writing, academic writing, and the teacher will not always be able to

edit their work (nor is that desirable), students need to be able to edit their own work.

1 DEVELOP SENSE OF AUDIENCE: WILL THE AUDIENCE UNDERSTAND THIS?

One of the first steps in learning to self-edit is to develop a sense of audience. Often students think that no one else is reading their work, or at most, the audience is the teacher (who will of course understand everything the student writes). Therefore students have to be actively taught a sense of audience. This can be accomplished in a number of ways:

1. actively querying the student about what does not make sense in their writing: "What is this an acronym for? I've never seen that..." "What market do you go to on Thursday?" etc., will start to move the student into realizing she has an audience when the teacher responds more like a reader in places than an editor.
2. have students be each other's audience. After some training in how to respond as a reader, students can begin to discuss their work with each other and often offer insightful comments on where there needs to be more development of a point, more connections between ideas, and so forth.

2 HAVE STUDENTS READ THEIR WORK OUT LOUD

Having students read their own aloud either to themselves or each other helps them hear, for example, monotonous sentence structure or awkward phrasing. As they get used to the revision process, students often take this step themselves without being asked.

3 LOOK FOR KNOWN PROBLEM AREAS/ERRORS

Once students have been editing and revising their own work for awhile, they begin to develop a sense of their own problem areas and can then go back and check their work and edit for those specific problems. If the student already knows he has problems with run-on sentences, and has been taught how to edit for them, he can go back and check that there are the correct connections between indepen-

dent clauses in his work.

REVISING AND EDITING ONE'S OWN WORK IS NEVER EASY.

Often even professional writers will pay an editor to help revise their work. Of course, this is not possible or even desirable for the beginning writer. However, by learning some general principles such as keeping an audience in mind and specific techniques such as targeting and editing for problem areas, students can learn to turn a critical eye to and revise and edit their own work.

In Your Own Words: 5 Ideas for Teaching Paraphrasing

AS ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS PREPARE TO BECOME EFFECTIVE ACADEMIC WRITERS, ONE OF THE MOST ESSENTIAL SKILLS THAT THEY WILL NEED TO ACQUIRE IS PARAPHRASING FOR THE PURPOSE OF SOURCE INTEGRATION.

Writing teachers will often find themselves reminding students to put things “in their own words”, but for many students, this is not a simple task, and they will need thorough practice before it becomes an accessible skill. Before students can begin to paraphrase with ease, they need to understand the purpose for doing so, and develop strategies for making it happen.

HELP YOUR STUDENTS PARAPHRASE EFFECTIVELY

1 EXPLAINING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students are more motivated to learn a new concept when they have a clear understanding of the purpose and importance of the task. It’s crucial that students understand why source attribution is so important in Western culture: we want to give others credit for their ideas when we share them. Some English as a Second Language students may come from cultural backgrounds that value shared information in a different way: in fact, often times, the use of others’ ideas can actually be seen as a sign of respect in some collectivist cultures. In some instances, there are no conventions for including citations in place.

2 COMPARING SUMMARIZING TO QUOTING AND PARAPHRASING

From the start, students should know that they will utilize paraphrasing to lend support to their ideas by providing evidence through the use of paraphrasing and quoting sources. Quoting is used similarly to paraphrasing,

and teaching these two writing techniques together can highlight the similarities and differences for students, hopefully, resulting in a greater understanding of how to properly use each technique to incorporate information from outside sources.

3 SPEAKING FIRST

Do you remember the childhood game, “telephone”? While paraphrasing is typically taught as a writing skill, students may benefit from exposure to it in a less formal way first. Paraphrasing comes naturally in speaking: we do it almost every day without realizing it. By engaging students in a casual and fun game of telephone, you can help them to connect paraphrasing to real life. Have students sit in a circle: the teacher can start the game by whispering a short, silly message to the student next to him. That student passes the message along to the next and so on. By the time the message has made its way around the circle, it will likely have changed into something completely different than the original. This is fun way to show students how easily information can get “lost” if we aren’t extremely careful with how we “pass it along”.

4 GROUP PARAPHRASE

One of the activities that works well to illustrate the challenges of paraphrasing well is to create an activity in which students work together in groups to write paraphrases of short excerpts from texts and then give them to another group of students in the class to “paraphrase the paraphrase.” The second group can give it to a third group, and so on. The activity can get time-consuming, and three rounds of paraphrasing should be sufficient. At the end of the activity, the class can compare the final paraphrase with the original and check to see if the meaning of the original has remained intact. If the meaning varies greatly, it’s important to direct students to review the progression as the paraphrase was forwarded to each group. This will help to illustrate

errors, which can be used as a valuable opportunity for learning.

5 AVOID COMMON PROBLEMS

There is a tendency among students to approach paraphrasing as a task that involves simply changing each word by using synonyms without addressing sentence structure. Arming student with different strategies is essential, and helping students to think of paraphrasing as a task similar to the way they would simply tell a friend story is essential. An instructor needs to provide ample opportunity for students to engage in structured practice that allows them to develop a variety of strategies and then put them together.

FOR THOSE ESL STUDENTS WHO WILL BE PURSUING ACADEMIC STUDIES IN ANY CAPACITY, PARAPHRASING IS AN ESSENTIAL LITERACY SKILL THAT SHOULD BE CAREFULLY DEVELOPED.

Teachers can aid the process by making sure that the purpose and technique of paraphrasing is clearly understood, and providing well-structured activities for guided practice.

Up, Down and All Around: 3 Editing Strategies for Your Students

A PROFESSIONAL WRITER ONCE SAID THAT WRITING IS REWRITING.

It may feel great when we put the final period on the last sentence in a paper or composition, but we are really only part of the way done with what we have written. Even the best writers make mistakes or choose less than perfect words and phrases when they write a first draft. That's why it's important to teach your ESL students that revising is an important and necessary part of the writing process.

WHAT IS THE WRITING PROCESS?

I use the acronym POWER to teach my students the process of writing. I stress that writing is not one event that starts with the introduction and ends with the conclusion. The best writers follow this five step process for generating, organizing, writing about and then refining their ideas.

1 PREWRITE

Prewriting is the idea generating stage of writing. In prewriting, writers come up with many ideas, all the possibilities in fact, before deciding which ideas have the most potential.

2 ORGANIZE

Once a writer has chosen her best ideas, it's time to organize them. Laying out what she will write and how the ideas will flow from one to another happens in this step. Organizing might include making an outline or it might just be making some notes on a sheet of paper before you write.

3 WRITE

Writing is the third step of the process, and it often takes the most time. Writing does not mean starting with the introduction and working through to the conclusion (though some people do write that way, most don't), but it does mean getting something coherent down on paper. After step three your students will have a

rough draft or what some people call a sloppy copy. The best writers know their compositions are not finished at this point and willingly move on to steps four and five.

4 EDIT

and

5 REVISE

Editing and Revision go hand in hand, and even the best writers (professionals, too) may go through these steps many times with the same piece of writing. You can distinguish the steps from one another like this. Revising is more about content, flow, word choice and organization. Editing is more about grammar, punctuation, spelling and formatting. It is possible to edit and revise at the same time, but writers may find even better results by taking each step separately. I like to teach my students three different strategies for revising and editing their compositions.

THE TOP DOWN TECHNIQUE

The top down technique is a revision strategy, and it is about as straightforward as you can get. To use this technique, your students will start at the beginning of their paper and read to the end. As they do, they will note any problems with content and style. As your students read through their writing, they should ask themselves these and similar questions.

1. Do I have a clear beginning, middle and end?
2. Are my arguments clear?
3. Do I give enough support to make my ideas convincing?
4. Do I have transitions between paragraphs and ideas?
5. Do I have any confusing sentences? How can I change what I am saying to make my ideas clearer?
6. Do I need to change any words to make myself clearer or make my points stronger?
7. Do my ideas flow easily into one another? What organization strat-

egy am I using? Is it effective?

If you have any specific requirements for the assignment, this is the time to make sure those have been fulfilled as well. Peer readers can often give a writer the best feedback during the revision process. Peer readers can often see problem areas better than the writer themselves. After each person has done a preliminary revision on his own piece, enlisting the help of a peer reader can make your students' writing more organized and more complete.

THE BOTTOM UP TECHNIQUE

The unfortunate thing about editing our own writing is that we tend to miss our own mistakes. We know what we want to say, so we sometimes fall into the trap of reading what we think we are writing rather than what we have really written. This is why the bottom up technique is so effective for editing. This technique allows the writer to get outside her own ideas and look at what is really on the page. To edit using this strategy, the writer should start at the end of her composition. She should then read one sentence at a time. As she does, she should look for any errors in grammar, spelling or punctuation. After each sentence, she moves to the one preceding it. This process does take time, and I don't recommend using class time for it once students understand the general concept. Even though it can be tedious, this step will ensure your students have used language as accurately as possible and make them more aware of their own errors.

THE TARGET TECHNIQUE

Every writer has their own bad habits when it comes to getting words on the page. While ESL students will have their own personal writing quirks, they will almost certainly struggle with first language specific errors. These errors may include incorrect word order, conjugation, punctuation trouble or inappropriate gender usage. What the errors are doesn't matter as much as each person being aware of the mistakes they make on a regular basis. This personal awareness of ha-

bitual mistakes is what makes this editing strategy so effective. To use this technique, each person should read though their composition looking for their own specific habitual errors. For example, if I misuse commas with compound sentences, I may go through my essay looking for every use of the word and. For each instance I find, I will check that I have used a comma when necessary and haven't when unnecessary. I will then read through my essay for another error I make frequently. If students reads through their essays for the three or four most common errors that they make, they will submit better final drafts with fewer mistakes.

THE MOST EFFECTIVE REVISERS USE ALL THREE OF THESE TECHNIQUES TO MAKE SURE THEIR WRITING IS CLEAR, ORGANIZED, WELL SUPPORTED AND FREE OF GRAMMATICAL, PUNCTUATION AND SPELLING ERRORS.

When students understand that revision is a part of the overall writing process and they put forth good effort to be effective revisers and editors, they will have strong effective writing about which they can be proud.

10 Most Common Writing Mistakes and How to Bust Them

MOST ESL STUDENTS STEP INTO THE CLASSROOM FOR THE FIRST TIME BRIMMING WITH ENTHUSIASM AND READY TO IMPROVE THEIR ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS.

And by “communication” they’re thinking of speaking skills. Which is great! But what happens when they’re faced with the challenge of communicating in writing? In today’s world where a lot of our communication and interaction is digital or online or electronic, ESL students need to learn to communicate well in writing, as well as orally.

Once you’ve gained some experience as an ESL teacher, you start seeing writing mistakes that pop up again and again, mistakes which are typical in ESL students in particular, and which are connected to the fact that English is their second and not maternal language. As teachers, it is not enough to identify these mistakes: we must deploy all of the strategies and tools we have in our arsenal to bust these mistakes once and for all.

THE 10 WRITING MISTAKES ESL STUDENTS MAKE MOST OFTEN

1 HOMOPHONES

Native English speakers who speak nothing but English, often make this mistake – it happens just as often with ESL students. Homophones are words that are pronounced the same way but have a different meaning. Classic examples are: their, they’re, there, new and knew, here and hear, its and it’s, etc.

2 PUNCTUATION

Punctuation can be a problem for those who are honing their writing skills in any language, and ESL learners are no different. The most common problem is the use of the comma. Students either don’t use it at all or insert it everywhere. Semicolons are also misused often.

3 CAPITALIZATION

Different languages have different rules for capitalization. In Spanish, for example, the names of languages and the adjectives for nationalities are not capitalized, which is why students often write english instead of English.

4 ARTICLES

The use of definite or indefinite articles is also no man’s land. ESL learners typically omit them entirely when they should be used or use them when they’re not necessary. This is when students write something like: The fruits and vegetables are good for you.

5 WORD ORDER

Word order is tricky particularly when there are several adjectives involved. Consider this typical mistake: I have blond long hair. Students forget that the length of the hair has to be mentioned before the color.

6 WORD CHOICE

Even very advanced ESL learners, who make very few grammar mistakes, will on occasion choose the wrong word or one that is not entirely wrong, but may not be the best choice. Consider this example: I am looking for an economic hotel. The word that is misused is economic -- it should be an economical hotel.

7 ADVERBS

I drove quick to my house. What’s wrong with this sentence? The student should have driven quickly or fast. Quite often students forget to use the correct adverb.

8 COMPARATIVES AND SUPERLATIVES

Raise your hand if you’re tired of correcting writing assignments that are full of “more better”, “more bad” or “expensiver”. Yeah. I thought so.

9 APOSTROPHES

The dog was sleeping on the cat’s bed. You might think this sentence is correct. Except the writer is referring to two cats who share a bed, not just one. Students have trouble with possessives in plural nouns (the cats’ bed), as well as nouns that end in s (Socrates’ ideas). They also use apostrophes when they shouldn’t (CDs is the plural of CD).

10 SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

This is one of the mistakes that crops up again and again in ESL students’ writing assignments. I’m talking about sentences like:

People is excited about the World Cup.

She have two dogs and one cat.

He speak English fluently.

HOW TO BUST THESE MISTAKES:

You carefully correct each and every mistake, and hand back the writing assignment to your students. They look over all of your corrections. They see how many mistakes they’ve made. But this is not enough. If this is all they do, your students are doomed to keep repeating these mistakes again and again. In order to bust these writing mistakes once and for all, your students must go from being passive receivers of your corrections, to actively recognizing and correcting their own mistakes.

How do you get students to correct their own mistakes (engage in self-correction)? You can go about this in a number of ways:

- If the writing assignment is short, simply write down and circle the number of mistakes they’ve made, which they must look for and correct.
- For longer assignments, you can break it down into paragraphs

or type of mistake, for example preposition mistakes, verb tense mistakes, vocabulary mistakes, spelling mistakes, etc...

- You can choose to correct some the mistakes, then single out a particular type for them to correct. For example, you can correct all of the spelling mistakes but make them correct grammar mistakes.
- Underline entire problem sentences and have them change them or rephrase them.
- Do what makes sense for your class and for the type of writing assignment. Just make sure they are self-correcting something.

BY HAVING STUDENTS CORRECT THEIR OWN WRITING MISTAKES, YOU'RE FORCING THEM TO TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THEIR WRITING, TO DIG DEEPER.

Self-correction increases awareness, and it is precisely the kind of awareness that will help them stop making these mistakes. It also boosts confidence. And we all know that confident ESL learners are happy learners.

Correct Me if I'm Wrong: Error Correction in Writing & Speech

ONE OF THE BANES OF A TEACHER'S EXISTENCE IS THOSE STUDENTS WHO ARE ALWAYS RIGHT.

They are never wrong, and if you think they are wrong, and produce evidence that they are wrong — well, both you and the evidence are wrong! (“Okay, today is not Mexican Independence Day -- despite the students in traditional dress celebrating in the quad.”) These contrary students are there to contradict and argue the most minor of points.

But perhaps even worse than the student who never admits to being wrong and never accepts criticism is the student who wants to have all of her failings pointed out, no matter how minor. She would like you to interrupt her when talking to point out mistakes in pronunciation and grammar, and if you don't do this it's a sign that you are failing at your job as an instructor. Clearly some discussion is needed for such students, as well as the class as a whole, on the rationale for error correction and when it is appropriate.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF ERROR CORRECTION

1 FOCUS ON MEANING

Language, is after all, about communication, therefore the focus, especially in the beginning stages of language learning, should be on communicating clearly, if not with perfect accuracy, and in a variety of situations. For example, like many other American second language learners, I can communicate with a good deal of accuracy in my second languages of French and Russian on a limited number of topics: in almost anything related to school and other familiar topic like family, I have been told I have near-native control. But outside that limited range of topics, my ability to communicate breaks down because, again like many American second language learners, I was not allowed to progress to learning a new topic or level of conversation or writ-

ing until I had achieved near-perfect pronunciation and grammar in the current one. I would rather my students have a range of topics they can discuss and write about, comprehensibly if not perfectly.

2 FOCUS ON GLOBAL ERRORS

Focusing on global errors is an academic way of saying “Pick your battles.” That is, it makes little sense to mark all the grammar errors in a student's paper if there are numerous concerns with organization, development, and vocabulary that are going to force major revision anyway — creating a new set of grammar errors. Rather, do correcting in stages, first focusing on the global then perhaps the more “local” errors of articles and punctuation, for example.

3 DON'T INTERRUPT

Being interrupted while trying to communicate a message is a universally frustrating experience. I would never do it to a native speaker who happens to use a nonstandard form in online production, so I would not do it with a second language learner who is struggling to communicate. Rather, the student should be noticed for the effort and eventual success at communicating after she is finished and then as appropriate some concerns pointed out. This strategy has an additional benefit in that the concerns you point out — e.g., “be careful about dropped word endings” — is advice that will probably apply to most of the class, so no one is singled out, and the other students also benefit from the instruction.

4 ADJUST EXPECTATIONS

Second language learners, especially those coming to the second language as adults, although capable of near-native like speech and writing and certainly proficient and comprehensible second language production, are still going to differ from native

speakers. They will especially vary in the idiomatic, that part of language without a set of formal rules and which follow largely native speaker “intuition,” such as two-word verbs (I was given “the run around” or “the run about”?) These differences should be accepted, and some nonnative “accent” in both spoken and written production accepted, especially if it doesn't interfere with meaning.

TALK TO STUDENTS ABOUT ERROR CORRECTION

Error correction is really an instructional strategy, meant to help students improve their second language acquisition, so it is important to not only have a set of principles of error correction but also to be able to talk to students about your guiding principles: why you don't correct every written or spoken error, for example. Many students expect and want each error corrected, and may become confused or frustrated if you don't, perhaps doubting your competence as a teacher (you don't correct because you yourself don't know the correct form or because you don't know how to mark a paper properly.) There are some methods to guide students in understanding error correction.

1 TALK TO STUDENTS ABOUT FLUENCY IN READING AND WRITING.

Fluency, the ability to speak or write without hesitation, is extremely important to general comprehensibility of the speaker or writer, probably more so than flawless production that proceeds very slowly for fear of making an error. In addition, aiming for flawless production probably limits acquisition: fewer vocabulary words and structures are attempted because risking use of new forms almost certainly results in errors at first.

2 TALK TO STUDENTS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING ITSELF

Language acquisition does not come from being corrected. There is little evidence that correcting errors and focus on perfection will lead to acquisition. Rather, acquisition occurs in predictable steps and from continual engagement with the second language through practice in spoken and written tasks: correction doesn't necessarily speed up this process. Error correction may actually be more practice for the teacher in the art of error correction than help for the students in acquisition of language.

3 MISTAKES ARE NOT TO BE FEARED

Mistakes are part of the process. Taking risks, trying out new vocabulary and structures, is part of the progress of learning new language: trying it out, getting some focused feedback at the end, and trying again. Correcting every error, and focusing on the incorrect rather than correct, often encourages students to not take risks, to not speak up in English class, unless they know exactly how they should say it, for fear of the teacher interrupting them to explain a grammar or pronunciation point — which will develop the theoretical understanding of the point but probably not the use of it. Students can really only learn the use of a second language through actual use of, not the discussion of, it.

4 TALK TO STUDENTS ABOUT YOUR ERROR CORRECTION STRATEGY

Because the teacher did not overtly correct you does not mean she didn't correct you at all: rather, she might have modeled the correct form after the use, for example ("Oh, I see, you visited your friend yesterday?" or summed up at the end some general areas to work on: "Remember to check your word endings before handing in a paper.") Because the teacher didn't correct every error in your paper or dialogue does not mean she didn't mark it at all. She may have focused on a couple of major problem areas to work on: repeated problems with verb tense, for example, rather than the one missing article.

5 GIVE STUDENTS SOME OF WHAT THEY WANT: EXPLICIT CORRECTION.

Often an instructional strategy will not work if students are simply convinced that it won't. If your students are used to having all of their errors corrected, try correcting students during production, or marking every error during a paper, and then ask how that works for them compared to the strategies of focused correction. Do they think that having every error pointed out helped them learn better? Often the answer is "no," especially if they experienced the frustration of the teacher interrupting them while they were in the midst of communicating a complex thought. You may then refer to your original explanation of how and why you address student error. Or if students remain convinced of the value of correcting every error, you may continue doing this, while still trying to introduce them to more focused correction by sometimes using this strategy.

GIVING STUDENTS FEEDBACK IS AN ART FORM, TOUCHING ON VALUES AND EXPECTATIONS OF BOTH TEACHER AND LEARNER.

There are some general principles of effective error correction, such as focusing on major concerns over minor and communication over correctness, that have been proven more effective than others and that should be introduced to students.

How to Teach Proofreading Skills: 6 Best Practices

I have a confession to make. While a passably good writer, I am a mediocre at best proofreader.

I'm always a little shocked whenever I see something of mine in print ("Really? How could I have missed that?") Of course, it is much easier to proofread someone else's work than one's own, which is why one proofreading technique is to let a reliable friend look the work over before submitting it. This is not always possible, however. There are, fortunately, a number of methods students can use for proofreading their own work.

6 BEST PRACTICES FOR SELF-EDITING AND PROOFREADING

1 FOCUS

To adequately proofread work, especially one's own, intense focus on it is usually required, meaning distractions like music, conversation, TV, internet, etc. need to be minimized or eliminated. It's hard, in our plugged-in, electronic world to avoid these distractions, but looking for editing and proofreading errors in one's own work, which is so familiar as to be almost invisible, requires too much attention, attention that can't be shared with the lyrics of your favorite music.

2 MAKE MULTIPLE PASSES

Editing and proofreading, especially of a first draft, can seem overwhelming. Where do you even start? With the ambiguous vocabulary? The problematic sentence construction? The nonstandard punctuation? It's easy to just give up and see if you can get your best friend to have a look rather than develop your own self-editing skills. One answer to this dilemma is to make multiple passes of the work — one first for content, focusing on the overall message and how if the way it's said makes sense, then a second pass focusing on the grammar and sentence structure, and then finally on to usage like word choice, punctuation, and spelling. There are two benefits to this method: not only is it less overwhelming a task to focus on one area at a time, but also one piece of writing gets multiple

and increasingly detailed reviews.

3 HAVE THE DICTIONARY, GRAMMAR, AND STYLE BOOKS AT HAND

Is it "uninterested" or "disinterested" in this context? Do I need a colon or semi-colon in this place? Do I mean "affect" or "effect" here? These are actually complex grammar/usage questions that are not easily Googled for an answer because of their very complexity. Rather standard reference materials, such as a style book, a thesaurus, and a dictionary is needed. One barrier is that many students today, because of online availability, don't own such reference books, which really should be a part of every student's library. In addition, if these materials are owned by the student, they are often inaccessible. It is physically much more difficult to look something up in a cumbersome dictionary than look online. I'm unlikely to go look for the thesaurus downstairs or try to pull it down from a stack of books on my desk, risking sending everything cascading, while I'm working on an article. It's much easier to try to Google my question, which again may very well not yield the needed results. So to use valuable reference books, they must be easily accessible. Keep them on the floor next to your computer, if necessary, when you are writing if the alternative is a high shelf. A caveat to this is that use of online materials will work if they are bookmarked on students' computers (rather than Googled), such as the Webster's dictionary, which is similar online to the print version.

4 WHEN PROOFREADING, FOCUS ON WORDS AND USAGE, NOT MEANING AND CONTENT

This seems counterintuitive, as of course language is more about meaning and content than about using the right punctuation or usage. However, this principle should be ignored when editing, where the editing issues actually do take precedence over meaning: we are at the stage in our writing, now having edited for content, to focus on issues of grammar, usage, and punc-

tuation. Also, reading a piece for content distracts the reader from minor problems like dropped apostrophes and spelling because naturally the reader's attention has shifted back to the overall meaning of the message rather than on editing issues.

5 READ ALOUD

Reading aloud again gets the reader to focus on his or her own work: the words, their sound, and how the sentences work together. In addition, he will learn to recognize some of his bigger mistakes, such as the dropped plural or past tense ending. Even problems with punctuation may benefit from this method as that in reading aloud the student can hear that run-on sentence that needs to be split into two, for example, or at least into two clauses connected with a coordinating conjunction and comma, or that sentence fragment that needs to be connected to the following sentence with a comma.

6 READ FROM BACK TO FRONT

Reading from back to front, sentence by sentence, is another way to get the reader really focused on the grammar and usage errors rather than focusing on the larger meaning. Starting with the last sentence of the piece, read it silently or out loud and consider its grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Then proceed to the next to last sentence, and so on, editing sentence by sentence, until the beginning of the piece has been reached. This method ensures that the reader is not focusing on content but on editing.

EDITING AND PROOFREADING IS HARD WORK, AND SELF-EDITING IS HARDEST OF ALL.

It's rather like trying to really "see" ourselves in the mirror as others see us — not really ever possible due to a number of real and metaphorical differences in perspective. However by focusing, and focusing on the grammar and usage specifically, rather than the content and meaning, the writer can begin to self-edit and not rely so much on well-meaning and tired friends.

Top Four spelling tricks for English language learners

SPELLING IN ENGLISH IS TOUGH, AT LEAST IT WAS FOR ME AS A STUDENT.

And although I have spell check to rescue me these days, that is not always the case with students. (That is until they invent a pen which checks spelling as you write.) Two big reasons contribute to English spelling being so complicated, both for second language learners as well as native speakers. The first is that English has borrowed words from so many languages, and as it did it often borrowed the spelling of those words as well. Think about words like hours d'oeuvres and tsunami. They are both English words, but neither follows the patterns we are accustomed to for most English words. The second thing that makes spelling in English tough is that spelling has remained static. Pronunciation of words has changed over the years, but often the spelling of the same words has remained the same. So often English words have spelling patterns which correlate with an extinct pronunciation of those words. These and other factors contribute to make English spelling, well, a challenge. But just because it is a challenge doesn't mean your ESL students have to feel defeated. Here are some tricks for both you and your students to help them conquer the giant of English spelling and become successful writers of English.

HELP STUDENTS OVERCOME SPELLING PROBLEMS WITH EASE

1 MAKE SPELLING COUNT, BUT ONLY SO MUCH

Finding the line that divides when to correct your students and when not to can seem like an impossible task. If you correct your students all the time, they can and will become discouraged and defeated. Fail to correct students enough and they will have no concern for spelling mistakes whatsoever, and as a result their writing may be at best sophomoric and at worst incompre-

hensible. Finding the line between when to correct and when not to correct is something every ESL teacher has to strive for. And where that line falls will be different with every group of students you teach. You can find it, though. Watch for repeated mistakes that your students make, and be sure to correct them. If a student has misspelled a word he has never encountered before but is still getting its meaning across, let that one go. Look for where your students are making silly, common, or repeated mistakes and be sure to correct them. When a student is being creative with language because he has little experience with particular words, let those go. As your students advance in their studies, get tougher on their spelling. Always be looking for signs that your students are becoming discouraged, and if you see them getting down, step back a bit from your corrections.

2 TEACH WORD ROOTS

I am a big proponent of teaching word roots to ESL students. When English learners know the meaning of the pieces that make up words, they have resources to understand new and unfamiliar words they encounter. But teaching word roots has an impact on how well your students spell, too. When students know the building blocks of words, they also know the building blocks of spelling. When word roots are repeated, spelling patterns are repeated, too. So taking time to teach word roots, either separate from your typical lesson plans or as the roots come up in the vocabulary you are teaching, is worth it.

3 CONQUER THE PHONICS MONSTER

For some ESL teachers, phonics is akin to a four letter word. I felt that way myself early in my teaching career. That is until I started teaching at a school which required phonics instruction. It was at that point that I was unable to remember why I hated phonics so much to begin with. Though

phonics instruction has little to offer a communicative approach to language learning, it really is worth devoting some time to, especially with young learners. When you teach phonics to ESL students, they will learn to associate letter patterns with the sounds that they hear. And the best phonics programs teach all the sound patterns a given group of words represents and in decreasing order of commonality. A program like this is worth investing in, and it will serve both you and your students well. They will become better readers and better spellers.

4 MAKE SPELLING FUN

Have you ever had to copy lists of spelling words over and over and over? It seemed to be a popular instructional technique in my elementary school days. But today teaching is more creative, more attuned to student learning styles, and more fun. At least that's what I strive for in my ESL classes. And spelling (and vocabulary instruction) doesn't have to follow the old boring styles. It can be fun and interactive, too. Following are some fun ways to practice spelling in your classroom.

VANISHING WORDS

Rather than copying words to practice spelling, make them disappear. Using a chalk board and a paint brush, have students trace over written words with a water-soaked brush. As they do, the words will disappear from the board. If you have a whiteboard in your classroom, you can still do the exercise. Glue a cotton ball to the eraser end of a pencil and have your students use that to trace words and make them vanish. This is much more fun than simply copying words, and your students will get the practice they need spelling them.

SENSORY SPELLING

Young learners, in particular, learn better when their senses are involved. Play to this advantage by letting them spell in a sensory environment. Try setting up a salt spelling tray as a

learning station in your classroom. Using a shallow box (a cereal box on its side with the opposite side removed works well), put a colorful piece of paper on the bottom and cover it with a thin layer of salt. Then have spelling/vocabulary words at your station for students to copy or try to spell independently (from pictures with the right spelling on the back so they can check). Students use their finger or a paintbrush to write the word(s) in the salt revealing the colorful paper below. You can also set up the station using sand instead of salt.

English spelling may be less than straightforward, but that doesn't mean your ESL students can't be successful. Making spelling a priority and making it fun are the keys to your students' spelling success.

INVISIBLE INK

What kid doesn't love writing in invisible ink? Let your students practice their spelling and vocabulary words with special ink that doesn't show up on the page. Have your students paint their words on a piece of paper using lemon juice or vinegar. Once the page dries, have students exchange papers and paint over the words using strong brewed black tea or juice from a red cabbage. The words should appear on the paper in a different color than the rest of the painting.

HANDS ON LETTERS

You don't have to stick to the page when it comes to spelling practice. Give your students some pipe cleaners and have them form the letters in bright and bendy colors. This is especially good for kinesthetic learners who need to get their hands involved to best grasp what you are teaching. Don't have enough pipe cleaners for the class? Whip up a batch of play dough or buy some at the store and have your students form letters from that.

CREATE A TREASURE LETTER HUNT

Set up a learning station to practice spelling with this highly sensory activity. Fill a container with colored scented rice and hide letters in the mix for your students to find. (Try magnetic letters or scrabble tiles.) Then put a list of spelling words at the station. Students must search for the letters they need to spell the words on the list. After the spell a word, they can return the letters to the bin and spell another one.

I Read It On The Internet: Teaching Students To Support Claims

DID YOU KNOW THAT PRESIDENT OBAMA WAS ONCE A GANG MEMBER AND EVEN SERVED TIME IN PRISON BEFORE RISING TO THE PRESIDENCY?

That vegetarianism kills? That more people die by violence from knives than guns in the U.S.? That the U.S. spends five bazillion dollars on foreign aid every year? I didn't know any of that either, but these are just some of the claims I've read in student papers over the last year. And how did my students find out? Well, the Internet, of course.

A number of issues, both in writing and critical thinking, are involved in such claims, of course.

A major problem with student writing is the writer's tendency to just repeat an often-stated claim --"You can kill with a knife the same as with a gun"-- without really researching and supporting it or even thinking about it and its underlying implications because the writer has heard it so often. This is not only a matter of writing but of critical thinking. Fortunately, there are ways to address such questionable claims through teaching research and critical thinking skills. Some of them follow.

TRY THESE 5 METHODS TO SUPPORT DUBIOUS CLAIMS

1 ATTITUDE OF SKEPTICISM

Primary to critical thinking is developing an attitude of skepticism, of not taking claims on face value but actually considering them. Carl Sagan, acclaimed astronomer, wrote for the lay audience in several of his books about the scientific method in general, especially of not just accepting claims on face value, but holding initial skepticism and willingness to investigate claims. He introduced the idea of "The Baloney Detection Kit," how one might investigate dubious claims. That is, if something sounds suspicious, like baloney, it may very well be. The claim that knives are more dangerous than hand guns may lead me to checking out that claim because my own experience and understanding of violence

lead me to be suspicious of it.

One of the first steps of "The Baloney Detection Kit" is the initial sniff test. That is, how reasonable does the claim seem at face value, "first sniff"? For example, there is a group of people, "9/11 Struthers," which claims that the Bush administration was behind the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. This claim fails the initial sniff test, whatever you might think of the Bush administration, because the first question that leaps to mind is "Why?" (followed closely by "How?") Bush-- whatever your politics and whatever you may think of him as a leader in general -- just doesn't seem like a lunatic who would kill thousands of his own people for no apparent reason. And such a plot would involve keeping perhaps a million conspirators silent for over a decade. The claim fails the initial sniff test and is probably baloney.

2 MODIFYING CLAIMS

During the course of questioning and investigating a dubious claim and its source, the writer will likely decide that her claim should be, if not totally abandoned, modified. While it may not be completely reasonable to say that knives are as dangerous as guns, they can certainly be dangerous weapons, and so the initial claim can be modified ("While the gun is certainly a very dangerous weapon that can do the massive damage that other weapons cannot, there are other dangerous weapons that are not as controlled as guns --" etc.)

3 CHECKING OUT CLAIMS

Along with the initial sniff test and modifying claims comes querying claims. If something sounds questionable--well, question it. Under what circumstances, and how, can knives be as dangerous as guns? Can an example be given of this? Who makes this claim? What might be her underlying motives? Querying a claim with pertinent questions to check out its validity is part of critical thinking and engaging in the academic process. Querying will also help develop writing skills because

in the course of questioning the claim, and if it does appear a valid argument, the writer will have more support for the assertion, for example, that knives can be as dangerous as guns, with expert testimony, examples, and so forth.

4 CREDIBLE SOURCES

Equally important to querying a claim for specifics on its validity is checking out the source and its reliability. Who said that knives kill more than guns? An ER doctor? A convicted felon? A criminal prosecutor? A scholar on the topic of violence? A member of the National Rifle Association? What expertise does the claimant have, and what motives/agenda might he hold on making the claim? On the issue of weapons, a doctor, scholar, and police officer have different types and valuable expertise, but their perspectives and agenda on the topic of how weapons should be addressed within a society are likely very different.

5 ADEQUATE SUPPORT

Besides modifying an overly broad claim during the course of investigating it, the writer will also be able to support it better. That is, in investigating the claim that knives are as dangerous as guns, the writer will have come up with statistics, examples, and expert testimony of the violence of both weapons and will then be able to better support the modified claim: e.g., if the modified claim is that knives, while not as capable of the kind of mass destruction a gun can produce, pose their own particular kind of damage, the author now has support for this.

BY TEACHING STUDENTS SOME OF THE METHODS OF ACTUALLY THINKING ABOUT, QUESTIONING, AND RESEARCHING DUBIOUS CLAIMS, THE INSTRUCTION CAN HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP NOT ONLY THEIR WRITING SKILLS BUT CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS AS WELL AND INTRODUCE THEM TO A MORE SCIENTIFIC AND ACADEMIC WAY OF PERCEIVING INFORMATION IN A WORLD WITH A LOT OF INFORMATION OF DUBIOUS QUALITY.

5 Strategies for Helping Students to Understand Academic Integrity

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS STUDYING IN THE UNITED STATES OR OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES OFTEN COME FROM CULTURES WHERE ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IS UNDERSTOOD DIFFERENTLY.

Thus, they may not be familiar with Western expectations when it comes to expectations in American universities for integrating source material using proper citations and formatting styles. It can be difficult to determine whether or not cases of plagiarism among English Language Learners are attempts at cheating or a simply a matter of misunderstanding. Hopefully, if students are familiarized with concept of plagiarism as it is understood in American classrooms, incidents of misunderstanding will occur less often.

MAKE YOUR STUDENTS FAMILIAR WITH PLAGIARISM

1 MAKE IT FUN

Using a guessing game is a fun way to help students begin to grasp the idea of plagiarism. Give students a list of common scenarios and behaviors that students engage in that may or may not be classified as cheating or plagiarism. Have students work in groups to decide whether or not each scenario is “acceptable”, “plagiarism”, “cheating”, or “a bad habit”. Other ways to approach this would be to create a chart that students are asked to use to classify each scenario or behavior, or by designing a matching worksheet or game.

2 READ AND WRITE ABOUT PLAGIARISM

Students who are learning about plagiarism are ideally doing so at a time in their studies when they will begin to integrate sources into their writing. Even if students are already familiar with the concept, it should be reinforced and discussed in depth when beginning to work with sources in writing. It is possible to select articles and readings that address plagiarism as a topic, and

to create prompts that ask students to consider the issue. Using readings and writing assignments to explore the problem of plagiarism gives students a chance to engage with the topic, and ideally, to apply what they have learned to their own academic experiences. Another added benefit of having students study and write about the topic in-depth? It also seems that students are likely to plagiarize on an essay that is about plagiarism!

3 INTRODUCE IT ALONGSIDE PARAPHRASING, QUOTING, AND SUMMARIZING

It helps students to better understand what they SHOULD NOT do (plagiarize) if they better understand what they SHOULD do (cite sources responsibly). Therefore, it is useful to introduce the concept of academic integrity when students are learning to use paraphrasing, quoting, and summarizing to integrate sources into their writing. Arming students with an understanding of these concepts at the same time that they are learning how to deal with sources will reinforce the importance of proper attribution and the use of citation, and will hopefully provide a clearer sense of Western expectations of how to use others' ideas in writing responsibly.

4 INVITE STUDENTS TO SHARE ABOUT THEIR OWN CULTURES

Conventions associated with using others' ideas are often linked to culture. Some ESL students may come from academic systems in which incorporating others ideas into one's own writing is actually seen as a way of honoring great thinkers, scientists, and writers. Students may benefit from a discussion of the differences among cultures with regards to definitions and standards of academic integrity. Other practices should not be labeled as wrong or inferior, but rather noted as different than what is expected in most Western systems. Offering students a chance to compare and contrast the expectations will help them to digest rules about

source attribution that may be new to them.

PLAGIARISM IS CONSIDERED A SERIOUS OFFENSE IN WESTERN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING, AND ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE WHO PLAN TO PURSUE ACADEMIC COURSE WORK INTERNATIONALLY NEED TO BE MADE AWARE OF THE CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH MAINTAINING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY EARLY ON IN THEIR STUDIES.

We can help ESL students to be better prepared by arming them with in-depth knowledge about why we utilize citation in writing and how to do so properly.

How to Teach Punctuation Skills: 5 Best Practices

“MOM, WHAT’S A SEMI-COLON FOR?” MY DAUGHTER ASKED ME RECENTLY. SHE WAS WORKING ON A SCHOOL ESSAY.

“Well, can you show me where you’d like to use it?” I asked. “But what is it?” “It’s a dot on top and comma below.” “No, I mean, what’s it for?” “You need to show me where you’d like to use it...” and so on. This kind of conversation is typical when talking about punctuation. It highlights why it’s so difficult to teach and learn correct punctuation: it’s near impossible to teach outside of the context of written text, and it is full of difficult terminology (independent clause, dependent clause, introductory phrase, etc.) foreign to most learners. However, there are several methods a teacher can rely on to teach punctuation and sharpen students’ grammar skills at the same time.

5 BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHING PUNCTUATION

1 RECOGNIZE AND DEBUNK PUNCTUATION “RULES” STUDENTS MIGHT ALREADY “KNOW.”

A period goes at the end of a thought. A comma marks a “breath.” A colon is stronger than a comma but not quite as strong as a period, and so on. “Rules” of punctuation are filled with such myths and elements impossible to measure as “thoughts” and “breaths” and “strong” and “weak,” probably because at some point in students’ education it was easier to talk about breaths and thoughts than about independent and dependent clauses and coordinating conjunctions, which is really how punctuation is actually used.

2 TEACH RELATED GRAMMAR AND SENTENCE VARIETY.

It’s not possible to teach punctuation without teaching independent and dependent clauses and coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, as it is these grammatical elements that punctuation actually marks — a period demonstrates the end of an independent clause, or simple sentence, for example — so teaching punctuation is also a good op-

portunity to review sentence construction and variety. For example, one exercise I like to use is after teaching some of the basic rules of punctuation use, giving students a passage from a well-known story, with all the complex and compound sentences changed to simple sentences. For example, one of the opening paragraphs of F. S. Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* goes from “The practical thing was to find rooms in the city, but it was a warm season, and I had just left a country of wide lawns and friendly trees, so when a young man at the office suggested that we take a house together in a commuting town, it sounded like a great idea...” to “The practical thing was to find rooms in the city. It was a warm season. I had just left a country of wide lawns and friendly trees. A young man at the office suggested that we take a house together in a commuting town. It sounded like a great idea.” Give students the revised version without showing the original, discuss why it is ineffective — e.g., the causal relationships have all been deleted — and see if they can work to combine sentences and improve the passage. Then have them compare their revisions with their original by Fitzgerald.

3 TEACH PUNCTUATION AND GRAMMAR AS AN END OF THE PROCESS, NOT AN END IN ITSELF.

I emphasize to my students that correct grammar, usage, and punctuation are not ends in themselves — they are not the purpose of written communication — rather they are part of the means of communicating a message. For example, the reader of the revised Fitzgerald passage above is likely to have trouble seeing the relationship between having just left a rural area and the decision to take a house outside of the city because the coordination and subordination, and their related punctuation, have been removed, causing a gap in communication. Knowing how to vary sentences with standard punctuation helps assist the reader in understanding the message, in other words.

4 TEACH IN CONTEXT.

One of the reasons I use classic

and contemporary passages like “*The Great Gatsby*” is that it’s very difficult to talk about grammar and punctuation without placing it in some kind of context, which is why it was hard to answer my daughter when she asked, “What is a semi-colon for?” I could have answered “It’s used to connect two independent clauses, and also to connect two independent clauses with a coordinating phrase...” which, I suspect, would mean little to her. That is why I asked to see her paper, to show her how she would use the semi-colon in the context of the ideas she was trying to communicate. Most importantly, however, the student should be told to not worry very much about semi-colons in the first draft, as she is just getting her ideas down at this point, and the sentences are likely to change in any case in later drafts.

5 RELATE PUNCTUATION TO EDITING & PROOFREADING.

Finally, punctuation really should be related to that final stage of writing: the editing, proofreading, and polishing that go on after all the ideas are arranged on the paper in coherent sentences. It is at this point that the student can look critically at a paper and make decisions about where a simple or a more complex sentence would be more effective, or whether to connect two independent clauses with a semi-colon or with a conjunction and period. That this stage of editing comes last does not make it of lesser importance, of course — it is Fitzgerald’s masterful use of sentence structure and variety, for example, that in part distinguishes him from lesser writers.

PUNCTUATION INSTRUCTION AND EDITING PAPERS IS IMPORTANT, OF COURSE — IMPORTANT TO COMMUNICATING IDEAS, TO COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY AND ELEGANTLY, AND TO HOLDING CREDIBILITY WITH YOUR READER, AS AN ESSAY SPLASHED WITH SENTENCE FRAGMENTS AND RUN-ONS BEGINS GRATE ON THE READER AND CAUSES HER TO QUESTION THE WRITER’S CREDIBILITY.

However, correct punctuation is not the end goal of writing itself, and it should be taught in the context of communicating a message with authority to a reader.

10 Fun English Spelling Games for Your Students

ARE YOUR STUDENTS READY FOR A FUN FILLED GAME STYLE SPELLING REVIEW?

Here are some ways to get their pulse quickening and the letters in the right order.

TRY THESE 10 FUN ENGLISH SPELLING GAMES WITH YOUR STUDENTS

1 UNMIX IT UP

Have students unscramble letters to make an English word. Using a current vocabulary list, have each student write the letters for one word on index cards – one letter per card. Then under the flap of an envelope, have each student write out the correct spelling of their word. Students then tuck the flap into the envelope, shuffle their letter cards and put them into the envelope in front of the flap. Now you have a learning center game ready for your students. Just put the envelopes out in a box or basket. Students using the center should pull out the index cards and arrange them to make a correctly spelled English word. They can check their answer by lifting the flap of the envelope when they are finished. As the year progresses, add words to the collection while leaving those that are already there and it becomes a way to review vocabulary as well.

2 UNMIX IT UP RELAY

Using the envelopes your students made for the 'unmix it up' learning center, have a spelling relay race. Divide your class into teams of five, and put a stack of ten envelopes on a desk across the room for each team. One at a time, students run to the desk, take the cards out of an envelope and unscramble the letters to make a word. When they think they have a correct word they call "check". You should see to be sure they have a correctly spelled English word. If so, he should put the letters back in the envelope and put it on the floor be-

fore running back to their team. The next person then runs to the table and choose his own envelope to unscramble. Whichever team finishes unmixing all their words first wins the game.

3 BLIND RELAY

If your whiteboard is also a magnetic one, this game will get your students excited about spelling. Divide your class into two teams. Each team should have a set of magnetic letters (the simple kind you find at the dollar store) on their half of the board. On your go, announce one word for each team to spell. One person from each team runs to the whiteboard and uses the magnetic letters to spell out the word. Just be sure you have enough duplicate letters to spell the words you call out. (For example, "taller" would require two letter ls.) The team that gets the word first scores a point. Then two other players take a turn. Play until everyone has had at least one turn. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins. If you want to make the relay even more challenging, blindfold each person and position them at the board before calling out the word. They will have to feel the letters on the board to spell their word correctly.

4 TELEPHONE SPELLING

This game is just as much a test of pronunciation and listening skills as it is of spelling skills. Divide your class into two teams, and have each team sit or stand in one long line. You whisper a word to the person at the back of the line, and she must carefully whisper it to the person in front of her. That person whispers to the person in front of him and so on until the first person in line hears the word. When he does, he should go to the whiteboard and write the word that he heard using the correct spelling. If he gets the word right, his team scores a point. If not, he does not score for the team. He then goes to the back of the line and the teams play again with a new word and a new player.

5 SECRET SPELLER

This game requires a small whiteboard or flipchart that you can face away from the students in your class. Set the flipchart up so it is opposite the front wall of the classroom. Put your students in pairs and have them choose one person to be the speller and one to be the writer. On the flipchart, write five to ten words that are difficult to spell or pronounce. When you say go, the speller from each team runs to the front of the classroom and looks at the list of words on the flipchart. He tries to remember as many of the words and their spelling as he can and runs back to his partner. He must then help his partner write the words on her paper, but the speller is not allowed to look at the paper. He can run back to the flipchart as many times as necessary to check spelling or remember words. When the pair thinks they have all of the words right, they call check. You should then look and tell them if the words are all correct or if there is a mistake. Throughout the game, the speller and the writer can say anything they want, but the speller can never look at the writer's paper. The first team to get all the words written correctly on the writer's paper wins.

6 SCRABBLE SLAM

Scrabble Slam is a fun spelling game that also builds vocabulary. Each card has one letter on the front and another on the back. (You can also create your own Spelling Slam cards by writing one letter each on index cards. Have more copies of common letters like vowels, t, s, r, n and l in your set, also omitting q and z.) Play starts with any four letter word laid out on the table and each player holding ten cards. The remaining cards go in a pile on the table. On go, players add one letter at a time to the word to create a different four letter word. For example, pole may become poke which becomes pike which becomes bike. Every time a letter is laid down, it must correctly spell an Eng-

lish word. Up to four players play at one time trying to get rid of all their cards as quickly as possible. If someone plays a word that is not spelled correctly, players stop and that person must take a three card penalty from the draw pile. If no one can play a word and everyone still has cards, each person draws one letter from the draw pile. The first person to use all her cards wins.

7 HANGMAN

This classic grade school game gives your students a fun way to practice spelling. For the traditional rules, look here:

<http://www.wikihow.com/Play-Hangman>

Start by playing with your entire class, you putting a word or phrase on the board. Players guess letters trying to decipher the words. If a student calls a letter that is in the phrase, you fill in all the places where it belongs. If they call a letter that is not in the phrase they receive a penalty. After a practice round with you leading, have students break into groups of three and play on their own.

8 3-D SPELLING

Why have a spelling test with pencil and paper when you can use play dough, beans, toys or other fun items to write out the words. You call out a word to your class, and they race through the items in their desk to spell the word out on their table. They might spell the word by arranging crayons, paper clips or other items in their desk. If they do not have enough items in the desk to spell the word, they can use items from around the room though collecting items will take more time. The first person to spell out each word correctly gets a point. The person with the highest score at the end of the spelling test wins.

9 SPELLING BATTLESHIP

In traditional Battleship, you sink your opponent's boats. In this spelling version, you sink their spelling words. Each person needs two 10 by 10 grids. Have students start by labeling the rows letters A-J and the columns 1-10. Then each person writes the same set of 5-7 spelling words on one grid, in random order and location, either vertical or horizontal. On the other grid, he tracks his op-

ponent's words. Players take turns calling out a coordinate, for example D-5. His opponent checks his grid and announces whether D-5 was a hit or miss. The first player should mark that square on his blank grid – red for a hit and blue or black for a miss. Play continues until one person finds every letter of all the words on his opponent's grid. (For more detail on how to play as well as a printable grid, see Salvo - the complete rules:

http://boardgames.about.com/od/salvo/a/salvo_rules.htm)

10 SPARKLE

This game tests spelling as well as listening skills. Have your students arrange themselves in a circle. Announce a word from the current vocabulary unit. The person to your left says the first letter of the word. The second person says the second letter. The third person the third and so on until the word is completed. The next person says 'sparkle'. Then you call out a new word. If at any time a person says the wrong letter, he is out and returns to his seat. If a student does not say sparkle when the word is completely spelled or if he says it too soon, he is out. Play continues until only one person remains in the circle.

What's the Buzz About? 5 Steps to Planning a Spelling Bee

SPELLING CORRECTLY IN ENGLISH CAN BE A CHALLENGE FOR MANY ESL STUDENTS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHOSE FIRST LANGUAGES UTILIZE A DIFFERENT ALPHABET.

Because spelling rules in English can be tricky, and given that English is not a phonetic language, students will benefit from as much practice as possible with this skill. So, why not hold a spelling bee for students to make it fun? Here are some ideas for how to make it happen.

PLANNING A SPELLING BEE FOR YOUR ESL STUDENTS? TRY THESE 5 EASY STEPS

1 EXPOSE STUDENTS TO IMPORTANT VOCABULARY

The first step in planning for a spelling bee is to create a list of words that will be used on the day of competition. The vocabulary words chosen should be ones that are relevant to students' needs. For example, if designing a spelling bee for students in a vocational program, vocabulary should be chosen according to the students intended careers. Likewise, in an academic program, words can be selected from the Academic Word List (AWL). There are many places to access the list online. Here is one option: <http://oald8.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/academic/>

Teachers will want to plan early, exposing students to the vocabulary gradually before the day of the spelling bee. Depending on the size of the competition, at least 100 words will need to be chosen to provide a full program.

2 SET THE PROCEDURE

After the vocabulary words that will be used have been determined, it's time to focus on the procedure that will be used on the day of the spelling bee. Students should become familiar with the process through "mini-bees"

held in class as opportunities for practice. A procedure that works well is to use small, individual-sized whiteboards or chalkboards that can be erased easily between competitors. Spelling is often difficult to master orally, and many students will benefit from the opportunity to visually see the word instead, by putting it in writing.

Have students form a line. The teacher can read a word aloud to the student at the front of the line, and the objective is to spell the word correctly on the whiteboard. It's a good idea to establish a time limit. If a student spells a word correctly, they go to the back of the line and continue competing. Once a student misspells a word, he or she is eliminated. The words should become increasingly difficult as time goes on.

3 JOIN UP WITH A BIG GROUP FOR A COMPETITION

On the day of the spelling bee, students from different classes can come together to compete in a larger contest using the words they have been practicing. If it's an especially large group, and enough teachers are available to help out, the game will move along more quickly with multiple lines of students. When only a few contestants are left, one line can be formed with the finalists. Take breaks between rounds to build excitement, and be sure to enforce a "no-talking" rule while the competition is in-session to avoid any cheating!

4 MAKE IT A PARTY

Get students excited about spelling by making the spelling bee a celebratory event! Black and yellow decorations (in the spirit of the "bee", of course) can really set a fun tone for the big day. If it's possible to arrange to have snacks and music between rounds, even better! The goal is to create an enjoyable experience for students that will also be worthwhile

in terms of developing spelling skills.

5 PRIZES

Students are usually highly motivated by rewards. Whether it's a piece of candy or a new novel in English, participation in the spelling bee will be even more appealing if there is some kind of incentive for performing well. This can begin inside the classroom during the practice bees, but it's especially fun to offer students a prize on the day of the formal event.

STUDENTS GET EXCITED WHEN THEY ARE PRESENTED WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO COMPETE.

Spelling in English is often a difficult skill for students to acquire, and it's difficult to get students to practice. A spelling bee can be the perfect incentive to motivate students to improve their spelling.

How to Use Email Writing in the ESL Classroom

THE INTERNET HAS COME A LONG WAY AND A LOT OF THINGS HAVE CHANGED – BUT EMAIL HAS BEEN THERE RIGHT FROM THE START.

Far and wide, it has become the medium of communication of choice, which is why it is also a great medium for English learners. It is real, it is fast and the skills they learn will be of use to them now or in the near future. Not convinced yet? Let's look at the advantages of using email writing in the ESL classroom.

ADVANTAGES OF EMAIL WRITING IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

1 EXTENDED PRACTICE

Email writing is the ideal type of homework assignment. Students may compose and send email from the comfort of their own home. Or coffee shop. Any time, any day. It's the perfect "excuse" to extend the time students spend writing in English outside the classroom.

2 IT'S AUTHENTIC

Email writing provides ESL students with the chance to write in a real-life context, and if they're not currently writing emails in English, they will most likely have to in the future. You should provide them with practice in this authentic setting, where they will also have the benefit of corrections.

3 IT'S STUDENT-CENTERED

When students write emails to each other, the teacher is no longer at the center. They decide when to write and how to write the email – the goal is communication. The teacher is there to guide students and help in case of doubt.

4 IT'S FLEXIBLE

You may choose to review topics covered in class via email writing, or tell students they can choose any topic they want to write about. You can make the assignment as targeted or as open as you please.

5 IT'S FAST

It's super fast and easy for students to send emails. And also a great paperless activity. Moreover, it's the ideal way to connect with and write to people in foreign countries.

HOW TO USE EMAIL WRITING IN THE ESL CLASSROOM – 7 IDEAS

1 TEACHER – STUDENT EXCHANGE

This is a less student-centered approach, but something you can do with students of all levels and adapt to suit their needs. Write a simple email with a greeting and a simple question. Each student must reply by answering your question and adding their own question at the end. Which you will answer in your reply. Communication can go on like this for as long as you like. For more advanced learners, you may give them something more complex to reply to like a creative writing prompt.

2 STUDENT – STUDENT EXCHANGE

Divide students into pairs and tell them they must write to each other, all the while cc'ing you. You can either give them a specific topic related to what you did in class (write to each other about what you did over the holidays) or tell them they can choose.

3 GROUP EXCHANGE

This is a little more complex, but you can definitely make it work. Give your class (or divide it into smaller groups) something they must research, for example a country. They must decide who will search for local foods, who will search for customs, who will search for statistics, etc. Students communicate their findings to the group, all the while cc'ing you. At the end, they must create a Word doc about the country they researched to send to you.

4 CHAIN MAIL

Give your class a printed copy of the class mailing list. Send the first student on the list an email with the beginning of a story: It was a dark, stormy night when Sarah heard a noise downstairs. The student must add one sentence to yours and email it to the next student on the list. And so the chain continues with each student adding their own sentence till the story is finished. Don't forget to tell them to cc you for each reply.

5 CORRECT MY EMAIL

Send your students an email and tell them it has 7-8 mistakes they must find and correct. They must reply with the correct version.

6 PUT IT IN THE RIGHT ORDER

Send students an email in which the greeting, closing and paragraphs are in the wrong order. Students must cut and paste the parts, compose the message correctly and send it back to you.

7 GAP-FILLING EXERCISE

Send to your class an email with blanks they must fill in. Be sure to include key parts of the email as blanks, such as the greeting and closing, or words that make the email more or less formal.

BONUS ACTIVITY FOR BUSINESS ENGLISH STUDENTS

Send your Business English students a business-related inquiry they must reply to: the cost of their service, questions about their products, if they may forward a copy of their catalog, etc. Students must reply and use their knowledge of appropriate business communication.

Did you notice something here? You can take any writing assignment you'd ordinarily make your students write in class, and assign it as email. It's eco-friendly, efficient and you'll be helping them develop the writing skills they'll need in the future.

7 Ways to Get Students to Collaborate in Interactive Writing

NO MAN IS AN ISLAND.

And this couldn't be more true of ESL students today. Learning English is more than a series of acquisitions that a student obtains alone. It's more than a list of words or grammar structures that an individual must grasp in order to communicate effectively in English. Learning English is not an individual, solitary effort. It is a social process, one in which interaction and collaboration are as fundamental as the vocabulary lists or grammar topics.

There are different types of collaborative tasks for ESL students, but let's take a closer look at collaboration in interactive writing.

WHAT IS INTERACTIVE WRITING?

Simply put, interactive writing is shared writing. In some cases, the teacher and students may literally share the same pen to produce together a piece of content like a story or letter, while in other cases the sharing is less literal. Students may write separately for a joint project, for example, different stories that go together in a book. Whether you have your students collaborate to produce one piece of content, or one that is a collection of their individual efforts, the possibilities for collaboration – and learning – are all there.

COLLABORATION IN INTERACTIVE WRITING – 7 EXAMPLES

1 LOTS OF SOURCES – ONE PRODUCTION

One of the most widely used forms of interactive writing involves having students research different aspects of one topic and then collate their findings to produce one piece of content. For example, have your class choose an animal to research, like the panda. Each student chooses what he/she will investigate, whether it is the panda's habitat, eating habits or characteristics. Students then work together

to write one paper on the panda.

2 ONE COLLECTION OF PRODUCTIONS

Another very popular form of interactive writing is having ESL students collate individual productions into a larger project or portfolio, such as a newspaper or storybook. Each student produces his/her piece of writing. Students collaborate to deliver the final product/collection. It's not as simple as gluing it all together. Decisions must be made as to the order of the articles/stories and if any of them should be cut/edited to fit the allotted space.

3 ONE STORY – DIFFERENT ENDINGS

Read out loud or hand out copies of a story, but leave out the ending. Students must individually write their own ending to the story. Then, they get together and share their endings. Students comment on which were similar, which were more surprising, which they liked best. Students choose one of the endings as the official ending for the story. They may choose one and keep it as it was written, or rewrite it taking elements from different endings.

4 EXPAND THE STORY

This is another classic interactive writing task. A student is given a piece of paper with the first line of the story written on it. He/she must continue the story and write the second line, then pass the paper to a classmate. When everyone has contributed to the story, the teacher reads the result out loud. Does it make sense? Is it a good story? They may do this task quietly, simply reading what the other has written before, or as a full collaboration, discussion ideas before writing down the next line.

5 EXPAND THE DESCRIPTION

Ask students to describe something like the classroom, a person

(you!) or an object, like an electronic device. Each student contributes a piece of the description and passes the sheet of paper to the next who will add something else to it.

6 STEP BY STEP

Another great form of interactive writing is having students work together to write a step-by-step process. What is something they can describe step by step? How to make a sandwich? How to send an email? The process can be as simple or as complex as your students' ages and level will allow.

7 GUIDED WRITING

A much simpler form of interactive writing, and one that is perfect for young learners or beginners, is guided writing. In this case, the teacher starts the sentence and students must complete it. The teacher may also give students different options. For example, write on the board: On weekends, it's fun to... Students submit different ideas. Based on the idea, you continue writing as a group. The students' contributions shape the final written result.

COLLABORATIVE WRITING PROJECTS ARE TREMENDOUSLY ENRICHING FOR ESL STUDENTS.

The focus is placed less on the teacher and more on the students' learning experience. We are not there to hand down or deliver knowledge. We are there to facilitate learning and guide students in their efforts.

Students may collaborate over 15 minutes or over several days. The important thing is not the how long or the how, but rather the what they produce. It will be a unique piece, the fruit of their labor, but also a meaningful learning experience they have cultivated together.

Be Reasonable: How to Help Students Write Using Good Support

ESL STUDENTS HAVE DIFFERENT REASONS FOR STAYING THE LANGUAGE.

Some are looking to further their careers and create business opportunities. Others are studying English to fulfill a language requirement or because their parents want them to. In my years as an ESL teacher, however, the most common reason for studying English among my students has been for academic advancement. Around 75% of my ESL students have gone on to attend universities in the United States. To help them prepare for their academic futures, we often talked about essay writing in class. Anyone who plans to attend college in the U.S. is bound to write an essay or two hundred, and one of the keys to writing a strong essay is having good support for your arguments. Here are some of the types of support I have taught my students to use in their writing.

HOW TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE SUPPORT FOR WRITING

1 WHAT IS GOOD SUPPORT?

Support is the evidence that a writer presents to prove her argument. I can say just about anything I want to in an essay, but if I don't give proof along with my opinions, my readers aren't likely to be convinced by what I am saying. So even though a writer's arguments are the key to what their essay says, the support, or proof, is the key to making those arguments believable and convincing. Writers can use several types of support to prove their points. I have found that going through the types of good support with my students makes their writing better. So what types of support are there? I'm glad you asked.

2 FACTS

The most straightforward of support is factual support. Facts are truths that are generally accepted. An example would be that the human body's normal temperature is 98.6 degrees

Fahrenheit. Facts are derived from scientific research and discovery. Researchers have proven that facts are true statements, and no one is going to argue with accurate facts. No matter what culture you call home, facts are accepted as truth. In addition to proven scientific facts, generally accepted truths also fall into this category of support. Most people would accept the assertion that too much junk food is bad for a person. I may not have scientific evidence to back this up, but very few people would say my statement is off base. When writing, scientifically proven truths and generally accepted truths are both strong types of support. A third type of factual support is statistics. Assuming the source of the statistic is reliable, statistics are a good empirical evidence to lend credibility to a written argument. They may come from scientific research, but they can also come from surveys or reliable second hand sources.

Let's say, for example, we are writing an essay on what qualities make a good student. Our first argument is that students who like to read do better in school and make better students. I can use statistical research that links a person's love of reading with their academic success. This would be using facts to support my argument.

3 EXAMPLES

Though not as empirical as factual support, examples are another way to support your arguments in a convincing way. Are you writing about literature that has stood the test of time? Shakespeare's Hamlet is an example of one such piece. Are you writing about ways to keep in good cardiovascular health? Running is an example of how to do that. These examples and others like them support reasoning and written argument. When my students use examples as support in their writing, I tell them a good example must meet two criteria. Examples must be well known (I wouldn't cite a book no one has ever heard of as an example of great literature) and be a good representative of

what I am writing about. For example, I wouldn't cite the movie version of a novel as an example of literature that has endured.

If I were to give an example of a student who loved to read and had academic success, I might write about my high school valedictorian who read books any chance she got.

4 PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Everyone, no matter how old or young, has a story. We meet people, have experiences and learn from our own mistakes. Sometimes, the best support for a written argument is a personal experience, that is, some event from your own life that proves your point. Personal experiences can make convincing support for written arguments. For any piece of writing, the personal experience should be directly tied to your argument -- just any personal experience won't have the impact that a good argument needs. If you can write your story briefly and make sure it is clearly tied into your argument, that personal experience may be just the support your students' essays need.

If we go back to our good student essay, I might share this personal example. I love to read literature. I have always performed well in English and literature classes. On the other hand, reading history is not something I would ever choose to do in my free time. In history classes, my performance has only ever been adequate. My experience linking reading to academic success in English and not in history might be a good personal experience to support my written argument.

5 EXPERT OPINIONS

The final type of strong support I encourage my students to use in their writing is the opinion of an expert. Though the information I get from an expert may not be scientifically proven, someone who knows the subject on which I am writing may have ideas that are probably true. Citing the opin-

ion of an expert has one extremely important element. The writer must establish that the person is an expert. In many cases, the expert will be a professional in a particular field, but a person doesn't have to be a professional to be an expert. I could cite my grandmother's opinion on strawberry pie because she has won the state pie championship three years in a row. I can share my brother's thoughts on classic cars since he has been restoring them as a hobby for twenty years. These people are also experts in their fields. Be careful not to cite expert opinions outside their fields of expertise. I would never ask my brother how to make a strawberry pie or my grandmother how to rebuild a carburetor.

For my qualities of a great student essay, I could cite an expert's opinion to support my argument. I might find an educational professional whose job it is to improve student performance and share her opinion. Or I might ask my high school English teacher who has been working with students for thirty-five years and who can tell me from his experience that reading makes a difference in how students perform.

STRONG SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESSFUL ACADEMIC WRITING.

I find that giving my classes a list of the types of support that work in writing makes their writing stronger. Giving them these tools for support also makes them more comfortable with the writing process and with their final products, and I'm happy with the results, too.

Figure Friendly: How to teach students about figurative language

SAY WHAT YOU MEAN AND MEAN WHAT YOU SAY.

It's something I heard often from my grandfather, and generally it's a good policy, I think. But the English language can sometimes be uncooperative, at least in the minds of nonnative speakers. Even when an English speaker is saying what she means, she might not mean exactly what the audience hears. Figurative language takes the blame. Figurative language is creative language: it is using words in a nonliteral sense to get one's meaning across. It's meaning what you say but not saying what you mean. English has five basic types of figurative language: similes, metaphors, personification, idioms and hyperbole. Each is a distinct technique to make language richer and to paint more vivid pictures in the minds of the reader or listener. For ESL students, understanding and recognizing figurative language is essential to achieve fluency. Here are the main types of figurative language used in English and activities you can do with your students to practice them.

GET AMAZING RESULTS WHILE TEACHING ALL TYPES OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

1 SIMILE

A simile makes a comparison between two items using the words like or as. The comparison makes a description more vivid or striking or easier to picture. A simile says to the listener that two things are similar. The key to recognizing a simile is identifying the word as or like in the comparison.

The man was like a prowling lion.

The man was as hungry as a bear.

If you know what a hungry bear might be like, you can imagine what the man feels or how he is acting. This comparison paints a picture in the listener's mind.

2 HOW TO TEACH SIMILES

Give your students a chance to get out of the classroom and do some

nature observation. Go on a short walk as a class or give your students a set amount of time to walk around your school grounds. Tell them to note any outstanding features of the landscape – tall trees, green grass, etc. After your walk, return to the classroom and have students write ten phrases using adjectives that describe a natural element that they saw. Once their sentences are complete, remind your students that similes compare two items to paint a picture for the reader or listener. Show your students how to take a descriptive phrase using an adjective and turn it into a simile. Starting with the phrase “a tall tree” have students volunteer other items that are tall: a skyscraper, a giant, etc. Then use one of those objects to transform the descriptive phrase into a simile: the tree was as tall as a skyscraper. Have each student rewrite five of his descriptive phrases as similes in this way. Then ask students to share what they have written with the class.

3 METAPHOR

Metaphors also make a comparison between two items, but they do not use as or like in the comparison. In a metaphor, one item is said to be something, that two items are equal, but this equality is not to be taken literally. Sometimes the comparison in a metaphor is clearly articulated. Other times, the comparison is implied.

The man was a hungry bear, a prowling lion looking for prey.

She jumped into a circus of activity once school started.

4 HOW TO TEACH METAPHORS

Give your students some examples of metaphors and discuss together what they mean. Make sure your students understand how two items are being compared without using the words like or as. Then challenge your students to create their own metaphors. One popular way to use metaphors is in describing people. Have students work in pairs to list fifteen personality traits. Then, have the pair choose eight of those to

use as inspiration for their own metaphors. Have students start by choosing a personality trait, for example, loud. Then have students make a list of a few items that are loud – a thunderstorm, a party, an elephant, etc. Students should then use one of those items as inspiration to write a sentence containing a metaphor.

His voice was thunder, rattling the windows and the doors of the classroom.

Give students a chance to share their favorite metaphors with the rest of the class. If your class is creative, give them a chance to illustrate their metaphors in a humorous way and display them in your classroom.

5 PERSONIFICATION

Personification is not used to describe people. Instead, personification is used to describe an animal or an object. In personification, an inhuman item is given human characteristics. Weather can be described with human characteristics, for examples. Likewise, animals are good subjects of personification.

The trees moaned in the wind.

Their arms reached for someone they had lost.

6 HOW TO TEACH PERSONIFICATION

Poetry is a great resource for personification. Because every word in a poem is carefully chosen, personification can pack a descriptive punch in just a few words. I like to use a jigsaw style activity when I teach personification to my students. I divide my class into three groups and give each group copies of one of the following poems: April Rain Song, The Sun, and The Sky is Low. I have groups work together to first define any unfamiliar vocabulary and then to find and highlight any human attributes used to describe the weather in their poem. I then break students into groups of three making sure each person has studied a different poem. Students share their poems with their new groups and point out the any personifi-

cation in the poem. I ask these same groups to then talk about how the personification each poet used helps create an overall feel to the poem. Finally, I challenge students to write their own poem about the weather using personification. If you are teaching younger students, give your class a chance to illustrate their poems and then post them on a bulletin board titled "Whatever the Weather".

7 IDIOMS

Idioms are language specific phrases that mean something other than their literal meaning. ESL students need lots of opportunities to practice idioms since ultimately learning idioms means memorizing them. Some common examples of idioms are

Drinks are on the house.
He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

Though you can coach students to understand some idioms based on their parts (the house is another word for the business, silver spoons are something the wealthy might have but not the average person) the best way for students to learn idioms is through practice.

8 HOW TO TEACH IDIOMS

With a little effort, you can find many idiom exercises for ESL students. One of my favorites is to give students a list of English idioms and have them guess at the meanings. I break my students into groups of three or four and give them a list of about twenty idioms. I ask the groups to discuss each idiom and guess what it might mean. They will know some of them already, but many of the idioms will be unfamiliar. After 15-20 minutes of discussion, I give my students a list in random order of what the idioms on their sheets mean. I challenge my groups to match the meanings to the correct idioms. This exercise is a challenge for ESL students, but it is also fun. I like to watch students' faces as they puzzle out what these crazy English phrases really mean. I wrap up the activity by going through the idioms and giving students the correct meanings and encouraging students to share some of their favorite idioms from their native languages. If you like, you can do this exercise multiple times giving students a different list of idioms for each discussion.

9 HYPERBOLE

A hyperbole is an exaggeration, a description taken to the extreme and not meant to be taken literally, instead intended to paint a picture for the listener.

This backpack weighs a ton.
I haven't been to this restaurant in forever.

Your students should be able to recognize hyperbole by the extreme exaggeration. Often, the literal meaning of hyperboles are physically impossible.

10 HOW TO TEACH HYPERBOLE

Give your students some examples of popular hyperboles. You can find a list here:

<http://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-hyperboles.html> or compile your own. Have students discuss in pairs what each of these phrases means. Then challenge your students to write a skit in which one character only speaks in hyperboles. The skit should be two people discussing a problem that might be common among your students: too much homework, asking a girl out on a date, or trying to understand American culture, for example. Have students perform their skits for the class. After each skit, as the audience to give examples of hyperbole that were used in the skit.

UNDERSTANDING THE LITERAL MEANING OF ENGLISH IS NOT ENOUGH WHEN FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE COMES INTO PLAY.

Make sure your students are prepared to tackle this new level of language by reviewing and practicing these five types of figurative language in English.

Easy as ABC: 9 Hands On Activities for Teaching Alphabetical Order

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR SOME FUN ACTIVITIES FOR PRACTICING ALPHABETICAL ORDER WITH YOUR ESL CLASS?

Do your students like learning that gets their bodies moving while their minds are working?

TRY THESE 9 HANDS ON ABC ACTIVITIES WITH YOUR STUDENTS

1 ALPHABETICAL DICE

If you use story dice or word dice for other language building activities you can have them serve double duty by playing alphabetical dice. Using dice with printed words, letters of the alphabet, or blank dice that you label yourself, have students take turns rolling three to five dice and then putting the words in alphabetical order. This game is best in groups of about three, though you may not have enough dice for groups that small. If that is the case, consider setting up a learning center with the dice you have and directions on how to play with one or two other students.

2 ALPHABETICAL DOTS

For students just getting familiar with alphabetical order, this simple activity may be just what they need. To prepare, write the letters of the alphabet in random order on a blank piece of paper. Make sure you scatter the letters over the entire surface of the paper but don't crowd them too close. If you like, you may want to include multiples of each letter as well as capital and lower case letters. Using dot markers, students cover the letters in alphabetical order. In other words, they search the paper for any As and then dot over them with the marker. They then move on to Bs and so forth until they reach the end of the alphabet.

3 ALPHABETICAL HIGHLIGHTS

Once students are familiar with alphabetical order, increase the difficulty of the previous exercise by writing selected words over the surface of the paper rather than isolated letters. Students then use highlighters to cross out the words in the correct alphabetical order. To give

your class more practice, simply make a new page of words and copy them for your class. This activity works well either as a class or as a learning center.

4 ALPHABETICAL FILES

Hands on activities are great for ESL students as well as kinesthetic learners. With that in mind, give your students a set of vocabulary which they can file in alphabetical order. Write one word each on an index card which your students will alphabetize. For an easier game, include only one word beginning with each letter. For a more difficult game, give as many words for each letter as you like. Then, provide your students with a plastic index card holder and alphabet dividers, both available at office supply stores. Students then file the cards under the correct letter in the file box. If you give more than one word starting with each letter, students will have to alphabetize within the lettered sections as well.

5 ALPHABETICAL CUPS

Styrofoam cups are an easy manipulative for giving your students alphabetical order practice. Using standard Styrofoam coffee cups, make a set of words for your students to put in alphabetical order. To do so, turn the cups upside down and write one word on the outside rim of each cup with a permanent marker. Students then rearrange the order of the stack of cups until the words are in correct alphabetical order from the top of the stack down.

6 ALPHABETICAL CLOTHES PINS

Another manipulative that works great for alphabetical order practice is clothes pins. Write one word each on an alligator style clothes pin. Students then clip them along the side of a file folder in the correct order. If you like, trim about an inch off the front flap of the folder and write the correct answers along the inside of the folder so the front flap covers them. When students have finished arranging their clothes pins, they can lift the folder's front to see if they are correct.

7 MAGNETIC ALPHABET

Alphabet magnets are easy to come by at most dollar stores, and with a simple baking pan you can make a magnetic alphabet activity that your students can use over and over. To create a magnetic alphabet learning center, put the alphabet magnets in a basket next to a baking pan. Write current vocabulary words on index cards for students to reference. They then copy the words from the index cards with the magnetic letters. As they copy the words, students should arrange them in the alphabetical order.

8 ALPHABETICAL LOLLIPOPS

This activity takes some preparation, but you can use it over and over once you get the materials together. Decide how many words you want your students to alphabetize, and gather that many popsicle sticks. Create word lollipops by attaching a circle to the top of each stick with one word written on it. Then create a paper doll chain with the same number of children as there are word lollipops. Laminate the paper doll chain and set it out with the word lollipops. To practice alphabetical order, students lay the words in alphabetical order on each of the paper dolls. To make the activity a little easier, use a dry erase marker to write the first letter of each word on the correct paper doll. You can always erase it when your students are ready for more of a challenge.

9 ALPHABET CONTAINERS

If you have the room in your classroom, have your students work with you to create alphabet containers. Label 26 small plastic containers with the letters of the alphabet and store them on a counter or spare desk in your classroom. Encourage your students to bring in small objects or pictures of items and put them in the container which corresponds with the first letter of the object. To practice more complex alphabetical order, have a student take all the items from one container and put the pictures or items in the correct alphabetical order. Once the objects are in order, have the student write out the words for each of the pictures in a list of alphabetized words. Once students finish, they can swap containers.

Scaffolding Summary Writing

WRITING A SUMMARY IS A GREAT ACTIVITY THAT BENEFITS BOTH STUDENTS AND TEACHERS ALIKE.

For the student, it offers them a chance to synthesize what they just read and sort out the ideas in their own words. For the teacher, it is a great way to assess the student's comprehension of the material.

Although writing a summary can be quite a rigorous activity for English language learners, that should not discourage teachers from doing summary writing in their classrooms. Like any rigorous activity, with the right scaffolding, students can rise to the level of the activity and come out stronger.

There are many ways a teacher could scaffold writing summary. The process I share below, done in its entirety, touches on all of the four language skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. Although the activities are very effective when done in the sequence below, they are very effective individually. When deciding which activities to use, the teacher must look at factors such as the level of the class and the class time constraints. It is best to do this sequence of a series of days.

HOWTO: SCAFFOLDING SUMMARY WRITING

1 INTERACTIVE READ-ALoud

The first step to writing a summary is to read the material to be summarized. There are many ways you could do this such as reading individually, reading in partners, or reading as a group.

For the most support, I recommend doing an interactive read-aloud first. This is where the teacher reads the material to the class using different voices, gestures, and facial expressions to facilitate the understanding of meaning of a story. During this process, it is recommended that the teacher stops at key moments throughout the story to offer explanations and/or to check for students' comprehension.

Following the read-aloud, the students should read the material in pairs or individually to solidify their understanding of the material.

2 GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

Once you have read the material, it helps to organize the ideas into a graphic organizer. This can help students get their ideas on to paper in a clear, organized format. It is recommended to have the students do this in a small group or in pairs so they have the support of others. If you don't have one already, the internet is filled with free graphic organizers that you can print and use in your classroom!

3 LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE

Language Experience is a great way to get the students talking while also helping them construct a summary with the support of their classmates and the teacher. The final product is a great example to the students of what a summary should look like. It is also all student created so the students will take pride in what they have accomplished together and will have the confidence to do it individually in the future.

Here is how to do a language experience activity.

1. Student Contribution: Have the students give you a sentence for the summary and write it on the board. You could ask for volunteers or call on individuals. During the activity, you may want them to have their graphic organizers out for extra support if needed. Go through each student in the class, having each student add a sentence, until a full summary is written on the board.
2. Make corrections: It is inevitable that students will make mistakes as they relate the ideas to you so you may need to model standard English after the student gives you a sentence. There are many different schools of thought on error correction so how you do this will depend on your teaching style. It is important that the teacher proceeds with care whenever doing error correction as some students may become self-conscious and not want to con-

tribute in the future. We want this to be a very positive experience for the students so they will want to always contribute in the future. There are many ways to do error correction. One way to approach it is to ask the student "May I write it this way?" followed by the model of standard English.

3. Read the summary: You should encourage your students to read along with you as you point to the words on the board. You may later choose to have them read it in partners after it is read as a group.

4 WRITE THE SUMMARY

You have read the material, you have organized ideas using graphic organizers, and you have composed a group summary that acts as a great example for the students. It is now time to write the summary. How much scaffolding you add at this point will depend on you and your students. Here are some options.

1. Cloze: Take the language experience summary that you created and turn it into a cloze activity. You can remove every five words, remove parts of sentences, or remove only important words that you want to focus on. This can be done with or without a word bank.
2. Partner Summary: If you do not think students are quite ready to write a summary by themselves, you could put them in pairs and ask each pair to turn in a summary.
3. Pictures: Sometimes students are able to write on their own but they need a little guidance. You could give the students a sequence of pictures that follow the storyline. This can help them stay on track and offer support if they run into a problem.
4. Individual Summary: If the students are ready, give them a blank piece of paper and let them run with it. Although as teachers we find giving summary tasks as daunting as our students find writing them, sometimes we just have to let go. Often, the students surprise themselves and us with what they produce.

5 SHARE

This is the most important step of all. You went through all the steps scaffolding the summary writing process and the students produced great summaries that deserved to be shared. You can have each student read their summary to the class or read it to their partner. If you want to allow comments after reading, it is recommended to only comment on content at this point. If you want to do a peer-editing step before sharing, that would be the time to comment on grammar and syntax.

Sharing should not stop with members of the class: we need to share this accomplishment with other teachers, parents, and the community. Post your summaries around your classroom or your school that is visible for anyone who drops by for a visit.

WRITING A SUMMARY CAN SOUND SCARY TO BOTH TEACHERS AND STUDENTS, BUT IF YOU TAKE THE PROCESS IN SMALL STEPS, STUDENTS WILL PRODUCE GREAT SUMMARIES IN NO TIME!

The Summary Response Essay: 5 Essential Components

THE SUMMARY RESPONSE ESSAY IS A CLASSIC WRITING TASK FOR ADVANCED ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENTS WHO ARE EMBARKING ON AN ACADEMIC PATH.

It is often used to introduce students to the notion of source integration, and it can also serve as a foundation for introducing other rhetorical styles. As students prepare to undertake university coursework, they need to be prepared to respond to reading material responsibly and effectively, and the summary response essay is excellent way to help them begin to learn how to do so.

PREPARE YOUR STUDENTS FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

1 SUMMARIZING

This writing task is a fundamentally important one, as it will be a useful and necessary technique in many academic writing assignments that ESL students encounter in their studies. It's especially challenging because a student's ability to do so effectively depends on both reading and writing skills. If students are at a deficit in reading proficiency, the writing aspect of summarizing will be incredibly difficult. Likewise, if a student is strong reader, summarizing will be challenging if his or her writing skills are not of a comparable proficiency level. When teaching students how to summarize, the focus should be on main ideas. Often, students are tempted to include too many details, and a summary can turn into one long paraphrase in which students include too many details. A summary grid is a useful tool for helping students to pull main ideas out of a text before organizing them into a piece of writing. This graphic organizer is simply a chart that has space for students to write the main idea of portions of the text. It can be divided by sentence, paragraph, or section, depending on the length of the text. Students can use a summary grid to take notes and then

further synthesize the information to decide what to include in a summary. Like anything we teach, summarizing needs to be broken down step by step when students first are first beginning to learn how to do so, and collaboration among classmates when students are first learning this concept will be very useful.

2 PARAPHRASING AND QUOTING

There can easily be confusion between summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting when students are learning to integrate sources into their writing. Therefore, it is often helpful to introduce these skills together, allowing students to compare and contrast the characteristics of each. Start by taking a passage and showing students an example of a summary, a paraphrase, and quote from the same excerpt, so they can begin to identify the defining features of all three. The focus of summaries should be on main ideas, which paraphrasing and quoting should preserve one, isolated idea in its entirety.

3 ORGANIZATION

The organization of a summary response essay is typically a 4-5 paragraph essay that includes a short summary in the introduction that provides an objective overview of a text. The body of the essay is the response portion and should include student's commentary on the reading or on an issue related to the topic or ideas stated within the reading. This format is a formative teaching tool because much of what students will encounter in later academic coursework will require them to engage in writing tasks that require stating information and then analyzing it. The summary response essay serves a stepping stone for this kind of thinking and writing process, and thus, the organization of ideas in a summary response essay is important as a foundational form.

4 TRANSITIONS

The summary response essay, like any basic writing task for English as a Second Language students, is also an opportunity to develop cohesion in writing. Students should be directed to choose appropriate connectors to join ideas, both between paragraphs and within them. Once students have mastered the general format of a summary response essay, the next step is to have them refine their writing by looking at how appropriate transitional words and phrases can be added to aid them in clarifying ideas and creating stronger arguments.

5 ARGUMENTATION CAN BE INTRODUCED

When students have become comfortable using the summary response format, argumentation can be introduced using the same structure. This allows students to focus on dealing with their ideas without needing to also worry about organizational issues in the essay. If they are working within the familiar framework of the summary response essay, they will be free to explore how concession and refutation can be used to strengthen opinions and enhance critical thinking. Argumentation is a concept that will take students some time to digest, so if students can work within a familiar framework, it minimizes the amount of new information that needs to be processed at once.

THE SUMMARY RESPONSE ESSAY IS A TRIED-AND-TRUE TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENTAL ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING AND READING COURSES.

It is an essential component of any course that is preparing students to write academically with the use of source integration. Students will benefit greatly throughout their academic careers from the practice that the summary response essay affords them in terms of honing their summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting skills.

Note-Taking During Lectures: 7 Ways to Help Students Prepare

FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS WHO ARE PREPARING FOR STUDY IN AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES, THE DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE NOTE-TAKING STRATEGIES IS AMONG THE MOST ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR ACADEMIC PREPAREDNESS.

Fortunately, as teachers, we can help students to develop meaningful listening and writing strategies for note-taking by creating appropriate practice opportunities.

USE THESE IDEAS FOR EFFECTIVE NOTE-TAKING TEACHING

1 EXPLORE COMMON RHETORICAL STYLES

The organization of ideas varies across cultures, and English as a Second Language students will need to become familiar with how ideas are presented in English-speaking countries in order to know how to listen for information most effectively. While they need to be made aware that there's no absolute blueprint for how information is presented, students will benefit from being able to anticipate the placement of main ideas and details in the rhetorical conventions they will likely encounter. Pulling from any prior knowledge that students may have about reading and writing will expedite this process: teachers should be sure to ask students what they know already about how ideas are usually presented in written texts, better yet, instructors can allow students to see written transcripts of lectures in class, enabling them to engage visually as well as aurally before relying strictly on listening.

2 FAMILIARIZE STUDENTS WITH TRANSITION WORDS

In addition to introducing general patterns of organization, students will also benefit from exposure to common transition words that can serve as "signposts" during a lecture. Examples of these might include things like Today we I will talk about..., Now I'd like to take a look at..., Some examples of..., In other words... Students will be better note-takers if they utilize these cues to assist them in organizing their notes. As an introductory classroom activity, students can first listen to lectures for the sake of noticing these guide words, without worrying

about content right away. Instructors can ask students to identify ones that stand out or ask them to brainstorm ahead of time what some may be and discuss what they signal. Having students practice using these transitional phrases in guided speaking activities can also reinforce their acquisition.

3 EMPHASIZING MAIN IDEAS

Many students mistakenly believe that they should try to write down everything they hear in a lecture, word-for-word. Not only is this nearly impossible, but it will greatly reduce students' comprehension of key ideas. Instead, they will need to practice identifying the most important ideas, writing down the key points. Showing students sample notes as a model can be a helpful way to introduce this concept.

4 CREATE AND PRACTICE ABBREVIATIONS AHEAD OF TIME

Good note-takers know how to use abbreviations as short-cuts while listening to a lecture in order to be able to record as much information as possible. Teachers can get students started by giving them a list of common abbreviations to serve as examples. From there, students should brainstorm their own. It's important to emphasize that there's no right way to create shortened versions of words: the only thing that matters is that students can go back to notes later and make sense of what they've written.

5 MAKE PREDICTIONS AND POSE QUESTIONS

Successful listeners engage in pre-listening strategies to familiarize oneself with the topic at hand. Instructors should provide written texts, pictures, and discussion questions related to the lecture's content before listening. This will allow learners to grow comfortable with the topic that they will be learning about. Ideally, students will be invited to create questions, just as they would when preparing to read a text. When students are listening for specific information, they have a meaningful goal that will hopefully increase the level of attention that they give to the lecture. If possible, new and especially difficult vocabulary can be previewed, though students should also be

encouraged to use context clues to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words while they listen. As a follow up to practice lectures used in class, it's helpful to have students answer questions about this vocabulary, the purpose of which is twofold: students will hopefully acquire new vocabulary as a result of repeated exposure to words, and as a result, their comprehension of the lecture will increase.

6 PRACTICE AND APPLY

In-class practice note-taking sessions will undoubtedly involve listening to the same lecture multiple times. A productive lesson will include pre-listening activities, an opportunity to listen to a lecture two or three times while taking guided notes, and follow-up comprehension and discussion questions. In between listenings, students can compare answers to comprehension questions. They can then listen again, knowing which answers are correct, which will give them a target piece of information to listen for.

7 EVALUATE NOTES

As students develop their own personalized note-taking strategies, the classroom is a wonderful place for them to learn and improve by working with their peers. After students have listened to a lecture, they can compare notes with classmates in partners or small groups to check for consistent main ideas and details, to see how others organize their notes, and to get new ideas for abbreviations. To facilitate these comparisons among peers, the instructor should create a checklist of items for the students to evaluate when going over their notes. This can include things like clarity of handwriting, abbreviations, use of underlining, margins, and indentations.

NOTE-TAKING DURING LECTURES IS SKILL THAT RELIES UPON STUDENTS' PROFICIENCY IN BOTH LISTENING AND WRITING. It is an essential component of most university courses, and therefore, any student who is preparing for academic study will want to hone their skills in this area. Like anything we teach in the ESL classroom, the purpose of note-taking should be emphasized in order to make the learning experience meaningful for students. Helping students to see note-taking as part of a process is imperative to setting them up for success.

Make them Want to Write: 6 Journaling Activities Teens Will Love

Journaling is a powerful educational tool for language learning as it 1) connects reading with writing, 2) encourages cognitive development in the foreign language, and 3) facilitates practice of conversational language writing.

It also deemphasizes the ESL/EFL teacher as the engager and frees up her classroom time for other activities, which can be very helpful in a large or busy class. The question then is not why use journal activities, but how to use journal activities, especially with teens that might not be thrilled at the prospect of writing. Here are six activities to try in a teen journaling segment of your ESL/EFL class that will make them want to write.

USE THESE IDEAS TO HELP YOUR TEENAGERS WRITE

1 RESPONSE TO A MOVIE SCENE/TV SHOW

Show a brief 10-15 minute clip from a movie, TV show, or interesting YouTube video. Prepare two or three questions in follow up to the video. Do not use impersonal topics, like “What did the characters in the scene look like?”, but use questions like “What would you do if you lived in an apartment in New York City?”, or “How would you feel if somebody treated you like that?” The trick is to relate the scene back to the students’ emotions. Teens are very self-absorbed by nature, and they will respond better if they are asked to connect situations to themselves. In addition, that technique inspires cognitive development and analytical thinking as opposed to rehashing obvious facts.

2 RESPONSE TO A SONG

Print out the lyrics to a favorite pop song and play it for students in class. Ask them to write about how they can relate to the song. You can use a romantic song, but romantic topics might make them shy and less willing to share. It is better to use another teen-related theme like being free or rebellion. Provide two or three topics and

ask them to write about one of them. For example, play “Free Falling” by Tom Petty and ask them, “Does it feel good to completely lose control?”, or “Have you been in a situation when you felt completely out of control, and was it freeing?”

3 THAT MADE ME SO ANGRY!

Have a conversation session about being angry, discussing two or three situations that invoke anger in teens. For example, ask them, “Has anyone ever broke your trust and made you angry as a result?” This topic provokes thought in teens because adolescence is the time when innocence falls and we become aware that people are not always good, which is taught by people hurting us and making us angry. Do not focus on the conversation aspect. Only a few students will be outgoing enough to openly share, which serves well for examples. The others will prefer to react to their classmates’ responses and journal.

4 WHAT IS YOUR OPINION?

Teens are, probably for the first time, realizing they have opinions different from those of important adults in their lives. Ask them, “What is one thing your parents believe that you think is wrong?”, or “What is a rule your school has that is silly?” Give them a personal example from your youth: “When I was in school, we could not dye our hair, which was silly because...” These opinions are good to share after the journaling session for a conversation starter!

5 RESPONSE TO AN ARTICLE

Pick an article from a teen magazine, or a teen topic from the paper. Topics that involve social media, parties, social behaviors, fashion trends, or other subjects particular to teens in your area will work. Read the article in class and check for meaning by asking, “What is this article about?” and other comprehension questions. Then, ask them to write for 10 minutes relating themselves to the article. If it was about

a fashion trend, ask “Would you ever wear that type of shirt? What do you prefer to wear?” or “What do you think about fashion versus utility?”

6 MESSAGE ME ABOUT A SOCIAL EVENT

Teens would rather think about their social lives than their school or work lives, and they probably even ignore you and have private conversations about those lives during your class. Ask them, for homework or as a classroom journaling session after the weekend, to react to a social event that they attended, like a friend’s birthday party or a family lunch. Instead of instructing them to write generally about certain aspects of what happened at the event and how the event made them feel, ask them either to log a text dialogue (translating to English if necessary) they had with a confidante after the event or create a text dialogue about the event. That type of writing will make them think in English about their emotions and informal conversation as they would in their native language.

ESL/EFL INSTRUCTORS CAN TEACH ALL OF THE GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE BOOKS, BUT IF THEY DO NOT ENGAGE STUDENTS IN USING ENGLISH COGNITIVELY, STUDENTS WILL STRUGGLE TO RETAIN IT AFTER THEY RECEIVE THEIR DIPLOMA AND LEAVE THE STRUCTURED CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT. Making teen ESL learners want to journal opens those brain channels and takes learning to a new level!

Falling Asleep Over Student Essays?

How Essays Can Come To Life

I'VE BEEN KNOWN TO FALL ASLEEP OVER STUDENT ESSAYS FOR AN HOUR.

At first I thought it was simply fatigue. It is tiring and requires reading hundreds of papers to teach several composition classes in a term. Then I thought it was boredom. Reading, over and over again, that technology has improved our lives immensely is pretty boring. Then I realized it was escape. Going to sleep is actually a pretty good defense against reading the unsupported and vague claims -- over and over -- that "technology" is "wonderful" and that "society" and "the media" are working -- sometimes in tandem -- to damage "youth." However, a better strategy than sleeping would be to teach students how to develop their points more specifically and vividly so that they are not putting their readers into snooze mode.

HELP YOUR CLASS MASTER ESSAYS TO A TEE

1 DEFINE AND NARROW TERMS

There are some terms that are real snoozers, guaranteed to get the eyes drooping: "society," "the media," "technology," "issue," "the government" are a few. These terms are used without much thought on the part of the writer, which is why they cause brain numbness in the reader. Whenever the writer catches herself using one of these terms, she should ask herself about what she really means: What exactly does "society" mean in the context I'm using it? Do I mean my country? The state of California? My school or neighborhood? By narrowing and defining terms the writing begins to be more vivid: "Twenty-first century America has been impacted greatly by the smart phone" is still not a really compelling thesis, but it is certainly stronger than "Technology has really affected current society."

2 THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU REALLY MEAN

This method of the writer thinking about and querying what she really means, besides working well in defining and narrowing terms, works equally well in examining unsupported claims. Students sometimes use vague or unsupported claims because they are repeating something often -heard and which they have

not given much if any thought: e.g., "Guns don't kill people: people kill people" is a standard argument against gun control in the United States which finds its way into many student papers. Teaching students to query what this claim means by asking questions about its different parts -- e.g., "What sorts of activities are guns used for besides killing? Under what circumstances can a gun kill without a human agent?"-- will get students to consider what they are saying and what it really means.

3 EXPLAIN WHAT YOU MEAN FOR UNINFORMED AUDIENCE

Once the student has defined her terms adequately -- returning to the topic of the massive effects of smart phones on the twenty-first century, for example--then the student's job becomes to explain not just the terms but the claim itself. This is an opportunity for developing audience awareness, the sense that the writer is indeed writing the essay for someone to actually read it -- maybe even engage with -- not just for the instructor to glance at with glazed eyes and scrawl a "C-" or "D+" at the top (depending on how tired she is). Ask students, for example, to explain to the reader who has no smart phone (there are such people still around) about the overwhelming influences of the phone on our lives. What are some of these massive effects? How have they impacted the 21st century in particular? How is life now different from the way it was before the invention of the phone? Who is most affected by the device? This forces students to really consider the claim in order to explain it to the reader, which in the process begins to develop the student's work. In the process, the student also gets more engaged with the writing process itself, as it begins to occur to her she is writing for this specific purpose of explaining the smart phone to a specific audience who isn't informed already on the topic--making this an authentic act of communication, not just a rote exercise the teacher is putting her through because it's the kind of incomprehensible thing teachers do. Students often even go beyond considering the hypothetical uninformed yet intelligent audience to thinking of an actual audience -- a place to post the essay online, for example, or a school or community newsletter it might be published in.

4 DETAILS & EXAMPLES. DISCUSS THE COUNTERPOINT

In the process of explaining what she really means, the student will almost of necessity begin using personal examples from her own life and lives of her associates to further support the point, in this case of the smart phone and its life-altering effects. This will further develop her work, making it more compelling and concrete to the reader. Also at this time, the student will on her own begin to notice some of the disadvantages of the smart phone -- its distracting, addictive nature, for example -- and begin to develop a counterpoint, usually necessary for really strong writing and critical thinking, demonstrating that the writer has thoroughly considered the matter.

5 USE RESEARCH AND SOURCE MATERIAL

As students get further into the topic, they will also probably on their own -- or maybe with some instructor prompting -- begin to consider how the topic goes beyond themselves and what experts, such as sociologists and psychologists, are saying on the topic of the effects of electronic devices such as the smart phone on the culture as a whole as well as the individual. This will lead students to doing some research on the topic, especially if instructors ask that students add quotes and citations from experts in later drafts of a work. In the process of doing some research, students begin to understand fully the depth and breadth of a topic as well as learning some basic research and citation skills. The process of developing an essay as at this point becomes a mini-introduction to academic writing in considering an audience, addressing various points of view, and researching the existing dialogue on the topic, and learning to quote and cite source material.

TEACHING STUDENTS TO REALLY THINK ABOUT AND DEVELOP THEIR ESSAYS CAN BE A CHALLENGE BECAUSE IT INVOLVES TEACHING A NUMBER OF CRITICAL THINKING, ACADEMIC, AND RESEARCH SKILLS THAT GO BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE PAPER. HOWEVER, THE REWARDS AND END RESULT OF INTRODUCING STUDENTS TO ACADEMIC WRITING ARE ENORMOUS.

To Timed Write or Not to Timed Write: Answer the Question

ONE QUESTION MANY ESL TEACHERS STRUGGLE WITH IS WHETHER TO INCLUDE TIMED WRITINGS AS PART OF THEIR CLASS PLANNING.

It can be a difficult question to answer because, as with most things in teaching and in life, timed writings come with both plusses and minuses. To help you figure out if timed writings are right for you and your students, here are some of the advantages and disadvantages I have found come with timed writings.

CONSIDER THESE ADVANTAGES OF TIMED WRITINGS

1 STANDARDIZED TEST PREPARATION

If you are teaching older students who plan to pursue higher education in English, timed writings may be a good idea to include in your class. In order to attend an American university, your students will have to take the TOEFL test or another test like it. Part of that standardized test is a timed writing. Students who have practiced composing essays on the spot in your class will stress less and be able to organize their ideas more quickly and effectively than those who haven't. If TOEFL preparation is a primary reason you choose to include timed writings in your ESL class, you can even model your writing prompts after those on the standardized test or recycle questions from previous tests.

2 TRUE MEASURE OF WRITING SKILLS

If you have been a foreign language student and especially if you have studied a language in a foreign country, you know how intimidating writing essays in a foreign language can be. Unfortunately, some students deal with their anxiety by soliciting help from native speakers. Some help may be fine, but help can quickly become do, and what you eventually receive is a very poor representation of how

your student writes. In class writing, timed or not, enables you to get a true measure of your student's writing ability. This means your students will not have input from native speakers on their writing – content, style, or most importantly grammar.

3 NO CANNED ESSAYS

I had never heard of canned essays until I was taking a foreign language testing methods class. The way my professor explained canned essays was like this. When scoring writing for standardized testing, a given essay had to relate to the writing prompt. If it did not at least mention it, the essay was disqualified. If, however, an essay mentioned the writing prompt and then proceeded to write on a completely different topic, that essay was something they could score. Some test takers know this and prepare for the writing sample on standardized testing by memorizing an essay that they will write during the exam. During the test, that person needs only connect the writing prompt to the topic of the memorized, or canned, essay. When you give in class timed writings, you will uncover those students who may want to rely on a canned essay during test taking. The more often you do in class writing, the more likely the canned essays will be outed and the less likely your students are to try a canned essay again. You can then meet with those students to discuss and practice essay writing strategies.

KEEP IN MIND THE DISADVANTAGES OF IN CLASS TIMED WRITINGS

1 IT'S STRESSFUL FOR STUDENTS

Writing an essay can be enough of a challenge on its own. When you add to that the urgency of writing in class and under a clock, students can become nearly paralyzed with anxiety. Stress is dangerous where second

language learners are concerned. Too much pressure, whether external or internal, can create a barrier that a language learner may not be able to overcome. For such students, in class writings may not be worth the risk.

2 IT'S BEYOND BEGINNERS

If you are teaching beginning students, you know that activities intermediate and advanced students would breeze through can be a huge challenge to the members of your class. In class writings may be one of those things. Even with ample time, your students may not be able to compose anything on the spot. For these students, it's important to have not only time but also resources – dictionaries, text books, etc. – on hand for any writing project and probably wise to avoid pressured writing experiences.

3 IT'S TWO CHALLENGES IN ONE

When ESL teachers ask students to do an in class timed writing, the primary goal is measuring the student's writing ability – his or her ability to organize, use correct grammar, choose the best vocabulary, and generally get his message through to the reader. And even though those are what an ESL teacher seeks to measure, that is not all the student is being tested on. In class writings also measure a student's ability to select appropriate content about which to write. Depending on your students, testing the ability to choose and support one's ideas may skew their success at writing in English. In this case, students may appear to have less successful writing skills when the content is what is really tripping them up. Giving students the question in advance will give them time to prepare their answers, but it will also tempt students to produce a canned essay in class.

4 IT TAKES TIME

For some ESL teachers, fitting

another task into the lesson plan is just too much on any day. Timed writings can take an entire class period, and some teachers do not have the time to spare. Some schools require that certain material be covered in each class, and often that leaves little to no room for additional exercises like timed writings. For these teachers, in class writing may be a luxury they cannot afford.

5 IT'S NOT REAL LIFE

Unless your ESL students intend to pursue higher education in English, it's not likely they will ever have to perform an English task like timed writing. In business, coworkers are more likely to collaborate when writing, especially if one of them is not a native English speaker. Requiring your students to do a timed writing in class may be the only time they have to write in such a way. You may decide that your class time is better spent on realistic writing tasks which have real world applications for your students.

ULTIMATELY, WHETHER TO HAVE STUDENTS WRITE TIMED, IN CLASS COMPOSITIONS IS A QUESTION EVERY TEACHER MUST ANSWER FOR HIMSELF OR HERSELF.

For some, the advantages will outweigh the disadvantages. For others, the opposite will be true. To find the answer for yourself, think about where your students are in their English studies and what their ultimate goals are. Ask yourself some questions and be confident in your own decision.

2 Sides to Every Page: 4 Fantastic ESL Resources in One Notebook

CALL ME CRAZY, BUT SOMETIMES THE BEST RESOURCE FOR ESL STUDENTS IS SIMPLY A BLANK NOTEBOOK.

At first, a notebook holds nothing but blank pages, but if your ESL students use it strategically and intentionally, it can become a gold mine of information tailored just for them. Here's how.

TRY THESE 4 FANTASTIC ESL RESOURCES IN A NOTEBOOK

1 A PERSONAL DICTIONARY

ESL students are learning new words all the time. Although learning language patterns and rules is what takes a speaker from ignorance to fluency, without the vocabulary to go along with it they won't get anywhere. Learning new words is always on ESL students' to do lists. And as much time as they put into learning new words, they will always encounter more they do not know. That is when the personal dictionary in your handy blank notebook comes into play.

Students encounter new words everywhere they go: restaurants, stores, television, English speaking friends, newspapers, -- the list could go on forever. For some ESL students, they can stumble and even stop when they encounter an unfamiliar word. I encourage my students to, instead, note these unfamiliar words in their notebooks. This way, they will be able to check the word at a later time but can continue with the activity they are doing: reading, speaking with someone, watching television, whatever. Later, when they have time, they can look up the meanings for these unfamiliar words.

Personally, I prefer that my students write their definitions in English for any new word they encounter. They do not always agree. So the notebook allows a compromise. Students list their unfamiliar words on one side of the page only. If they choose, they write

a definition in their native language in a second column on the same page. Then, they fold the page over so they can still see the English word but their translation is covered. They then write an English definition on the folded section so it lays next to the English word. That way they have definitions in their native language and in English, and the folded page is easy to find in the notebook.

Each person now has an ever expanding personal dictionary. They can study the words if they like or simply reference them as needed. My students also bring their notebooks to class with them to clarify questions on spelling and definitions.

2 WORD ROOT CELLAR

Another useful vocabulary resource for ESL students is understanding word roots and affixes. I often teach them in vocabulary classes or as I introduce new vocabulary to students. When ESL students learn and understand word roots, suffixes, and prefixes, they have tools for deciphering unfamiliar and otherwise intimidating words.

A word root resource page is similar to a personal dictionary page. Whenever I teach a word root, I have students put it in their notebooks. These word roots get listed in one column of the page. In a second column, students write the meaning of the word root. I then have students fold the page over so they can still see the root but not its meaning and write examples of words using that root. I like students to keep a separate page for functional affixes as well. Again they list the affixes along the left side of the page and the meaning or function of them along the right side of the page. On a folded over flap, they write examples using those affixes.

If you choose to teach your students word roots and haven't done it before, you might want to start with some of the following.

Culp Blame Culpable, inculcate, culprit, exculpate

Luc Light Lucid, elucidate, pelucid, translucent

Tort Turn Contort, distort, retort, tortuous, extort, torsion

Vor Eat Voracious, devour, herbivore, carnivore

Rupt Break Corrupt, erupt, rupture, disrupt, bankrupt, interrupt

Eu Good Euphemism, eulogy, euphoria

Mal Bad Malevolent, malediction, malefactor

Bene Good Benevolent, benediction, benefactor

Un- Not Unhealthy, untitled, unwanted

-ly Changes an adjective to an adv. Carefully, happily

-tion Changes a verb to a noun Celebration, confrontation, hibernation

3 JOURNAL ME THIS

So much of language instruction, both for native speakers and second language learners, is focused on grammatical and correct use of language. That is a good and necessary thing, especially when a student is learning language rules and uses. However, too much stress on writing correctly can paralyze some students. They become so concerned about writing things right that they write nothing at all. For these students a personal journal or diary can be very useful. When I encourage students to journal, I tell them I will not be correcting what they write, and in some cases I will not even read what they write. I do require, though, that all their writing be in English and that they do not use a dictionary or other reference when they journal. This practice does two important things for my students. First, they become more comfortable writing in the first place. They don't let fear of a bad grade or lack of knowledge stop them from getting words on the page, which is the first step to getting reluctant writers moving in the right direction. Second, my students learn to use

the language that they know in creative ways. If they do not know a particular vocabulary word or grammatical structure, they use what they do know to communicate the same idea. This is what native language speakers do naturally and is a strategy that is practical for every ESL students.

Some students may be natural journalers. They are creative and never lack for ideas to write about. For others, writing does not come as easily. Busy Teacher has hundreds of journal prompts and story starters that you can suggest to students who need a little push in the right direction. I often encourage students to journal at home but also set aside a couple of 10-20 minute sessions in class each week for this type of writing.

4 VERB TENSE REVIEW

Learning the twelve English tenses takes time for ESL students, and your grammar book probably does a great job of explaining them. But I find that students benefit from having a handy resource they can check quickly without having to open their grammar book when they have verb tense confusion. If you are teaching tenses to beginning and intermediate students, you may want them to add the tenses to their notebooks one at a time as they learn them. If you are teaching advanced students, they may benefit from a twelve tense review that can go directly into their notebooks.

Whether your students are beginning or advanced, they may also like to have a list of irregular verbs in this section of their notebooks. This list can be expanded as your students encounter irregular verbs. A simple list will have the infinitive, the past tense, and the past participle (e.g. to eat, ate, eaten) for each verb listed.

THOUGH A NOTEBOOK MAY START WITH BLANK PAGES, IT CAN QUICKLY FILL WITH GRAPHITE GOLD IF YOUR STUDENTS PUT FORTH THE EFFORTS.

A personal dictionary, a word root and affix summary, a journal, and a verb tense review with list of irregular English verbs will all be valuable resources to your students as they learn to speak, write, and read English.

What IS a writer's notebook? & Why should students have one?

IT'S TIME FOR YOUR STUDENTS TO WRITE SOMETHING.

They sit at their desks, a blank page in front of them, the pencil twirling between their fingers, they eyes searching the room for some kind of inspiration. They have writer's block. What is an ESL teacher to do? Maybe you don't have any ideas either, but the writing has to get done. There is a simple answer to the writer's block dilemma – a writer's notebook. With a few bound pages, your students can have unlimited inspiration when it is time to fill the page. In fact, a writer's notebook is a tool even professional writers use, but it works for ESL students, too. Here is everything you need to know about a writer's notebook and how to give your students the tool that never comes up empty.

WHAT IS A WRITER'S NOTEBOOK?

A writer's notebook is a simple tool that helps students (and writers) when they need an idea to write about. Students can jot down any ideas that come to them in a fleeting moment to come back to later. You can also direct certain exercises that help students dig up ideas they didn't even know they had. All of these go into the notebook. Later, when it's time to write, students can browse through their notebook looking for an idea that seems right for the moment. Think of it as a garden for ideas. In a sense, students plant the seeds and come back later to see which have the most potential. When they have a writer's notebook as one of their writing tools, your students will never lack for ideas or inspiration. It's just a matter of putting the notebook to good use and showing your students how to use it. As a bonus, some of the best writer's notebook exercises also have a language learning component. How can an ESL teacher say no to that?

LEARN HERE HOW YOU CAN FILL A WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

The following are some exercises that you can direct your students through to fill their notebooks. I often do one activity with my students each day, or at least each week. Since these exercises are all about idea generating, I don't read or evaluate them. Students use creative grammar, original spelling, and even pictures at times. However, I let them know that when they come back to these ideas for writing assignments, I will expect grammatical compositions, and they deliver.

1 ALL ABOUT...

What are your students interested in? What catches their attention? Is it sports? Cars? A particular entertainer? No matter what your students fancy, that subject can be the topic for one of their writer's notebook pages. It's really quite simple to do this ongoing idea generating activity. Students simply title a page in their notebooks with their great interest. For me, I have a page titled "Facts about Hippos". I saw part of a documentary about the animals, and I became fascinated. I wrote down the things I learned in the documentary and other things I have learned about the unique animals since. The page slowly filled, and I expect it to come in handy one day for my own piece of writing. I'll know when I need it. Your students can do this, too. Have them title their page after their interest and just collect information about it. This is a page that won't be filled all at once.

Don't stop there, though, for ESL students. Most often, my teaching units center around a theme, occupations, animals, sports, food, etc. If yours do too, have your students choose one item that falls into the theme you are covering in class and title a page after that. For example, in a sports unit one student might become fascinated with American Football. As you do different exercises, read informational

material, and learn about sports, your student can add bits of information to their page about American Football. At the end of the unit when it's time to write a formal informational piece, he will have all the facts and information he needs about American Football at his fingertips. (Not to mention, you can see just how much he understood throughout the unit by seeing just what information his page contains.)

2 GETTING EMOTIONAL

Some of our most poignant memories are the most emotional, aren't they? Use this fact of human nature to help your students remember experiences they might want to use as inspiration for a narrative later on. Have students title a page in their writer's notebook with a simple emotion centered statement: I was scared... I was excited... I felt guilty... Then have them use that phrase as inspiration to write for five to ten minutes, uninterrupted, about anything that statement brings to mind. Most often, they will remember a story from their past that brought about that particular emotion, but not necessarily.

If you want to make a grammar point before engaging in this lesson, it's a good opportunity to talk to your students about dependent clauses. I was angry when... I felt guilty because... I was excited that... By starting with a more complex sentence, your students will be able to practice this grammar point without even realizing it.

3 MY FAVORITE WORDS

ESL students have one never-ending challenge no matter how long they have been studying the language – learning new vocabulary. It's inevitable that your students will come across words that are unfamiliar to them, and that's just how it should be. Tap into this never-ending process by encouraging your students to make a list of their favorite English words. The words don't have to be related. Your students may like them because

of the way they sound, how they are spelled, or what they mean. It doesn't matter. Have them title one page in their notebooks "Words I Like" and start listing. This is another page that won't be finished all at once but will be added to over time. When it is time for your students to write, they may use this page as an idea generator or even as a word bank or vocabulary resource. It really doesn't matter, as long as they use and remember the words they have written on the page.

4 I REMEMBER...

Think about that phrase for a moment. What comes to mind? An important personal moment? Some historical event? A person who meant something to you? Starting a page in a writer's notebook with this simple phrase can bring about all kinds of ideas for your students. In fact, you could do this exercise with them every day and never have them write about the same event twice. Generating ideas doesn't have to be complicated. Let your students reminisce on the page, and see if they don't come up with something that they can write about later. Not to mention, this activity is great for practicing past tenses. If you want to target a specific tense, set the scene for your students. Start with, "What were you doing when..?" Just remember these exercises aren't about perfecting grammar use, so don't get upset if your students use creative grammar even when you have set the scene for a particular verb tense review.

5 DON'T STOP

Do you do free writing with your students? If you have never heard of it, free writing is a prewriting exercise that is used for, you guessed it, generating ideas. I have often used it with my students before a particular writing assignment, but it's also a great item to include in a writer's notebook. The point of the exercise is to NOT STOP WRITING. That's it. It's simple, in theory anyway. Give your students a specific amount of time. The first time you try this you should keep it short – three minutes or so. When you say go, students start writing. And they cannot stop until you say time is up. The pencil should never stop moving. The result is a stream of consciousness on the page. It's possible that your students write one coherent para-

graph, but more likely they will have a whole bunch of random and scattered thoughts sprinkled over their page. Either way, this type of writing is great for encouraging writing fluency. Remind your students before they start that you won't be looking at grammar, spelling, or any other language learning points, and you don't expect them to write a coherent paragraph though it's okay if they do. As long as they do not stop writing, they will have successfully completed the exercise.

THESE ARE JUST A FEW SIMPLE EXERCISES THAT YOU CAN DO WITH YOUR STUDENTS TO FILL OUT THEIR WRITER'S NOTEBOOKS, BUT THEY ARE JUST THE BEGINNING.

If you want more ideas on what can go into a writer's notebook, check out Ralf Fletcher's *A Writer's Notebook: Unlocking the Writer Within You*.

How To Design A Rubric That Students Can Understand

MOST WRITING CLASSES TODAY COME WITH A STANDARD WRITING RUBRIC.

A “rubric” is a grading standard which breaks down the grade into several categories: “excellent,” “good,” “fair,” and “poor,” for example, or a more traditional “A,” “B,” “C,” and “D.” For each of these levels, there are a set of criteria related to writing such as organization, use of details, sentence structure, etc. The criteria are further refined at each level, so that an “A” grade the organization criteria might be described as “excellent organization with clear transitions that advances the purpose of the paper” while a “B” grade might have “clear organization with transitions related to the paper purpose,” showing with some details the differences between two levels based on one criteria.

Many departments and schools now have an expectation that rubrics be designed for each major assignment, with the idea, apparently, that rubrics will clarify expectations and result in fewer student complaints regarding grades. The problem is that rubrics often fail in their mission to clarify for both instructor and student the grading standards. Students, especially those earning poor grades, often view the grading standards suspiciously, seeing them as unfair and arbitrary -- grading rubrics are no exception. However, there are ways to clarify grading rubrics and teach course expectations so that both students and teachers can understand and use rubrics effectively.

CONSIDER PITFALLS OF GRADING RUBRICS

Rubrics, as with most tools that evaluate in some way, have inherent problems. Some of those problems are detailed below.

1 LANGUAGE MAY BE DIFFICULT

To someone outside the field of writing, for example, words such as “tran-

sitions” and “voice” and “controlling idea” and so forth sound foreign as they are part of a technical jargon the student is not familiar with, but the rubric assumes that familiarity.

2 TOO ABSTRACT

An “A” is for an excellent paper, a “B” for a “good” one. What does that mean, exactly? What does an excellent paper look like? The language meant to clarify this difference fails to do so because in part the language can be difficult, as discussed above, to anyone outside of the field of study, and often, also, the language and concepts are vague. What exactly does “excellent” mean in terms of writing?

3 THE DIVIDING LINE BETWEEN GRADE LEVELS IS BLURRED

A related problem to this vagueness of terms is the unclear differentiation between grades. When does organization stop being a “B” level “strong” and move into a C grade’s “formulaic”? The differences between two levels of grades and deciding that difference can be difficult for teachers, let alone students.

Overall, the main problem with a grading rubric is that it is grounded on the assumption of a deep understanding of the field that only specialists within it possess, which is why rubrics are typically designed by teachers with teachers in mind as an audience. We do the grading and are the ones who will use the rubrics for the purpose of grading, after all. But as many instructors give out the grading rubric now, either with the assignment itself or with the course syllabus, it is also important that students understand how these standards are applied to writing.

AVOID THE PITFALLS OF GRADING RUBRICS

1 CLARIFY TERMINOLOGY

A major problem for novices in

general is their unfamiliarity with the lingo of the field related to their recent entrance into the field and academic life in general and truly understanding the technical language. Grading rubrics are often replete with technical language of a discipline. Therefore, the teacher should be aware that she will have to clarify the terminology of the rubric when she introduces it. Showing clear examples of what makes a good “controlling idea” will go a long way in clarifying the rubric.

2 GIVE EXAMPLES

Showing examples of the largely abstract rubric applied to actual student work is important for complete understanding of it. What is the difference between an “A” and a “B” anyway? Well, better than talk in generalities about the dividing line between “excellent development” and just “good development,” the instructor can show examples from past student papers that demonstrate excellent development as opposed to just good.

3 APPLY THE RUBRIC TO MODEL PAPERS

With some training in understanding the language of the rubric and use of examples, students can develop a strong intuition about the difference between an “A” and a “B” paper. After some training in how to interpret and apply the rubric, students can be remarkably adept at assigning grades to sample papers, often hitting close to the assessment the instructor would have given. I have sometimes had students participate in mock “grading sessions” much like teachers participate in, “grading” past student work which have had names removed and which students have given prior consent to use. These kinds of grading sessions will occur after the beginning part of a term, after students have gotten to know each other, learned the rubric, and practiced working in groups. Often insightful discussion occurs in such sessions, with students supporting the grade they assign with clear

rationale and coming to a reasoned agreement with each other.

4 RATE PEERS' WORK

The next step is to rate peers' work. The week a paper is due, I have students work together, reading each other's papers, and discussing their strengths and weaknesses. Again, training has already taken place in courteous discussion on how to use the rubric, and students are clear that they are responding as readers, how the paper works for them as readers rather than as teachers--they are not really assigning grades. Valuable peer feed back.

5 APPLY THE RUBRIC TO THEIR OWN WORK

This is the hardest step off all. But after weeks of looking at sample and peer work, students are now trained enough to turn a more objective eye on their own papers. Especially if they have taken a "break" from them for a couple of days, students will now be able to turn a more trained eye on their own papers and pick out concerns in development and sentence structure, for example, that they hadn't noticed before because they now have a stronger understanding of what good writing is. Techniques such as having students set the work aside for awhile, reading aloud, and visualizing their audience all help students develop the ability to self-edit and revise their own work in accordance with the standards set forth in the rubric.

RUBRICS CAN BE OPAQUE AND CONFUSING, EVEN TO TRAINED TEACHERS.

However, by teaching students the language of the rubric and discipline, providing examples of student writing at different levels, and applying the rubric to other students' and their own work, students will develop a strong understanding of the rubric as well their understanding of good writing.

Key Reading and Writing Experiences: Getting a Literacy Biography

APPLY THESE IDEAS FOR LITERACY BIOGRAPHY WRITING

1 WHAT

What is a literacy biography? It is, like most biographies, a chronological discussion of the author's life, or some aspect of it: in this case, focused on key literacy experiences of teachers, classes, and books that made an impression and impact on the writer. Often reading and writing experiences radically change us in some way that we haven't even consciously considered.

For example, one student in a development composition class discussed the impact on his life of Alice Walker's "The Color Purple," the story a young African American woman's struggle with and ultimate triumph over oppression in the segregated South, told through her letters and diary. The young man who was so moved by the story was drawn to it because it was the first story he had read written in the narrator's authentic "voice," with all of its idiosyncrasies, grammatical incorrectness, and beauty, growing in expressiveness as the character matures. This narrative structure awoke the student to the true possibilities of fiction and literacy itself--the variety of forms that may be legitimately called "literature." Similarly, drawing from my own experience, I am not the same person I was for having read "The Great Gatsby" and "Breakfast at Tiffany's" at age fifteen, these novels' view of New York and its endless variety, possibility, and danger forever altering my perspective on that city and somehow life itself. In discussing these key literacy experiences, students can then begin to see the real impact reading and writing have had on their lives and therefore the importance of continuing to expand their literacy experiences.

Besides getting students to reflect on their reading and writing experiences, the literacy biography also gives the instructor insight into their students' past experiences with reading and writing. This information then will help the teacher in determining what instructional methods

and which curricula might be most valuable in the classroom. Just knowing that some students carry a preconceived notion that "good writing" is limited to handwriting and spelling skills, for example, can clue the teacher into that a beginning discussion is called for on the topic of what goes into "good writing." In addition, reports from a number of students on their negative past experiences with literacy instruction--not uncommon-- can also inform the instructor this might be a class that will need some self-esteem building related to their writing skills, opportunities to experience success, and an environment free of public judgment of their skills that will allow growth.

2 WHO

Developmental students and beginning composition students often benefit most from the assignment. Again, these students are many times carrying negative beliefs about literacy and learning and themselves as readers and writers because of unhelpful early experiences. For example, one young man in my developmental composition class, one of the most articulate and thoughtful students of that class, saw himself as a poor writer--a belief that seemed to have sprung from early experiences he related regarding his "bad handwriting" and being criticized for it. In writing about these experiences, the students can then begin questioning these beliefs (e.g., how related handwriting really is to actual composition skill and what we generally call "writing"). Once questioned, these existing negative understandings of themselves as writers can possibly be discredited enough to form a new writer's "identity" that will allow growth.

3 HOW

So you have decided on the value of the literacy biography. How then do you actually implement the assignment?

On the first or second day of class, give out the prompt, or topic, to write a literacy biography. The assignment will probably need to be explained in detail, as students in all likelihood have never consciously considered key experiences in read-

ing and writing and their effects. I offer ample examples of books and teachers that have influenced me and how. I also discuss methods to organize and format the assignment. One method of organization, for example, is first discussing books, teachers, and classes that influenced them as readers and writers and then reflecting on why these experiences were so formative. After students have written for about a half hour, they can begin to share their experiences in groups and usually find areas of commonality: a shared love for a specific author, for example, or common experiences with the kind of writing classes and teachers they have had, both positive and negative.

4 WHY

To summarize, one major use of the literacy biography is to get students to begin to reflect on their key literacy experiences. They can then either reaffirm or begin to question those experiences as related to those preexisting ideas of their literacy skills rather than just accepting they are by birth "not good writers" or "naturally" bad readers. In addition, the literacy biography gives the teacher insight into her students' reading and writing background to inform her teaching.

Finally, through sharing their literacy experiences, students find areas of commonality and begin to form a writing community, a safe space to express ideas.

A literacy biography is not a standard writing assignment and may at first blush seem confusing or unimportant to students, a "throwaway" assignment to fill time the first days of class while the dust settles during the add/drop period and everyone gets used to the class routine. However, implemented correctly, a literacy biography is not fluff but rather a key assignment opening the door to student reflection, teacher information, and the creation of a safe environment for developing reading and writing skills.