



Writing is an Essential Tool for Learning

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to focus students' attention to written assignments. Before starting the lesson, list two or three short-answer questions on the board and ask the students to write their answers. Questions may require reviewing material discussed on a topic or recalling information from an assigned task. When presenting an argument, it is appropriate to stop and ask students to write down all the reasons and arguments that support one side or the other. These statements can be used as a basis for discussion.

Keywords: responsibility, writing assignments, brief summary, writing skills, grammar, spelling, phrasing, comments, awareness of audience, specific instructions.

This article does not state that none of these traditional manners are bad or harm to students. In principle, they proved useful today. There are many opportunities for students to gain confidence in learning English, which learns language not only for pleasure. As the popularity of English grows with each passing day and throughout the world, English teachers feel the need to change the methods of teaching their language. Today the professional language teacher has a good grounding in the various techniques and new approaches, and they know and understand the history and evolution of teaching methodologies. The modern teacher will in fact use a variety of methodologies and approaches, choosing techniques from each method that they consider effective and applying them according to the learning context and objectives. Therefore, each new proposal must undergo a thorough examination and be publicly discussed by the scientific and pedagogical community.

Teaching writing is not only the job of the English department alone. Writing is an essential tool for learning a discipline and helping students improve their writing skills is a responsibility for all faculties. Stress the importance of clear, thoughtful writing. After you have made the assignment, discuss the value of outlines and notes, explain how to select and narrow a topic, and critique the first draft, define plagiarism as well. Ask students to analyze each other's work during class, or ask them to critique their work in small groups. Students will learn that they are writing in order to think more clearly, not obtain a grade. Keep in mind, you can collect students' papers and skim their work.

Pool ideas about ways in which writing can help students learn more about the subject matter. See if there is sufficient interest in your discipline to warrant drawing up guidelines. Students' welcome handouts that give them specific instructions on how to write papers for a particular course or in a particular subject area. Ask your students to write a brief summary of what they already know or what opinions they hold regarding the subject you are about to discuss. Periodically ask students to write freely for three minutes on a specific question or topic. They should write whatever pops into their mind without worrying about grammar, spelling, phrasing, or organization. This kind of free writing, according to writing experts, helps students synthesize diverse ideas and identify points they may not understand. There is no need to collect these exercises. At the end of the class period, give your students index cards to jot down the key themes, major points, or general principles of the day's discussion. You can easily collect the index cards and review them to see whether the class

understood the discussion. By taking minutes, students get a chance to develop their listening, synthesizing, and writing skills. Boris (1983) suggests the following: Prepare your students by having everyone take careful notes for the class period, go home and rework them into minutes, and hand them in for comments. It can be the students' discretion whether the minutes are in outline or narrative form. Decide on one to two good models to read or distribute to the class.

At the beginning of each of the following classes, assign one student to take minutes for the period. Give a piece of carbon paper to the student who is taking minutes so that you can have a rough copy. The student then takes the original home and revises it in time to read it aloud at the next class meeting. After the student has read their minutes, ask other students to comment on their accuracy and quality.

If necessary, the student will revise the minutes and turn in two copies, one for grading and one for your files. For example, have your students pick three words that are of major importance to the day's session. Ask your class to write freely for two to three minutes on just one of the words. Next, give the students five to ten minutes to meet in groups to share what they have written and generate questions to ask in class. Divide your class into groups of three or four, no larger. Ask your students to bring to class enough copies of a rough draft of a paper for each person in their group. Give your students guidelines for critiquing the drafts. In any response task, the most important step is for the reader to note the part of the paper that is the strongest and describe to the writer why it worked so well. The following instructions can also be given to the reader: State the main point of the paper in a single sentence. Written critiques done as homework are likely to be more thoughtful, but critiques may also be done during the class period. Read-around groups are a technique used with short assignments (two to four pages) which allows everyone to read everyone else's paper. Divide the class into groups no larger than four students and divide the papers (coded for anonymity) into as many sets as there are groups. Give each group a set and ask the students to read each paper silently and decide on the best paper in the set. Each group should discuss their choices and come to a consensus on the best paper. The paper's code number is recorded by the group, and the same process is repeated with a new set of papers. After all the groups have read all the sets of papers, someone from each group writes on the board the code number from the best paper in each set. The recurring numbers are circled. Generally, one to three papers stand out. After completing the read-around activity, ask your students to reconsider those papers which were voted as excellent by the entire class and to write down features that made each paper outstanding. Write their comments on the board, asking for elaboration and probing vague generalities. In pairs, the students discuss the comments on the board and try to put them into categories such as organization, awareness of audience, thoroughness of detail, etc. You might need to help your students arrange the characteristics into meaningful categories. Faculties who tell students that good writing will be rewarded and poor writing will be penalized receive better essays than instructors who don't make such demands. In the syllabus, on the first day, and throughout the term, remind students that they must make their best effort in expressing themselves on paper. Back up your statements with comments on early assignments that show you really mean it, and your students will respond. To vary the pace of a lecture course, ask students to write a few minutes during class. Some mixture of in-class writing, outside writing assignments, and exams with open-ended questions will give students the practice they need to improve their skills.

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