

Course Topic: Teaching Writing**Course Instructor:**

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Course Synopsis:

The language skill of writing can be very overwhelming for low level students. To help our low level students become motivated to write and be successful in their writing endeavours, we need to select writing tasks that are both engaging and achievable. Criteria for writing tasks that are effective for low level students include: clear, simple, scaffolded, structured and controlled. In this session, we will introduce you to a wide range of writing activities to use with your low level students that fulfill these criteria.

Course Agenda

1. Writing Activities that Use Prompts
2. Writing Instructions
3. Writing Poems
4. Writing a Journal
5. Sharing Student Writing

1. Writing Activities that Use Prompts

With lower level students, providing prompts can make the task of writing less daunting and more manageable. There are many different kinds of prompts that can be used to get students started on their writing. Here are some examples.

A. Picture Prompts: The teacher gives the students a picture or a series of related pictures which the students then write about.

B. Comic Strip Prompts: The teacher gives students frames of a comic strip, with the dialogue bubbles blank. Students interpret the comics and write the dialogue.

C. Sentence Beginning Prompts: The teacher gives the students the beginning of a sentence and students then have to write the ending.

D. Real Object Prompts: The teacher brings in a selection of interesting or unusual real objects and displays them at the front of the class. Students pick one of the objects to write about. They can either write a description of the object, a story involving the object, or speculate about what the object is used for.

E. Story Prompts: The teacher gives the students the first two or three sentences of a story. The students then write the remainder of the story.

F. Question Prompts: Use questions, presented in a logical order, to prompt students to describe themselves, write about real experiences or write a creative story. As students answer the questions, in the order provided, they end up creating a complete piece of writing.

Here is a sample set of question prompts to get students to write a description of themselves.

- What do you look like?
- What adjectives describe you as a person?
- What do you like to do in your free time?
- Who is in your family?

Here is a sample set of question prompts to get students to write about a real experience.

- Where were you?
- When were you there?
- Who was with you?
- What happened to you?
- How did you feel?

Here is an example of a set of question prompts to get students to write a science fiction story.

- What planet are you on?
- What does the planet look like?
- Why are you there?
- Who is there with you? Describe them.

- Why can't you get back to earth?
- What danger are you in?
- What happened?

2. Writing Instructions

Instructions are a very simple genre of writing for low level students to work with. Writing instructions allows students to practice the imperative, a simple and frequently used grammatical structure. Here are some examples of what students can write instructions about:

- How to use a specific electronic gadget.
- How to drive a car.
- How to complete a household chore (laundry, vacuuming, etc.).
- How to play a sport (basketball, soccer, etc.).
- How to use a bank machine.
- How to make a type of food (this becomes a recipe, a specific form of instructions).

3. Writing Poems

Poems, if they are short, require few words and follow a clear structure. Short poems with simple structures are therefore ideal writing activities for low level students. The following are some simple poems to try.

A. A Definition Poem

In a definition poem, students describe what something is or what something or someone means to them. The teacher can provide the word that students have to define, or the teacher can ask students to define their favourite food, animal, season and so on. A definition poem can range from five to ten lines in length. Here is an example definition poem for spring.

*Spring is happy.
Spring is bright and sunny.
Spring is like waking up after a long sleep.
Spring is rainy and green.
Spring is like starting a new life.
Spring is joy.*

B. A Five-Senses Poem

In this kind of poem, students write about a topic using each of the five senses. The title of the poem gives the topic of the poem and then each line uses one sense, so that in the end, the poem is five lines long. Here is an example.

Finding a New Best Friend

*Sounds like singing.
Looks like the sun coming through the clouds after rain.
Tastes like chocolate milk.
Feels like soft wool.
Smells like freshly baked bread.*

C. An “I wish” Poem¹

With this kind of poem, students write four or five sentences, each beginning with “I wish”. The poem can be wishes all about one topic (such as food) or about any wish the learner has. Here is an example of an “I wish” poem about food.

*I wish I had a chocolate chip cookie.
I wish I had an ice cream cone.
I wish I had a big cake with candles on it.
I wish I had a glass of milk.*

D. A Colour Poem

With this kind of poem, students write four or five sentences, each beginning with the same colour word (for example, red) or each beginning with a different colour word. Here is an example of a colour poem with each sentence beginning with “red”.

*Red is like my heart.
Red is like my nose in the winter.
Red is like my favourite dress.
Red is like my mother’s lipstick.*

E. An “If I Were” Poem

While the grammar in this type of poem is more complex, students don’t have to add much of their own language, therefore making the activity a lot easier than it initially appears. The first sentence starts with “If I were...” This is then followed by three sentences using “would”. Here is an example.

*If I were a daisy I would be bright and cheerful.
Everyone would be happy when they looked at me.
I would stand tall and proud.
A child would pick me and take me home to her mother.*

For more information and activity ideas on using poetry with your students, check out the video, **Using Poetry Writing to Teach English**, which can be found on the ACE site.

¹ Adapted from suggestions in Gail E. Tompkins, et. al. 2005. Language Arts: Content and Teaching Strategies. Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall.

4. Writing a Journal²

Another good form of writing to have low level students complete is journal writing. They can write three or four sentences, or a single paragraph per writing class. Students can write about something they did recently or they can complete a task assigned by the teacher. Alternatively, the teacher can provide prompts—statements or sayings—to which students write their reactions or responses. Another alternative is to have students bring in personal pictures from recent events in their lives and write journal entries based upon the pictures.

5. Sharing Student Writing³

You don't want your students to just write for themselves. You want to encourage them to share their English writing with other students and other people. Be careful, however, that you do not cause students embarrassment by having them share their work. All sharing should be entirely voluntary. Here are some ideas to get students sharing their English writing with classmates.

- Students read aloud to the class what they have written.
- Students create a multi-media presentation of their work.
- Display student work on the classroom walls or on bulletin boards.
- Publish a class anthology of the work of all students. It can include stories, descriptions, poetry and/or reviews.
- Students publish their work on the internet, either on their Facebook, a personal web page or a class web page.

Thanks for participating!

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² Adapted from suggestions in Gail E. Tompkins, et. al. 2005. Language Arts: Content and Teaching Strategies. Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall.

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