

# Making Writing Exciting!



**Kantuta is an ESOL Tutor at Morley College. She recently presented a workshop at the NATECLA annual conference 2018 for Making Writing Exciting. Below, she has included class room tips and activities!**

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Teaching writing can feel daunting. Whenever I'd set a writing task, the class would become slow, lifeless and anxious. Many ESOL students haven't written for decades so our classes unintentionally bring them back to their school years where they were often made to feel inadequate. This is apparent when they fidget, grimace and continuously apologise for their writing. Whereas, in the same class we have a student who is an avid reader and writes daily – what a mix. What's more, they are all working towards the same exam with limited contact hours and busy lives – daunting indeed. However, writing lessons don't need to be like this. They can foster confident and focused students engaged in lively discussions and cognitive tasks.

## **Scaffolding**

Use aspects of writing they know to support unfamiliar ones. For example, my students who had never had a job really struggled with the Level 1 report task no matter how many times I taught it. The next year, I tried teaching them how to write an article first and then re-wrote an example as a report. When my students analysed and discussed the differences, it instantly clicked. Informal letters can scaffold formal letters, role-playing a student's first day can scaffold role-playing a first day at a job, etc.

## **Collaborative Writing**

Extend those discussions to the process of writing where students are brainstorming, planning and drafting together. Collaborative writing provides the differentiation that is often needed – less confident writers don't need to touch the pen but are involved and learn from the process as they negotiate with their partner regarding what to write.

## Independent Writing

Taking inspiration from flipped classrooms, in the initial stages I leave independent writing for homework as students can dictate their own pace and level of input e.g. translating some words, which is often considered to be counterproductive but can help students develop their writing skills as they grow in confidence.

## Feedback Workshops

Setting writing for homework also maximises class time for the most crucial stage - feedback. I grew tired of marking my student's writing to see them just skim it and then repeat the same mistakes. I decided to put them in charge of marking, which not only promotes retention and proof-reading skills, but it saves the teacher time too!

- **Checklists** – simplify the exam specification to a list student can tick off. These can get more detailed as the course and your expectations progress. (see an example at the end of this piece)
- **Treasure Hunt Feedback** – e.g. '3 grammar mistakes in paragraph 2'. Progress this by nominating students to give feedback e.g. 'ask Maria' in the margin – a student who has improved in this area and can consolidate their learning by helping their partner. Turning their weakness into their specialism which they are then consulted upon is incredibly empowering.
- **Upgrading Tasks** – analyse texts with no errors but below-level language and use this to redirect the focus away from being 'correct' to thinking about impact and attempting new language. Get them to upgrade the text and then upgrade their own writing.

As these tasks are done in pairs, only half the class need to do their homework, but all will benefit

## Exam Writing Training

Leave in-class independent writing until after they have developed their skills and confidence but maintain that energy by doing it under time-pressure which can be followed by focused speaking and reflection. This is also effective for specific skills e.g. planning – students write a plan for an exam task in 5 minutes, then use it to tell their partner their story, description, etc. instead of writing it. Repeat this a few times and finally students choose one to write up. This also helps students get better at understanding exam tasks.

## Example of an Entry 3 writing checklist for your students

# Marking Entry 3 writing



1. Did you write more than 130 words?
2. Did you put a title/heading at the top?
3. Did you write in paragraphs?
4. Did you answer all three parts of the question?
5. Do you have the correct past grammar and any past continuous?
6. Do you have high-level vocabulary? (absolutely amazed, incredibly tired)
7. Do you have sequence markers? (next, after that, finally)
8. Do you have correct spelling?
9. Do you have good punctuation? (full stops, capital letters, commas)