



THE STAGES OF TEACHING WRITING

Normurodova Kibriyo Muxtor kizi

Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Faculty of English philology and translation Chair of English philology

2nd Master's student

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ABSTRACT

When a writing process is used to teach writing, students begin to understand writing as a form of communication. Furthermore, writing helps students recognize that they have opinions, ideas, and thoughts that are worth sharing with the world, and writing is an effective way of getting them out there! There are many types of writing such as descriptive writing, persuasive writing, informative writing, narrative writing, and creative or fiction writing. Many students are familiar with the basic writing assignments such as book reports, social studies reports, short stories, and essays on topics such as: "What I did on my summer vacation". But these writing assignments should be thought of as applications of basic writing modes. For instance, a book report is usually a type of descriptive writing, and an essay on dinosaurs might include both informative and perhaps persuasive writing.

Although writing specialists have agreed that writers go through several stages while writing, they have not reached an agreement on labeling the stages. For the purpose of this paper, I will adopt Tompkins' five-stage writing process: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and sharing. The following is an in-depth look at each of these stages and strategies for writing teachers to employ them in the EFL classroom.

Pre-writing

The pre-writing stage focuses on stimulating students' creativity and letting them think about what to write and how to approach the chosen topic. To implement this stage effectively, Tricia Hedge suggests that teachers remind students of two important questions: the purpose of their writing and its audiences. That is, students should keep in mind the intended readers and content of the text when they make a global outline for their writing.

By a means of providing teachers with a more clear-cut guideline, Brown presents the following classroom activities for the pre-writing stage:

- Brainstorming
- Listing (in writing-individually)



- Clustering (begin with a key word, then add other words, using free association)

1. Freewriting
2. Reading (extensively) a passage
3. Skimming and/or scanning a passage

These activities can help students generate ideas about a topic for their writing and allow students to start their writing informally.

Drafting

It is not easy for students to move from planning to actual writing. However, students need to transform plans into temporary text at some point. In this respect, Ron White presents the following activity which can help students transition from idea generating to drafting:

- (A) Associate the theme with something else
- (D) Define it
- (A) Apply the idea
- (D) Describe it
- (C) Compare it with something else
- (A) Argue for or against the subject
- (N) Narrate the development or history of it

Taking the first letters of each sentence, White produces the mnemonic: A DAD CAN. This mnemonic can enable students to recall the idea-generating process, which eventually helps students compose text

In the drafting stage, students concentrate on getting ideas on paper without worrying about grammatical and mechanical errors. In this regard, Fulwiler urges that instructors and students should not expect error-free early drafts. Instructors should focus on more global issues (topic, organization, and evidence) while ignoring surface problems (spelling, punctuation, and wordiness) because the surface problems can be dealt with in subsequent drafts. Hedge also highlights the importance of focusing on content in this stage: "Good writers tend to concentrate on getting the content right first and leave details like correcting spelling, punctuation and grammar until later"

Revising

In the revision stage, students should decide how to improve their writing by looking at their writing from a different point of view. Teachers should let students know that revision is not correcting minor grammar errors but focusing on content and organization of the whole text. Tompkins states that students have the chance to refine their work during the revision stage and describes the features of revising as follows: "Revision is not just polishing writing; it is meeting the needs of readers through adding, substituting, deleting, and rearranging material". Similarly, Sommers emphasizes the significance of the revision stage in the writing process characterizing the revision process as the writing process itself. In the revision process, not only do writers polish their writing, but they also develop their ideas. Less experienced writers focus on vocabulary and local grammatical errors in the revision stage whereas experienced writers are concerned with developing content and organization of ideas. Therefore, teachers should help students apply what experienced writers do in the revision stage.



In the revising stage, students reread their first drafts, get feedback from peers, and revise them. Sample revision questions such as what parts does not make sense? or what details can be added can be helpful for students to understand what they have to focus on while students are giving feedback on peers' writing as well as their own writing. Providing sample revision questions enables students to focus on content of writing and comment on improving coherence and organization of writing

Editing

In the editing stage, students proofread their own writing or peer's writing carefully to correct mechanics and grammatical errors. Tompkins defines editing as "putting the piece of writing into its final form". Prior to this stage, the students' main concern has not been local grammar errors or mechanics but content. Going into this stage, however, students eventually have time to polish their writing by the correction of local errors and spelling. Tribble says that editing checklists can help students focus on specific points in the editing stage, and the checklists might vary depending on learners' ability levels and needs. In terms of the levels, different grammatical aspects can be focused on each time. Rob Nolasco and Lois Arthur present what writers should check in the final stage of their drafts as follows: the order in which the information is presented, the layout, the spelling, punctuation, handwriting, choice of words and grammar. In the final stages, students should get distance from their composition and read it checking grammatical and mechanical errors. They can use not only grammar books and dictionaries but also peers and the teacher as resources in this stage. As to the issue of providing feedback in this stage, Brown also suggests some guidelines for teachers. Teachers should indicate grammatical mechanical errors but not correct them by themselves and can suggest further word choices and transitional words to improve clarity and coherence of writing. For academic purposes, teachers can comment on documentation, and citation

Sharing

Most of the time, the reader of students' writing is their teacher, but gradually they should learn to write to other students and to genuine readers outside of the classroom. Although writing to show what students know is a vital element in the writing classrooms, writing classrooms should seek genuine communication through written texts. Tompkins illustrates that having students share their completed works with audiences such as peers, friends, families, or community, teachers can promote real communication between writers and readers in the process writing classrooms since students can have real audiences who can meaningfully respond to their writing and develop confidence as authors. To him, sharing is a social activity, which can help students develop not only sensibility to readers but also confidence as authors. He further presents twenty-five ways to share writing. Among the ways, reading the text aloud in class and sharing writing in a writing group can be the easiest ways for writing teachers to implement in EFL classrooms. Also, displaying students' writing on a classroom bulletin board and making a classroom newspaper can give students the sense of professional authorship.

In addition, Brown highlights the importance of providing authenticity of writing for students and asserts that sharing writing with peers is one of the important ways to improve authenticity. Hence, teachers should encourage students to read each other's work and



comment on others' final products. Teachers also should not only read students' writing to locate errors and give a grade but read for information and enjoyment.

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