

CONTROLLED WRITING AS ONE OF WRITING EXERCISES AT THE BEGINNING LEVEL

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Abstract

There are four skills in language that needed to communicate ideas. Those are speaking, listening, reading and writing. Writing is one of the skills that the students must learn in class. This skill seems to be the most difficult for some of the students who learn English as second or foreign language. At the basic level, writing is an act of committing words or ideas to some medium. On the other hand, writing is a work of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express the ideas and organizing them into sentences that will be clear to readers. Writing itself is not a skill that cannot be learned. By the help of the teacher and a lot of exercises, the students will be able to improve their ability in writing. Some exercises that can help the students are controlled writing. The examples of controlled writing are imitating, rewrite a story using the clues given, combining sentences, completing sentences, and arrange sentences into chronological order. The aim of this paper is to show the need of controlled writing as an exercise to improve students' ability especially beginner in writing for communicating their ideas.

Keywords: controlled writing, writing exercises.

Introduction

According to Brown (2001), parts of communication skills are listening, speaking, reading and writing. The skills can be categorized in two main parts, receptive and productive (Nunan 2003). Listening and reading are considered as receptive skill, while speaking and writing are part of productive skill.

One of principles for language teaching methodology, as stated in Nunan (2003) is focus on the learner. It means that the learners are involved in making decisions about what to learn, how to learn, and how to be evaluated. Besides that, it is necessary to maximize the class time in which the learners, rather than the teacher, do the work. So, although the teacher and the students are negotiating things, such as when to submit the assignment, whether to do a task in small groups or pairs, and so on, but the teacher also have to help, encourage and provide learners with many opportunities. It is also necessary for the teacher to guide the learners by giving a structured exercise, in order to achieve the instructional goals.

The point of writing is to express something in our mind. However, sometimes it is not realistic to expect that the ideas will flow logically and easily from our mind just because we want to write. This kind of problem often occurred when the students were asked to write a paragraph or an essay.

Writing is both as a physical and a mental act (Maggie Sokolik in Nunan,2003). At the very basic level, writing is a physical act. As stated by Brown (2001) that, at the beginning level of learning to write, students will simply 'write down' English letters,

words, and possibly sentences. Some forms of dictation fall into this category. Writing as product according to Brown (2001):

“Composition were supposed to (a) meet certain standards of prescribed English rhetorical style, (b) reflect accurate grammar, and (c) be organized in conformity with that the audience would consider to be conventional.”

Here, the attention was placed on ‘model’ composition that the students would try to imitate and the students’ final product would be graded on a list of criteria including grammatical accuracy and correct organization as well as its content. In a writing class the students spent time mostly copying models rather than expressing their own ideas.

While on the other hand, writing is a mental work in getting ideas and organizing them into sentences and paragraph. There are some techniques in this process of writing. According to Sokolik in Nunan (2003):

“...these activities serve to encourage brainstorming, drafting, writing, feedback, revising, and editing in a cyclical fashion. These types of activities encourage the idea that learning to write is more than creating a final product; it is the learning of a series of skills leading to that product.”

In the process of writing, the first step is brainstorming. In here, students list all the ideas they can think of related to a topic. It can be done individually, in pairs or groups of students. After that, students begin to create wordmaps, which is to relate words and draw relationship. The next step is for the students to write their first draft which will be given the feedback from teacher and or peer feedback. After receiving the feedback, students begin to revise their papers. Before the final draft submitted, the students can help each other by proofreading and editing.

Microskills needed in Writing

Writing is an effective means of communication just like speaking. According to the theory given by Canale and Swain as stated in *Measuring Second Language Performance* by Tim McNamara, about communicative competence, one of the aspect that build communicative competence is grammatical competence, in which knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, sentence grammar semantics, and phonology. So, this is a need also to exercise grammatical rules such as tense, combining sentences, and using transition words.

Below are microskills for writing according to Brown (2001):

1. Produce graphemes and orthographic patterns of English.
2. Produce writing at an efficient rate of speed to suit the purpose.
3. Produce an acceptable core of words and use appropriate word order patterns.
4. Use acceptable grammatical system (e.g., tense, agreement, pluralization), patterns, and rules.
5. Express a particular meaning in different grammatical forms.
6. Use cohesive devices in written discourse.
7. Use the rhetorical forms and conventions of written discourse.
8. Appropriately accomplish the communicative functions of written texts according to form and purpose.
9. Convey links and connections between events and communicate such relations as main idea, supporting idea, new information, given information, generalization, and exemplification.
10. Distinguish between literal and implied meanings when writing.

11. Correctly convey culturally specific references in the context of the written text.
12. Develop and use a battery of writing strategies, such as accurately assessing the audience's interpretation, using prewriting devices, writing with fluency in the first drafts, using paraphrases and synonyms, soliciting peer and instructor feedback, and using feedback for revising and editing.

Controlled writing Exercises

There are numerous examples of controlled writing activities in writing class. This section will explore controlled writing exercises as mentioned in Heaton and Brown.

1. The teacher gave a short reading extract to the students.

Extract 1 (taken from *Writing English Language Tests*)

Although dogs are only animals, they are very useful and help men a lot. For example, certain dogs help farmers to look after their sheep. Some dogs are used for hunting and others help to rescue people. Even now policemen use dogs when they are looking for thieves and criminals. Men also teach dogs to race, and dog racing is a sport which many people like. All dogs like eating meat very much and like bones best of all.

After that the teacher asked the students to write a similar paragraph, using the notes given by the teacher.

Although – horses - animals, - useful - a lot. For example, - horses – men -cattle. Some horses – hunting - pull things. In the past – soldiers – horses - fighting against the enemy. Men – horses - horses racing – sport - like. All horses – hay - oats.

2. Several types of exercises can be based on the given reading extract.

Extract 2 (taken from *Paragraph Power: Communicating Ideas Through Paragraphs*)

my favorite musical group is the style council because of the singers sexy nice voices and their songs the style council members are british musicians the lead singer belonged to the famous group jam before he formed the style council first when he sings his voice is wonderful a little husky and sexy for me the voices of the other group members complement the leaders voice very smoothly not only are their voices nice but also their songs are excellent their songs make me romantic because they dont have a strong sound and in some wat they are old fashioned the type o sound that was popular in the 1940s 1950s the style councils music seems old fashioned but the music is not old the songs are skillfully arranged like modern music my favorite songs of theirs are youre the best thing and blue café when i listen to songs like these i feel as if im in a happy dream in conclusion the style council is a great group if you have a chance to listen to them youd better do so with your boyfriend or girlfriend

Exercise 1: Add the appropriate punctuation and capitalization to the paragraph.

Exercise 2: Rewrite the story by changing the tense into past tense.

Extract 3 (taken from *Visions: A Pre-intermediate Grammar*)

Helen is a bilingual secretary. She has a good job with a large corporation. Last year she worked in Los Angeles, but this year she is working in her company's Washington office. Her time in California was fun; she enjoyed going to the beach often. She has many good memories of that year. She likes the change to

Washington, D.C., though. There is a lot to do in D.C.: theaters, concerts, shopping.

Helen is looking for a desk lamp today. She loves to read in the evening, but her apartment doesn't have enough lights. There is a large department store near her office. This store is a good place to start, she thinks. Helen looks at the pictures of credit cards in the store window. Luckily, she can use the card in her wallet; payday isn't until Friday.

Exercise 1: Ask the students to rewrite the story using the first person point of view. So, the first sentence of the story will be: I am a bilingual secretary.

Exercise 2: Ask the students to rewrite the story by changing the tense into past tense. So, the first sentence of the story will be: Helen was a bilingual secretary.

Exercise 3: Ask the students to rewrite the story and add other information related to the main character (Helen).

3. To measure the ability to link sentences, the teacher could give several short sentences.

Extract 4 (taken from Well Written, Well Spoken)

Combine the sentences below with while, until, before or after.

- a. Everyone went over to Paul's house for a drink.
The game was over.
- b. John and Mary came to an agreement about their budget.
They had already had several arguments about money.

Extract 5 (taken from Writing English Language Test)

Join the short sentences in each of the groups below to form one sentence. Then write each of the finished sentences so as to form a paragraph. Use the joining words given, but note that sometimes no joining word is necessary; also -ing denotes the verb ending only.

Each Olympic Games opens. (before)
An athlete appears.
He holds a torch. (-ing)
It has been carried from Mount Olympus in Greece. (which)

The ceremony was started in Berlin in 1936. (which)
It links the sites of the modern Games with the first Olympic Games.

However, the actual torch ceremony dates back to Ancient Greece. (where)
One of the most spectacular events was the torch race. (which)
It was always run at night.

The athlete enters the stadium. (when)
He is holding the torch. (who)
He runs to the huge bowl.
The sacred flame will burn there. (in which)

4. The student is required to complete given composition by writing several sentences of his own.

Extract 6 (taken from Writing English Language Tests)

Read these sentences. Finish each one and then complete the story in your own words.

One morning Peter and Tony got up early to go
They cycled to a small beach where
“We want to go,” they told an old fisherman.
“Will you lend us your rowing-boat so that?”
“Yes, but you must not,” the fisherman
said. “The sea is very rough over there.”
The two boys climbed into the boat and
They rowed quickly towards the small island which

5. In controlled writing, the teacher asks the students to answer some guiding questions after they watched a story on the screen. After that, the students write a story based on the questions given.

For example: -Where does the story take place?
-Who are the main characters?
-What does the man do after getting the bad news from his
sister?

Another form of controlled writing is the teacher gives sentences which are not in the correct order, and asks the students to arrange the sentences into the correct order.

Extract 7 (taken from Communication Through Writing)

Arrange these sentences in chronological order. Then add transition words to make a good paragraph. The first and the last sentence have been done.

1. I will never forget the morning I slipped on a piece of ice in front of the grocery store.
_____ Several of people rushed to help me get up.
_____ The taxi driver took me to the closest hospital.
_____ I fell flat on the ground and twisted my leg.
_____ I moaned as they put me into the taxi because my leg hurt so badly.
_____ Finally, I had x-rays and learned that my leg was broken.
_____ I got very depressed and began to cry.
_____ The emergency room attendant made me wait two hours before I saw the doctor.
9. The doctor fixed the break and put on a cast from my ankle to my thigh.

Extract 8 (taken from Visions: A Pre-intermediate Grammar)

Situation: When Dr. Robins got home from work yesterday, the door to her apartment was open. The place was a terrible mess. Everything was on the floor. When the police arrived, their first question was “When did it happen?”

Read the clues below and figure out the right order. Use numbers in the blanks. After that decide when it happened.

- _____ Dr. Robins’ neighbor came over at 9.30 a.m., but no one was home.
_____ Dr. Robins left at 7:30 a.m. She locked her door.

- _____ The manager came back one-half hour later to check the heater. He turned it off and locked the door again when leaving.
- _____ Dr. Robins arrived home at 5:15.
- _____ It took him 45 minutes to fix the heater. He left it on.
- _____ Dr. Robins' neighbor walked by Dr. Robins' door at 4:30 and noticed that her door was open.
- _____ The building manager knocked on Dr. Robins door at 2:45. He went in to fix her heater.

6. Another form of controlled writing is a dicto-comp (Brown, 2001). In this kind of exercise, a paragraph is read at normal speed, usually two or three times, after that the teacher asks students to rewrite the paragraph. The teacher also can write the keywords on the board.

Conclusion

Although writing now seen also not only as a product but also a process, it is not inherently wrong to pay attention to the criteria in which the students will be graded. A list of criteria that is usually included is content, organization, vocabulary use, grammatical use, and mechanical considerations. (Brown, 2001) Based also on the microskills in writing stated by Brown, these controlled writing exercises can be very useful for beginner writer in order to learn from the model and to practice how to combine sentences and to think in chronological order, before they move to the further stage, which is to produce their own ideas in form of writing. As it is sated by Sokolik in Nunan (2003) that writing is not a talent and cannot be taught like many people believe, instead writing is a teachable and learnable skill. Here, the instructor can play an important role in making this skill an enjoyable one for the students.

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