

Making Writing Fun: A Bag of Tricks

Rationale:

As any writing teacher has experienced, students are frequently worried about writing in English. They worry about expressing their ideas clearly within the boundaries of correct usage, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Often in the first years of their language learning, there is little focus on the creative aspects of writing because exams focus on grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Because of this, students develop a fear of writing and think that everything they write is full of errors. They hate writing as they hate taking a cold shower in the winter. These fears hinder them from writing and frequently make their writing process slow and also unsuccessful.

Teachers generally put more emphasis on the development of writing such as paragraphs and essays. The students, however, facing their fears of writing, do not feel comfortable writing freely to allow ideas to flow. This can lead to stiff, uncreative and poorly developed writing assignments.

Objective:

The workshop will raise the teachers' consciousness to the difficulty of writing and suggest some activities that make writing fun with more focus on ideas than form.

Audience:

Pre-service or in-service teachers

Activity 1: Derby Writing

Derby Writing is a famous horse race in Kentucky. Derby writing is a writing race. The class can be divided into two teams. At the end of a predetermined time for writing, each student will count the number of words s/he has written. Then the teacher will add up the number of words of each team member and write the total on the board. The group with the most words wins. Another possibility is to have each individual race with himself or herself. Each time the class does a Derby Writing exercise, the students compare their scores to their own earlier scores to see the improvement in the number of words written.

➤ Steps in this activity:

1. The students take out a piece of paper and a pencil or pen.
2. Before the activity begins, the teacher advises the class of the few rules they must follow:
 - a. Write as fast as possible until the teacher says "Stop!"
 - b. Write about any topic, but write in sentences, not just lists of words.
 - c. Do not worry about connecting ideas logically. Just write whatever comes into your mind.
 - d. Do not stop writing. If you do not know what to write, write the sentence, "I do not know what to write" until you think of something.
 - e. Do not erase or cross out words, and do not use contractions because they count as only one word rather than two words.
 - f. Do not worry about spelling, grammar, or punctuation.
 - g. If you do not remember a word in English, write that word in your native language and continue in English.
3. After the specified time of writing, the teacher says, "Stop!" Each student then counts the number of words s/he has written. These will be the totals used for the competition or race. The amount of time depends on the level. Advanced students will need about five minutes, but lower-level students may need more time because they write more slowly.

➤ **Benefits:**

- a. Positive response
- b. Overcoming fears
- c. Writers learn to express themselves fully and build communicative competence in the written medium of their foreign language.

Activity 2: Silence as an aid in a writing class

Fuller's poem:

Sometimes I let my silence speak for me.

So much can be said without saying a word....

Silence can hinder human communication, especially at crucial moments when speaking out verbally would be better. But, in a writing classroom once in a while, being silent can teach important lessons about written communication while strengthening EFL students' and instructors' abilities to express themselves in writing and with immediacy.

- a. Students discuss essays or reading passages from any book in the box they have read by exchanging written messages. Then, near the end of the class period, they wrote their conclusions on the board.
- b. The teacher writes a question about a reading assignment on the board. Students take turns writing responses to the question on the board while classmates took notes. At the end of class, students draw some conclusions about the readings for themselves in one-paragraph summaries. The teacher compiles and distributes their summaries, and they talk about the differences and similarities among them in another session using verbal discussion.

➤ **Benefits**

- a. Occasional silent days in EFL writing classes have special relevance for learning about writing as process
- b. Communication through writing reinforces instant written communication.
- c. A radical way to learn about writing, it is valuable as students feel more confident in their role as writers.

Activity 3: Pictures by hook or by crook

The teacher divides students into groups of four; each author group receives a folder containing a set of pictures from Books in a box. A story must be created using all the elements described in the pictures. The group that finishes their writing with all the pictures included within the predetermined time is the winner.

- **Benefits:** Surprisingly simple instructions yield complexly creative results!

Activity 4: Picture Talk

The teacher divides students into groups of four; each author group receives a set of scrambled pictures that make a story, tape or glue, paper (poster size). Each group should glue the pictures in the right sequence. In front of each picture, they should write a description of it. It is preferable for teachers to choose pictures that make funny stories.

Activity 5: Extension

From books in the box the participants will look for books in which these writing activities can be implemented.

- **Benefits:** Surprisingly simple instructions yield complexly creative results!