

DEVELOPING STUDENT'S WRITING ABILITY BY OFFERING VARIOUS TECHNIQUES

Oleh: Siti Azizah

(Dosen Tetap Prodi Tadris Bahasa Inggris Jurusan Tarbiyah STAIN Pamekasan)

Abstract:

Teaching writing is not only giving a topic, asking the students to write, and correcting the students' tasks but it also means teaching students how to develop ideas and how to make improvements in the drafts in order to produce readable and understandable text for the readers. In other words, students' writing ability is very much influenced by teacher's role in class. Therefore, teachers should use purposeful and meaningful teaching strategy to help their students in developing their writing ability. This article describes the role of teacher and the use of various techniques in the process of students' writing.

Key Words:

Teaching Writing, Various Techniques, Writing Ability

Introduction

In learning English, a learner does not only learn vocabularies and grammar but s/he also has to use and apply such knowledge through communication activity. Communication can be done through oral communication (speaking) and written communication (writing).

Writing is one of four skills in English. It is included in productive language skill in which exploring the idea in the written form. In language skills, writing is considered as most difficult subject for most students since it is detached from the wide range of expressive possibilities in speech. A writer is unable to exploit all the devices available to a speaker such as gesture, body movement, facial expression, pitch

and tone of voice, stress, and hesitation. A speaker can clarify and revise ideas as listener's question. A writer has to compensate for all of these disadvantages.

Writing is complex, difficult, and time-consuming process. It covers ability to arrange language, master vocabulary, and it needs a skill to think logically to have meaningful writing. In accordance with writing skill, Richards states that there is no doubt that writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners to master. The difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas, but also in translating these ideas into readable text. The skills involved in writing are highly complex. L2 writers have to pay attention to higher level skills of planning and organizing as well as lower level

spelling, punctuation, word choice and so on. The difficulty becomes more pronounced if their language proficiency is weak.¹

In writing class, usually most students find difficulty in getting the idea that is going to write. They spend their time in classroom without getting the idea suitable with the topic asked. Moreover, the teacher sometimes gives the same technique when s/he teaches writing. This monotonous teaching will make the students have no motivation to write. Finally this condition causes their score in writing is not satisfying for both the student itself and the teacher. Therefore, it is really needed to pay much attention to consider the students' writing competence. The teaching and learning process to increase the students' writing performance needs to be improved. To overcome such problems, a competent teacher in classroom is really needed. S/he should be able to implement the teaching strategies that can help the students to generate ideas and organize them that finally can produce readable and understandable text for the readers.

The Reasons for Writing

According to Tricia Hedge when she asked groups of English language teachers from around the world why they ask their students to write in the classroom, they have provided

¹Jack C. Richards and Willy A Renandya, *Methodology in Language Teaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 303.

interesting set of purposes for writing which includes the following points:²

1. For pedagogic purposes, to help students learn the system of language
2. For assessment purposes, as a way of establishing a learner's progress or proficiency
3. For real purposes, as a goal of learning, to meet students' needs
4. For humanistic purposes, to allow quieter students to show their strengths
5. For creative purposes, to develop self-expression
6. For classroom management purposes, as a calm activity which settles student down
7. For acquisitional purposes, as a careful mode of working with language in a conscious way
8. For educational purposes, to contribute to intellectual development and to develop self-esteem and confidence.

The reasons of writing above pinpoint the importance of writing. It is used for a wide variety of purposes, specifically, in improving writing skill.

Process Of Writing

Process of writing is a way of looking at what people do when they compose written texts.³ The process approach treats all writing as a creative

²Tricia Hedge, *Writing*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 9.

³Jeremy Harmer, *How To Teach Writing*, (Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 2004), p. 12.

act which requires time and positive feedback to be done well. In the process of writing, the teacher moves away from being someone who helps students facilitating learning strategies in developing ideas and receives the finished product for correction without any intervention in the process of writing itself.

The process of writing is often described as consisting of three activities: Pre-Writing, Drafting and Redrafting, and Editing, but Richard states it comprises four main stages: planning (pre-Writing), drafting (Writing), revising (Redrafting) and editing, and three other stages externally imposed on students by the teacher, namely responding (sharing), evaluating and post writing.⁴ Those can be described below:

a. Planning (Pre-Writing)

Pre-Writing is any activity in the classroom that encourages students to write. It stimulates thoughts for getting started. It includes two important things that provides the writer with a sense of purpose and a sense of audience. In other words, it is a writing context which significantly influences the first activity in the composition process, that of exploring possible content and planning outlines.

b. Drafting

The second phase of activity is the drafting or the writing itself. At the

drafting stage, the writers are focused on the fluency of writing and are not preoccupied with grammatically accuracy or the neatness of the draft.

c. Responding

Responding to the student writing by the teacher (or by peers) has a central role to play in the successful implementation of process writing. Responding intervenes between drafting and revising. It can be oral or in writing, after the students have produced the first draft and just before they proceed to revise.

d. Revising (Redrafting)

Revision involves assessing what has already been written and deciding on point like these:

- Am I sharing my impression clearly enough with my reader?
- Have I missed out any important points of information?
- Are there any points in the writing which may be unclear to my reader because I've omitted a line of argument or I've forgotten to explain something?
- Are there some sentences which don't say much or which are too repetitive and can be missed out?

The drafting process focuses primarily on *what* the writer wants to say, while redrafting progressively focuses on *how* to say it most effectively.

e. Editing

The editing process makes the final readjustments and checks accuracy

⁴Jack C. Richards, *Methodology in Language Teaching*, p. 315.

so that the text is maximally accessible to the reader. In this stage, students concentrate on accuracy in grammar, spelling, diction, punctuation, sentence structure and supportive textual material such as quotations, examples, and the like.

f. Evaluating

The criteria of evaluation should be known by the students, such as content, form (organization), grammar (language use), vocabulary, and mechanics.

Students may be encouraged to evaluate their own and each other's texts once they have been properly taught how to do it. In this way, they are made to be more responsible for their own writing.

g. Post-Writing

The post writing stage is an activity that includes publishing, sharing, reading aloud, transforming texts for stage performances, or merely displaying texts on notice-boards. In other words, it consists of reading through and trying to apply a reader's perspective in order to assess how clearly readers might follow the ideas.

The Teacher's Role In Writing Class

The teacher plays the most important factor that affects student learning and development. It is related to success on student's achievement. In line with the role of teacher, Harmer states that when helping student to become better writers, teachers have a

number crucial tasks to perform.⁵ Essentially, the teacher's role in writing class is to provide an environment in which students will learn about writing, show them how to learn using different kind of writing strategies, see models of good writing, get plenty of practice in writing, and receive help during the writing process.

The Principles in Writing Class

The activities in writing class are based on the following principles:⁶

1. Teenage and adult students are aware of their own problems in writing, and they have attitudes and feelings about the writing process. Teachers can play a valuable part in raising awareness of the process of composition by talking explicitly about the stages of writing as well as by structuring activities to take account of it.
2. Teachers can play a support role during the early stages of the composition process by helping students to get their ideas together. This can be done by talking about things to generate ideas, doing things such as interviewing other students, pooling information, ideas, or opinions in the class, working from pictures, or reading text of various kinds.
3. The teacher can also provide good models for writing, indirectly, by

⁵Jeremy Harmer, *How To Teach Writing*, p. 41.

⁶Tricia, *Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 55.

- encouraging good reading habits but also directly, when appropriate, by analysing textual structure, particularly with some types of more formal academic writing.
4. Planning activities structured by the teacher can help students to develop a sense of direction in their writing, though they should always be encouraged to regard a plan as an enabling device or support rather than as a rigid control.
 5. Teachers can encourage the drafting process by creating a workshop atmosphere in their classrooms, to the extent of providing rough paper, scissors, paste, erasers, etc., and while monitoring writing in progress, they can suggest that they are used for chopping and changing the structure of the text. Teachers can support the drafting process in various ways. They can intervene quietly, questioning and advising, in order to help writers get their ideas down on paper in English. Or they can encourage students to read each other's work and suggest restructurings and revisions. Giving help during writing proves far more effective than giving it afterwards. Rewriting is more motivating when it can be done quickly, easily, and relatively painless by moving pieces the text around. Alternatives can be evaluated and improvements immediately appreciated on the display screen.
 6. Students need opportunities to engage in writing a holistic process of composition. This means that they need practice in writing whole pieces of communication, not just controlled exercises in sentence structure, grammar, or bits and pieces of paragraph development. These activities have their place, as students need to be accurate in their writing, but they are not sufficient in themselves.

Various Techniques in Writing Class

Teaching writing is not only giving a topic, asking the students to write, and correcting the students' tasks but it also means teaching students how to develop ideas, how to make improvements in the drafts, how to make their writing can become effective texts. Effective writing requires a number of things: a higher degree of organization in the development of information, ideas and arguments; a high degree of accuracy so that there is no ambiguity of meaning; the use of complex grammatical devices for focus and emphasis; and a careful choice of vocabulary, grammatical pattern, and sentence structures to create a style which is appropriate to the subject matter and the eventual readers.⁷

From the statements above, teaching writing requires a teacher that can facilitate their students in developing their writing ability. It means the teacher can select and use strategies that are

⁷Ibid., p. 11.

most effective for students in writing their tasks. You as a teacher need to think on the process of writing. There are a number of techniques you need to consider. But unfortunately this article only focuses on the pre-writing techniques since this stage greatly influences for the first activity in which students try to get ideas and organize them.

1. Brainstorming

In pre-writing stage, that is before getting students to write you can encourage them to think about what they are going to write or to think about the topic and find ideas for their task. This activity is called brainstorming. Brainstorming can take many forms. The students can brainstorm on their own by writing down ideas on paper. They can also discuss the topic with other people. Brainstorming is useful for timed essays, such as in tests, or for writing task which does not require research.⁸ The following is an example of brainstorming.

Preparation:

The topic, for example is An unforgettable Experience. You can begin the activity by using a text in which the student recounts an unforgettable experience. Alternatively, you could tell the class of a funny incident from your own experience.

Procedure:

- a. Let students skim through the extract from the text and ask them for their response to the situation. Focus on their response as readers rather than on comprehension.
- b. Ask if anyone in the class remembers something in their experience and let them describe what they remember.
- c. Ask students to write down everything in note form that they can remember about an incident from their own experience. Tell them not to worry about language or even clarity but to get as much down on paper as they can. Give a time limit for this, perhaps five minutes. If students have difficulty in getting started, suggest that they close their eyes and focus on the incident, remembering sights, sounds, smells, etc
- d. Ask students to work in pairs and tell each other about their memories, talking from the notes they have made.
- e. Then allow another five minutes for students to jot down any ideas or associations which the discussion has generated.
- f. Ask students to choose one of their experiences and consider the details of the circumstances associated with it, for example, the time, the people involved, the

⁸Peter Chin, *Academic Writing Skills*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 5.

DEVELOPING STUDENT'S WRITING ABILITY
BY OFFERING VARIOUS TECHNIQUES

Siti Azizah

incident, and to write more detailed notes on them.

- g. Again, students should talk about the incident with their partner.
- h. Students should now have plenty of ideas for writing a composition on 'an unforgettable experience', and can begin the process of writing.

2. Mind Mapping/ Making Mind Maps

Mind mapping is another brainstorming activity. It aims to introduce and encourage the pre-writing strategy of making notes.

Preparation:

This activity can be carried out quite simply on a board or OHT. If you draw spontaneously while eliciting ideas from the class, students will quickly grasp the value of pre-writing activity. It's a good idea to practise making a mind map on the topic before you try it in class.

Procedure:

- a. Ask students to think individually about the topic. They should jot down all the things associated with the topic that come into their minds. Set a definite time limit (a couple of minutes). Let students jot down things in their first language if they do not know the English words. They can then share their ideas in small groups.
- b. Elicit ideas from the group and, as they suggest things, start to create a mind map on the board so that they can see how you

draw out aspects of the topic and subgroup items. As they listen to other students making suggestions and to your explanations and corrections, they will learn the English for ideas they have jotted down. This is an of need. The reasoning behind mind maps is that we do not necessarily think in an ordered or linear way with some topics, but rather explore them by moving between their various elements.

- c. Branches can be added to the mind map as students suggest new ideas or add ideas to already established aspects. The end result is a map with topics and subtopics radiating from the central topic.
- d. When the map is reasonably full, lead a class discussion on the best order of items in a composition. An audience and purpose will need to be decided in order to do this effectively.
- e. Alternative writing activities are then possible. Students can elaborate the mind map for the topic and write it up.
- f. Encourage student to begin the process of writing and to share their work with classmates, in order to get feedback and make appropriate revisions.

3. Free Writing

Free writing is a technique which has the main purpose of generating

DEVELOPING STUDENT'S WRITING ABILITY BY OFFERING VARIOUS TECHNIQUES

Siti Azizah

ideas. It tries to overcome the problem of writer's block. It has sometimes been called speedwriting or quickwriting because its main feature is writing as quickly as possible without stopping. Its main feature, a product of the speed, is that the writer concentrates on content rather than on form. In this way, the primary focus is on getting as many ideas down on paper as possible. At a later stage, quality can take over from quantity in a process of selection and redrafting. Free writing is useful follow-on activity from brainstorming which can be done as a class or with students working individually.

Preparation:

No preparation is needed but you should have a board or an OHP which can be seen clearly by the class.

Procedure:

- a. Explain to the class that you are going to try out a technique called free writing, which some writers find useful as a way of getting started and developing for a topic.
- b. Ask students to brainstorm individually for a few minutes and jot down their experiences of learning a foreign language, noting anything that occurs to them.
- c. Demonstrate free writing to your students. Choose an item from your notes and start writing freely

and quickly on the board or on an OHT so that the class can watch you composing. Try to elaborate on the item you have chosen from your notes. Tell your students beforehand not to interrupt but to stop you after you have covered about ten or twelve lines.

- d. Show students how one part of the writing could then be taken to elaborate further as you begin to remember more.
- e. Encourage students to try the same process and give them time to work quietly by themselves. When they can't think of anything more to write, they should go back to their notes and choose another point to freewrite about.
- f. The students should end up with notes, paragraphs, and partly elaborated points; in other words, a collection of partially drafted pieces of writing which are now ready to be redrafted with an eye to accurate language, organization, and development of the topic.

4. Using a diagram of Ideas

It aims to introduce a logical pre-writing activity for writing a formal 'for and against' essay. In this activity you can elicit ideas from students, who can then use them in their own writing. Ideally, students will provide all the necessary content but it is as well to be

DEVELOPING STUDENT'S WRITING ABILITY
BY OFFERING VARIOUS TECHNIQUES

Siti Azizah

prepared by working out the 'for' and 'against' arguments before the class.

Procedure:

- a. Write the topic on the board and ask students to think quietly whether they agree or disagree with the statement and what arguments they could use to support their opinion.
 - b. Ask a student to volunteer an argument for the statement and then ask another to volunteer an argument against it. Use these to begin drawing a diagram on the board.
 - c. Ask students to work in small groups to provide further 'for' and 'against' arguments until each group has several of each. Set a time limit which you think is appropriate to the level of the group.
 - d. Elicit arguments from the class in order to elaborate the diagram. As you do so, provide vocabulary, correct grammar, useful phrases, etc.
 - e. Students can then begin the process of composition, using the ideas provided by the diagram, prioritizing them according to their own views, and adding further ideas as the process of writing generates thinking.
5. Pyramid discussion
- Pyramid discussion will help students generate ideas and organize them for a description.

Procedure:

- a. Explain the context of the activity to students and its purpose.
 - b. Ask students to work individually for a few minutes. They should jot down some ideas about the topic.
 - c. Ask students to work in pairs. Each pair should discuss possible content of the topic. Give a time limit appropriate to the level of students.
 - d. Then organize the class into groups of four, each member from a different pair to allow the widest exchange of ideas. Each student should then have a comprehensive list of possible content.
 - e. Suggest that each student decided their own content from the list and prioritizes in his or her own way. Then ask the class to start drafting.
6. Making Linear Notes
- The strategy of brainstorming above is especially useful in creative writing, where spontaneous and unstructured flow of thoughts is a good way to get ideas together. Brainstorming can also be effective as the first stage in more formal types of writing. However, some forms of writing are probably best tackled with a more structured approach from the beginning. Structured is required before putting pen to paper; it also implies a

process of controlling ideas. This activity aims to help students organize ideas in more formal writing.

Preparation:

Choose a topic which involves description and which lends itself to listing content and sorting it into sections.

Procedure:

- a. Introduce the topic and ask students what items they think should go into a composition of this type. Write a list of suggestions on the board as they are offered. Prompt students if they run out of ideas with items from the list you have prepared.
- b. Give students your list of points and ask them to add any points from the board which are not already listed.
- c. Explain that some points in the list are headings and cover or subsume other points. Ask students to work out the headings and the points they cover.
- d. When each student has finished this, you can organize checking between partners.
- e. Students decide next on the order of points. This can be done individually, in pairs, or as a whole class with you. If done in pairs or individually, there should be a feedback session to discuss the criteria for organization.

7. Cubing

Cubing is a technique which involves consideration of a topic from six points of view. It is an invention process which can be visualized as bringing together six sides of a cube which holds the subject inside.

Preparation:

You will need to prepare the cubing framework for students, with some explanatory notes, as in the worksheet below.

Procedure:

- a. Introduce the topic, for example the internet, by asking students what sort of people use the internet, what they use it for, and what they feel its values are. Elicit uses values from the class and develop useful language on the board.
- b. Use worksheet below to develop discussion about the internet. Do the first item with the whole class and ask them to describe the internet.
- c. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to go through the other five points on the worksheet and interpret them in relation to the internet. Give them a time limit for this activity.
- d. Hold a feedback session with the class, eliciting ideas and putting them on the board. Students will then have gathered sufficient ideas to write an essay on the

DEVELOPING STUDENT'S WRITING ABILITY
BY OFFERING VARIOUS TECHNIQUES

Siti Azizah

Internet, taking whatever perspective they wish.

8. Using visuals to focus descriptions

This technique aims to help students see the importance of selection and focus in writing a description.

Preparation:

You will need to make collection of pictures, cut out from magazines, postcards, or even your own enlarged photographs, sufficient for a class set, which show interesting scenes or still life. It can be useful to work with other teachers to prepare this resource, which can then be used by several classes. If the pictures are on mounted on card and covered with plastic film, they can make a permanent resource.

Procedure:

- a. Give each student a picture. (This activity also works well as pair work). Ask students to study their picture closely and look at each part of the composition in turn. Can they describe the scene clearly in words as the potographer or artist has captured it?
- b. Ask students to decide wht is the most important or striking thing about the picture. What would they write about first in describing it? How would they bring in the otherv parts of the picture?
- c. Ask students to write a first draft of a paragraph describing the picture. As they finish drafting,

write these questions on the board.

- What is the focus of the picture and where is it in the picture?
 - Where have you describe this focus in your paragraph?
 - Have you followed a certain order inyour writing for example, foreground to back ground, right to left, top to bottom? If so, why?
 - Could you improve on the order?
 - How will your description change if you move the order around?
- d. Encourage students to review their work againts these questions and start redrafting.

Conclusion

Teacher plays important role in developing students' writing ability. The most difficulty in writing for most students is in getting ideas and organize them. So, teacher should be able to take an idea and find suitable writing teaching strategy. The variety of writing techniques can be ideas on how to change the activity for different types of texts, different levels, or alternative ways of delivering the activities in writing class, specifically, can help to improve students' writing skill.

DEVELOPING STUDENT'S WRITING ABILITY
BY OFFERING VARIOUS TECHNIQUES

Siti Azizah

References

- Richards, Jack C and Willy A Renandya. 2002. *Methodology in Language Teaching*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Harmer, Jeremy. 2004. *How To Teach Writing*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited
- Peter, Chin. 2012. *Academic Writing Skills*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Tricia sHedge, 2005, *Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press