

Twenty-six Letters

*Twenty-six cards in half a pack;
Twenty-six weeks in half a year;
Twenty-six letters dressed in black
In all the words you ever will hear.*

*Think of the beautiful things you see
On mountains, riverside, meadow and tree.
How many their names are, but how small
The twenty-six letters that spell them all.*

James Reeves

Teaching Writing

When we start teaching writing in English, learners can already write in their native language usually or they are in the process of learning to write. Before we started writing learners perceived English just with their eyes and ears. Now hands are added and via writing students may express their personalities. It might bring them a wonderful satisfaction if they have written something. On the other hand many learners take a long time to acquire the skill of writing which needs a lot of patience. And there's one more thing quite unpleasant, associated with writing at school either in the native or in English languages and it is correcting errors. We should also mention the difference between pronunciation and spelling which is a source of mistakes. Students should be explained the difference generally to accept it. When teaching writing, the teacher can hardly ever use his/her usual tricks: miming, gestures, pictures, real objects etc. They reappear during training or testing.

The beginning of writing in English is often limited to copying. Thanks to the reading skill learners may copy words and sentences. When the teacher asks the students to do minor adjustments in words and sentences they switch to training writing. As soon as they try to write similar constructions, sentences and words, they try so called imitation in writing and there's just a small step to real writing. There is a special feeling about seeing your work in a written form.

Writing for reinforcement

During this period learners are focused on spelling and self-expression is ignored. learners may perceive writing as nothing more than an exercise in accuracy. Students write to reinforce something that they have just learned. We should let learners read aloud for themselves when copying the words. Copying practises the language concentration:

- 1 **Straight copying** – look at the word and write it down.
- 2 Write down the words that you can read in a wordchain.
- 3 Write down all the animals, pieces of furniture, fruits, drinks ... you can find in the text.
- 4 **Matching** – match pictures with the words which you process yourself.
- 5 Multiple choice – write down which offer belongs to the picture.
- 6 **Delayed copying** – try to remember the words you read, write the words after the teacher has covered them. This activity trains short term visual memory.

Writing for training

Writing for training presents patterns of linguistic forms and gives students the chance to use and manipulate them:

- 1 **Gap-filling** exercises – choose the word from the list and write it down into the gap
- 2 Substitute the pictures in the text for the right words
- 3 Put the words/sentences given in random order into the best order for an English sentence/paragraph.
- 4 Complete the sentence by adding a word.
- 5 **Dictation** – listen to an incomplete sentence. Write it down and complete it.

Writing for imitation

The teacher wants the students to become familiar with syntactic forms by following carefully chosen models. Learners will be concentrated on transformation as well as on the content:

- 1 Read a passage talking about an English boy. Write a similar passage about yourself/your friend.
- 2 Read a few sentences about a cat. Write a similar paragraph about your dog/pet.

Free writing activities

At the beginning teachers emphasized accuracy and patterns in writing. Now the purpose and audience are in the centre of our attention. The language is the student's own language. Learners may write in pencil and use a rubber at the beginning. Mistakes should be corrected during the process of writing. The teacher even doesn't have to correct all the mistakes. The result may be displayed on the notice-board even with some mistakes in it:

- 1 Write what you do in the morning/afternoon, what you did yesterday.
- 2 Word stars – a key word is given. Write all words associated with the key word.
- 3 Vocabulary charts – write all the words describing the picture.
- 4 Dialogues – fill in the speech bubbles.
- 5 Messages – write a note, a message, a postcard, an invitation, or a letter.

The teacher should help learners as much as possible with the pre-writing preparation, during writing and correcting the text. Ideally students should have a folder to keep all written work in. They can decorate the folder. When everything the student has written is kept in one folder, the teacher and the student himself/herself can easily see how much progress is being made.