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DAFTAR ISI

Designing a Framework for Writing Tasks

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Abstract: In fact, there has been much debate over the utility of composition as tests of language proficiency and even as tests of writing skill. This article, nonetheless, will clarify that subjective methods of evaluating and objective scoring technique are strongly correlated. Some studies have also found that lecturer judgments of a subjective sort have substantial reliability and are significantly correlated with similar judgments by independent raters and with objective scores computed over the same composition work. In this article, how both holistic evaluation and objective measures are operated in the classroom of English writing will accordingly be discussed.
Key words: *holistic evaluation, objective scoring methods, language proficiency, coherence, unity*

INTRODUCTION

The writing skills are complex and most of the time difficult to teach, requiring mastery not only of grammatical and rhetorical devices but also of conceptual and judgmental elements. This stands to reason why writing has been a neglected area of English language teaching for some years. Consequently, large numbers of English students writing seem to pose great problems. Broadly, the many and varied skills necessary for writing good composition are basically grouped into five general components or main ideas (Hedge, 1991); they are: (1) language use: the ability to write correct and appropriate sentences; (2) mechanical: the ability to use correctly those conventions peculiar to the written language, such as, punctuation, spelling; (3) treatment of content: the ability to think creatively and develop thoughts, excluding all irrelevant information; (4) stylistic skills: the ability to manipulate sentences and paragraphs, and use language effectively; (5) judgment skills: the ability to write in an appropriate manner for a particular purpose with a particular audience in mind, together with an ability to select, organize, and order relevant information.

Of greater importance in the teaching and testing of writing, according to Heaton (1988), are those skills involving the use of *judgment*. Certainly, the ability to write for a particular audience or topic using the most appropriate kind of language is essential. The use of correct registers, for example, becomes an important skill, especially at advanced levels of writing. This is reasonable since failure to use the correct register results in incongruities and embarrassment. Naturally, the various kinds of register include *colloquialisms, slang, archaic words, legal language, standard English, business English, the language used by educated writers of English,* etc.

The purpose of writing will also help to establish a particular register, for instance, to entertain, inform, or explain. In addition, a piece of continues writing may take the form of narrative, description, survey, report, discussion, or argument. Virtually, the subject and the format, the actual audience, e.g., an examiner, a lecturer, a student, a friend will also determine which of the various registers is to be used. Commonly, the use of appropriate register implies an awareness not only of a writing goal but also of a particular audience. Most importantly, organization and ordering skills then follow selection (Hedge, 1991; Hughes, 1991; Brooks et.al., 1979).

Apparently, an attempt should be made to determine the types of writing tasks with which the learners are confronted every day. Of course, such tasks will probably be associated with the writing requirements imposed by the other subjects being studied at college or university level if medium of instruction is English. Henceforth, according to Hedge (1991) the approaches and activities presented in classroom writing need to be based on a number of assumptions which can, in general, be elaborated in the following ways:

1. The reason for writing

It is said that if writing in the English language classroom is undertaken as an aid to learning, for example, to consolidate the learning of a new structures or vocabulary or to help learners remember new items of language, in this context, then, much of this writing is basically at the sentence level and is called *sentence level reinforcement exercises* (White, 1980).

Hedge(1991) points out further that these exercises have their value in language learning, but successful writing depends on more than the ability to produce clear and correct sentences. Lecturer's task is actually to help students to write whole pieces of communication, to link and develop information, ideas, or arguments for a particular reader. Thus, these typical writing tasks relate appropriately to the ultimate goal of those learners who need to write English in their social, educational, or professional lives. By encouraging the production of the whole pieces in the classroom, we can provide for these different motivations for writing; they are:

Assumption 1

Classroom writing tasks of English as a foreign language (EFL) should reflect the ultimate goal of enabling students to write the whole passages which form connected, contextualized, and appropriate pieces of communication. This assumption leads us to view the following features of writing skills.

2. The product of writing

One approach to writing is to look at instances of writing and to analyze the features of written pieces (Hughes. 1991; Oller, 1980; Orgel, 1962). This will tell us something about what it is students have to produce. It is, of course, possible to build up a list of skills the students need. It would, as previously mentioned, include (a) getting the grammar right or correct, (b) having an adequate range of vocabulary mastery, (c) punctuating meaningfully, (d) using the conventions of layout correctly, e.g., in letters, (e) spelling accurately, (f) using an effective range of sentence structures, (g) linking ideas and information across sentences to develop topic, (h) developing and organizing the content clearly and convincingly.

In addition, it is also reasonable to build up a check test of the forms, e.g., essay, report writing, etc, and the functions, such as, narrative, description, comparison and contrast, etc, of the written passages and to show the students how the features and organization differ from one another. This will determine setting and marking work teacher and students focus on (Hedge, 1991; Heaton, 1989).

Assumption 2

Students need to have opportunities to practice various forms and functions in their writing and within these to develop the different skills involved in producing written pieces. This according to Hughes, 1991; Brooks, et al, 1979; Hedge, 1991) provides us with the process of composing clarified like the followings.

3. The process of composing

The most important insight that recent research into writing, in general, has given us is that good writers appear to go through certain processes which lead to successful pieces of written works. That is to say, they start off with an overall plan in their heads. First of all, they think about what they intend to say and who they are writing for. They then draft out sections of the writing and as they work on them they are constantly reviewing, revising, and editing their work. In other words, we can categorize good writers as people who have a sense of purpose, a sense of audience, and a sense of direction in their writing.

Assumption 3

Classroom writing tasks need to be set up in ways that reflect the writing process. Consequently, we need to encourage our students through a process of planning, organizing, composing, and revising. This idea guides us to analyze the process of communicating.

4. The process of communicating

Hedge further asserts that most of the writing we do in real life, naturally, is written with a reader in mind, e.g., a friend, a relative, a colleague, an institution, or a particular lecturer. Knowing a specific subject provides us with a context without which it is difficult to know exactly what or how to write. This is true because the selection of appropriate content and style depends on a sense of audience. Thus, without a context, it is then difficult to know what to put in and what to leave out or how formal and informal to be.

One of the lecturer's tasks, henceforth, is to create context and provide audience for writing. This may sometimes be conducted by setting up 'roles' in the classroom for tasks in which students write to each other (Hughes, et al, 1988; Orgel, 1962).

Assumption 4

When setting tasks the instructors need to vary audience, identifying who the readers are to be, and try to make every piece of writing fulfill some kind of communicative purpose either real or simulated. When students understand the context they are more likely to write effectively. This assumption denotes, in terms of classroom writing, the process of improving.

5. The process of Improving

Naturally, helping our students with planning and drafting is only a half of the lecturer's task. The other half, according to Hedge (1991), concerns his or her response to writing, a response which is important for a number of reasons; namely:

a. writing requires a lot of consciousness effort from students, so they understandably expect feedback and can become discouraged if it is not forthcoming.

b. learners monitor their writing to a much greater extent than they do in their speech because writing is more conscious effort in its process. It is reasonably true that writing is a truer indication of how a student is progressing in learning the target language and it can therefore provide the lecturer with an opportunity for assessment and diagnosis problem areas.

c. writing is much more easier to revise than speech because it is permanent and therefore available. It is therefore possible for the lecturer to exploit writing subject for learning in several effective ways.

In most cases, responding positively to the strengths in a student's writing is important in building up confidence in the writing process. When marking any piece of work the lecturer can use ticks in the margin and commendations in the comments aimed at providing to correction of errors in students' work. The instructor can actually ask the students to get involved the revising and editing their own work so that the activity known as 'marking' becomes part of the writing process and a genuine source of learning for both students and lecturer. To be exact, it becomes a process of *improving*.

Assumption 5
In its traditional focus, the process of marking on error-correction, the lecturer reasonably needs to make a review and modification in order to provide a range of activities involving both lecturer and learners. By so doing, making revision can become an integral part of the process of classroom writing. This assumption refers to the so called *time for writing analysis*.

6. Time for writing

Generally, there is a widely held belief that in order to be able to develop certain topics, a student needs to read a lot because reading activity benefits the learners to be exposed to models of different text types so that they can develop awareness of what constitutes good writing. It is agreeable that reading is necessary and valuable but in order to become a good writer, more importantly, a learner needs to write or practice a lot (Brooks et al, 1972; Orgel, 1962; Oller et al, 1980; Warriner, 1958)).

Poor writers, particularly, those who tend to get trapped in a downward spiral of failure; usually will remain poor if they are not motivated and seldom practice. This situation exacerbated in many classrooms where is mainly relegated to a homework activity. This is reasonable because if writing tends to be an out-of-class activity many teachers feel that class time is best devoted to *aural/oral* work and homework to writing which can be done at the students' own pace. However, Hedge (1991) says that many students would benefit from classroom practice in writing for which the lecturer can prepare tasks with carefully worked out stages of planning, drafting and revision. By doing so, if poorer writers feel some measure of success in the supportive learning environment of classroom, they will begin to develop their confidence and so start on the upward spiral of motivation and improvement. This opinion leads us to make clarification concerning the following assumption.

Assumption 6
Students need time in the classroom for writing. The instructor's task is to select and design activities which support them through the process of producing a piece of writing.

7. Working together on writing

Another very good reason for spending classroom time on writing, according to Hedge, is that it allows students to work together on this language skill in different ways. Ideally, the lecturer's ultimate aim is to develop the writing skills of each student individually, nonetheless, individual students have a good deal to gain from collaborative writing exercise. This is true since group composition is a good example of an activity in which the classroom becomes a writing workshop as the students are asked to work together in small groups in a writing task. In general, at each stage of the activity the group interaction contributes in useful ways to the writing process, specifically, for examples:

a. brainstorming a topic in group discussion provides lots of ideas from which students have to select the most effective and appropriate selection of content which is an important part of the art of good writing.

b. skills of organization and logical sequencing come into play as the group decides on the overall structure of the piece of writing.

c. while writing out a first draft with one student acting as "scribe" or secretary and the other students arguing out the structures of sentences, the choice of words, and the best way to link ideas, there is, of course, a spontaneous process of revision in progress.

Obviously, group composition can have the added advantage of enabling students to learn from each other's strengths, that is, it is an activity where stronger students can help the weaker ones in the group. It also enables the lecturer to move around from group to group monitoring the work and helping with the process of composition. Collaborative writing in the classroom, then, generates discussion and activities which encourage an effective process of writing.

In summary, reviewing critically the previous description, it can specifically be cited that the stages of writing process respectively involves the followings, they, among other things, are:

1. **Composing.** Particularly, this stage describes how the pre-writing and drafting stages are processed. When students get their ideas, they make rough plans or formulate mental outlines and develop a sense of direction as they begin to draft their writing. This task clearly presents a range of techniques in the process of composition practices.

2. **Communicating.** Primarily, this focuses on one aspect of composing a piece of writing, the need to develop a strong sense audience. The task demonstrates ways in which the lecturer can create contexts for classroom writing as well as provide a range of readers.

3. **Crafting.** This stage mainly denotes the skills a student needs to produce so called *coherent* and *appropriate* composition. The lecturer can help learner to develop paragraphs coherently, to use cohesive devices, to use a range of sentence structures, and to develop a range of appropriate vocabulary.

4. **Improving.** Basically, this relies on the ways in which lecturer and students can work mutually together to improve the clarity and quality of writing. It certainly includes ideas for involving learners in activities of redrafting and editing their work.

5. **Evaluating.** This stage, actually, is used to considers criteria which lecturer might apply in selecting or designing appropriate writing tasks and materials for his or her own students.

Clearly, the outcome of this type of steps shows that there is a discrete focus in the tasks of each section of writing exercises. For example, in the case of *composing*, undoubtedly there is a task which demonstrates in detail the strategy of brainstorming. Further, brainstorming may be mentioned in tasks in *crafting* but of course will not be repeatedly described in detail. Similarly, *improving* describes strategies, such as, group writing or pair-work editing which can be applied to any of the writing tasks. In this way, it is then possible to highlight each stage in the writing process and present a range of strategies without undue repetition (Oller et al, 1980; Orgel, 1962; Warriner, 1958). The next essential process is, practically, concerned with, how each of activities is organized.

As the name indicates, it suggests the organization of each task, as Hedge (1991) argues, is used to provide the information relevant to particular focus of each task. In *improving*, for example, activities are presented which can be applied to any writing task. They should, therefore, be described only in terms of the *level* or range of levels at which the technique may be introduced, certainly the *preparation needed*, and the procedure to go through in class. In so doing, here are descriptions of each of the tasks detailing the terms of the *topic, function, form, focus*, and *context* of the writing clarified like the followings.

Level. This naturally relates to an indication of the minimum level at which the task can generally be successfully attempted by the students. That is, sometimes the language required by a certain task can be adapted upwards or downwards to suit a particular group of our students and, in case, a range of levels is given. In other cases, lecturer is hopefully able to take an idea and find suitable content for other levels of learners.

Topic. Specifically, this refers to the content of the task. Sometimes the topic is not always given since the activity is a more of a technique which can be generalized top many of the tasks in the book regularly used. Therefore, lecturer needs to always check the task because he or she may o ten find that the content is flexible and he or she can actually transfer the ideas very quickly to another content area.

Function. Conventionally, this relates to the type of discourse organization required by the piece of writing, e.g., *narrative, description, instruction, argument, comparison,* etc.

Form. This is the form within which any of the discourse types mentioned previously can be presented, e.g., a letter, a report, an information leaflet, or an academic essay.

Focus. This explains the writing skill or skills which the task aims to develop, such as, paragraphing, selecting relevant content, using cohesive devices, etc.

Context. The real or projected reader of writing is reflected in *context.* For examples: we are (1) writing for visitors to our institution, (2) practicing a composition of the type we need to write in our end-of-the year examination. Most importantly, it should be formal and academic.

Preparation. Anything we need to do or think about before we go to the classroom is mostly shaped in preparation.

In class. A step-by-step procedure for carrying out the task is conducted in class.

Remarks. These may be introductory, immediately after the title, in which case they describe aims or relate the task to others in the section. The remarks given at the end of activities may (1) give warnings about classroom exploitation, (2) compare possible advantages and disadvantages of the task, (3) suggest useful sources of further ideas, or cross-refer to other sections of the source books.

Variations. Ideally, some activities should have variations that can be used with different types of classes at different levels.

Moving ahead, our attention is now mainly focusing on scoring and rating *writing task* in practice. This especially leads us to view the critical question concerning possibility to combine rating or scoring writing using both subjective and objective counting procedures. Is it possible to differentiate aspects of writing skill, e.g., vocabulary, and organization, also specific discrete points of structure? Likewise, what do we do on scores derived from occurrences of conjunctives, e.g., conjunctions, anaphoric referring terms, such as, pronouns, and foregrounding elements, e.g., articles?

Oller, et al (19 80) assert that there have been much debate over the utility of writing as test of language proficiency and even as tests of writing skill per se. They say that scoring methods for writing skills can include *subjective* and *objective* scoring techniques, although in the past many critics have opposed the use of composition as a measure of language proficiency. This is, of course, reasonable since, in terms of composition, students are apt to perform differently on different occasions and topics; the scoring of writing is highly subjective; and students can easily avoid problems and mask their weaknesses (Harris, 1989).

Furthermore, scoring composition, as indicated by Oller et al, is considered to be too time-consuming in large scale of testing situations, i.e., the other methods might work much more economical to use. On the other side, lecturers have felt that composition is reasonable sort of task to require students who will have to do a great deal of writing in order to accomplish just about any educational program. To assess the reliability and validity of writing tasks, logically both *holistic rating techniques* and *objective scoring methods* need to be conducted. Language acquisition study has found that there were difficulties for items within the grammatical categories of *conjunctions, pronouns, and articles* (Lee and Canter, 1971; Warden, 1976. It can simply be hypothesized, then, that correct usage within each of these categories would increase from elementary to advanced levels.

EFL learners undoubtedly need help with linguistic form, i.e., with grammar, sentence structure, and so on, in their writing tasks. They often need help with the organization of the composition as well, since conventions for this can differ from one language to another (Hedge, 1991; Raimes, 1983).

The objective tests aimed at writing skill evaluation, according to Oller et al, (1980), consist of the following types, they, among other things, are:

(1) Choosing an appropriate word, phrase, or clause to form a continuation at various decision points in a text, e.g.,
A farmer's daughter had been out to milk the cows and as was returning home, carrying her pail of milk on her head. As she walked along she
A. started
B. had to   thinking
C. prepared
D. began to be
"The milk in this pail will provide me with cream…."

(2) Error recognition, e.g.,
Most people have misconceptions (1) for A. no change B. with C. toward
D. through   E. about
gifted children. It seems no one knows for sure (2) which A. no change B. that
C. because   D. whether   E. unless
this qualities reflect heredity or the environment.

(3). Putting words, phrases, and clauses, in an appropriate order, e.g.,
A small child has (1) -------- (2) --------- (3) ---------- (4) -------- A. very   B. idea C. a
D. limited
of feature. The year between one Christmas to the next Christmas (5) ------- (6) -------
(7) ------- (8) ------- A. seems   B. eternity C. an   D. like

While, in terms of *holistic rating techniques*, lecturer needs to judge composition answers as a whole on (1) *technique of composition*, but require (2) *competence development of the topic*. A correctly written answer should show appropriate development of the topic. An answer of composition should also show appropriate technique of coherent development. It is advisable to judge the answer of composition as a whole on a percentage basis. Lecturer, of course, can give an honor mark, 90 – 100 percent only to an answer showing exceptional development of topic, approximate perfection in technique of composition and some other good quality, such as individuality and evident power, vividness, discriminating vocabulary, etc (Orgel, 1963; Brook and Warren, 1979). More operationally, below are some authentic examples of the scales of holistic rating techniques as previously suggested; they are classified as:

1. **Excellent** = 90 – 100 percent – Approximate perfection in technique composition, with evident power, exceptional smoothness or vividness, etc.
2. **Good** = 80 – 90 percent – Approximate perfection in technique of composition, good development of topic; good work, but not really distinctive in any way, i.e., Good technique of composition and exceptional development of topic.
3. **Fair** = 70 – 80 percent – Good technique of composition and average development of topic or weak technique of composition and exceptional development of topic
4. **Passing** = 65 – 70 percent – Weak technique of composition and good development of topic, or approximate perfection in technique of composition and weak or meager development of topic.
5. **Rejected** = below passing – Poor technique of composition or incoherent development of topic.

In judging technique of composition, as Orgel asserts, lecturer needs to consider *competence* in the following areas as *essential* and *incompetence* as *serious*; namely:
a. Thought coherence, i.e., *general plan*
b. Sentence structure, i.e., *run-on sentence* or *sentence fragments* which indicate incompetence in expression
c. Grammatical correctness
d. Punctuation and capitalization
e. Paragraphing
f. Unity
g. Spelling – basic and ordinary words

Furthermore, the lecturer should consider the following areas as desirable. That is to say, if incompetence in one of the following areas significantly affects the clarity or coherence of the composition. Therefore, the errors should be considered serious. Those mentioned areas are:
a. Introduction and conclusion
b. Use of idioms
c. Emphasis
d. Word order
e. Vocabulary
f. Word coherence, i.e., connection or transition
g. Modes and tenses
h. Spelling – unusual words.

Conclusion

Essentially, the lecturer's role is to provide an environment in which students will (1) learn about writing, (2) see models of good writing, (3) get plenty of practice in writing, and (4) receive help during the writing process. Specifically, it can be concluded that the writing tasks, in this article, are based on the following principles; they are:

1. Learners are aware of their own problems in writing, and they have attitudes and feelings about writing process. Lecturers 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 tasks to take account of this.

2. Lecturers can play a support role by helping the students to get their ideas together done by doing activities, such as, interviewing other students, by (a) pooling information, ideas, or opinions in the class, (2) working from pictures, or (3) reading texts of various kinds.

3. The lecturer can also provide good models for writing, indirectly, by encouraging good reading habits but also directly, when appropriate, by analyzing textual structure, particularly with some types of more formal academic writing.

4. Planning activities structured by the lecturer can help the 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. Lecturers can actually encourage the drafting process by creating a workshop atmosphere in their classroom and support this process in various ways, e.g., they can intervene quietly, questioning and advising, in order to help learners get their ideas down on paper in English. Or they can encourage students to read each other's work and suggest restructurings and revisions. It is also widely accepted that the idea of giving help during writing proves far more effective than giving it afterward.

6. Students need opportunities to engage in both of a holistic process of composition as well as the so called linguistic form exercises. This also means they need practice not only in whole pieces of communication but also controlled exercises in *sentence structure, grammar*, or *bits and pieces of paragraph development*. These activities commonly have their place, as students need to be accurate in their writing, although they are naturally not sufficient in themselves.

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