

Pre Writing Strategies for Beginners EFL Students

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Abstract

To make students write, we teachers of writing have to get them involve with some activities. We keep them up and make them go through some stages of writing before they are assigned to do 'real' writing. The activities involve and occupy them both in groups or individually to experience some processes of learning like thinking, focusing on a specific topic, discussing and revising. Focusing on writing about things they like or interested in help them enliven communication and avoid writing block. This article introduce some pre writing strategies, alternatives the students can choose and motivate them to write better. They are ; 1).listing Ideas, 2).Free writing, 3). Brainstorming, 4).Preparing a scratch outline, 5). Guided writing and 6).Summarizing a reading selection.

Key words :

Pre writing, strategies, beginners, EFL students, listing Ideas, Free writing, Brainstorming, Preparing a scratch outline, Guided writing, Summarizing a reading selection.

Introduction :

Teachers of writing for EFL students complain because the students do not do their assignments. The students complain they are not able to transfer their thoughts and feeling into a sheet of paper. They can not express what they have in mind not even in their own language. Most of the students admit that writing class is boring and absolutely not fun at all.

Some teachers of writing turn back to the traditional ways of teaching writing. They begin lecturing the students about what writing 'is supposed to be'. Some start thinking that focusing on grammar

might be a good idea and very useful. It might improves the students structure .but on the other hand it doesn't help them improving writing skill and paragraph organization They are soon occupied with the rules of verbs usage and other sentence skills such as verbs ending, irregular verbs, comma etc . For a while these students will forget they have to write.

Speaking and writing skills are productive . And Like speaking , writing is a process of communication. Both skills demand an acquiring of the knowledge of sentence skills. Both need planning and processing for developing ideas beginning from initial conception to final presentation. Speaking and Writing

demand students effort to be active and involved in all the process of these productive communications.

Before starting writing teachers of writing for EFL students need to remind the students that in some ways these two skills are each having significant specifications. In speaking we say what we have in mind and the person(s) we talk to respond .When they don't understand they ask and demand more explanation. In writing we express our thoughts expecting others who read the writing piece understand and agree with what we writers think. We have obligations to support every idea with reasons, details and facts. In writing we communicate with our readers on paper, we don't. Speak face to face and can't see their reaction right away.

Alice Oshima and Ann Hogue say that "Writing is a progressive activity. This means that when you first write something down, you have already been thinking about what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. Then after you have finished writing, you read over what you have written and make changes and corrections. Therefore, writing is never a one-step action...." (Oshima and Ann Hogue, 1997:2)

The statements assert that some important factors need to be considered. In other words, to be competent writers, students need to adopt some principles of writing. Before doing real writings the students also need to get involve in some activities.. The activities will begin with thinking of what to write, followed by how they are going to express what they have in their mind and then, write them all and finally never forget to reread and make some changes and corrections when needed.

This article intends to provide and help beginner EFL students to practice pre-

writing activities. The purpose is to make the students realize practicing prewriting strategies eventually help them learn to write simple unified thoughts in good, orderly, meaning-full expressions. "Pre writing activities generate ideas; they encourage a free flow of thoughts and help students to discover both what they want to say and how to say it on paper. In other words, pre-writing activities facilitated the planning for both the product and the process." (D'Aoust, C, 1986 :7)

What is Pre-writing ?

Alice Oshima and Ann Hogue declare that pre-writing is the first step in the writing process. In this step, you gather ideas to write about. One way to gather ideas is to discuss a topic with your classmates and takes notes. (Oshima et al, 1997)

"Pre-writing is the first stage of the writing process and the point of which we discover and explore our initial ideas and about a subject. Pre-writing help us to get our ideas on paper, though not usually in an organized form, and brainstorm thoughts that might eventually make their way into our writing" (retrieved from http://faculty.newe.edu.lakirby/English%20090/prewriting_strategies.htm) –June 2011

"Pre-writing can be defined as any structural experiences that influence active student participation in thinking, talking, writing and working on the topic under focus in writing lesson." (Adewumi Oluwadiya, 1992). The experiences and performances in the writing class will eventually lead students to be better writers. The activities will be the best accomplished under the teachers guidance and direction.

"Prewriting is the first stage of the *writing process*, typically followed by drafting, revision, editing and publishing. Elements of prewriting may include

planning, research. Outlining, diagramming, storyboarding or clustering” retrieved December 8th 2011 from(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/prewriting>).

There are many types of pre-writings to carry out but the writer will only introduce six pre writing strategies - *listing ideas, free- writing, brainstorming, preparing a scratch outline, guided writing and summarizing a reading selection.* “

Teachers can pick and choose from the activities or adapt them based on the level of language proficiency of the students” (Fife MacDuff et al, 2010)

The teachers introduce pre-writing strategies, explain how to use them. and make sure that the students follow directions suggested. The teachers should encourage an individual or groups to ‘show off” each project / In groups or collaborative activities, the teachers will see how pre-writing stimulate and motivate students to write.

The following strategies help to recall memories and connect the ideas with memories to write workable and interesting topic sentences. Pre writing strategies involve Teachers are not necessary to use all of them. They could acquaint the students with a strategy that they believe most effective for their students.

Pre-writing strategies

1. Listing Ideas

Listing Ideas is an activity when all students in the classroom can get involve with. This activity can be used as a model activity when later on the students should do the group project-when the students should do their writing assignments in groups. Each

student has an obligation to think of an idea that needs to be included when discussing a certain topic.

For example the topic is “How to get comfortable at home”. Each student should think of at least one idea. In the end with the help of a teacher, these ideas will be sort out to make three to four paragraph writing. All students are invited to share their thoughts. A class of 20 students will contribute some ideas such as the ones below:

- Get children to bed
- Wash the kids and put them to bed
- Stop arguing with each other
- Read magazine
- Listen to music
- Watch TV
- Get washed with bubble
- Eat or order favourite food,
- Sleep early
- Shut off the telephone etc

2. Free-Writing,

The students are directed to think and to get what they have in mind on paper. The free choice of the target of writing is expected to motivate and make them easy to think then rite anything they can remember about the topic. This will help them from being frustrated because they write something about things they are familiar with.

In free-writing strategy students are allowed to think too much but write whatever they have in mind about a person or things they are very close to. They write about things they know, about their best friends or other things that they are very close with. They are free to choose the subjects from their daily lives, about events or activities they are supposed to do almost every day. The students are encouraged not to spent too much attention to unrelated matter, they don’t have to worry about

punctuation, All they have to do is to write and fill the paper with words for a sustained period of time without stopping.

3. Brainstorming,

Brainstorming is a traditional approach. It is generally an effective way to generate ideas on a certain issue and get them down on paper quickly. A teacher summarizes the topic in a phrase or a sentence. He can also start asking questions that lead the students to decide what topic or ideas they are going to discuss. When a topic has been stated the teacher can start giving a direction to the students on how the activity will be conducted. Some facilities or other media such as a white board, a flip chart for each group and software tool have to be available. A little bit different from 'Listing ideas' a brainstorming activity is best conducted in groups of five to six students and performed in a relaxed situation.

The teacher divides the students into groups, explain the topic discussed and each group to write down everything that each member speaks out. The teacher makes sure that all students has an opportunity to participate to produce openly creative and collaborative ideas .Each member must contribute at least one idea. One of the member act like a secretary to write down the ideas.

4. Preparing a Scratch Outline,

Another way to get ideas down on paper is by practicing 'preparing a scratch outline. In this strategy students are told to choose a topic provided by their teacher. After choosing the topic they can individually or in groups write scratch sentences or possible ideas that

come into their mind that are connecting to the topic. Again, when done in groups, one of the students in the group should be appointed to list all the ideas or write down scratches outline that they can use later to write their assignment. In the end they can go back to the list. They scratch out the ideas they do not need . As soon as listing is finished, they can start writing. They can write a three to four paragraphs essay from the list they have The following list are some scratches for the topic "How to get comfortable when I get home ":

- Get washed with bubbles
- Watch TV
- Get something to eat
- Enjoy afternoon tea and snack
- Get dinner ready for the whole family
- Get things ready for work
- Seat or lay down and read my favourite novel
- Call a friend
- Water the flowers and vegetables in the back yard.
- Invite a friend for tea
- Plan activities for the coming weekend

5. Guided writing .

This prewriting must be the easiest and most favourable. Guided writing is a strategy that help students to write with minimum errors. In guided prewriting the students only need to follow the direction available in every exercise and practice..And since writing is not an automatic process the students should do some practices and repetitions. .

To make this strategy works the teachers provide a list of some related questions some exercises that concentrate on certain topic and

grammatical construction. These questions are accompanied by a direction. Beginners EFL students who have problems with yes-no questions will do some exercises that focus on this specific 'yes-no' construction. They have to answer all the questions in complete sentences. The students practice writing by transforming a list of interrogative sentences into positive sentences or change negative sentences into positive sentences. Writing an essay using this strategy help beginner EFL students see and learn how to write grammatically. While trying to write the answers to all the questions available they learn how to write correct grammatical sentences at the same time. This type of exercise or guided writing strategy gives the students as much practice writing in correct forms and structures as they could have.

This approach provides two alternatives that help to focus on specific topic. This guided writing strategy prove helpful specifically for students who encounter writing block. All they have to do is try to answer directed questions provided. The teachers get two groups of questions. Each groups are free to choose one of the them. They may consider which helps them easily expanding their thinking.

In guided writing the students do not answer with the 'yes or no' but they have to answer each question with complete answer. After answering all questions they may arrange the answers in orderly sequence to make two or three paragraphs writing as follows:

Direction:

First answer these yes-no questions with complete answer and then compose and organize them to make a three paragraphs pre-writing.

Step 1 : Answering yes-No questions :

Is The Grand City a city or a mall?

Is The Grand City busy at night?

Is The Grand City filled with people on Saturday evening?

Are all the shops opened?

Are people making their way to a restaurant or to a movie?

Are there people coming for sightseeing only?

Are restaurants crowded on Saturday evening?

Are the restaurant still opened after midnight show?

Are the restaurant opened 24 hours?

Is the road busy at 2 o'clock in the morning?

Is the police on duty at that hour of the day?

Does the traffic light work?

Are people free to cross the traffic light ?

Step 2 : Answering the questions in complete sentences and make a short writing of two or three paragraphs.

Another example of guided writing strategy is to lead the students to practice answering combination of both why - questions and yes-no questions. The teachers ask the students focus on answering all the questions in complete sentences. After answering all the questions, the students can start writing.

6. Summarizing a reading selection.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP,) defines “ reading as an active and complex processes that involves three main activities namely understanding written text, developing and interpreting meaning and using meaning as appropriate to the type of text, purpose and situation” (NAEP : 2009)

Harris and Hodges state that “reading comprehension as the construction of meaning of a written communication through a reciprocal, holistic interchange ideas between the interpreter and the message. (Harris and Hodges :1995)

In this prewriting strategy the teacher provides a simple text for the students to read and some guidelines questions about the text. The students answer the questions .

Each groups read their work before other groups who make comments on the summary. This activity covers two things : improving reading ability and demonstrating their writing capability practicing a prewriting strategy - *summarizing a reading selection.*

Simple Reading Text example:

Patches my dog.

I have a dog, patches. I call him patches because his body is covered with patches. This little creature has some black and white patches all over his body. Patches is cute and fun to play with.

He likes to distract my attention when he wants to play with me. He will roll on the floor on his back or lick my foot, when I read on the sofa. He will jump into the empty space next to me and push himself into my lap whenever I pretend not to pay attention. He will start licking my face when I don't move at all.

His favourite is to play ‘hide and seek’. I will run around the house and hide .When he can find me he will bark happily.

When duties call and I must leave for a few days he misses me so much. Everytime someone is at the door he will stand up with his two legs expecting to see me.

Patches is the reason I miss home. I miss to play with him.

Direction:

These following questions are about the text you have read, write a summary of the selection and include the important ideas only. Answer the questions and arrange them in orderly sequence:

- 1) What is the selection about?
- 2) What important idea is repeated in each paragraph?
- 3) Which repeated ideas from the text support your answers to number two?
- 4) Include two supporting sentences.
- 5) Could you find the conclusion? Write it to close your summary!

Conclusion

The objective of this article is to suggest teachers of writing for EFL students practice some pre-writing strategies before assigning the students to write . These strategies help them to enjoy their first writing assignment. Pre writing strategies for beginners EFL students help them to be better writers. These strategies have been prepared to assist the students in developing their writing skill. Pre-writing strategies are more effective and help the students to feel at ease in working on their first assignments because the activities could be done without pressure. important that these students are able to make their

readers or their classmates to believe and understand what they write.

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