SOME USEFUL ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING WRITING

Zaw Htway[1]

Abstract

In a formal education setting, English is taught as a foreign language and writing is a tested skill at every level. In this article, theories on writing and teaching writing are presented first and then some useful activities for teaching writing are suggested. To make students more motivated in writing classes and to develop their writing skill, activities play an important role. Although writing can be taught to some extent, to become a fairly good writer needs creativity. To make students creative, the activities applied in teaching writing must be interesting, motivating and challenging. It is hoped that the suggested activities in this article are suitable for writing classes or they can be modified and adapted to the needs of the students and the teachers.

1.   Introduction

Although it is rather easy for a student to understand a text written in simple English or a short utterance spoken by a native speaker at a normal speed, he may find it more difficult to express himself in English both in written or spoken forms. Although speaking is not a tested skill at the basic education level and ordinary student life at the higher education level (except at the Universities of Foreign Languages), writing is an inevitable portion of every examination in the life of a student. However, most of the students have difficulties in producing written texts required in their respective courses.

Then, the questions have to be raised: Why is it difficult for them to produce written texts? What kinds of techniques can be applied in teaching writing? With these questions in mind as the driving force, this study is carried out in order to find out some ways to develop the students' writing skill.

2.   What writing is

Most linguists accept the idea that speech is primary in linguistic communication. They point out the fact that speech has existed for as long as human beings are in existence but writing was invented only over five thousand years ago. Although writing is quite

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[1] Associate Professor, Department of English, Yadanabon University

younger than speech is, its importance in linguistic communication is not less than that of speech. If speech can do all the necessary tasks that human beings want it to perform, then there is no need for them to invent another mode of communication. Writing has come into existence only because speech has certain limitations. Moreover, spoken form of the mother tongue can be acquired without being formally taught. In other words, a child can learn to speak by himself. On the other hand, it is not the case with writing, a skill that can be acquired only through teaching and learning. Without proper teaching, a child will not be able to read or write although he may be able to pronounce or write down some linguistic symbols or letters of the language. The older a child grows, the greater the need to master the literate skills of the language. This is because most of the aspects of his academic life, if not all, are tested through reading and writing. If a student is not able to produce a piece of writing through which he is to communicate his thoughts, ideas and feelings, it is doubtful that he will be able to understand fully the thoughts, the ideas and the feelings of others in written form.

2. 1. Meaning of writing

Writing is a complex process that allows writers to explore thoughts and ideas, and make them visible and concrete. Writing encourages thinking and learning for it motivates communication and makes thought available for reflection. When thought is written down, ideas can be examined, reconsidered, added to, rearranged, and changed.

Writing is most likely to encourage thinking and learning when students view writing as a process. By recognizing that writing is a recursive process, and that every writer uses the process in a different way, students experience less pressure to get it right the first time and are more willing to experiment, explore, revise, and edit. Yet, novice writers need to practice exercises that involve copying or reproduction of learned material in order to learn the conventions of spelling, punctuation, grammatical agreement, and the like. Furthermore, students need to write in the language through engaging in a variety of grammar practice activities of controlled nature. Finally, they need to begin to write within a framework that include: transformation exercises, sentence combining, expansion, embellishments, idea frames, and similar activities.

2. 2. Purpose of Writing

Most of the students would say that they write because they have to. Although the answer may be correct, it is discouraging. According to this response, writing seems pretty

trivial. Another group of students may say that they write to show what they know. Although this is the better or more satisfactory answer than the first one, it is not complete. The best reason to write is that writing helps the writer grow and develop his or her potential. When a student writes he discovers whether he really understands something, or just think he does; and the process of writing makes him think, and think hard.

Writing is an indispensable part of thinking and learning. The process of writing that involves a restless cycle of inquiry, composition, and revision pushes students toward the true goals of higher education: critical thinking, creativity, analysis, synthesis, and informed judgment. Writing, therefore, is primarily about learning, not showing off what you already know. If writing an essay teaches a student nothing, the assignment will be a failure.

2. 3. Types of writing

There are two broad categories of writing: *expressive* and *communicative* writing.

Expressive writing is personal and informal. And it expresses the writer's comprehension and reflection. Expressive writing gives students an opportunity to start to make sense of the world they find themselves in, to bring the myriad facts, definitions, rules, theories, and perspectives to life. There are many different kinds of expressive writing. Journals and think-pieces commonly used in school are kinds of expressive writing. Both are meant to encourage thinking and learning, and to get students used to using writing in order to think.

On the other hand, communicative writing is analytic, formal and more or less impersonal. It is assumed for communicative writing that the writer already has considerable knowledge and understanding of the topic, and his purpose in writing is to inform the reader. In communicative writing, the writer has to keep to such established conventions as tone, voice, diction, evidence, and citation that may have variations according to discipline and type. Communicative writing includes essays, final papers, lab reports, handouts accompanying student presentations, senior theses, and so on. These kinds of writing have in common the fact that they place a great weight on appearance. A misspelling in an essay undermines trust in the author's effort and just one typographical error in a cover letter is usually enough to sink a job application.

School assignments like essays or lab reports give students practice in writing for others according to a strict format and fixed conventions. Especially in the sciences,

communicative writing assignments train students to turn personal observations into impersonal prose, avoid value judgments, and write with economy and precision.

Teachers can use different kinds of writing to emphasize different kinds of learning. Over the course of a semester, typically, teachers might choose to start out with relatively informal expressive writing assignments to encourage reflection and thinking and move progressively to more formal communicative ones to encourage more rigorous, polished thinking. Informal assignments like in-class reactions and weekly reflections can be used to prompt regular thinking, and to build towards polished essays.

2. 4.   Features of written language

2. 4. 1. Permanence

Once something is written down and delivered in its final form to its intended audience, the writer abdicates a certain power: power to emend, to clarify, or to withdraw. That prospect is the single most significant contributor to making writing a very scary operation. Student writers often feel that the act of releasing a written work to an instructor is not unlike putting yourself in front of a firing squad. Therefore, whatever you can do as a teacher and guide and facilitator help your students to revise and refine their work before final submission will help to give them confidence in their work.

2. 4. 2. Distance

One of the thorniest problems writers face is anticipating their audience. That anticipation ranges from general audience characteristics to how specific words and phrases and sentences and paragraphs are going to be interpreted. The distance factor requires what I have called cognitive empathy. In that good writers can read their own writing from the perspective of the mind of the targeted audience. Writers need to be able to predict the audience's genera knowledge, cultural and literary schemata, specific subject-matter knowledge, and very importantly, how their choice of language will be interpreted.

2. 4. 3. Complexity

It is generally said that writing is more complex than speech. But in reality, that would be difficult to demonstrate. Writing and speech represent different modes of complexity, and the most salient difference is in the nature of clauses. Spoken language tends

to have shorter clauses connected by more coordinate conjunctions while writing has longer clauses and more subordination. Writers must learn how to remove redundancy, how to combine sentences, how to make references to other elements in a text, how to create syntactic and lexical variety and much more.

2. 4. 4. Vocabulary

It is true that written English typically utilizes a greater variety of lexical items than spoken conversational English. In our everyday give and take with family, friends, and colleagues vocabulary is limited. Because of more processing time that the writer was allowed, because of a desire to be precise in writing and simply because of the formal conventions of writing, lower frequency words often appear. Such words can present stumbling blocks to learners. However, because the meaning of a good many unknown words can be predicted from their context and because sometimes the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph is nevertheless still clear, learners should refrain from the frequent use of bilingual dictionary.

2. 4. 5. Formality

Writing is quite frequently more formal than speech. Formality refers to prescribed forms that certain written messages must adhere to. The reason that a person can both recognize a menu and decide what to eat fairly quickly is that menus conform to certain conventions. Things are categorized in logical order and subcategorized, exotic or creative names for dishes are usually defined, prices are given for each item, and the menu is not so long. There are rhetorical, or organizational formality in essay writing that demands a writer's conformity to coming something, openings and closings, preference for non-redundancy and subordination of clauses, etc. until a reader is familiar with the formal features of a written text, some difficulty in interpretation may ensure.

2. 5. Issues in teaching writing

2. 5. 1. Process

A few decades ago, writing teachers were mostly concerned with the final product of writing: the essay, the report, the story, and what that product should look like. Compositions were supposed to meet certain standards or prescribed English rhetorical style, reflect

accurate grammar, and be organized in conformity with what the audience would consider to be conventional. A good deal of attention was placed on model compositions that students would emulate and on how well a student's final product measured up against a list of criteria that included content, organization, vocabulary use grammatical use, and mechanical considerations such as spelling and punctuation.

There is nothing inherently wrong with attention to any of the above criteria. They are still the concern of writing teachers. But in due course of time, teachers became better attuned to the advantage given to learners when the latter were seen as creators of language, when they were allowed to focus on content and message, and when their own individual intrinsic motives were put at the centre of learning. What is now termed the process approach to writing instruction began to develop. Process approach is an attempt to take advantage of the nature of the written code to give students a chance to think as they write.

However, the new emphasis on process writing must be seen in the perspective of a balance between process and product. As in most language teaching approaches, it is quite possible to go to an extreme in emphasizing process to the extent that the final product diminishes in importance. This should not happen. The product is after all, the ultimate goal; it is the reason that the writers go through the process of prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. Without that final product firmly in view, the writer could quite simply drown himself in a sea of revisions. Process is not the end; it is the means to the end.

2. 5. 2. Cultural background

In the Module E - 641: *Developing Language and Literary Skills* of Second Year M.A. Course of Yadanabon University, an article printed in 1966 by Robert Kaplan is quoted to contain a thesis that different languages have different patterns of written discourse. In that article, English discourse is described as proceeding in a straight line, Semitic writing in a zigzag formation, 'Oriental' written discourse in a spiraling line, and so on. What Kaplan wants to say in the article is that learners of English bring with them certain predispositions, which come from their native languages, about how to organize their writing. For example, a Chinese speaker who usually spirals around the point in writing Chinese discourse will encounter some difficulty in learning to write English discourse in which English writers get straight to the point. Kaplan is true. No one can deny the effect of one's native culture, or one' predispositions that are the product of perhaps years of schooling, reading, writing, thinking, asserting, arguing, and defending. In recent years, new research studies have appeared that tackle the issue of different cultural rhetoric. One important conclusion from

this renewed wave of research is the significance of valuing students' native-language-related rhetorical traditions, and of guiding them through a process of understanding those schemata, but not attempting to remove them. That self-understanding on the part of students may then lend itself to a more effective appreciation and use of English rhetorical conventions.

2. 5. 3. Authenticity

The third issue in the teaching of writing surrounds the question of how much of the classroom writing is 'real' writing. That is, how authentic are the classroom writing exercises that students are asked to perform? Very little, and that little amounts to filling out forms, writing telephone messages and occasionally dashing off a letter or post card. In the era of electronic communication, people are less and less called upon to write. However, students have to write in order to succeed in mastering the subject matter.

Another way to look at the authenticity issue in classroom writing is to distinguish between 'real' writing and 'display' writing. Real writing is writing when the reader genuinely want information without knowing the answer. However, in many academic contexts where the instructor is the sole reader, writing is primarily for the 'display' of the student's knowledge. Written exercises, short answer essays, and other writing in test situations are instances of display writing.

In the language classrooms, more real writing should be incorporate. If the language courses strive to be more content-based, theme-based, or task-based, students are more likely to be given the opportunity to convey genuine information on topics of intrinsic interest.

3. Suggested activities for teaching writing

Writing exercises can be classified into two main groups: sentence level reinforcement exercises and discourse level practice exercises. The first type is usually linked to a particular language item, such as a tense or structure, which initially will tend to be presented and practiced orally, often in dialogues and substitution drills. The written work is then intended to provide reinforcement of the language item in another medium.

Discourse level practice exercises are not, of course, an innovation, though the way in which they are organised and presented may be. This kind of exercise gives the student practice in writing a connected series of sentences as a way of reinforcing the use of some

grammatical items. While incorporating interconnected sentences, this kind of exercise does not really promote the practice of a contextualised piece of communication, either.

In giving students practice exercise for writing, they are given cues. It is important that they are provided with good cues. Even though the cueing device seems good, it may not be very helpful to the students and may even produce unwelcome results. So, in using the cues in a writing class, the teacher should make sure that they do not lead the students into making errors. Moreover, if a cueing device (visual, etc) proves to be a success, it should not be over-used as this can cause confusion and boredom. It should also be made sure that students have already had the language needed to make use of the cues. And it is important for the cues to be an authentic and valid way of providing the students with information for the writing task. That is why this section deals with some useful activities for teaching writing. There are three types of activities presented in this section.

3. 1. Describing objects

Describing is the second major language function. It is important to distinguish between description and narration. Narration involves the concept of sequence. However, with description, there is no hard and fast logical constraint on the organization of what is written. A second point is that a lot of description involves the use of the Present simple Tense, whereas narrative typically involves the Past Simple. Then description provides the students with a good context in which to present and practice the use of the Present Simple Tense. Moreover, in narrative, it is activities which are important; in description, it is things. And in describing things we are usually more concerned with the noun rather than the verb phrase. Thus, description has a reason for teaching features of the noun phrase which are of particular importance in describing things, people and places.

A description gives us the following information on the object concerned:

Name of object

Size

Weight

Materials

Colour

Other features

Basically, such descriptions are intended to inform the interested reader about the thing, giving information which can only be presented verbally. In fact, the same information could be produced in tabulated form as a specification sheet or entry in a manufacturer's

catalogue, and such a summary can be used for exercises connecting both reading and writing descriptions of this type. The important point is that a description of an object is written (or spoken) when the reader/ hearer cannot be fully informed by an illustration alone. This is the reason for writing such descriptions.

First, it is assumed that the students have either been introduced to the following language items or that some of them will in fact be presented in the lessons dealing with description:

Adjective of colour and shape

Vocabulary of measurement, both size and weight

'is' and 'has'

Sentence pattern: Subject + Verb (be) + Complement

Subject + Verb (have) + Object

a + singular countable noun

zero article + uncountable noun

The procedure to be followed involves the use of a set of pictures of objects (or realia) together with three written texts. The students are presented with one of the texts as a reading comprehension exercise and they are asked to match the text with the appropriate object. The combination of elements is summarized in Table (4).

Table (4): *Combination of elements*

Object	Colour	Size	Price	Place of Origin
a	✔	✘	✔	✘
b	✘	✔	✘	✔
c	✘	✘	✔	✔

If there are three of the same type of object (e.g. a car), their characteristics can be varied by only one feature at a time so that the objects will be alike in two respects but different in one; and so on. This means that the students will have to match the descriptions quite carefully with the array of objects. The matching procedure which forms the comprehension task has real-life parallels: objects are described in order to be discriminated from others of the same kind. So there is an important communicative element in this part of the exercise.

Here is a brief sample of classroom activities. First, some coloured pictures of motorcars are collected. Then students are provided with five or six such pictures and three reading texts, of which the following is an example:

This car is expensive. It has a big motor and it is fast. It has five
seats and a large boot. It is from Germany.

The picture cards can be set out as shown in Figure (2).

Figure (2): *Picture card of a car*

The students match the descriptions to the pictures. Some of the cars illustrated will share many characteristics in the descriptions so as to make the matching task more challenging. Once the students have succeeded in matching the text to the illustrations, they can then write three parallel descriptions of their own, based on the remaining pictures. If they are working in groups of four or five, the groups can then swap their sets of pictures and the descriptions that they have written. Each group then has to match the new pictures and texts as in the first stage of the lesson.

However, this is just the general procedures and there remains the problem of giving cue to the writer. There are three alternatives. First, a specification table like the one given in Table (5).

Table (5): *A specification table*

Object	a T'ang horse
Material	pottery
Age	1,000 to 1,300 years
Original function	a funerary figure
Height	72 cm
Colour	Parts
orange-brown	body
cream	mane
cream	tail
green-brown	saddle
Price	£68,000
Buyer	Eskenazi, the London dealer

The table, with only the headings provided, can be used in conjunction with the text in a comprehension exercise. Then using the table which they had completed, they wrote their own descriptions as for a catalogue entry. Basically, the same type of table can be used, with some variation in headings and content, for almost any object, and the student can use the information from the table as a basis for his own written text.

The second type of cue is a purely visual one, in which an illustration is used. The illustration can be either labelled or unlabelled, depending on the familiarity of the students with the type of object concerned. Advertisements or illustrations from instruction booklets provide a useful source of visual cues.

Finally, the third type of cue is, of course, a real object. As with using pictures, care needs to be taken when using realia. If the students do not have the necessary vocabulary, they will not be able to describe the object, so although realia may provide a glamorous focus for the writing class, the teacher will have to feed in the necessary vocabulary to enable the students to write.

What has been discussed on describing things concerns only the physical attributes of an object, that is, size, clolour, materials, etc. of the object. But for the students of a Technological College, it should go further than that. For them, the ability to describe the use or the function of an object is more desirable than the one to describe its physical attributes.

Descriptions which deal with what something looks like do not follow any particular logic in their organisation. In other words, there is not any rule which states that the colour of the object comes first, and then size, and then material, and so on. However, when describing how something works, the organisation of the description is determined by the sequence of actions in the operation of the equipment. Here is a description of how a piston pump works, and this follows a logical sequence:

A piston pump consists of a cylinder, a piston connected to a handle, an inlet valve and an outlet check valve, the piston is pushed upwards to suck air in through the inlet valve. On the return downward stroke, the inlet check valve is forced against the piston wall, thus preventing any air from escaping, while the outlet check valve opens to allow the air to flow through the connecting tube. Pumping is continued by moving the piston up and down in the cylinder.

Here the description must begin either at either upward or downward stroke of the piston, and continue through a complete cycle in the pumping process. Obviously the description and the related cycle of activities should be illustrated, either graphically or by demonstration with realia. Moreover the sequence and logic signals used in such a description – then, thus, while – and the adverbials of manner – by moving – will also have to be pointed out and practiced.

One procedure to teach writing such a description involves displaying diagrams in which the action sequence is illustrated. Then students are issued with the text, but with the sentences in random order. This is most easily done by having each sentence on a separate slip of paper so that students can easily sort the sentences into the correct order as they work. This reordering task should be done as a group-work. Groups of students then have to put the jumbled slips into the correct sequence according to the diagrams they have studied. After a specified period, one student from each group has to present their sequence and then the correct sequence is to be displayed on the blackboard or OHP. But in displaying the correct sequence of the sentences, they should be divided into sense groups as shown below.

The piston   is pushed   downwards   to force air through the inlet valve.

Then   the piston   is pulled   upwards   to suck air in through the inlet valve.

Using these sentences as a cue, students are to give individually an oral description of the operation of the pump. After erasing the sentences on the blackboard or covering those on the OHP, students are to write down the complete description, using only the labelled diagrams as their prompts.

3. 2.   Teaching writing narrative

In all cultures people report past events, and the receptive skills of listening and reading are well exercised in recreational contexts. The ability to report events both in speech and writing is an important productive skill, and the teaching of narrative will occupy a significant place inmost English Language Teaching programmes. Narrative consists of several key features. First, narrative is almost always in the Past Tense. Secondly, narrative is concerned with the sequence of happenings over a period of time. In some contexts, failure to report the events incorrect sequence can have serious consequences. Thirdly, narrative incorporates a number of language items which are important in showing spatial as well as sequential relationships. Finally, there are some portions such as statements of reason and cause and effect that the writer may wish to incorporate into narrative.

There are two aims in teaching narrative at the elementary level: to associate the Past Tense with telling stories and to link the function of story telling to the concept of chronological sequence. To achieve these to aims, a list of regular Past Simple Tense verbs and a picture sequence of about six related actions or events are required. When they are ready, there are a number of possible combinations as shown in Table (1).

Table (1): *Possible combination of verbs and pictures*

Verbs	Pictures	Students' task
Correct sequence	Jumbled sequence	To match jumbled pictures to correct verb order
Jumbled sequence	correct sequence	To match jumbled verbs to correct picture sequence
Jumbled sequence	jumbled sequence	To work out correct sequence and match verbs to pictures

Here is one suggested order of activities.

(1) Display the jumbled picture sequence to the class. Ask students to suggest an order for the events in the sequence. Put the pictures into the correct order according to the class suggestions. Discuss reasons why the pictures must follow a given sequence.

(2) Present the sentences in jumbled order. Ask the class to match the sentences to the picture sequence.

(3) Write the correct sentence sequence in a table on the blackboard. Table (2) shows the sentences in table form.

Table (2): *Sentences in table form*

One day	Tim	discovered	some apples on a tree	.
	He	climbed	the tree	,
and	he	filled	his bag	.
Then	he	climbed	down the tree	.
Finally	he	carried	the apples to his house	.

(4) Ask individual students to read two of the sentences from the table.

(5) Rub out all of the sentences, except for the verbs. Elicit complete sentences from students, as in step (4).

(6) Remove the verb sequence and do as in step (5).

(7) Display the picture sequence in correct order. Elicit the verbs from the class.

(8) Have the class write their own story in their workbook, using the verbs and picture sequence as cues. Have them write the sentences in a table, as shown in Table (2), so as to emphasise sentence organisation and make it easy to check for the presence of Verbs, Subjects and Adverbials.

In the above example, the vocabulary is limited, as is the total number of verbs. At an elementary level, it is important to limit the quantity of new language presented to the students at any one time. Similarly, during the early stages of teaching narrative, it is advisable to restrict the number of action sin the story to about five or six. This is because it is difficult to manipulate more than about eight pictures at a time, and the exercise becomes muddled and confusing if there are ten or more items of picture/action sequence.

The procedure of combining pictures and verbs or sentences can be employed with a number of variations. And it is advisable to vary the procedure because using exactly the same procedure for lesson after lesson is a sure way to kill student interest.

However, First Year students will tend to regard pictures as 'kid's stuff'. So, instead of pictures, maps and itinerary tables can be used, either by themselves or in combination. Here is a suggested procedure with a map and an itinerary table, for use with First Year

students. A map (Figure 1) and an itinerary table (Table 3) are given here to illustrate the procedure.
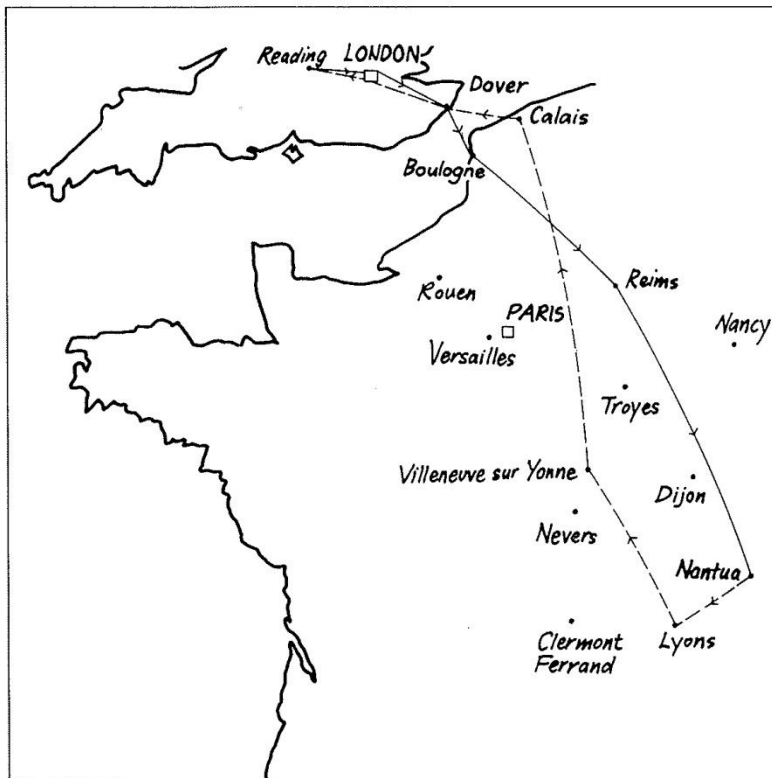

Figure (1): *Map showing outward and homeward journeys*

Table (3): *Itinerary*

Day and Date	from	to	miles	by
Monday 22 May	Reading Dover Boulogne	Dover Boulogne Reims	127 187	road and motor way hovercraft road
Tuesday 23 May	Reims	Nantua	297	road
Wednesday 7 June	Nantua	Lyons	60	road
Thursday 8 June	Lyons	Villeneuve sur Yonne	219	autoroute
Friday 9 June	Villeneuve sur Yonne	Calais	280	road and autoroute
Saturday 10 June	Calais Dover	Dover Reading	127	ferry road and motroway

(1)   Find or make up information on two similar journeys in which the travelers (A and B) follow routes which share certain places in common, but which differ in other respects.

(2)   Write the story of A's journey, or use an appropriate available text if one exists.

(3)   Draw a simple map on which you mark the names of the places mentioned in both journeys.

(4)   Make up an itinerary table for B's journey. The table will resemble the one shown here as Table 3.

(5)   Prepare a blank itinerary table on the Blackboard or OHP, together with a Blackboard or OHP version of the map, with only places (but not routes) marked.

(6)   Issue copies of the story of A's journey to the class. (The account of the journey could be in the form of a letter to a friend, or it could be a report of a journey of exploration such as would appear in a history or geography textbook. The nature of the account depends on the type of journey and the kind of reader for whom the narrative is intended.)

(7)   Tell the class to read the narrative and to underline the names of places.

(8)   Elicit these names from the students and fill in the appropriate part of the blank itinerary on the blackboard or OHP.

(9)   Ask individual students to plot the route on the blackboard or OHP map.

(10)   Elicit other items from the class in order to complete the other parts of the itinerary table.

(11)   Issue copies of an itinerary table for B's journey, in which all items are completed. Ask individual students to plot the journey on the map. Use the different colour of chalk or pen.

(12)   Tell the class to write an account of B's journey, using the report of A's journey as a model. Specify an intended reader for the composition.

There is a significant reading comprehension element in this lesson. The provision of a model text is important as it shows the student what he should be aiming at in his own writing. The linking of reading and writing also provides for integration of these two skills, while the translation of information to and from graphic or table form practices information transfer skills in a way that is both interesting and useful.

As a variation on the above procedure, students can be provided with the following:

(1)   The text of A's journey, though without its being identified as such.

(2)   Itinerary tables for journeys by both A and B.

(3)   A map, either with both journeys marked (but not identified), or with neither journey indicated.

The student has to read the text, compare the information with the itinerary table, and then identify the name of the person involved similarly, using this information, the student can then identify the route on the associated map. Finally, using the itinerary table and the map, the student can write a parallel account of the other journey.

In both procedures, the follow-up work can involve students in both personal and institutional writing, as required. They can, for instance, fond out about journeys of exploration in their own region or journeys carried out by explorers from their own county. If the students themselves have traveled on a vacation, they can us the information as a basis for a narrative in the form of a letter or an article for the class or school magazine finally, the account of a journey could be written in the form of a report submitted to one's manager or head of department.

Apart from learning to handle the Simple Past Tense verb forms, students will also need to learn how to use adverbials of place, time and duration. Typically, a report of a journey will include such adverbials as the following.

at Paris

from Rome

to London

through the Alps

across the Channel

form London to New York

by rail/car/air/ship/hovercraft/ motorway

along Whitehall

down Regent Street

for three days

for twenty-four hours

from noon till midnight

at 11 o' clock

at midnight

There will also be sequencers:

First

Then

After that

Next

Finally

In the end.

In addition, there will be adverbials of purpose or reason:

to see the El Dorado exhibition

to do some shopping

to visit the Louvre.

However, there will probably be some problem areas. There may be students who 'arrive *to*' a place or stay there '*during* three days' or go there '*for* doing some shopping', and so on. By providing lots of practice of the correct forms, such errors can be eliminated. If there is a remedial teaching problem, a lot of work will be needed to get rid of such unwanted forms.

The kind of narrative practice presented provides a very good context for such practice, and problems items can be focused on using variations on the content and procedures.

3. 3.   Describing processes

In a process, a raw product is transformed into a finished product. Descriptions of process are very common in scientific and technological writing, although they also occur in everything from advertisement to elementary school textbooks. A receptive and active command of the language used to describe a process is an important part of the repertoire of a very wide range of students. Here is a sample activity to practice writing descriptions of processes, using the passive voice.

(1)   Tell the class that they are going to learn how milk is processed. Refer them to the table (see Table 6) that they have been given. Tell them that they are to listen for all the verbs of the pattern 'is produced' while the teacher reads the text to them.

Table 6: *How milk is processed*

Sequencer	Subject	Verb	Adverbial	Full Stop or Comma
	Milk	is produced	on diary farms	.
	The milk	is delivered	to a factory by tanker	,
and then	it	is tested		.

(2) Read the text aloud to the class. Read at a steady pace, pausing between sentences. Do not use contracted forms at this stage. Read the text a second time to allow the students to check their work, then elicit the verbs from the students and complete the blackboard or OHP equivalent of their tables.

(3) When the verbs are set out in the table, ask the students to identify the features common to all the verbs these are, first, that each verb item consists of two elements; 'is' or 'are' plus past participle, and secondly, that the past participle in this particular text is always the '-ed' form.

(4) Following the discussion of the verbal element of the description, continue with a third reading during which the student are to complete the Subject column of their table. Elicit these completions from the students at the end of the reading and complete the appropriate part of the table.

(5) Give a fourth and final reading, and this time the student complete the remaining parts of their table. Elicit items from the class and complete table, including the important punctuation column.

(6) When the table is complete, draw attention to the overall organisation of the text, viz, that each sentence describes a step in the process and that the steps are sequentially organized, the sequence being indicated by the sequencers drawn to backward pointing 'the', this being an important cohesive feature of the text with the students contributing, ring and arrow the text, thus;

Milk is produced …

The milk …

(7) Refer to the blackboard or OHP flow diagram. (See Figure 3.) One or two boxes should be completed by way of example, the rest of the diagram being blank.
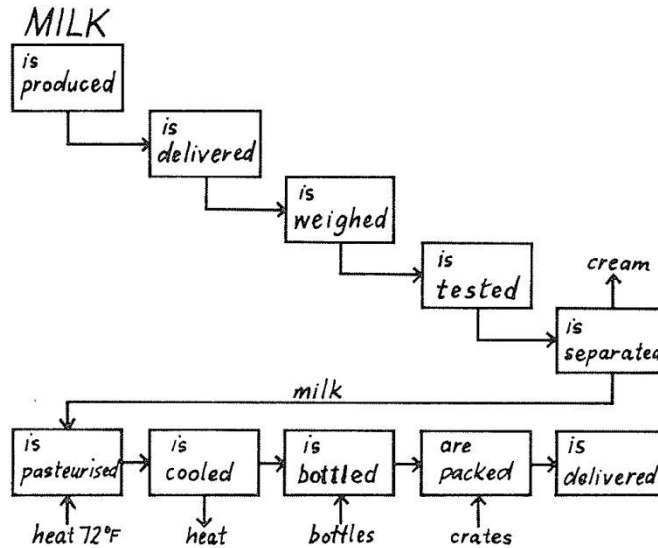

Figure 3　　　Flow Diagram: How Milk is Processed

(8) Ask students to give completions for the other boxes.

(9) Discuss the form of the flow diagram, pointing out how it summarises the sequential organisation of the process with each step constituting an input / process / output sequence, the output from one step being the input for the next. Note also how by-products, such as cream, are indicated, while subsidiary inputs, such as heat, bottles and crates, are also shown by appropriate arrows.

(10) Ask the students to read aloud from the completed table to the text. Have each student read more than one sentences is stressed and practiced.

(11) After two or three turns around the class, obliterate or obscure the competed table and instruct the students to put their own tables away. Then use the completed flow diagram as a cue for oral production.

(12) Instruct the students to reconstitute the text in written form, using the flow diagram as a cue.

4.　　FINDINGS

Through the study of different literatures by different scholars, there have appeared various techniques that can be used in teaching writing. Although they are different according

to the scholar who suggests them, they can be grouped based on the stages of writing and the type of text to be produced. And it is found out that the importance lies in the choice of text type and appropriate techniques in different stages. Choosing the one text type that matches the topic helps the writer organize his writing and helps the reader process the information he wants to discuss. Using key structures and vocabulary that emphasize the chosen type helps reinforce the essay's coherence.

5.   DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Teaching writing is an art. It needs to be creative. There are techniques presented in this paper that can be used to develop the writing skill of the students. There are, of course, other techniques that are not left out for various reasons. For a language teacher, it is advisable not only to use the techniques that can be studied in literatures, but also to create appropriate techniques that may not have appeared in any literature. Moreover, not all the techniques that are described in or suggested in literatures are to be used, that is, a teacher should be selective in using the techniques. In addition, he needs to be able to make certain modifications to the techniques to suit the needs of his students. The most important thing in teaching writing is to have the students write as much as they can and to do correction to their works. If a teacher has a considerable interest and endeavour in his work, he will surely be successful in his career.

6.   CONCLUSION

In learning a foreign language, learners have to improve all the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, for a first year student of the University of Computer Studies, it is more important to improve reading and writing skills than to improve listening and speaking skills as he has more work in reading prescribed texts and reference materials and writing assignments and reports than in listening to speeches and giving presentations. In this paper, there are some useful activities for developing the students' writing skills. These activities have been suggested by various scholars around the world and it is believed that they will also work well with the students of Myanmar. And it is hoped that this paper will be of some help for both the teachers and the learners of English as a foreign language.

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