

Multiple Learning Styles to Improve Writing Skills

M. Chithra

**Research Scholar, Bharathiyar University Coimbatore
Asst. Professor, Department of English
Valliammai Engineering College**

V. Jayanthi

**Research Scholar, Bharathiyar University Coimbatore
Asst. Professor, Department of English
Valliammai Engineering College**

Dr. Stephen Jebanesan

**Associate Professor- Department of English
Madras Christian College
Tambaram**

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In the present scenario professionals certainly need effective and impressive LSRW (listening, Speaking, reading, writing) skills. There is a great need to frame course materials and develop methods and strategies to enhance LSRW skills of undergraduates. Students require LSRW skills to express and share their experience, knowledge, ideas and thoughts in an effective manner and to harness a better understanding and harmony for the common benefit of the society.

LSRW skills thus can be developed by rigorous training programmes and a lot of practice work. It requires persistent efforts. It is possible by applying various methods discussion in the classes, studying famous speeches, mastering the art of oral presentation and by active participation in presentations, seminars, workshops, conferences, group discussions, etc.

Writing is an individual effort. Individuals compose their thoughts often in privacy and then reduce their thoughts to writing, using the strict conventions followed in the language. Writing is an individual effort or work, but it must follow the rules laid down. The development of writing even in native English speaking children is conscious and is thus non-spontaneous, written language differs from oral language in structure and mode of functioning. The acquisition of oral speech by itself is the acquisition of signs (symbols). The acquisition of writing is a step further and the learner must now transfer the symbolization he/she acquired in the process of speech acquisition to written language. Vygostsky (1962) compares this to the acquisition of algebra which is harder than arithmetic.

In writing, the discrete nature of linguistic signs should be appreciated consciously. The learner must recognize the sound structure of each word, dissect it and reproduce it in alphabetical symbols, which he must have studied and memorized before. This same deliberate preparedness is needed to put words in a certain sequence to form a sentence.

Teaching writing to native speakers of English has always been a major concern of education. More often than not, most students, both native speakers and second language learners of English, feel inadequate in the face of the writing task. Modern world demands some efficiency in writing skills. However, when one can learn to speak the first or second language with little or no conscious thought, switch from the spoken to writing poses greater difficulty.

“Writing is more an individual effort than speaking, while at the same time more rule-bound and therefore more error-prone. . . The speaker does not have to pronounce each word exactly according to one standard of pronunciation or one model of structure, while the writer is expected to produce according to one model of spelling, and usually a reduced range of structures, with 100 percent accuracy” (Bowen et al. 1985:252). Everyone will agree with Bowen et al when they declare that “writing is more rule-bound than speaking. Considering the control of the orthographic system, the careful organization, and the linguistic conservatism required, writing is the most demanding of the language skills.”

The writing classes have the potential to help consolidate and improve the students’ speaking and reading skills. However, it is important for us to remember that writing is an important skill which can be taught as an end in it, although none of the language skills is far removed from the other language skills. Focusing on writing as an independent skill helps us to identify the specific problems faced by the learners, and to identify the specific needs of the learners relating to writing. Mechanics of writing are distinct from the mechanics of other skills such as speaking and reading. While reading involves seeing and pronouncing, writing involves association of sounds with mental composition of thoughts and their orderly presentation, and hand movements.

Writing can be viewed and taught as a developmental process just as reading. And we can view writing from four perspectives: Mechanics, emphasized in the low beginner stages (beginning); Extended Use of Language, emphasized in the high beginner and low intermediate stages (elementary); Writing with Purpose, emphasized in the high intermediate and low advanced stages (intermediate); and Full Expository Prose, emphasized in the terminal stage (advanced) (Bowen 1985).

Raimes classifies approaches to teaching writing into five types: controlled to free, free writing, paragraph pattern, grammar-syntax-organization, communicative, and process approaches. In the controlled to free approach, “students are first given sentence exercises, then paragraphs to copy or manipulate grammatically by, for instance, changing questions to statements, present to past, or plural to singular. They might also change words or clauses or combine sentences” (Raimes 1983:6).

Activities to Develop Writing Skills

Writing skills may be developed through working on the following:

- Basic skills of simple and short composition
- Writing sentences
- Techniques of creative and critical writing
- Use of appropriate vocabulary
- Paragraph, essay and précis writing
- Coherence and cohesiveness
- Narration / description
- Note Making
- Formal and informal letter writing
- Editing a passage

The key in motivating students towards writing is to plan activities that will capture the curiosity of students and that will be fun. Writing competitions (essays, short stories, poems, etc.), teaching students about writing for specific purposes, and rewarding the super writer may be beneficial. The following activities have been tried by students and have high motivational value.

Students are given a specific topic or title or picture to write about with the understanding that they only have three minutes in which to write about it. The fun is in the time limit and in the interesting Paragraphs that the students develop. After the students have had some experience with writing within a time limit, their writing will become more and more creative. The activity would sharpen their thinking style. It also allows them to utilize the best of words that they have learnt and also use them in the right place they need. The creative task would help the learner apply knowledge gained and also make an effort to write by self without a pressure of evaluation

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