

Web-chat Date: May 10, 2011

Topic: Powerful Writing Skills in the Online Era

Abstract:

With the era of computer and information technology, much of the knowledge database exists in the realm of written record. Ideas and communication are exchanged instantly through written words and materials, both formally and informally, all nevertheless has in its own extent to share point of views, influence, and shaping social ideologies. How could EFL teachers cope with the changing nature of the language discourse? How or should traditional writing instruction of product and process be adapted to best suited the needs of EFL communicators? How can teachers encourage and draw out critical thinking and creative language skills in their students writing processes? What types of assessment can teachers consider in analyzing their students' authentically written work?

In this web-chat, we would like to explore these relevant issues.

Transcript:

Damon Anderson 2: Hello Everyone. Sorry for the delay. We had some technical difficulties here today.

Damon Anderson 2: Let's begin our chat. Thank you for your patience and for your pre-questions and comments.

Pham Thi Thuy Lan: hi

sandra: hi i'm sanda from Myanmar

Jill Kester: Hi! I'm here for the 5/10 webchat but am only seeing things from last time.

hang: hello

Jill Kester: Mei wenti, no worries. Hello from Beijing!

Shei Sanchez: Hi Damon! Technical difficulties are common in the information age

le Tran loan phuong 2: Good afternoon Damon

ketsa: Hi

le Tran loan phuong 2: Wishing you all the best

Shei Sanchez: Hello everyone! I'm Shei currently teaching in Bangkok.

le Tran loan phuong 2: hello, i'm loan phuong from Vietnam

le Tran loan phuong 2: Hello Ms. Thuy Lan

Teresa Valais: Hello Damon

ketsa: Hello everyone. I'm new here

Damon Anderson 2: Writing is a skill that many teachers shy away from because they see it as taking too much work. Would you all agree with this?

Kiki: Hello, everyone ! This is Kiki Zhang from Chengdu, China!

Damon Anderson 2: We have a good mix of people from across Asia today. That is great!!

hang: I think I misunderstand something

hang: my name is Hoang Thi Hang

Damon Anderson 2: What are you misunderstanding Hoang?

Phanisara: Hi everyone. Writing skill is a must in today world.

sandra: hello I'm sanda from myanmar

Nguyen Mai Huong: Hi, I,m Huong from Vietnam. I'm new here. I totally agree with Damon.

hang: Nice to chat with so experienced teachers all around

Shei Sanchez: Partly agree... I think that perhaps many teachers anticipate the work and exhaustion in trying to help improve students' writing

Kiki: Yes, Damon, writing is always a challenge for both students and teachers.

sandra: i think writing is the most difficult for the students to produce

THAO: Hi everyone

Damon Anderson 2: Actually, Sandra, I think that many students would prefer writing over speaking, especially those who are shy about speaking.

sandra: it makes them lots of challenges too

hang: I agree that writing is something difficult to students

Shei Sanchez: I agree with Kiki that it is a challenge and can be discouraging. But on the other side of the coin, it's actually en-couraging

ketsa: I love teaching writing but it's difficult to teach, sometimes

Giang: Hi, I'm Giang from Vietnam. Great to join the forum today.

hang: But I think for many teachers it is not difficult as speaking

Phanisara: When we teach students integrated skills covering the four skills---teaching writing tasks should not be difficult.

Damon Anderson 2: With writing, students can take their time, correct mistakes before anyone sees the mistakes, and can rehearse more than they can with speaking.

Shei Sanchez: Very true that writing is for the more timid students... I was definitely that type when I was younger.

hang: Even I think Vietnamese teachers are quite good at writing

sandra: I agree with you Damon

hang: Do Vietnamese teachers agree?

sandra: can you give me some suggestions about how to overcome writing challenges?

Jill Kester: I agree with Damon's point that writing can give some students a voice. To promote this we should allow some choice in topics.

Eaindray: Hello, I'm Eaindray from Burma!

Shei Sanchez: Going back to Khun Nina's comment, writing tasks shouldn't be difficult. It's a process that must be learned step by step

Pham Thi Thuy Lan: Writing is not as difficult as speaking but if you want to have a good & impressive essay, it's not easy. You need to read a lot as well as practice writing a lot to enhance your writing skill.

sandra: i think sometimes process writing make them confidence, right?

Shei Sanchez: I agree with Jill. Choice and ownership leads to autonomy and students (as well as teachers) can therefore enjoy teaching/learning writing more.

Shei Sanchez: Yes, I agree with Thuy Lan. Reading is the key to writing.

Pham Thi Thuy Lan: yes, but students are often lazy in writing

hang: But today with support from internet, students can easily find many interesting ideas

ketsa: I agree with you Pham thi thuy Lan

Shei Sanchez: Yes, process writing or just knowing/acknowledging that writing is a process is confidence-building.

Phanisara: I totally agree with Pham--with extensive reading practices, students will gain good model for writing.

Giang: I don't think writing is too difficult as long as teachers equip students with helpful guidelines as to how to write particular types of document, to give enough incentives, and provide helpful feedback.

hang: so they can have a well-structured and even impressive writing

Teresa Valais: I think teaching writing is easier when taking a process approach that includes learners' awareness and active involvement in the process

sandra: I also agree with Thuy Lan. but we need to encourage them to write more

Shei Sanchez: The laziness is perhaps a result of the 'fear' to write?

Pham Thi Thuy Lan: how can we encourage our students to practice writing?

Shei Sanchez: encouragement can start with asking them to 'tell' a story

Teresa Valais: Pham I like your question

hang: I like Pham's question too

Eaindray: But we can promote the motivation of our Ss wrt with guided writing for some extend.

Jill Kester: One thing that might help students is to provide strong models. I used to shy away from models, fearing I'd get 30 or more versions of the same paper! But then I realized I also had to teach how to use/look at models.

sandra: starting with simple topic they like and culture them to write more interesting topic that with their interest

Tony: How can teachers bridge the gap between high-level reading skill and high-level writing? I agree that reading is helpful, but does not always translate to clear, effective writing.

hang: I think students should be taught basic principles

Shei Sanchez: everyone has a story to tell. It's more encouraging for students if I think that is when reading skills come into play (re: Jill's comment on models)

hang: when they practice these principles well

hang: they will be confident to produce writing

sandra: but writing and telling stories is little bit different, i think

Shei Sanchez: Yes, there is that gap between reading and being an attentive reader in order to be an effective writer.

hang: creative in different situation

Jill Kester: I'm reading "Advancing Formative Assessment In Every Classroom" and it suggests saving old work for current students to assess according to the project's objectives (names removed, of course).

Teresa Valais: I agree with Shei that the narrative approach is a good place to start because when writing about oneself the schemata is full

Shei Sanchez: well, when telling something, you are using organizational skills

Damon Anderson 2: I agree with several of you who are talking about giving the students a voice or allowing their voice in the writing.

Shei Sanchez: writing came after speaking

ThuTrang: @ Tony: I always have kinds of orientation/ reading analysis for like the whole first half of the course

Eaindray: Tony, I think, reading for writing is helpful & effective.

Teresa Valais: Jill that is a very good practice and one that students seem to very much relate to. Great modeling.

hang: organizational skill is very important in writing I think

Phanisara: I agree with K. Shei. There is a gap that teachers will need to point out in term of process writing. And how to connect one's own original thoughts and connecting sentences.

Damon Anderson 2: Students are afraid of "being wrong" or saying the wrong thing. The Asian students seem to want to guess at what the teacher wants to hear, rather than write what they think. Would you agree?

sandra: without organization it can't tell the writing is good one

Shei Sanchez: Just thinking about online chats or texting for instance... when students 'write' they are 'speaking'

Shei Sanchez: they are talking to each other

Shei Sanchez: telling each other's stories

sandra: before they write they need to think clearly what they are going to write

Damon Anderson 2: I still believe that giving the students a rubric before they write will help them and free them to write more and better.

Phanisara: In today activity with writing, students will need to provide their own responses and thoughts. Thus, they will also first to appropriately understand the provided input first before responding.

sandra: and find relevant facts for writing

Giang: Some of you say reading is good, I agree. But do you deliberately guide sts what and how to learn from reading?

Shei Sanchez: yes, indeed. before writing, there is a level of clarity and organization that the students undergo. some need more guidance than others.

Eaindray: Jill, how do you think of when you assess writing skill?

sandra: online chat is good way but the problem is that

Shei Sanchez: I agree with Damon. A rubric helps to give students a guideline as to the expectations of what a good writing piece is all about

sandra: in our country, youths use language for chatting not proper english but they use myanglish like they write like what the pronounce in myanmar

Kiki: right! It's very important to get Ss understand that writing is to express one's ideas than just please the teacher!

Shei Sanchez: Giang, good question. I think that teaching reading is just as essential.

Shei Sanchez: Yes, I agree with Kiki, it's not just for teachers...hence, not just for the grades

Tony: Damon, I agree. What is a process teachers may use to help a student find his/her voice? What should the rubric include?

Phanisara: Totally agree with Kiki. That's powerful writing. When the students can express their own voices--not just to please the teachers. Or expressing just the "right" answers.

sandra: good and systematic rubric is really helpful for both teacher and students

Jill Kester: Eaindray, do you mean what do I assess? It all depends on the objectives--but in general, expression, mechanics and composition.

Damon Anderson 2: Tony, the process would vary depending on the topic and reason for writing. But I would always encourage the students to just jot down some initial thoughts, more in a mind map fashion than in a list.

Shei Sanchez: I agree with Jill on those elements for assessment

Jill Kester: Do any of you teach elementary (primary) students? There's a great approach called Balanced Literacy which integrates reading and writing.

Shei Sanchez: besides structure of the writing, there is tone and clear purpose

Eaindray: yes, your most effective way of writing assessment.

Teresa Valais: Perhaps developing an open dialogue 'about' writing is the key. This can be implemented in a low-risk fashion at first by developing the practice of dialogue journals where learners record their reflections in a journal where the writing prompt can be guided by the teacher as an out of the English classroom learning experience and submitted say once a week. The teacher reviews but only makes comments to carry forward the dialogue, not corrections; therefore, it is a fluency practice.

Shei Sanchez: Thank you. I haven't heard of Balanced Literacy.

Giang: When analyzing reading, I often ask sts to point out the good ideas, good language structures, words, expressions they can make use in their own writing, and I do require them to use some of them in their next writing.

Damon Anderson 2: That is excellent Giang.

Phanisara: To teach students to write in their own voices; teachers need to have an open mind to "listen" to students free writing without being too critical.

Shei Sanchez: yes, dialogue journals. I tried that once but some students were not as consistent

sandra: thanks for good idea

Eaindray: I do appreciate with Giang.

Shei Sanchez: then again, you leave it open to them rather than an actual assignment. what do you think?

Phanisara: Agree with Teresa. "Open dialogue" method.

Damon Anderson 2: Perhaps at the beginning of a writing class, show the students models where the authors discuss the same topic but from different points of views and different perspectives. Then discuss how they know that these are different. During the discussion, let them know it is ok to be different.

Giang: Thank you.

Teresa Valais: At first, it can be challenging for students, but as they become more fluent and more experienced, it can really take off.

hang: I like Damon's idea that to just jot down some initial thoughts, more in a mind map fashion than in a list.

hang: in this way students learn more than writing

Shei Sanchez: Thank you, Giang. Great ideas. I find that students need to know HOW to read and not just understand what they are reading. Also, imitation of style leads to the students' own style

hang: their logic mind is better

Teresa Valais: I like both.

Eaindray: What Giang's approach is a great help for a proper writing.

hang: Giang and Damon's ideas join together make it perfect

Shei Sanchez: As Mary Oliver put it, it's important to learn the craft by imitating the ones before us. Along the way, we find our own voice and style.

Kiki: Jill, i'd like to learn more about Balanced Literacy, thanks.

Giang: I also provide them with exercises to improve their vocabulary and sentence writing.

hang: What do you mean by Balanced Literacy

Eaindray: If there were no more ideas to jot down for some topics, what 'd be helpful, Damon?

Giang: I know they cannot be confident in writing when they do not know how to express their own thoughts successfully.

Jill Kester: Kiki, I'm looking right now for some good websites. I'll post when I find them!

Damon Anderson 2: If they don't have any more ideas, then give them some techniques such as cubing.

Phanisara: Love the quote K. Shei. ---along the way...we find our own voices. Let's the students be exposed to different styles. And the balanced input is also necessary.

sandra: I agree with Damon. modal writing is of great help for novice students to create their owns

THAO: When we teach Ss to write a letter, are there any difference in writing an email letter and paper letter?

nangthongpinit: Please, what is Balance Literacy?

Phanisara: Balanced Literacy is a framework designed to help all students learn to read and write effectively. The program stands firmly on the premise that all students can learn to read and write. This balance between reading and writing allows students to receive the teaching needed in order to reach grade level status, while allowing students to work at a level that is not frustrating for them. There are several models currently used in schools today.

Damon Anderson 2: Another idea to go from reading to writing is to have the students take an article and summarize each paragraph in one sentence of their own. Then, put the sentences together in their own fashion and add some of their own support statements and questions. Then add their own conclusion. It works.

Kiki: thanks a lot , Jill!

hang: thank you

hang: I understand it now

THAO: Is an email letter more direct than paper letter? or just the same?

Jill Kester: Balanced Literacy is based on teaching students the strategies they need to be independent readers and writers.

Teresa Valais: THAO, email is more to the point

Shei Sanchez: Thank you for bringing this up, Jill and thank you, Khun Nina for giving that definition. I am finding some website online right now and some are quite helpful.'

Giang: Paper letters is often considered more formal than emails.

Giang: Good idea, Damon.

Damon Anderson 2: I think we need to teach our students how writing in different genre and media is different. As they communicate more via social networking and the Internet, they need to learn how to communicate well and effectively and quickly in those media. It is not just about academic writing.

nhanvicky: i am teaching primary

hang: Great Damon

THAO: Thanks alot

Shei Sanchez: I think the hard part is avoiding plagiarism

nhanvicky: and how to teach them write effectively?

Jill Kester: The classtime in Balanced Literacy is divided into different activities--Shared Reading (whole class), Guided Reading (small, leveled groups with explicit instruction), Independent Reading. Writing is the same way. Shared writing is looking at models, Guided Writing could be the class writing something together and then there's independent writing time as well.

Eaindray: You mean summarizing from reading passage. Can we say that it is writing focused task?

THAO: As in TOEIC tests, the reading comprehension is most about email letters

Kiki: Damon, that's the same way we learned our mother language!

Phanisara: I like K. Damon's idea on letting the students practice summarizing ideas. This will help with the issue of plagiarizing.

Damon Anderson 2: Yes, Eaindray, summarizing is a focussed task, but it helps the students to begin writing.

Teresa Valais: It is important to teach Ss the difference between writing a letter and writing an email and give them plenty of 'authentic' opportunities to do so. Modeling good examples is very important, also. I suggest if students are uncomfortable or inexperienced, have them work in pairs to develop a letter or email - this is great for interaction and 'talking' about writing

Jill Kester: Here's a link to writer's workshop which can be part of Balanced Literacy. It looks very elementary but there's no reason why the format wouldn't work for older students with more complex objectives. http://www.busyteacherscafe.com/literacy/writing_workshop.html

Shei Sanchez: Also, I think the emphasis on using their own words is key. Along with summarizing is paraphrasing, which comes part and parcel with being able to read carefully and therefore, write carefully. Also, I think this then touches upon vocabulary building

nhanvicky: What about the small kids? Any suggestion 4 me cuz for speaking is fine but whenever facing with writing they make mistake with grammar?

Htay: In my opinion, the teacher has to decide whether he wants to focus more on critical thinking or writing skills. In case if his focus is on thinking skills, he has to ignore some of the grammatical mistakes and more weightage should be on originality.

Teresa Valais: Thanks, Jill

Giang: Yes, I'm very unhappy with plagiarism, and have not dealt with it effectively. Who has any idea to eradicate plagiarism?

Shei Sanchez: I think that critical thinking is part of every skill. So writing integrates a lot of critical thinking.

Eaindray: Could you suggest me how we can link this writing to more extended writing, Damon?

Htay: To encourage the small kids to write quite frequently, we need to ignore some minor grammatical mistakes.

Phanisara: With free writing, we might have to be less focus on grammar. After the students express their own idea and thoughts---then teachers can help later with editing---and further explain the grammar points.

Damon Anderson 2: For young learners, I have them write definitions of what things mean to them. Such as what is a mother? I have them make a mother's day card.

Giang: I also agree paraphrasing is a good practice for sts.

Htay: To avoid plagiarism, we need to encourage Ss to focus on originality.

nhanvicky: but that is not minor?

Shei Sanchez: I agree with Khun Nina. grammar is important but if the teacher is too focused on it, then it will discourage students from continuing their exploration.

Phanisara: Giang--may be appropriately providing the references and quotes---giving credit to the original writers/thinkers.

Damon Anderson 2: Eaindray, you can have them expand the writing to include more ideas, or develop an opposite point of view.

Shei Sanchez: I think picking the most salient or obvious grammatical errors should be done. Perhaps the writing lesson can focus on using 1-2 grammatical points.

nhanvicky: the children often have very interesting idea but the mistakes are a lot

nhanvicky: for that case we can not ignore right?

Teresa Valais: Htay, I like how your points focus on accuracy and fluency. It's important to have writing tasks that help students develop both, and I think this needs to be well-planned by the teacher

Htay: Ss need writing of other people to get inspired but there is a danger to this, i.e. they may feel discouraged to write or they may copy the ideas of others.

Damon Anderson 2: The teacher has to make sure in making corrections that they do not insert the teacher's voice into the writing, but let the students keep their voice, of which style is a part.

Teresa Valais: I agree with Shei. Great place to start.

Shei Sanchez: yes, there is always the danger of plagiarism.

Jill Kester: Teachers can have their students save the error correction for the final editing stage in the writing process. But it's important WE don't edit their papers for them but teach them how to critically re-read their writing.

nhanvicky: ok kool.

Phanisara: nhanvicky---even with a lot of grammatical errors---teachers can help students "publishing" his or her own original thoughts. Help them/show them how to express the sentences better. But encourage them to use their own original thinking.

Damon Anderson 2: Everyone, I know we started a little late, but we only have 8 more minutes to go. Do you have any suggestions for next month's topic?

Teresa Valais: What about peer evaluation? Do students talk about their writing with other students in class? Is it important to share their ideas about their writng with other peers?

Eaindray: Thanks!! With mid teens, learning Eng through proverbs for mother's day helps a good rapport between Tr & Sts.

nhanvicky: yes, i agree cuz children often have ideas that amazed us

hang: Damon

hang: students talk about their writing with other students in class

hang: it is important

hang: sometimes students learn more from their friends

Damon Anderson 2: Hang, I agree and this is where rubrics can help again because they can help students to focus on what is important.

Eaindray: How about integrating reading & writing skill?

hang: they find it confident to ask classmate than teachers

Htay: Peer evaluation is great Teresa but it should be well administered by the teacher again.

hang: And students have chance to discuss with many ideas

hang: not just one from teachers

Shei Sanchez: I agree. Peer evaluation sounds like a good topic

Phanisara: I agree with Teresa--Peer evaluation (with the guidance from the teachers) will be less threatening, reduce affective filter, and encouraging collaboration. Group work in writing will be very useful.

nhanvicky: Damon: can we discuss about games for kids???

Shei Sanchez: Oftentimes students are dependent on the teacher's approval

nhanvicky: yes teacher is the guide onlly

Htay: When I let my students read the work of their friend, they do enjoy it.

Jill Kester: Shei, that's a good point!

hang: Vicky and Phanisana, I agree with you both

nhanvicky: we can give the suggestion if necessary but let them be the pathfinders

hang: Peer evaluation make students critical thinking too

Tony: Damon, how about Differentiated Instruction?

Teresa Valais: I agree with you Htay, At first this is very necessary, but then it is important to give the 'ownership' to the students once they learn the proper, effective way to interact with each other.

Phanisara: Agree with nhanvicky and hang.

Shei Sanchez: yes indeed. besides strengthening critical thinking, peer evaluation also builds confidence in their own work

Htay: I agree with you Teresa.

Jill Kester: Differentiated instruction would be great, too. Good idea, Tony. (Hi Tony!)

Phanisara: K. Shei--yes--and a powerful sense of ownership.

Damon Anderson 2: We have some great ideas for our next web chat in June. This has been one of the most engaging chats we have had. We have more than 12 pages of transcript with more than 4,000 words. Great chat!! Thank you all!!!

Htay: Peer evaluation allow students to make right choices to make when they are to choose out of 2-3 topics for their exam purposes. They can even guess who will be choosing which topic.

Phanisara: So I guess we will decide on the topic for the next chat. Which will be June 14th.

Jill Kester: Thank you, Damon and all!

hang: Thank you Damon

hang: Thank you all teachers for good ideas

thuypham: what should we do if some ss only like T correction /feedback as they don't trust their friends (the case in my class)

nhanvicky: thanksssssssss

Tony: Thanks, everyone!!

Phanisara: THANK YOU all. Hope to see you again soon.

Htay: Thank you Mr.Anderson and all!

Shei Sanchez: Thank you, Damon, Khun Nina, and everyone! Great chat! Great ideas!

Giang: Thank you all for great ideas.

Nguyen Mai Huong: Thanks for your great ideas.

Eaindray: Thanks everyone!!

Teresa Valais: Great collaboration. Thank you, Damon and all!

nhanvicky: thuy pham in that case we have to improve to the sts that their friends do correctly so believe in them

Damon Anderson 2: Thank you all. We will end the chat here. We hope to see you all in June for our next chat. Thanks!!

thuypham: but some partners are not of the same level of proficiency

thuypham: We change the pairs Nhan

Damon Anderson 2: Thank you all. The chat is now closed. See you in June.
