

Appendix

Reading Activities

Communicative Reading

In a communicative approach to reading, students are first given a reason to read. An example might be the following scenario: You must plan a tour for some exchange students coming to St. John's during Easter weekend. They would like the tour on Tuesday or Wednesday between 9 A.M. and 5 P.M. They wish to visit places of historical interest and would like to go as one group. Read the texts describing a number of tours. Make a list of suitable tours and write a letter to the tour operators to obtain more information. In this activity, the information gathered from the reading becomes input for a writing activity.

Information Gap/Jigsaw

In an activity based upon this procedure, information required for the completion of the target task is distributed in two or three different versions of a text. These texts are then made available to subgroups within the class such that each group will obtain only some of the information required for the target task. Students read their text and exchange information so that information gaps are filled and the target task is completed. For example, two versions of a short mystery story might be distributed. Version 1 contains clues not available in Version 2 and vice versa. Students must read their text and exchange information to solve the mystery.

Reading Re-tells

After an appropriate pre-activity, the class is divided into two groups A and B, each group having one of a set of related texts. Students read their text in class (or outside the class for more complex texts). Then, within their groups, students work in pairs or triads to complete one of several comprehension tasks set according to the level of the students or the difficulty of the text. The questions should be of sufficient difficulty that students are required to pool the information they get from the reading and discuss possible answers with other members of the group. The teacher prepared worksheets help students focus on important information.

After completing their comprehension tasks, students are asked to regroup in pairs. Each pair comprises one student from the original group A and one from B. The partners take turns explaining the information in their texts, using the worksheets they have completed as an organizational framework and as an aid to memory. The listener is expected to ask for clarification and additional information and to note down the main points of the partner's presentation on a worksheet.

Because the students have been working in pairs and groups on different texts, there is a need for a final step to synthesize the information. One way to accomplish this is to have a short wrap up class discussion. Students could be given copies of all texts, with or without worksheets to read in class or at home. Thus, within the re-tell activity, the student has:

- read a challenging passage;
- completed a comprehension task through interaction with students who have the same text;
- presented new information to people who did not have the same text;
- listened actively making brief notes;
- practised the functions of asking for clarification and additional information;
- reconstructed some or all of the information received during the activity.

Writing Activities

1) Composing

This type of activity is concerned with the pre-writing and drafting stages during which writers get their ideas together, make rough plans or formulate mental outlines, and develop a sense of direction as they begin to draft their writing. The following are some examples of the activities used in the pre-writing stage:

- gathering information
- pyramid planning
- making mind maps
- using a diagram of ideas
- brainstorming
- using questionnaires
- interviewing people
- conducting a survey
- observing and making notes

2) Communicating

Skilled writers are sensitive to their audience. Less skilled writers produce what can be called ‘writer based’ rather than ‘reader based’ prose; that is, writing which focuses on the topic at the expense of the reader, and as a result is ambiguous and presents ideas less clearly.

The tasks described below focus on the need to develop a strong sense of audience. They demonstrate ways in which the teacher can create contexts for classroom writing and provide a range of readers.

Giving Directions

Divide students into pairs. Ask one student to locate a place on a street map which is his or her real or imagined home. Ask each partner to write a letter to the other sending a party invitation which includes directions to his/her home. The address should be given without the street or number. The directions should begin with reference to a landmark which is clearly marked on the map, for example, “Get off the bus at Bannerman Park”. Then ask each student to give the letter to his or her partner to trace the directions on the map and name the destination.

There is an element of task dependency here, as the task cannot be completed without clear directions. It is particularly useful for students who have newly arrived in the area.

Jigsaw Story Writing

The use of picture stories to stimulate narrative writing in ESL is well established. This task uses a picture story and the principle of information gap to create task dependency. Each student has only one picture from a sequence, and students are required to pool their knowledge in order to piece the story together.

Place students in pairs/triads. Give each pair/triad one of the pictures. Working together within the group, students write paragraphs describing events in their picture. In order to ensure coherence, suggest that everyone work in the past tense. When the paragraphs are completed and agreed upon, each student writes down his/her own copy.

Collect the pictures. Then reorganize the class into groups of five, each student having a description of one picture in the story. Ask students to assemble the parts to produce a logical story with appropriate cohesive devices, tense sequences etc.

A final stage could be reading the completed versions aloud to compare and assess them.

Asking and Giving Advice

A popular activity in ESL, writing letters to 'Dear Abby', can be modified into pair or group work in order to provide an audience, as well as a sequence of activities which work on the task dependency principle.

A preparatory stage is needed for the teacher and class to discuss the concept of the advice column. Authentic examples from newspapers should be used as a reading activity to introduce the topic and provide models for the language.

Ask each student, pair or group to think of a problem and formulate a letter to Dear Abby. When students have completed their letters, they exchange them with another student, pair or group whose task it is to prepare possible answers and write a reply in the role of Abby.

Writing Letters of Invitation

It is common in ESL classrooms to ask students to fill in a diary as a basis for language practice in giving, accepting and declining invitations.

Ask students to fill in the blank pages of their diaries with a predetermined number of appointments, real or imagined. The teacher should ensure that students have a sufficient number of appointments so that two students may well have simultaneous engagements. Students should not see each other's diaries so that an information gap is created.

Ask students to work in pairs. All students should write a letter to their partner inviting them to do something the following week. The letters can then be exchanged and students refer to their diaries to see whether or not they are able to accept the invitation. Students write a reply, accepting or declining the invitation. If they cannot accept, they should suggest an alternative arrangement.

Matching Descriptions to Pictures

Teachers need pictures of people cut from magazines/books. The pictures should be chosen for clarity, a degree of distinctiveness in the characters and should ideally show more than just the face or head, that is, some indication of clothing would be useful.

Take one of the pictures for preparatory work with the whole class. Display it to students and elicit adjectives, descriptive phrases, and sentences for describing the person shown.

Use the language collected in this way to write a description with the students, asking them to suggest a logical organization and the structure of sentences. Alternatively, display a prepared description as a model. Give each of the students one of the pictures, asking them to keep it concealed from the others. They should then write a similar description.

Collect the pictures and completed descriptions. Display all the pictures on the wall and number them. Shuffle the descriptions and give them out to students, ensuring that every student has someone else's text. Students then try to match the descriptions with the pictures.

Writing to Real People

Teachers will need an assortment of newspapers and magazines. Take an interesting advertisement or small ad and discuss its language and content. Elicit from the class what needs to go into a letter of inquiry. Show a prepared letter of enquiry as a model and point out important aspects of layout, appropriate endings etc.

Give students time to browse through a newspaper to find an advertisement of interest. (This part of the activity becomes a useful skim reading session).

When students have selected an advertisement, monitor them as each one writes a letter.

Many students want to actually send their letters. It is particularly motivating for students to discover that they can write a letter in English and receive information of personal interest as a result. The letters and brochures they receive are in themselves useful authentic reading materials and may give rise to further correspondence.

The above mentioned tasks are merely examples of the multitude of tasks which can be completed in the communicating stage of the writing process.

Successful authoring implies having a sense of purpose and a sense of audience. However, it should not preclude attention to another aspect of writing, that of crafting. This is the way in which a writer puts together the pieces of the text, developing ideas through sentences and paragraphs within an overall structure.

3) Crafting

The crafting process allows the students to focus on:

- form: e.g. letters, technical reports, memos etc. All have different forms which may have to be learned.
- discourse organization: Classroom writing tasks can make explicit reference to different types of discourse organization
- cohesive devices: Activities which focus on reference, conjunction, substitution, ellipses and lexical relationships show students how these devices signal the relationship between ideas.
- choice of vocabulary: The selection of appropriate words to communicate precise meanings, to create an effect or to develop a theme is very important. Work on vocabulary building is essential in the writing process.

Students will be expected to write texts from all of the following categories: personal writing, study writing, creative writing, public writing, social writing and institutional writing.

Listening Activities

Non linguistic response/short response

This type of activity is good for helping students to focus on the listening itself because they are not distracted by the need to take down words. Examples of this type of activity might include the following scenarios:

- students hear a description or a conversation and have to decide from the selection offered, which picture is the right one;
- two or three sets of pictures are presented to the students who then listen to a story, and try to decide which set of pictures represents the story;
- students listen and put a given a set of pictures in sequence;
- students listen and follow a route on a road plan or a map or mark the direction of the flow of blood in the body on a diagram;
- students listen and complete a grid to record bus or plane arrivals/departures;
- students listen and fill in details on a graph;
- students listen and label diagrams and pictures.

Listening Re-tells

These activities use the same principle as the Reading Re-Tells. Students:

- listen to a challenging passage;
- complete a comprehension task through interaction with students who listened to the same passage;
- present new information to people who did not listen to the same passage;
- listen actively making brief notes;
- practise the functions of asking for clarification and additional information;
- reconstruct some or all of the information received during the activity.

Speaking Activities

A wide variety of activities can be used to practise speaking in the ESL classroom, including role play, group discussions, drama, debates, consensus activities, surveys, monologues, dialogues, conversations, interviews and projects. Four of these are outlined below.

Role Playing

Role playing usually involves giving students a situation and related character roles to act out. This activity permits practice of dialogues in a non-threatening context that mimics real life. Before the students arrive, choose or develop a role-play scenario (conversation between parents and children or two friends over a controversial issue). Preteach any necessary grammar and vocabulary. Divide the class into pairs and give each pair a role-play card. Give each pair/group time to read their card and prepare for their role play. Then all pairs improvise their dialogues simultaneously, with no audience. Volunteers can be asked to perform their role plays for the class.

Group Discussions

Group discussions are especially effective because they require the participation of all students in an open-ended discussion. Divide the class into groups (minimum three per group). Assign each group a topic and give students time to write five open-ended or opinion questions related to the topic. Give students 10 - 15 minutes to discuss their topic in their group, with each person responsible for leading the discussion on his or her five questions. The discussion leader must ensure that everyone asks and answers all questions. When the time is up, have students pass their topic card to the group on their right and repeat the procedure.

Monologue Activities

A monologue activity is an activity in which the student speaks on his or her own for a sustained period, without interacting with others. These include informal speeches, presentations, storytelling, etc. The advantage of monologues is that they demand extended, albeit perhaps slightly unnatural, discourse on the part of the student. One example of a monologue is the “two-minute speech”. Prepare a list of topics (ex: my hero, my fondest memory, my favourite sport, my best vacation, etc.) and have each student select a topic on which he or she must present a two-minute, semi-impromptu talk. Give the student time to prepare what he or she wants to say and locate any specific vocabulary and language required. Randomly select students to present to the class.

Media Projects

Media projects also provide a vehicle for speaking practice. For example, students can prepare and present a news program. Provide each student or group of students with a different section of the day’s newspaper which they must prepare to present on a simulated newscast. For example, students responsible for the news portion can select one paper to present orally, students with weather can present the forecast, students with the entertainment section might do a movie review, concert listings or interview with a celebrity. The newscast can be videotaped for viewing and analysis later.

