
Can emojis help develop writing skills?

Webinar handout

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In this handout, I'm sharing the activity ideas for developing writing with emojis that I developed as part of an action-research project. Below are activities you may try in your own classroom, building from working with vocabulary to writing full texts with the help and inspiration from emojis.

Introduction to emojis: sample activities

1. You could give learners emojis and ask them to write words that describe the emojis.
2. You could also get learners to transcribe words to emojis and vice versa. The transcription could include gap filling exercises or ticking/underlining the emoji that best represents a given word or phrase.
3. For advanced learners, give emojis that represent various emotions, actions or objects and ask for synonyms, antonyms and collocations to build learners' vocabulary range.

Sentence construction based on emojis: sample activities

1. You could ask learners to write sentences that explain when they'd use the given emojis.
2. You may also give learners an emoji sentence variety task to get them to expand their initial sentences by adding modifiers and conjunctions. This will help learners to practise sentence expansion in a fun way – using emojis as the foundation for their sentences.

Emojis to words paragraph development: sample activities

1. You may ask learners to write a short descriptive paragraph based on an emoji.
2. You could ask learners to write about an event based on an emoji.
3. You could also ask learners to develop a dialogue based on a set of emojis.
4. Learners may also complete an email or job application based on a set of emojis. It might be useful to brainstorm the meanings of the set of emojis together before they write.

Emoji chain stories: sample activities

1. You could provide an emoji and ask a learner or group of learners to write a sentence about the emoji. They are required to end the sentence with an emoji and pass it on to the next learner or group of learners who must continue the narrative with the emoji that was passed on to them while maintaining the plot of the preceding sentence or sentences. They keep passing the same sheet of paper until everyone completes the task.
2. You may also ask the learners to start the story with an emoji of their choice.

Emoji text connection: sample activities

Use emojis to help students to practice using cohesive devices to create a smooth flow in their writing. Pay attention to the meaning and usage of different conjunctions depending on the level.

1. For a start, you may want to introduce learners to various connectors by asking them to identify and match different types of connectors (addition, contrast, sequence, cause and effect) with corresponding emojis. This will give you the opportunity to discuss various connector types and provide examples.
2. You could provide a sequence of emojis in a logical order, representing the events of a typical day or the process of doing something and ask learners to write about their ideal day or a given process using each emoji as a step in the sequence of events/process description. It might be worthwhile to provide them with a list of transitions they can use in their writing – for a start.
3. You may also provide emojis in disorder and ask learners to rearrange them in order to create a narrative that requires different transition words.

My advice

- Use emojis that students are familiar with, and that are appropriate for an educational purpose. If your learners are teenagers or young adults and have access to devices at school, monitor the images they are exposed to.
- Scaffold gradually. Begin with common emojis and simple activities.
- Be creative!

A recording of Anestin's webinar can be watched here:

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/webinars-teachers/teaching-four-skills-mini-event>