

How can we make writing interactive?

Webinar handout

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When teaching students how to write, there are common challenges they may face. Here's an overview of these problems and suggested solutions to address them effectively.

Problem 1: Students can't get started writing

Solutions: Students often struggle with writing the first sentence, which is essential for focusing the paragraph and what will come. So, teach students how to write a strong topic sentence by breaking it down into two parts: the topic and the controlling idea. Provide examples that show this structure clearly, and practice creating topic sentences on familiar subjects. Think about the main point you want to share. For example, if they are writing about their favourite hobby, the topic sentence might just be: "Playing basketball is my favourite hobby." Make it specific but general enough to include supporting ideas. Instead of saying, "Basketball is great," encourage students to be clear about why or how it's relevant.

Problem 2: Students don't have ideas

Solutions: Provide a model paragraph that includes features such as reasons, details and explanations and have students highlight them to understand what makes the paragraph effective. Then, guide students in brainstorming ideas in pairs to encourage collaborative idea generation. The brainstorming activity could be for students to list ideas or reasons that support the topic sentence. For example, if their paragraph is about basketball, they could write down reasons like exercise, teamwork, and fun. Then, guide them to think deeper by asking questions, like Who? What? When? Where? Why? This helps generate more specific ideas.

Problem 3: Students don't aim high/don't push themselves

One solution could be to use a rubric. A rubric is a scoring tool that lists criteria for what makes a good paragraph, like having a clear topic sentence, supporting details, and correct grammar.

Explain that a rubric helps students understand what is expected. It's a guide and can be used to assess themselves and others. To use it, show them a simple rubric and let them practice grading sample paragraphs. This helps them understand what makes a paragraph strong.

Problem 4: Students don't re-read their work

Students often submit their work without reviewing it, leading to avoidable errors. One solution is to introduce a peer-checking list and correction codes to foster a habit of reviewing and self-correcting. When using peer editing explain that students will read each other's work to give constructive feedback. It helps them see different styles and learn from each other. Peer review with correction codes (e.g., *sp* for spelling, *gr* for grammar) encourages students to look critically at their work and make improvements. Explain that these codes help students focus on specific areas to improve without feeling overwhelmed.

Problem 5: Tasks don't motivate students

A solution is to use interactive activities to make writing fun and help students feel comfortable sharing ideas. They build teamwork and encourage creativity. Here are example tasks:

Find Someone Who based on writing

Step 1 - Students write about themselves on a piece of paper

Step 2 - Pass these pieces of writing around the class

Step 3 - Students go around the class asking questions to find if the person they are talking to is the person mentioned in the writing or not, e.g. "Have you ever been to Spain?"

Chain letters Activity

Step 1 - Students continue a story without knowing what has been written before.

Step 2 - Students fold the paper so that only the second line can be seen.

Step 3 - Pass the papers. This continues until the whole text is finished.

Invitations game

Step 1 - Ask students to write some of their real arrangements for the coming week

Step 2 - They should then send each other 'texts' on slips of paper inviting each other to do other things, making sure that they don't accept invitations that clash with others.

Comments

Step 1 - Put students into small groups of 3 or 4. Tell them they are going to write a creative response to a social media post.

Step 2 - Students pass their post on to the next group, who continue the discussion. Repeat until you have a 'thread' of comments.

A recording of Eman's webinar can be watched here: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/webinars-teachers/teaching-four-skills-mini-event>

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