

Opportunities Teachers' Room

HELPING STUDENTS TO WRITE IN ENGLISH

by Michael Harris

Synopsis

Although there is usually a lot of written practice in the classroom, in the form of grammar and vocabulary exercises, these do not tend to offer much practice in communication. This article looks at on how to teachers can help students to focus on the message, rather than just accuracy when writing stories and letters. It examines writing as a process and discusses reasons for writing, the stages of writing from ideas, note-taking and drafting through to and the finished text. It also looks at correction and ways students can assess their work.

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1 Writing Methodology

The skill of writing is probably the most neglected in the secondary language classroom. There is often a large amount of **written language practice**, where students do grammar or vocabulary exercises: filling in blanks, transforming sentences, ordering words, practising patterns. Even activities which at first sight appear to be developing the skill, such as the writing of letters and stories, are often transformed into written language practice by an approach to assessment which concentrates solely on accuracy and ignores message.

However, the development of the skill of writing, **communicating** with other people (or with oneself) through writing, can be done at all levels and is an essential part of communicative competence. Students need help when writing, which must come during the whole writing process and not only in the form of the teacher's corrections and comments on the final product.

Lack of vocabulary or grammar is the most obvious but not the only obstacle to writing in English: 'a lack of competence in writing in English results more from the lack of composing competence than from the lack of linguistic competence' (Rowe Krapels 1990 p. 49). Learning to write in a foreign language is thus a challenge as it is in a first language, for it seems that 'the composing processes of 'unskilled' L2 writers are similar to those of 'unskilled' L1 writers' (Johns. A.M. p.49 1990).

One of the most important things to bear in mind is that, due to their age and their cognitive capacities nearly all secondary students of English will experience at least some difficulties with writing in their own language. One factor here is the kind of training they have received and are receiving for L1 writing. In fact, students who have experienced more traditional methods in their L1 language class may have had very little explicit training at all. In addition, there will obviously be a wide spectrum of ability within classes in terms of L1 written competence which will have a very considerable effect on students' reading and writing, in a way that does not happen with oral

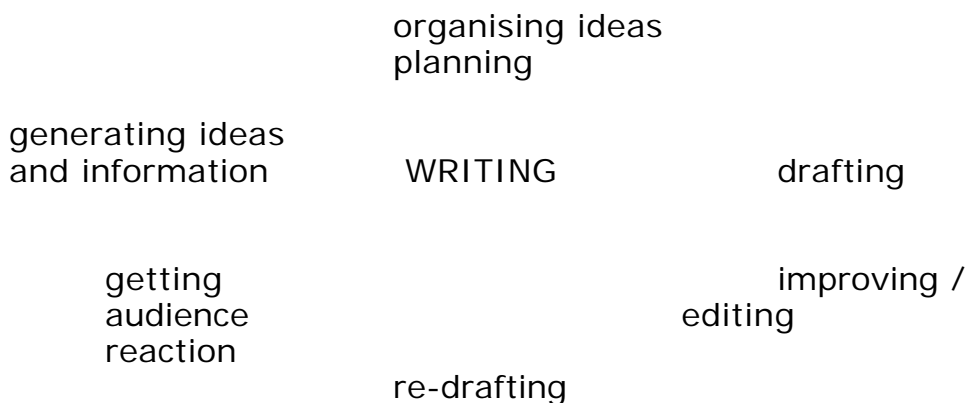
communication. Students who have special difficulties such as dyslexia and handwriting problems in their L1 will undoubtedly have similar if not much greater problems in a foreign language.

In the past, the emphasis has been firmly on the 'product': the composition which is handed in to the teacher. Generally, time has been set aside for these activities, either in class or for homework, and they have been done individually. When the product is finished, learners are given feedback by the teacher about how many mistakes they have made in their written composition. Recent trends in methodology have been to move away from this approach towards one which focuses on the 'process' of communication itself and on the learner as writer. Research about foreign language writing 'now seems to suggest that we could be as much concerned with responding to the student writer as to the student's writing' (Hedge T 1988 p.19).

Thus, students need guidance and feedback from the teacher at various stages in the process, 'students do ... appreciate the efforts their teachers make in responding to their writing' (Ferris 1995), especially at intermediate stages of the process. Nevertheless, they also need to develop an awareness of the process themselves and to acquire strategies that they can use on their own. There will not always be a teacher looking over the student's shoulder and in fact in a very large class the class time that can be given to individual students is going to be limited anyway.

Silva describes the writing process like this: 'the teacher's rôle is to help students develop viable strategies for getting started (finding topics, generating ideas and information, focusing and planning structure and procedure), for drafting (encouraging multiple drafts), for revising (adding, deleting, modifying and rearranging ideas), and for editing (attention to vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar and mechanics). (Silva 1990 p. 15). The different stages in this process could be seen like this:

The writing process



(For a more detailed model of the writing process in: *The Writing Process* White and Arndt 1991 p.17)

Students can be helped with different stages of the writing process above, so that when they are working on their own they can approach writing with more confidence and write more effectively. This does not mean that, every time students write, each stage of the process needs to be focused on explicitly. It implies developing awareness and working on strategies systematically, so that all of the stages of writing are covered.

The secondary classroom varies ostensibly from many of the contexts in which the skill of writing has been researched and developed, which tend to be those involving adult students at or before university; the time spent on writing, the kind of writing done and the degree of accuracy, relevance and sociocultural appropriacy aimed at will be significantly different. Nevertheless, techniques and approaches which come from the EAP classroom can be adapted to be used with secondary students. One of the most important of these is the cooperative nature of writing, writing in groups, brainstorming together, reviewing and editing of each other's work, and assessment and reaction to it (see the title in this series on groupwork).

2 Reasons for Writing

As for other skills, your students' own language is a good starting point to start looking at the process of written communication. One of the first things to do is to try to make learners aware of why people write and how it can be useful. In an increasingly audiovisual world both reading and writing are seen by some people, amongst them

many teenagers, as redundant. However, the ability to write even at a basic level remains crucial in a competitive and sophisticated world.

Activity 1 - Reasons for writing

1 Complete the table below with the different kinds of writing. Add other kinds of writing.

a letter to a penfriend/ a letter to a boyfriend/girlfriend/ a diary/
a letter asking for information about courses/ a postcard to a friend/
a curriculum vitae/ an address book/ notes for studying/
filling in a form/ graffiti/ an e-mail message to a friend

COMMUNICATING WITH OTHER PEOPLE	WRITING FOR YOURSELF
a letter to a penfriend	a list of things to do

2 Which of the kinds of writing do you do in your language?

3 Which of the kinds of writing in English could be important for you in the future?

a for getting a good job

b for personal reasons

(For a similar activity see: *Learning to learn English* p. 93 Ellis and Sinclair 1989)

When secondary students are older and are becoming more aware of the outside world and possibly of their own future, it can be interesting to get them thinking about the kind of letters that they will receive and may have to write.

Activity 2 - Your Letters/Emails

1 In the future, which of these letters (or emails) would you

a really like to receive?

b not like to receive?

- 1 a letter from your bank saying that you have overspent
- 2 a letter from a university accepting you to do the course of your dreams
- 3 a letter from a very good friend you haven't heard from for ages
- 4 a letter from one of your family when they are away from home
- 5 a letter from the head teacher of your school asking you to see him/her
- 6 a letter from the lottery company saying that you have won twenty million pesetas
- 7 a funny postcard from a friend who is on holiday
- 8 a letter from a company offering you a job which you have applied for
- 9 a letter from a girl/boy you met recently saying they love you
- 10 a Valentine card from an unknown admirer

2 In the future which of these do you think you may have to write in English?

- 1 a business letter or fax
 - 2 a letter to a girl/boyfriend you met on holiday
 - 3 a letter applying for a university place
 - 4 a letter to a friend in another country
 - 5 a letter applying for a job
 - 6 a letter asking for tourist information
 - 7 an e-mail message to a friend
 - 8 a letter applying for a grant
-

3 A Focus on the Writing Process

The next thing to look at is the writing process itself. One of the best ways to do this is by getting students to write something in their own language and then reflect on what they actually did in the process of writing it. Many people feel that they are not 'good writers' and that people are born with the gift or not. However, effective writing in any language is the result of a process. It is worth pointing out that brilliant writers usually go through the various stages of planning, drafting and re-drafting several times before they are happy with the result (see a copy of a draft of Jane Austen - in Ellis and Sinclair 1989 p.102).

Activity 3 - Are you a good writer?

1 Imagine you are not in class, but you are on holiday. Write a short letter in your language to the rest of the class.

2 In pairs, find out if your partner is a good writer. Find out which of these things he/she did when writing.

a Imagined where he/she was on holiday.

b Imagined what the rest of the class would feel like when they got the postcard.

c Thought about what he/she was going to say.

d Wrote down a few notes.

e Wrote a rough version of his/her letter.

f Used a dictionary to check words.

g Re-read what he/she had written.

h Checked his/her writing for mistakes.

i Thought about how he/she could improve what he/she had written to make it more interesting.

j Wrote out a final version neatly.

Points

For each thing you did you get one point.

6-10 You are a very good writer. Think about which of the other things you could do to become even better.

3-5 You are probably quite good, but there are lots of things you can do to become better.

0-2 You just sat down and started to write without thinking and planning. To become a better writer you need to think, plan and check what you write.

Having got students to think about the different stages of writing in their own language, it is possible to get them to observe the main stages in English, ordering and identifying them (see activity below).

Activity 4 - The stages of writing

Look at the stages of someone writing a letter to the people in their class. Order them and then match them with these stages.

1 ideas 2 plan 3 first draft without corrections 4 final letter

a Dear All,

Well, here I am in Antigua. It's an amazing little island, with amazing beaches, freindly people ... paradise! I'm here with Brad Pitt. He invited to his villa. He's REALLY nice. We got here on monday. Yesteday we went on cruise and saw some dolphins. This morning I went waterskiing. It was great! Now we're on the beach and Brad is learning his lines for his new film. Tonihgt we are going to a carnival. Wer'e going to dance all night!

Tomorrow
we are going in Brads plane to another island.
Love,
Angie

b Dear All,

Well, here I am in Antigua. It's a beautiful little island, with amazing beaches, friendly people ... paradise! I'm here with Brad Pitt. He invited me to his villa. He's REALLY nice.

We got here on Monday. Yesterday we went on a cruise and saw some dolphins. This morning I went waterskiing. It was great!

Now
we're on the beach and Brad is learning his lines for his new film.

Tonight we are going to a carnival. We're going to dance all night!

Tomorrow we are going in Brad's plane to another island.

How is everyone in 5 B. I hope you are enjoying your classes. Be good girls and boys and WORK HARD!

Love,
Angie

c Caribbean / exotic island
with attractive movie star
arrived Monday / cruise / waterskiing
lying on beach/fruit juice

d 1 island/Brad Pitt
2 activities
3 plans

tonight – carnival

With higher-level students, it would perhaps be useful to compare the differences between the first and second draft (in terms of content, organisation, spelling and punctuation).

4 Writing Assessment Criteria

As well as looking at different stages in the process, you can start discussing with students the criteria that you use (and they) are going to use to assess writing. To start with, this can be done by looking at more basic aspects of writing such as message, presentation, and accuracy. Then, it is possible to look at more complex areas such as organisation, linking and appropriacy.

The best way of increasing awareness about what is good and bad writing is by getting students to read and assess example compositions and then discuss them with the whole class.

One way of doing this is by keeping copies of students' work from previous years (with names deleted). In the two examples below, there are considerable differences. The first postcard does not have very interesting information and has quite a few serious mistakes. The second postcard is more interesting in terms of content and is easier to read, as the grammatical mistakes are not very serious.

Activity 5 - Comparing writing

1 Read the two postcards. Which is the most interesting? Why?

Dear Lucy,	Lucy Graves
I am holiday with my fathers in Greece. It is very hot and is a lot of people in the beach.	22 Falkland Road,
Like swim and like play voleibol in the beach.	London NW2
Like go at the beach at 10 o'clock and go at home at 2 o'clock. In the afternoon like have the siesta. ¿How are you?	Great Britain
Love,	
Eva	

Hi Ralph,	Ralph Cohen,
How is you? Was your holiday good?	1203 Lincoln Boulevard,
I am in Salobreña with my family. It is fantastic. Salobreña is a small city with white houses. I have friends here and we go to the beach all days and play the football.	Pittsburg,
We have an equipe- The Salobreña Saltamontes. Yesterday we play some German boys. !We win 8-7! I have a new girlfriend. Her name is Marta and she is VERY prety.	Pennsylvania,
Write me about your holiday.	USA
Bye!	
Alfonso	

2 Read the postcards again. Which has fewer serious mistakes?

3 What mark out of ten would you give the postcards?

This work on assessment criteria then needs to be followed up throughout the school year. Every time that you set a piece of written work you can discuss and negotiate criteria with students, **before** they start to write. Criteria can vary according to the kind of work to be done. For a project poster, perhaps the most important thing is for the information to be interesting and original and for the poster to look

attractive. For a group story the most important thing is that the story is exciting and clear to read. It is essential for students to realise that, while accuracy is important, writing is about communication and is not just extended written language practice.

When discussing criteria it is important to keep metalanguage to a minimum and to use simple language. (See Activity 6 below)

Activity 6 - Negotiating criteria

Which of these things do you think is important for the ... you are going to write?

- 1 Is it interesting to read? Is the information original? (content)
- 2 Is it tidy and easy to read the handwriting? (legibility)
- 3 Is it well-organised? (planning/coherence of structure)
- 4 Are there a lot of simple mistakes? (accuracy in grammar/vocabulary/spelling)
- 5 Is it easy to follow? (cohesion/linking devices, etc)
- 6 Is the style correct for the situation? (appropriacy)

5 Preparation Strategies

As well as discussing criteria before getting students to start writing, it is important to prepare students for the writing task itself. There are various pre-writing activities which can focus on the topic and activate students' knowledge and experiences (e.g. discussions, reading texts, listening texts).

One of the most important of these activities is developing students' awareness of audience, of who is going to read what they have written. One of the best ways is to get them to write to real people: to penfriends, to other students or to you the teacher. When they are writing to an imaginary audience, as well as input such as letters to reply to, it can be useful to get students to imagine themselves what kind of person they are writing to and what kind of information this person would like to find out from the writer, (see Activity 7 below).

Activity 7 - Audience Profile

Imagine you met someone last summer. Write a letter to them.

26 Brookbank Road,
Chalkside,
Surrey SN 5 3 BQ
April 27th 1988

The Managing Director,
Sinton Exports Ltd,
3 Castle Chambers,
Chalkside,
Surrey.

Dear Sir,

I saw your advertisement for the post of bilingual secretary in the Gazette last Thursday. I would like to apply for the position. I am twenty-two years old, Italian and speak German and English. My German is fluent as I lived in Germany for five years and attended High School there. After leaving school I returned to Italy and took a course in Secretarial Studies. I enclose a copy of my School Certificate and my Diploma in Secretarial Studies. I worked in Rome for six months as secretary to the manager of a small export company.

I came to England a year ago to improve my English and have taken the Cambridge Proficiency Examination in English and a course of English for secretaries. I enclose copies of the certificates which I received for these.

I shall look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

Claudia Cremisi

(From *Writing* p.37/38 Hedge, T. (1988) OUP)

Other questions which could come from a conversation related to the letter above could be: 'What nationality are you?' 'What languages do you speak?' 'How good is your German?' 'What secretarial qualifications do you have?' (Hedge 1988 p. 38).

Along with audience awareness there is a need to focus on strategies for generating ideas and information. Students can be helped through guided writing tasks which provide input, but they also need to develop ways of generating ideas on their own. One way of doing this with factual writing is by including an information gathering stage, when students use information task sheets to find information they need for their project.

Another strategy for the generation of ideas is the use of mind maps and networks to help brainstorming. Students can also activate their

senses when brainstorming for stories, by closing their eyes and 'seeing' the situations themselves before doing their mind map. (See activity about Christmas - Hedge 1988 p. 30). Music can be a very useful aid for setting the mood and helping students to generate ideas (*Musical Openings* Cranmer and Laroy 1994).

The use of questions by students to generate ideas is another helpful strategy (see Activity below - for more ideas see *The Q Book* Morgan and Rinvolutri 1988 and *Creative Questions* Hess and Pollard 1992).

Activity 9 - Questions for generating a story (The Haunted House)

In groups, discuss the questions below.

What time is it?
 What is the weather like?
 How do you feel?

Where is the house?
 How big is it?
 Why are you there?
 Do you believe in ghosts?

What can you hear?
 What can you see?
 What is your reaction?

What happens in the end?
 How do you feel?
 Do you believe in ghosts now?

(Adapted from an idea of Tony Shannon-Little about travelling in the New York subway *The Writing Process* p.28/29 White and Arndt 1991 Longman)

Having generated ideas, the next stage in the process is the organisation of ideas and the structuring of what is going to be written. One of the best ways of doing this is by using tables, timelines or text flow charts, as they can be linked to prior reading tasks. At lower levels this can involve ordering ideas in short texts such as postcards or informal letters. At higher levels, work can be done on planning separate paragraphs and then on writing key sentences for each one (see Activity 10 below).

Activity 10 - Organising writing

1 In pairs, organise the notes below by completing the paragraph boxes

b and **c**. Then write a key sentence for each one.

bank robbery - 10 o'clock in morning - Saturday morning - four men - masks and guns - people on floor - very frightened - shots in air - men took money - left bank - car outside - somebody telephoned police - came 5 minutes after - gave police descriptions of men

Paragraph one: introduction / the situation

frightening experience- bank robbery in my town - 10 o'clock in morning - with mother and sister - Saturday morning - very quiet

Key sentence: A few months ago I saw a bank robbery in my town.

Paragraph two: what happened / your reaction

Paragraph three: what happened in the end

2 Use your plan to write the description.

Flow charts can be used for stories, letters and factual writing and give students support when they are planning. Another important thing to do is to make sure that when learners have done plans that they are either looked at and commented on by you or by other students. Only by making planning and organisation an essential part of the writing process can students approach open-ended and creative tasks.

6 Drafting Strategies

The next stage is actually drafting and in the same way as the previous stages mentioned this can be done in pairs, groups or with the whole class. Drafting stories with the whole class can be done on the board (or if available on personal computers). In this way students can see the process and at the same time produce a piece of collective writing, which can be then shown to other classes.

If students follow their plans when drafting it will be much easier, but they will also need help either from the teacher or from reference books like dictionaries and grammars. When they do not know words they should be encouraged to use small bilingual dictionaries, but they do need help in actually using them, as it is very easy to choose the wrong word (see Activity 11 below).

Activity 11 - Using dictionaries

Find the correct translations for the words in bold.

Example: 1 = a

- 1 It is very hot in my town ... **sobretudo** ... in summer.
- 2 This year I have ... **particular** ... classes
- 3 The ... **conductor** ... of the bus was very friendly.
- 4 Spring is my favourite ... **estación** ... of the year.
- 5 I was tired after the ... **jornada** ..., but I liked my new job.

sobretudo adv. a) above all, especially b) n.m. greatcoat, overcoat

particular adj. a) particular b) special, peculiar c) private, individual

conductor n. a) leader, guide b) driver (of vehicle) c) conductor (electrical)

estación, n. a) station (train/bus) b) season (of the year) c) (holiday) resort

jornada, n. a) day's journey b) working day c) time-table (e.g. summer)

This activity can be adapted for other languages using a bilingual dictionary.

Students can also refer to examples of key functions or structures which are needed for the writing task in hand. One way is by using reference books such as grammars. Another way is to get learners to refer back to model texts that they have read previously and focus on key features of format and language. At higher levels, students can

also be encouraged to collect examples of model texts, which they can refer to when they are writing on their own (see Ellis and Sinclair 1989 p. 104).

Activity 12 - Using model texts

Before writing your letter, look at the letter that you have just read. Answer these questions.

- 1 Where are the address and date?
- 2 How does the letter begin?
- 3 How does the person talk about their news? (simple past or perfect?)
- 4 How does the letter end?
- 5 How does the person sign off?

Incorporate these things in **your** letter.

7 Checking and Reviewing

When students have completed their first drafts, the next stage in the process is that of checking and reviewing, both in terms of content and language. Students can use checklists (see Activity 13 below) to go through what they have written.

Activity 13 - Writing checklists

- 1 Review what you have written. Try to answer these questions.
 - 1 How can you make it more interesting? What information can you add?
 - 2 How can you improve the organisation? Think about paragraphs and the main points.
 - 3 Are there any mistakes of spelling? Use your dictionary to help you.
 - 4 Are there any words that you are not sure about? Use your dictionary to check.
 - 5 Have you made any simple grammatical mistakes? Use your list of common mistakes. Example: 1 He live in Barcelona. 2 My news trousers. 3 Yesterday I go to the cinema.
 - 6 Have you always used complete sentences?
 - 7 Can you improve your handwriting and make your work neater?
-

At higher levels, questions can be added that are related to style and cohesion: 'Is what I have written suitable in terms of style?' e.g. formal/informal / 'Does it flow well? Could I improve the linking?'

These checklists are particularly useful when students are working together and reviewing the first draft of group writing, such as a story or poster.

Students can also use lists of common mistakes to help them do review their written work in terms of language. Far from being 'contagious', lists of mistakes can help students to iron out linguistic inaccuracies which they can easily become blind to. There are certain mistakes that recur again and again in students writing and a checklist with them in can help students to eliminate them (see Activity 14 below).

Activity 14 - List of common mistakes

- 1 Word order with questions ~~Where live you?~~ (Where do you live?)
- 2 present simple ~~She live in a small house.~~ (She lives in a small house.)
- 3- adjective order/agreement. ~~The cats blacks.~~ (The black cats.)
- 4- articles with names ~~I know the Mr Smith.~~ (I know Mr Smith.)
- 5- numbers ~~two millions~~ (two million)

6- countables/uncountables ~~There are any money in my pocket.~~ (There is some money ...)

7- number: singular/plural ~~People in the town is very friendly.~~ (People are friendly.)

8- there is/are ~~Are a lot of cars.~~ (There are a lot of cars.)

9- this/these ~~These type of music.~~ (This type of music.)

10- prepositions to/at/in ~~I go at school every morning.~~ I go to school.

* The list above is relevant for Latin learners.

Another helpful tool for reviewing students' work is the correction code. This can be used by the teacher or by other students to signal the mistakes that are in a composition. The most important thing is to familiarise students with the correction code that you use, and get students to practise using it themselves (see Activity below).

Activity 15 - Correction codes

1 Use the correction code to help you correct the mistakes in the story extract.

G - grammar

V - vocabulary

S - spelling

P - punctuation

WO - word order

- word missing

^

(extra) - extra word

One day the ultimate winter I were in the home with my brother Sam and there were snow out the house It was cold but suny We decided to walked at the park local. In the park was a lake. Some people was playing and skating over the lake. Sam and I started to make a big figure of snow. Suddenly we heard ...

Write a correct version of the story.

Example: One day last winter I was....

(see another example of a correction code *Writing* p.152 Hedge 1988 OUP)

For higher levels, codes can be more complex with symbols such as these: Pr (prepositions), T (tenses), L (linking), PV (phrasal verbs), ST (style). The ideal time to use these codes is after an initial draft and this is when students pay most attention to teacher feedback on their writing, so that they can improve their final product (Ferris 1995). The time spent by students correcting mistakes in their own work which have been signalled by the teacher is also valuable for language development: 'giving cues to students so they can correct their own errors will further activate their linguistic competence' (Makino 1993 p. 34).

This stage in the process is also the time for peer reviewing. 'Teachers should provide L2 students with opportunities to talk about their essays with their peers, as peer reviews seem to allow students to explore and negotiate their ideas as well as to develop a sense of audience.' (Mendonca and Johnson 1994.) With teenage students however this reviewing needs to be done with great care and it is advisable to protect weaker students from criticism. Students should have their work looked at by the people they usually work with and not by all the other students in the class, unless they are doing writing in groups, when other groups can be asked to make suggestions and comments.

8 Giving Feedback

When students have produced their final draft, either individually or in pairs or groups, they can receive feedback from their peers and then from the teacher. When students are working in groups, work can be put up around the class and other students can go around and look at it. When work is individual, it can be passed to another student who has not been involved in earlier reviewing stages, so that he or she can react to what has been written as well as assess it using the criteria agreed at the outset (see Activity 16 below).

Activity 16 - Peer assessment: reacting to writing

Read another group's poster project and answer the questions.

- 1 What do you like most about the other group's poster?
- 2 What is the most interesting piece of information in the poster?
- 3 What is the best drawing/photo in the poster?
- 4 What do you think could be improved about the poster?
- 5 Use the criteria you agreed upon before starting to assess the poster.

Example:

interest/originality 4/5
 presentation 3/5
 mistakes 4/5

Are there any questions that you would like to ask the group about their project?

The checklist above could also be used by learners to reflect on their own work, before it is given to the teacher (who can also use the same checklist). However, perhaps the most useful kind of self-assessment at this stage involves students thinking about what they did at the various stages of the process.

Activity 17 - Self-assessment of writing: performance

1 Which of these things did you do to produce your (or your group's project)?

- a** brainstorm ideas to start with
- b** make a plan of what you were going to do
- c** show your plan to other people and get ideas from them
- d** write first drafts of the project
- e** show your drafts to other people and get them to check for mistakes
 and make suggestions (including the teacher)
- f** produce your final draft with care
- g** show your final product to other people and get comments

2 What can you do to improve in the future?

With groupwork, self-assessment can be combined with peer-assessment of what each member of the group did (see Activity 18 below).

Activity 18 - Groupwork peer-assessment

Answer the questionnaire below.

GROUP WORK	YES	NO
Did your team/group work well together?		
Did you think that anyone worked harder than the others?		
Did you finish your task before the others?		
Did you need more time than your classmates?		
Have you learnt something from working with your classmates?		
Were you bored working in a group?		

(From: *La Enseñanza de la Lengua Extranjera en la Educación Secundaria* p. 147 Ribé and Vidal (1995) Alhambra Longman)

Having done regular self-assessment of writing, students will then be ready to look back and reflect on their progress at periodic intervals. This is made much easier if students keep portfolios of their written work.

Activity 19 - Self-assessment of writing progress

1 Look at the writing that you have done throughout this term/year and answer these questions?

- 1 Which two pieces of work are you most pleased about? Why?
- 2 Which piece of writing did you like doing most?
- 3 Choose the first piece of writing you did and one of the most recent:
How is it better? presentation / interest / mistakes
- 4 What do you still need to improve most?
- 5 Which of these things could help you do that?
 - a more time thinking about ideas
 - b more time planning and organising before writing
 - c using a good dictionary when writing
 - d checking your work and asking other people to help you
 - e trying to improve your work in the final version

2 What mark do you think you deserve for these things this term/year?

- a Effort in class and for homework. /10
- b Improvement in writing over the term/year. /10

Reflection

- 1 Were you ever helped with the writing process when you were at school or university? For example, taught how to plan and make notes.
- 2 How could you improve the way YOU write? Think about the different stages of the writing process.
- 3 Do you agree that students need help in learning how to write and not only to be taught the language to write with?
- 4 How much time do you spend doing writing activities (communicative not written grammar practice) in class? Which stages of the writing process do you do in class?
- 5 Which of the writing activities suggested could you use with your class?

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