

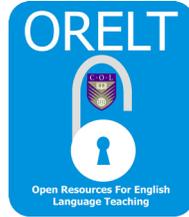
ORELT

**Open Resources For English
Language Teaching**



Module 4 - Effective Writing





ORELT

Open Resources for English Language Teaching

Module 4 – Effective Writing



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.

Commonwealth of Learning, 2012



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Open Resources for English Language Teaching: Module 4 – Effective Writing
ISBN: 978-1-894975-47-6

Published by:

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Acknowledgements

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) acknowledges the contributions of the following in the development of the Open Resources for English Language Teaching (ORELT) at Junior Secondary School (JSS) Level modules:

Professor Thomas K. Adeyanju, Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria (Module 1); Dr Musa Maisamari, University of Abuja, Nigeria (Module 2); Dr Speranza M. Ndege, Institute of Open, Distance & e-Learning, Kenyatta University, Kenya (Module 3); Dr Mukti Sanyal, Bharati College, University of Delhi, India (Module 3); Dr Cornelia Muganda, Institute of Continuing Education, The Open University of Tanzania (Module 4); Professor Isaac Olaofe, Faculty of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria (Module 5) and Dr Padmini Boruah, Department of English Language Teaching, Gauhati University, India (Module 6).

We also wish to acknowledge the contribution of the following people for reviewing/critiquing the modules:

Dr Padmini Boruah, Department of ELT, Gauhati University; Dr Mukti Sanyal, Bharati College, University of Delhi; Dr Ravinarayan Chakrakodi, Regional Institute of English, South India; Dr Kishor G. Bhide, Department of English, SNTD Arts and Commerce College for Women, India; Dr V. Rajagopalan, SSKV College of Arts and Science for Women, India; Mr Rajesh Nimesh, Video Production Division, Central Institute of Educational Technology, National Council of Educational Research & Training, India; and Professor Vasudha Kamat, Central Institute of Educational Technology, National Council of Educational Research & Training, India.

Dr Padmini Boruah, Department of ELT, Gauhati University edited and substantially revised all the six modules. Messrs Nicholas Kimolo and Maurice Mulinge of Futuristic Ltd. developed the multimedia content materials and Dr Abdurrahman Umar, Education Specialist, Teacher Education, Commonwealth of Learning conceptualised, designed and co-ordinated the ORELT project.

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About this module manual

Module 4 — Effective Writing has been produced by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). All module manuals produced by COL are structured in the same way, as outlined below.

How this module manual is structured

The module overview

The module overview gives you a general introduction to the module. It will help you determine:

- if the module is suitable for you,
- what you need to know,
- what you can expect from the module, and
- how much time you will need to invest to complete the module.

The overview also provides guidance on:

- study skills,
- where to get help,
- module assignments and assessments, and
- activities and units.

We strongly recommend that you read the overview *carefully* before starting your study.

The module content

The module is broken down into units. Each unit comprises:

- an introduction to the unit content,
- unit objectives,
- unit learning outcomes,

- new terminology,
- core content of the unit with a variety of learning activities,
- a unit summary,
- assignments and/or assessments, as applicable, and
- answers to assignments and/or assessments, as applicable.

Resources

For those interested in learning more on this subject, please see the list of additional resources at the end of each unit of this module manual. These may be books, articles, websites or audio/video files that can assist in the teaching of the unit, and so on.

Your comments

After completing **Module 4 — Effective Writing**, we would appreciate your taking a few moments to give us your feedback on any aspect of this module. Your feedback might include comments on:

- Module content and structure.
- Module reading materials and resources.
- Module assignments.
- Module assessments.
- Module duration.
- Module support (assigned tutors, technical help, etc.).

Your constructive feedback will help us to improve and enhance this module.

Module overview

Welcome to Module 4 — Effective Writing

The skill of writing is one of the most effective tools of communication. It helps to develop imaginative and critical thinking abilities, and is often the sign of an education. It involves the ability to write *effectively* and *creatively*. Writing is more permanent than speaking, and requires more careful organisation. It is also less spontaneous because it involves a process, from organising ideas in the mind to setting the final document on paper. Like speaking, writing can be both formal and informal, depending on its purpose. For example, the language of a formal invitation to a party is very different from that of an invitation through a text message from a mobile phone. Since specific contexts require special vocabulary (words and phrases) and grammar (sentence structures), teaching the skill of writing involves familiarising your Junior Secondary School (JSS) students with various formats of informal and formal written texts. Also, teaching writing includes taking students through a process — a series of steps — such as brainstorming for ideas, organising and sequencing them, revising and editing the draft and so on.

This module provides you with some learner-centred strategies and activities through which you can help your JSS students develop their writing skills. It gives you some resources to explore ways of encouraging your students to express themselves creatively.

Is this module for you?

This module is intended for teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) at the JSS level.

Module objectives



Objectives

The objectives of this module are to:

- promote the teaching of writing in English using personal experiences,
- develop skills for teaching effective writing through controlled and guided activities,
- enhance JSS students' ability to communicate effectively in writing in a variety of situations,

- promote interactive techniques of teaching effective writing across the curriculum, and
- promote creative writing skills amongst JSS students.

Module outcomes



Outcomes

Upon completion of **Module 4 — Effective Writing**, you will be able to:

- use students' personal experiences in guided/controlled activities to develop their writing skills,
- develop your students' ability to write effectively to communicate in a variety of situations,
- teach effective writing across the curriculum, and
- stimulate your students' interests in creative writing.

Time frame



How long?

You will need approximately 15 weeks to finish this module — eight weeks for formal study and seven weeks for self-directed study — to complete all the activities recommended.

This is a distance learning programme, thus the time frame is flexible and largely self-directed.

Study skills



Study skills

As an adult learner your approach to learning will be different from that of your school days: you will choose what you want to study, you will have professional and/or personal motivation for doing so and you will most likely be fitting your study activities around other professional or domestic responsibilities.

Essentially you will be taking control of your learning environment. As a consequence, you will need to consider performance issues related to time management, goal setting, stress management, etc. Perhaps you will also need to reacquaint yourself with such things as essay planning, coping with exams and using the Web as a learning resource.

Your most significant considerations will be *time* and *space*; that is, the time you dedicate to your learning and the environment in which you engage in that learning.

We recommend that you take time now — before starting your self-directed study — to familiarise yourself with these issues. There are a number of excellent resources on the Web. For example:

- <http://www.how-to-study.com/>

The “How to study” website is dedicated to study skills resources. You will find links for tips on study preparation (a list of nine essentials for a good study place), taking notes, strategies for reading textbooks, using reference sources and coping with test anxiety.

- <http://www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/stdyhlp.html>

This is the website of Virginia Tech’s Division of Student Affairs. You will find links to tips on time scheduling (including one called “Where Does Time Go?”), a study skill checklist, basic concentration techniques, how to take control of your study environment, note taking, how to read essays for analysis and tips on developing memory skills (“Remembering”).

- <http://www.howtostudy.org/resources.php>

Another “How to study” website with useful links to learning about time management, efficient reading, questioning/listening/observing skills, getting the most out of putting your knowledge into practice, memory building, staying motivated and developing a learning plan.

The above links are our suggestions to start you on your way. At the time of writing these Web links were active. If you want to look for more go to www.google.com and type “self-study basics,” “self-study tips,” “self-study skills” or a similar combination.

Need help?



Help

Contact your Google Group support email, SMS number or your tutor.

Group email: orelt_tutors@googlegroups.com

Assessment



Assessment

- Each unit of this module consists of a self-assessment activity. The assessments are for self-development purposes and need not be submitted to anybody. The goal of the module is to develop your teaching-learning skills, not to test you.
- Assessment is also meant to encourage you to think about and devise some innovative teaching practices that could make your teaching more exciting and relevant to your students.

- All assessments are to be completed at the end of every unit. You may cross-check your answers with your colleagues.

Resources



Resources

- <http://www.angelfire.com/wi/writingprocess/links.html>
- Foggin, J. (1991). *Real Writing*. Sevenoaks, UK: Hodder and Stoughton.
- <http://www.askoxford.com/betterwriting/letterwriting/?view=uk>

Getting around this module manual

Margin icons

While working through this module manual you will notice the frequent use of icons in the margin. These icons serve to “signpost” a particular piece of text, a new task or change in activity; they have been included to help you to find your way around this module manual.

A complete icon set is shown below. We suggest that you familiarise yourself with the icons and their meanings before starting your study.

			
Activity	Assessment	Assignment	Case study
			
Outcomes	Summary	Objectives	Feedback
			
Terminology	Reading	Reflection	Study skills
			
Help	Time	Audio	Video

Unit 1: Better Writing Using Personal Experiences

Introduction

Like most of us, students are more comfortable and confident in a familiar environment. This makes them feel ready and more willing to learn new things. This unit encourages you to use your students' personal experiences and the school environment as basic resources for teaching writing skills. These experiences, based on students' familiar life-spaces, will be a good starting point for them to write descriptions of themselves and their family, their school and friends, important and interesting events in their lives, and also their feelings and emotions.

Unit outcomes



Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit you will be able to:

- use your students' personal experiences and the local environment to develop students' writing skills,
- help students improve their grammatical and communicative competence by practising writing about familiar people and events,
- inspire your students to develop their creative thinking and imagination, and
- help enhance students' active vocabulary for describing people and events.

Terminology



Terminology

Active vocabulary:

Active vocabulary comprises words and phrases that one uses regularly in one's speech and writing. **Passive** vocabulary, on the other hand, describes the vocabulary that one recognises and understands in other people's speech and in writing, but does not use oneself.

Autobiography:

An autobiography is a written account of somebody's life written by himself or herself.

Narrative: A piece of written or oral text that describes an event in a chronological order. A narrative usually has a clear beginning, middle and end, and may include conversations and descriptions. Stories, novels and ballads are all examples of narratives.

Teacher support information

The activities in this unit will help you as a teacher to help your students to write authentic texts such as descriptions and diary entries using your students' knowledge about themselves, and their home and school environments. This will provide a familiar context to more easily motivate them to practise their writing skills. **Resource 1: Using group work in your classroom** will assist you in planning and facilitating your students' active participation and learning through group activities.

Case study: Writing descriptions



Case study

Mr Amani Hamis, Mr John Katale and Ms Sara Samson are teachers at three different secondary schools in Tanzania.

Recently, the three teachers participated in a professional development workshop on teaching English. One of their assignments involved working on a group mini-project on teaching effective writing to students who are in their early years of secondary education.

The group members discovered that they had all been using the students' familiar contexts in designing writing assignments. They agreed that describing people, events, things, emotions and situations always stimulates students' interest in writing lessons. They decided to brainstorm on the activities that assisted them in their teaching.

Mr Hamis described the strategy he used. At the beginning of the activity, he usually did a "show and tell" routine. He asked the students to bring to the class something they wanted to describe. Each student showed his or her item and described it. Meanwhile the teacher wrote on the board the keywords used by the students in the description. A different student would then be asked to write a description of the object using those words. The students were then encouraged to put their descriptions on the display board.

Sara and John used similar strategies in their classrooms, but since their class size was bigger, both preferred putting students in groups for this activity. In their groups, students would be asked to decide on an object to describe. Each group member then wrote a sentence describing the object. The group sequenced the sentences and edited them, and one group member presented the final description.

John added that, to encourage healthy competition, he had the class judge the presentations, and the best two descriptions were displayed in the class every week. When the teachers presented their group report, the workshop participants agreed that this was a good way of motivating students to communicate spontaneously. They suggested, however, that the teacher needed to intervene before the presentations were displayed, so that students learned how to edit their written work for grammar and style.

Points to ponder

- 1 Have you attended any professional development courses? Did you learn some techniques there that could be adopted in your classroom?
- 2 Do you think encouraging students to discuss or describe things from their own lives is a good strategy to develop language skills? Why?

Activities

Activity 1: Describing a person



Activity 1

Describing oneself and one's family can be an exciting activity for both students and the teacher. However, you need to prepare for it. Before carrying out this activity read **Resource 2: Using brainstorming/mind maps**.

- 1 Hand your students a sheet with pictures of two people on it (see **Resource 5**). (If you have access to an overhead projector, you can put the pictures on the screen instead.) Tell them that one of the people in the picture has escaped from jail, and the police are looking for him. Have a general discussion on what each person in the picture looks like, so that they can be described accurately to the police. Practise key vocabulary related to physical features (**Resource 4**).

Now ask the students to listen carefully to the description of the prisoner in the news report in **Resource 3**, and then identify him from the photographs in **Resource 5**.

Have a general feedback discussion on how they managed to identify the prisoner from the description in the audio, reminding them that it was *certain words* that helped them to identify the man. Distribute the transcript of the audio for their reference.

- 2 Now put your students in pairs and announce that they are going to play a guessing game. They are to write a description of their partner. Instruct them not to write down the name of the person they are describing, as the game is to guess the person from the *nameless* description. Tell them their descriptions will be collected and jumbled up, and then you will read each one aloud.

The class has to identify the classmate described. The more accurate the description and the sooner the person is identified correctly, the more points the writer is awarded. As an incentive, you could announce that there will be a prize for the most accurate descriptions.

To prepare for the task, tell the students to use words from the list in **Resource 4**. Remind them that their descriptions should contain information about their partner's general height and build, and also details of their face, and any other noticeable marks, such as a birthmark. Ask the students to edit their work. Advise them to use a dictionary to check the spellings of words that they are not sure of, and to make any necessary corrections.

Activity 2: Writing about memorable events: Writing a narrative



Activity 2

We all have events we remember because they were exciting, interesting or appealing to us; they may be historical, cultural, scientific or topical. In this activity, students will learn how to write a narrative passage on events of their choice.

As a pre-task activity, show the students the video in **Resource 6**. Then ask them to narrate from memory the sequence of the events described. Play the video once more to let them check that they can narrate the events in the correct order and with all the details. Draw their attention to **linkers** such as *firstly*, *then*, *after that*, *meanwhile*, *in the end* and so on. Explain that these linking words are like signposts, helping the reader to move through the passage easily. They also help to keep the reader interested in following the events.

- 1 Ask the class to name five or six recent school events that they enjoyed (sports day, annual day, visit of a guest, etc.). Divide the students into groups of five or six, and let each group choose one event to narrate. Have them brainstorm on the most important parts of the event they would like to include.
- 2 The next step is to arrange the parts in a chronological order (i.e., beginning with the earliest part).
- 3 Each group then writes a first draft. Encourage them to use linkers in their passages to make their passage easy to read and interesting to follow.
- 4 The group then re-reads the passage and checks for errors in spelling, grammar or facts. One group member then reads out the narrative to the class. After each presentation you can discuss any mistakes so that the groups can revise their texts.
- 5 The groups then write their final drafts and submit them.

Activity 3: Talking about ourselves: Writing a diary entry



Activity 3

One activity that appeals to all of us is talking about ourselves. Keeping a diary is a good way of recording our personal experiences. A diary is different from a journal entry or a log, because it is not a mere record of events. In a diary we express our innermost thoughts and feelings. At the JSS level, students are entering adolescence, which is a stage of life in which they are naturally self-absorbed. As teachers, we can use this factor to encourage students to practise their writing skills through diary entries.

- 1 Ask your students if they have heard of Anne Frank. Have a general discussion with them about Anne Frank's life and how she sustained herself in those difficult days, especially as an adolescent. (See **Resource 7** for a photograph of Anne Frank's diary.)
- 2 Now discuss with them the habit of maintaining a diary. Ask them to work in pairs to list the advantages and disadvantages of diary writing, if any. This pre-task will help them brainstorm on diary entries in general.
- 3 Now distribute a handout containing three sample diary entries in different styles (see **Resource 8**). Ask the students, working in groups, to discuss and note the differences between a story and a diary entry.
- 4 Using the samples as a guide, encourage them to list the sections in a diary entry: where to write the date, the personal address form "Dear Diary," the introduction, body of the text and ending.
- 5 Finally, ask them to write their own diary entries for that day. Encourage them to revise their drafts to check for spelling, grammar, tense and style. Refer to **Resource 9: Guidelines on diary entries**.

Unit summary



Summary

In this unit you learned how to use the experiences and local context of your students to teach writing skills, and that description can create a familiar context upon which students can base their writing. Group work can be a good way to manage large classes. Always check students' spelling and grammar at the end of the exercises.

Reflections



Reflection

- In what way was the unit useful to you?
- Did you try out the activities suggested in this module? If not, what could have been the reason? If yes, was your lesson successful?

Assessment



Assessment

- What would you have done differently to make the activities more effective?
- In a big class, how would you make sure that each student's spelling and grammar are correct?

Resources

Resource 1: Using group work in your classroom



Resource 1

What group work does

Group work can be a very effective way of motivating pupils to learn by encouraging them to think, communicate, exchange ideas and thoughts, and take decisions. In groups, pupils can both teach others and learn from each other in ways that result in a powerful and active form of learning.

When to do group work

Group work can be used:

- at the start of a lesson or topic, to find out what pupils already know;
- during a lesson, to encourage understanding or to share views and opinions about a topic;
- at the end of a lesson, to help pupils think about their learning and be clear about what they know and what they still need to understand.
- Before you start
 - Before starting a group session, be clear about what you want to achieve from it. It needs to have a clear purpose or objective. For example: ‘By the end of the session we will be able to describe how rain is formed and what it does to our local landscape.’
 - Divide the class into manageable groups depending on the size of your class, but don’t make them too large — everyone needs to be able to contribute. You may have to move furniture or perhaps have some groups outside.
 - Give each individual a job to do in the group. These could include: recorder of what’s said; organizer; devil’s advocate; peacekeeper; spokesperson; link person with other groups.
 - Decide ways in which you will divide pupils into groups. You could use friend groups, put people with similar interests together, have similar ability groups, mixed ability groups — or have no category at all. Which one will work best in the situation you are planning?
 - Plan enough time for the pupils to reach a conclusion as well as time at the end of the session for each group — and you — to summarize the conclusions.

Introducing the group work: Once pupils are in their groups, explain that working together to solve a problem or reach a decision is an important part of their learning and personal development.

From: KR_HO_Using_group_work_in_your_classroom.doc (<http://www.tessafrica.net>)

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Resource 2: Using brainstorming/mind maps



Resource 2

What is brainstorming?

Brainstorming is a group activity that generates as many ideas as possible on a specific issue or problem, then decides which idea(s) offer(s) the best solution. It involves creative thinking by the group to think of new ideas to address the issue or problem they are faced with. Brainstorming helps pupils to:

- understand a new topic;
- generate different ways to solve a problem;
- be excited by a new concept or idea;
- feel involved in a group activity that reaches agreement.

How to set up a brainstorming session:

Before starting a session, you need to identify a clear issue or problem. This can range from a simple word like ‘energy’ and what it means to the group, or something like ‘How can we develop our school environment?’

To set up a good brainstorming session, it is essential to have a word, question or problem that the group is likely to respond to. In very large classes, questions can be different for different groups. Groups should be as varied as possible in terms of gender and ability. There needs to be a large sheet of paper that all can see in a group of between six and eight pupils. The ideas of the group need to be recorded as the session progresses so that everyone knows what has been said and can build on or add to earlier ideas. Every idea must be written down, however unusual.

Before the session begins, the following rules are made clear:

- 1 Everyone in the group must be involved.
- 2 No one criticizes anyone else’s ideas or suggestions.
- 3 Unusual and innovative ideas are welcomed.
- 4 Lots of different ideas are needed.
- 5 Everyone needs to work quickly. Brainstorming is a fast activity.

Running the session

The teacher's role initially is to encourage discussion, involvement and the recording of ideas. When pupils begin to struggle for ideas, or time is up, get the group (or groups) to select their best three ideas and say why they have chosen these.

Finally:

- summarise for the class what they have done well;
- ask them what they found useful about their activity. What did they discover in the brainstorming that they didn't realise before?

What is mind mapping?

Mind mapping is a way of representing key aspects of a central topic. Mind maps are visual tools to help pupils structure and organise their own thinking about a concept or topic. A mind map reduces large amounts of information into an easy-to-understand diagram that shows the relationships and patterns between different aspects of the topic.

When to use a mind map

- A mind map is useful when you want to encourage creativity as its structure encourages free thinking.
- When trying to solve a problem, a mind map helps to highlight the aspects of the problem and how they relate to one another.
- A mind map can help to revise previous work with a class — quickly and in an organised way.
- Use mind maps when you want to encourage discussion, variety, experimentation and thinking in class groups.

How to make a mind map

- Begin by drawing a box in the centre of a piece of paper. Write in it the main theme, topic or idea you are going to represent.
- Make branches from the main box that have sub-themes associated with the main theme.
- Be creative with your basic map, adding in ideas around your sub-themes.
- Try a mind map out on your own before trying it with your class. You could use it as a demonstration.

From: TESSA Key resource: Using Brainstorming/Mind-maps Technique (www.tessafrica.net).

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Resource 3: A reporter's story



Resource 3

Transcript

A notorious thief escaped from Central Jail last night through a hole in a broken part of the old wall, Police Commissioner Smith informed our correspondent. A red alert has been sounded in the city, and the public has been warned to keep their doors securely locked at night.

A reward of 50,000 dollars has also been announced for any information on the escaped convict, who has been identified as Anthony Carlos. When he escaped, Anthony was in prison uniform. Here is the official description given by headquarters to our news desk. Anthony is about 5 feet 2 inches tall, with a round face, bulging eyes and a broad nose. He is about 35 years of age, bald and with a long scar across his forehead. He also has a thin moustache. The public has been requested to inform the police immediately if the thief is seen in their locality. The emergency numbers 100 and 101 will be open for the public 24 hours a day, police sources added.



Video

Resource file

See in the enclosed DVD a video recording of the activity:

- Scripts\Module4\Unit 1\Activity 1\Resource 3\Video\A_Reporters_Story.mp4



Audio

If you have trouble playing the video, you can have your students listen to the audio recording (below) of the same conversation:

- Scripts\Module4\Unit 1\Activity1\Resource 3\Audio\A_Reporters_Story.mp3

Resource 4: Common terms for describing physical features



Resource 4

- Face:** round/oval-shaped/square/pointed/triangular/angular/large
- Hair:** straight/wavy/curly/silky/shoulder-length/bald/thinning/grey/pepper-and-salt
- Eyes:** round/almond-shaped/small/large/soft/bulging/narrow/wide/Oriental/light
- Complexion:** fair/dark/dusky/light/rough/pale/sallow/sickly

Nose:	sharp/pointed/broad/small/flat/thin/large/hooked/flaring nostrils
Other marks:	mole/birthmark/scar/spot
Body shape:	thin/slim/stout/overweight/fat/angular/V-shaped
Lips:	thin/shapely/broad/bow-shaped/wide/pouting/full/cracked

Resource 5: Photographs of two men



Resource 5



Resource 6: News report on accident



Resource 6

Transcript

Good morning! Here are the news headlines for today. **First**, the national news. In our **next** section, we have a report coming in from Westlands. Four people perished in a grisly car crash along Waiyaki Way when a saloon car collided with an oncoming lorry in the wee hours of this morning. Our reporter Amos Kubai has more on that...

...Traffic was brought to a standstill for several hours when a saloon car heading to town collided with a lorry along Waiyaki Way, killing all four

passengers on board. According to eye witnesses, the lorry belonging to a city dairy company lost control and **then** swerved onto the wrong lane, ramming into the saloon car. **After the accident**, the lorry driver and his turn-boy, who were unhurt, took off and the police are still on their trail. **Incidentally**, this is the third accident to take place along the route this week. Previous incidents, 15 people lost their lives, including seven members of the same family.

Meanwhile, Nairobi area traffic commandant Alfayo Muthee has called on all road users to adhere to the highway code and to also ensure that their vehicles are in good working condition to avoid road carnage. Amos Kubai reporting for News 54 in Nairobi.



Video

Resource file

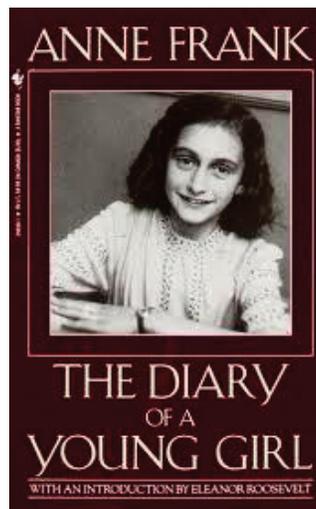
See in the enclosed DVD a video recording of the activity:

- Scripts\Module4\Unit1\Activity2\Resource6\News_Report.mp4

Resource 7: Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl



Resource 7



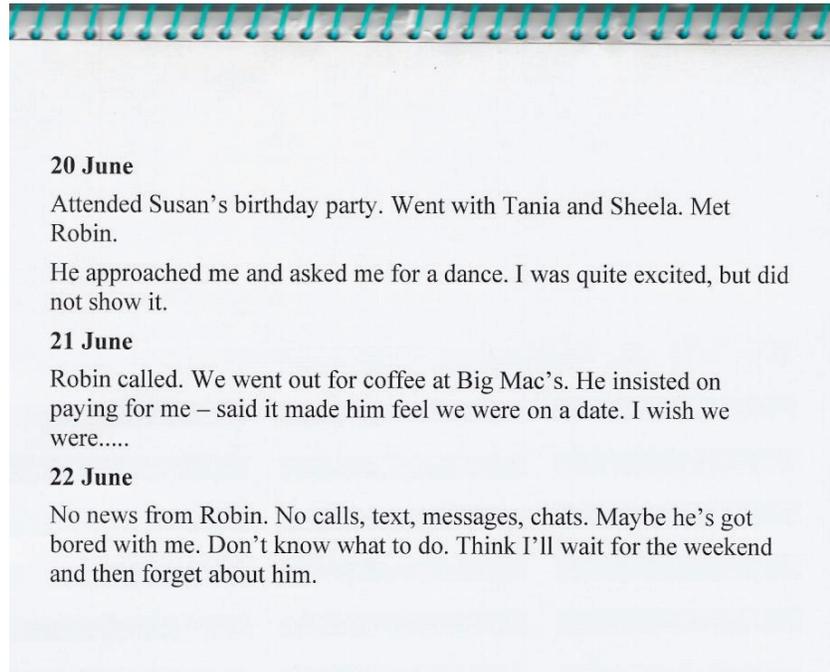
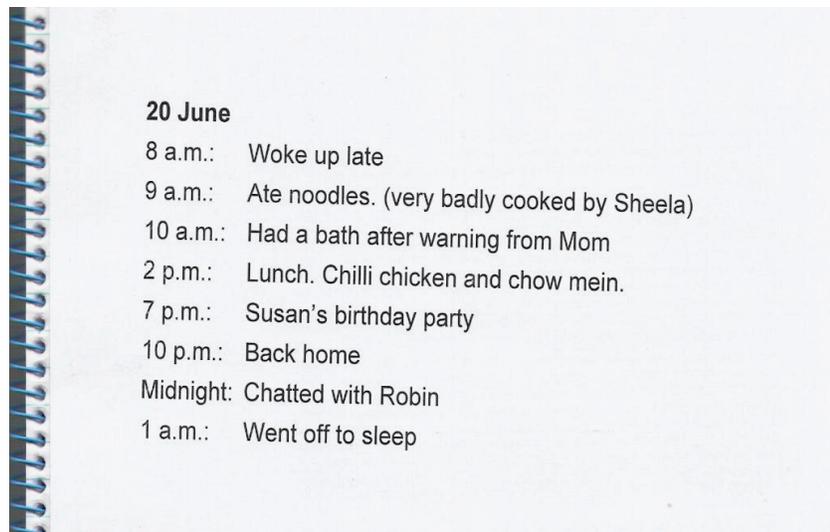
Resource 8: Sample diary entries



Resource 8

Sample 1

Dear Diary, 20th June
I've been dying to tell you what happened today! I suppose this is the best day of my life so far!
Guess what... Robin came away from his friends when I entered the hall at Susan's birthday party, and walked straight to me. I was so nervous that I began sweating. I pretended not to notice him coming, of course. Tania and Sheela pinched me from both sides, and just wouldn't LEAVE! I was really irritated, I tell you! But thankfully Robin looked at neither of them. He came straight to me, said 'Hi' and then guess what!!! He asked me for a DANCE!! Can you believe it!!! The school star footballer asking ME for a dance??? But I could have slapped myself just then, I tell you, dear diary! Instead of the low tone and husky voice that I carefully rehearsed for my words, I stammered and stuttered and actually tripped over my dress... but thankfully he didn't seem to notice.....

Sample 2

Sample 3

Resource 9: Guidelines on diary entries

Resource 9

- Write in the first person. A diary is a *personal* account of the events of a day or some hours in your life, so it is inappropriate to use the third person.

- In a diary we refer to events that have happened in our lives and to people who are in our lives.
- We disclose our innermost feelings in a diary, so a diary entry includes our emotions. In a diary we write about our *feelings* more than about *facts*.
- A diary has one particular point of view of events: our own. If we include other people's comments or judgement, we do it from our own perspective.
- A diary is a keeper of secrets. That is why a diary is for our own eyes only — we rarely allow others to read our diaries.
- For more guidelines and activities on diary writing, visit the website www.kidsonthenet.com/adventureisland/teachers/worksheet_diary.pdf

Teacher question and answer



Feedback

Question: In a large mixed ability class, when students are working in groups, how do I make sure that the slower learners are benefiting?

Answer: Make sure that the groups reflect the nature of your class. Groups should also be of mixed ability to ensure that the faster learners are assisting the slower ones. During group work make sure you move around to observe the participation in each group. Insist that every group member contribute at least one point to the discussion. When you pick some students' work to read, make sure that you pick from students of varied abilities.

Unit 2: Better Writing through Appropriate Vocabulary and Grammar

Introduction

JSS students are usually less confident about expressing themselves through writing because the language of their everyday speech differs greatly from that of written texts. They may have limited vocabulary and skills in punctuation, be less practised in producing original answers to comprehension questions and have little familiarity with producing original compositions.

However, their confidence can grow through practice in expanding their range of vocabulary and teaching them better grammar and punctuation skills. This unit provides some ways to help develop your students' spelling, grammar and punctuation skills.

Unit outcomes



Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit you will be able to:

- use different ways to enhance your students' vocabulary and punctuation skills,
- use authentic texts such as news reports to familiarise your students with conventions of grammar and uses of punctuation, and
- develop your students' confidence in communicating through writing.

Terminology



Terminology

Semantic markers:

Words and phrases that help signal the progression of ideas in a text. Semantic markers can perform various functions, such as showing the chronology of events (*firstly, then, eventually, in the end*), a cause and effect relationship (*since, because, so, consequently*), summing up (*in short, to sum up*), rephrasing (*in other words*) and so on. These expressions help a reader to navigate easily through a text.

Context:	The context of a word can be either <i>physical</i> or <i>linguistic</i> . The physical context refers to the real-world situation in which the word is used, as in “ <i>horrible</i> weather” (i.e., <i>bad</i> weather — when it’s raining heavily). The linguistic context refers to the words or sentences surrounding the word that help to make its meaning clear, as in “I don’t know what’s happening to me... I seem to be making mistakes all the time! It’s <i>horrible</i> ! I think I need to take a break” (<i>horrible</i> here referring to some unhappy circumstances).
Narrative:	A written text that may be a fictional or factual account of an event described in chronological order. A narrative usually has a clear beginning, middle and end, and includes descriptions, dialogues and comments. Novels, short stories, travelogues and biographies are some examples of narratives.
Collocational restrictions:	When two words cannot be used together to make a meaningful unit, we say that they have collocational restrictions . For example, the collocation <i>married spinster</i> is unacceptable, as are the phrases <i>smiling computer</i> or <i>manicured hair</i> . These combinations ignore collocational restrictions on grammar and meaning. A spinster is an unmarried woman, a computer is inanimate and hence cannot smile, and unlike nails or gardens, hair cannot be manicured. Collocation therefore refers to the appropriate use of a combination of words.

Teacher support information

One of the interesting things about the English language is that there is often little correspondence between the spoken and the written form. This means that many words in English — for example, *write*, *women*, *sight* and *white* — are pronounced differently from how they are spelt.

Sometimes the meaning that is conveyed depends on the spelling or the arrangements of the words. Words like *write*, *right* and *rite*, or *sight*, *cite* and *site* have different meanings, but are pronounced the same.

Similarly, the same sound may be spelt in different ways — for example, the sound “sh(u)n” in *mission* and *addition* (see **Resource 2: Commonly misspelled English words**). Or the same sequence of letters may be pronounced differently in different words — for example, the sequence *ough*, which has a different pronunciation in *rough* (“ruff”), *though* (“thoa”), *through* (“throo”) and *thought* (“thot”). These characteristics of English are a challenge to many students in secondary school. The case

study, resources and activities in this unit should help you use interesting activities to develop students' effective writing skills.

Case study



Case study

Mrs Mwemezi, the English Language teacher at Kabanga Secondary School consulted her scheme of work and found that her next topic was “Developing Better Writing.” She decided to use guided/controlled activities to teach this topic. To make the lessons more interactive she planned to use a variety of techniques including dictation, conversation and stories.

In the first lesson Mrs Mwemezi gave her students a passage she had carefully picked from a book for them to read in pairs. She asked the students to underline all the words that they did not understand. She then wrote the problem words on the board, and asked for the meanings from the other groups. She repeated the exercise for each group, until they had about 20 words on the board that were unfamiliar to all the students.

Mrs Mwemezi now practised with the students the strategy of “guessing meaning from the context.” For each word, she wrote a sentence that used the word in an appropriate context (for example, *The **contours** of this landscape are very interesting... sometimes the land goes up and down, and sometimes it breaks into deep valleys*). The class was now asked to supply possible meanings. Amid laughter and competition, the class came up with appropriate synonyms after several wrong guesses (**contours** = ~~quality, beauty, barriers~~, **shape**, etc.) for eight of the words. Having exhausted this resource, Mrs Mwemezi now used the next strategy.

She divided the class into four groups, and gave each group a set of three words from the list. The groups had to consult the dictionary and

- find the meaning of each word that most closely fit the meaning in the original story,
- look up the pronunciation of the word,
- use the word in a sentence of their own, and
- share their findings with the class.

For homework, Mrs Mwemezi asked each student to think about the possible heading of the passage. She also asked them to note the important information they got from the passage. In addition, she gave them a list of commonly misspelled words (see **Resource 2**) so that they could improve their vocabulary skills as well. In the next class, Mrs Mwemezi had the students write short summaries of the passage using some of the new words they had learned. The students enjoyed the exercise, and informed her that it would now be easy for them to remember and use those words in other compositions later on.

- Points to ponder**
- 1 What strategies do you use to help your students understand the meanings of unfamiliar words?
 - 2 How effective do you think it is to ask your students to refer to a dictionary every time they encounter a new word? If you have encouraged students to do this, has it helped them improve their vocabulary?

Activities

Activity 1: Expanding your students' vocabulary: Adjectives of quality



Activity 1

Adjectives of quality are a class of words used widely in narrative and descriptive texts. They are used for describing people, objects and events.

However, most English adjectives have **collocational restrictions**. For instance, the adjective *meticulous* will collocate with the nouns *planning*, *embroidery* or *work*, but is unlikely to be used with the noun *vocabulary*, as in the phrase *meticulous vocabulary*. This activity is meant to help you develop the students' skills in creative composition with exercises on using adjectives of quality. As a pre-task, show the students a picture of any object (an umbrella/a car/some scenery, etc.) and ask them randomly to use an adjective to describe it. For example, they might say *red/spotted/large/frilled/ladies'/silk umbrella*. Remind them that such adjectives are called adjectives of quality as they tell us more of the *distinctive* characteristics of the object (*umbrella*).

- Pick up any adjective from the ones supplied (e.g., *red*) and ask the students to replace it with synonyms. Encourage them to use words that are creative and interesting (*scarlet/crimson/fiery red/tomato red*, etc.). Discuss with them the special meanings that arise with each new synonym, and how one can use language creatively by using adjectives of quality appropriately.
- Now divide the class into groups of five or six and distribute the passage in **Resource 1**. Instruct the groups to replace the underlined adjectives with appropriate and interesting synonyms. Allow them to use a dictionary or thesaurus to be creative. After they finish, ask them to present the passages with the new adjectives. Discuss how each new version makes the passage more interesting.

As a homework assignment, ask the students to write a similar composition using the words they have just learned. This will help them improve their active vocabulary.

Activity 2: Using punctuation for effective writing



Activity 2

As a preparation for this lesson, put this well-known sentence on the board:

A bear eats shoots and leaves.

Now show your students, with a little humour, how the meaning of these words changes when we punctuate the words differently (and add extra text):

- 1 *A bear eats shoots and leaves.* (Describes what a bear eats.)
- 2 The hunter sees *a bear, eats, shoots and leaves.* (Narrates, a little dramatically, the actions of a hunter: four steps taken chronologically.)
- 3 Stopping for a while, *a bear eats shoots, and leaves.* (Narrates the chronology of the two things a bear does.)
- 4 A hunter sees *a bear, eats shoots, and leaves.* (Narrates the chronology of the three actions of the hunter.)

Call their attention to how punctuation marks such as commas and semi-colons can change the meaning in sentences and longer passages. You can highlight the fact that being able to use punctuation skilfully is a part of effective writing.

Now announce that you are going to test the students' punctuation skills, and put them in groups of four or five. Put on the board the following sentences from **Resource 3a: The Tortoise Story (extracts)**, note that these have no commas and speech marks. Alternatively, you can ask them to copy the lines, or distribute the text in a handout.

One day as he was strutting proudly around the kingdom Hare met Tortoise carrying a heavy load on her head.

Old bag of bones Hare said get out of my way before I push you off the path.

The task for each group is to put commas and speech marks (quotation marks) wherever appropriate **as they listen to you read the lines**. Play the audio clip of these lines, or read the lines aloud (paying attention to the punctuation).

After the students have finished the task, give them oral feedback. First read the lines again, but more slowly, pausing longer at commas and animating your facial expressions as you read the dialogue. Ask them to make corrections if they wish as they listen the second time, then have the groups do peer correction, while you punctuate the lines on the board.

If you wish to give them more practice, use different extracts from passages that illustrate the use of other punctuation marks such as the colon, dash, exclamations and so on.

Finally, give the students the first seven paragraphs of **The Tortoise Story** (up to "Wait and see," *Tortoise said.*) without punctuation, and ask them to read and punctuate the passage appropriately. After they have done so, play the audio version of the seven paragraphs (**Resource 3b**).

As a homework task, you can ask your students to write and bring to the class a short story (not more than three paragraphs) on a popular folk tale similar to **The Tortoise Story**, or have them make up their own story, with at least two characters and dialogue between them.

Activity 3: Effective writing: Using linkers and connectives



Activity 3

As you are aware, in any text, whether spoken or written, linkers and connectives (some of which are also sometimes called **semantic markers**) act like signposts that help us navigate through the text.

Expressions like *firstly*, *meanwhile*, *however*, *in other words* or *in short* help us understand the links between ideas, concepts and arguments in a text. To write effectively, your students need to learn how to use such markers for maximum effect.

Before having the students use linkers in their own compositions, it would be helpful to familiarise them with the functions of such connecting devices. For functions of semantic markers, see **Resource 4**.

- Announce to the class that they will hear two telecasts of the first news item of the evening news. As they listen, they will have to guess the differences between the two telecasts. Now play the video of two newscasters reading the evening news on television.
- If you cannot play the video, read aloud the transcripts of the news (see **Resource 5: Examples of semantic markers**) and ask the students to note the differences.
- Ask them which version they understood better, or found more interesting, and why. They should be able to tell you that the second version was better because the information was easier to follow because of the extra words used in this version. Before explaining or drawing their attention to the functions of semantic markers, give them another task on the texts to help them identify the linkers and semantic markers used. This one is a dictation task. Give the transcripts to the students in the form of a handout or write or display it to them on a slide or chalkboard. **Remember to replace the words in bold in Text 2 with dashes before you distribute the texts.** Before you begin the dictation, explain to the students that they should read both the texts in the handout carefully before doing the task. Their task would be to fill in the blanks by inserting the expressions they hear when you dictate Text 2.
- Now give them as a handout a passage from any of their subject textbooks, preferably a History or English literature textbook, that have some of these semantic markers, but delete the markers. Ask the students to work in pairs to discuss and fill in the appropriate semantic markers. Compare their insertions with the original text, and have a class discussion on which ones are appropriate and why.
- After taking the students through this process of understanding the use of semantic markers, give them a homework assignment to write a short passage, either (i) *a description of a memorable personal event*, or

(ii) a short essay on the advantages and disadvantages of using computers. Remind them to use the appropriate semantic markers. They can consult the list given in **Resource 4** or use their own.

Unit summary



Summary

In this unit you learned how to guide your students to expand their vocabulary, use correct punctuation and present their ideas and information in written form more clearly using linkers and semantic markers. These resources should give you ideas for engaging your students in similar activities in pairs and groups to practise other aspects of written communication such as writing in formal and informal situations.

Reflections



Reflection

- Did your students enjoy doing the activities?
- Do you think your students can now use punctuation more skilfully?
- Can you think of other activities to improve your students' vocabulary? Some common word games that your students might enjoy playing for vocabulary expansion are crossword puzzles, anagrams and guessing words from actions (dumb charades).
- Do you agree that students need to understand the functions of semantic markers and use them in their written work?

Assessment



Assessment

- In the case study, if you were Mrs Mwemezi, what would you have done differently? Explain how this would have helped students learn better.

Resources

Resource 1: Passage on adjectives of quality



Resource 1

The Incas: A unique civilisation

The Incas of Peru were one of the most **civilised** races that lived on earth. They were a **small** ethnic group who came to rule an empire of more than 12 million people. They established their **powerful** empire in Cuzco in Peru and built their kingdom using **splendid** architectural designs. The Incas were also **skilled** craftsmen who created **beautiful** jewellery and textiles. They were **able** administrators who ruled with a mixture of force and kindness. They were also **tolerant** rulers, and allowed people of different races to practise their religions and cultures peacefully.

Things changed, however, when the Spanish conquerors arrived in 1532.

With an army of fewer than 400 men, the **cunning** Spanish defeated the Inca army of 40,000 soldiers. Then the **vicious** conquerors began looting and plundering the riches of the Inca culture. Most of the **amazing** architecture and **intricate** buildings the Incas had carefully built were torn down and replaced by Spanish-style palaces and fortresses.

Luckily for the world, one **astonishing** discovery was made in 1911 of a **splendid** piece of Inca architecture. It was of **Machu Picchu**, the temple of the sun god. This **magnificent** Inca memorial stands at the top of a mountain near the Urubamba river in Peru. The Incas did not survive, but their temple remains a **glorious** tribute to their civilization: a **timeless** memorial of the greatness of a people we can only read about in history books.

Resource 2: Commonly misspelled English words



Resource 2

Spelling words correctly is one of the skills of effective writing. Some words may change their meaning if spelled differently (*live/leave; write/right; assent/ascent*) which could make the text meaningless.

Because many pairs of words in English are pronounced the same, people often confuse their spellings and use such words in the wrong contexts. People also often misspell words with double letters.

Here are some commonly misspelled English words.

Words with double consonants

accommodation	aggression	bubble
address	business	committee

commission	middle	success
fiddle	millennium	
feel	summon	

Words with “i” before “e,” “e” before “i,” “a” before “e” or “a” after “e”:

belief	deceive	please
thief	conceive	meal
friend	aegis	mean
briefing	aesthetic	seam
field	algae	knead
receive	caesar	
receipt	faeces	

Words with “au” or “ou”:

beautiful	accountant	fabulous
bureaucracy	contentious	congruous
restaurant	generous	zealous

Words that sound similar are called *homophones*:

assent – ascent	peace – piece
break – brake	principal – principle
cereal – serial	red – read
complement – compliment	seize – cease
course – coarse	waste – waist
great – grate	weather – whether
jail – gaol	

Resource 3a: The Tortoise Story (extracts)



Resource 3a

Transcript

One day as he was strutting proudly around the kingdom, Hare met Tortoise carrying a heavy load on her head.

Old bag of bones, Hare said, get out of my way before I push you off the path.



Audio

Resource files

See in the enclosed DVD an audio recording of the activity:

- Scripts\Module4\Unit2\Activity2\Resource3a\Audio\Short_Sentences_With Punctuation.mp3
- Scripts\Module4\Unit2\Activity2\Resource3a\Audio\Short_Sentences_Without_Punctuation.mp3

Resource 3b: The Tortoise Story



Resource 3b

Transcript

Hare always won all the competitions held in the animal kingdom. No other animal was cleverer than him or could run faster. Although he was small, Hare always came up with ways to make sure he won any competition.

Because of his cunning ways, Hare was always proud and treated other animals with lack of concern. In short, he was arrogant and rude and wanted to have his own way all the time.

One day, as he was strutting proudly around the kingdom, Hare met Tortoise carrying a heavy load on her head.

“Old bag of bones,” Hare said, “Get out of my way before I push you off the path!”

Tortoise was very angry. “How dare you insult me? Don’t think yourself smart in everything. I can outrun you in a race.”

Hare laughed heartily and said: “How dare you challenge the honourable Hare to race?”

“Wait and see,” Tortoise said.

The day Tortoise beat Hare in a race

BY PAUL KARIUKI

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Because of his cunning ways, Hare was always proud and treated other animals with lack of concern. In short, he was arrogant and rude and wanted to have his own way all the time.

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"Old bag of bones," Hare said, "Get out of my way before I push you off the path!"

Tortoise was very angry. "How dare you insult me? Don't think yourself smart in everything. I can outrun you in a race."

Hare laughed heartily and said: "How dare you to challenge the honourable Hare to a race?"

"Wait and see," Tortoise said.

When the other animals heard about this, they were excited. No one thought Tortoise would actually challenge the Hare to a race. The wise king Lion proclaimed a day for the race.

On the race day, many animals gathered to witness the contest. At the starting point, Hare took off at a great speed, leaving Tortoise behind in a cloud of dust. Midway to the finish line, he took a nap thinking Tortoise was far off. He fell into a deep sleep and when he awoke, Tortoise had overtaken him.

Hare then sprinted at great speed. When he came close to the finish line, he could see Tortoise crossing the finish line as all the other animals cheered loudly, stamped their hooves and clapped their wings.

Hare had been beaten! He could not even bring himself to the finish line but slipped away in shame.

LESSON: Pride comes before a fall.
from Sunday April 18th THE STANDARD page 18



Audio

Resource file

See in the enclosed DVD an audio recording of the activity:

- Scripts\Module4\Unit2\Activity2\Resource3b\Audio\Tortoise_Story.mp3

Resource 4: Functions of semantic markers



Resource 4

Semantic markers are important cohesive devices that serve as “signposts” to connect ideas in any piece of writing.

Some broad categories of semantic markers and their functions are:

- List of points (*firstly, secondly, finally*).
- Time relationships (*next, then, eventually*).
- Illustration (*for example, for instance*).
- Rephrasing (*in other words*).
- Emphasis (*a crucial point is, importantly*).
- Expressing a condition (*if, unless, until*).

- Counter-arguments or contrasts (*but, however, on the other hand*).
- Summary or conclusion (*to sum up, the gist of it is*).

For more information on the use of semantic markers (also referred to as discourse markers) look up Wallace, Michael J. (2009). *Study Skills in English* (Second Edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Resource 5: Examples of semantic markers



Resource 5

News report transcripts

Text 1

The prime minister announced that the Commonwealth Games would be held smoothly, despite delays in the preparation of venues. Construction rubble would be cleared from roads by the end of this month. The Sports Ministry has called for a high-level meeting on Monday to discuss the final touches to the Games. There would be three levels of activity, a spokesperson for the ministry told this channel. A team of top security experts would visit the venue to seal all entries. International observers for the Games would inspect the facilities. The prime minister would visit the stadia before declaring the Games venues ready. The ministry stated work on the venues would be halted. It wanted the contractors to clear all venues and roads of the construction waste and heavy machinery that still blocked many of the main streets of the city. It would cause delay. The ministry believed the Games would begin on time. Everything would be done to make this Commonwealth Games the greatest sports event ever organised by a Third World country.

Text 2

The prime minister **today** announced that the Commonwealth Games would be held smoothly, **despite** delays in the preparation of venues. *He also made it clear that* construction rubble would be cleared from roads by the end of this month. **Meanwhile**, the Sports Ministry has called for a high-level meeting on Monday to discuss the final touches to the Games. There would be three levels of activity, a spokesperson for the ministry told this channel **today**. **Firstly**, a team of top security experts would visit the venue to seal all entries. **After that**, international observers for the Games would inspect the facilities, and **finally**, the prime minister would himself visit the stadia before declaring the Games venues ready.

However, the ministry added, work on the venues would be halted **next week**, **as** it wanted the contractors to clear all venues and roads of the construction waste and heavy machinery that **still** blocked many of the main streets of the city. **In spite of the delay that might cause**, the ministry believed that the Games would begin on time. **In short**, everything would be done to make this Commonwealth Games the greatest sports event ever organised by a Third World country.



Video

Resource files

See in the enclosed DVD a video recording of the activity:

- Scripts\Module4\Unit2\Activity3\Resource5\Video\Telecast1.mp4
- Scripts\Module4\Unit2\Activity3\Resource5\Video\Telecast2.mp4

Teacher question and answer



Feedback

Question:

How can I use the audio resources when I do not have any audio equipment?

Answer:

Your voice or your students' voices are good audio resources. You may read the script aloud or ask one of your students to read it aloud to his or her classmates.

Unit 3: Writing for Effective Communication: Formal Occasions

Introduction

As we are all aware, English remains the most popular language of official and business communication. It is the medium through which we apply for jobs or for leave, present our findings, write important notifications or communicate with colleagues in the workplace. As young adults preparing for professional or vocational education, your JSS students need to practise communicating effectively in writing in formal situations. This unit aims to provide you with opportunities to explore a variety of techniques to assist your students to communicate effectively through letters, notices and reports.

Unit outcomes



Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit you will be able to:

- introduce your students to formal written communication through business letters, notices and reports;
- teach JSS students to write formal letters;
- familiarise your students with the format of notices; and
- give your students some exposure to reports.

Terminology



Terminology

Formal communication:

Communication for official or business purposes. It often has a prescribed format. A formal letter is an example of business or official communication.

Informal communication:

Familiar, casual and personal communication. An informal letter, for example, is a way of communicating with people we are close to or familiar with.

Summary:

A brief statement that presents the main points in a concise form.

Report: A written summary/analysis of an event, which may include numerical data and factual details. Reports may be short, such as news reports, or detailed summaries of official meetings and presentations.

Teacher support information

Effective communication is an essential element of writing. The case study and activities in this unit identify some of the teaching techniques that can assist you in developing your students' ability to communicate effectively. Through demonstration and discussion, for example, your students will explore the importance of taking time to consider who they are writing to, what they wish to communicate and how they can present their message or ideas better to achieve effective communication. The Resources section has additional materials to supplement your activities.

Case study



Case study

Mrs Mwasala, a Form Two English Language teacher at Juani Secondary School, decided to try a new method of teaching letter writing. She read out to the class a letter that she claimed to have found in the corridor, and asked them to say what kind of letter it was. The students said it was a love letter. Mrs Mwasala then distributed a copy of the letter to her students, working in pairs, and asked them to write a reply to the letter.

Mrs Mwasala then formed groups made up of three pairs each, and asked all the groups to note the format of the letters they had written. As she moved from group to group, she noticed that they were able to clearly differentiate the sections of the letter, including the salutation and closing. She then asked one member of each group to write a similar format on the board, and reminded the students that this kind of format belonged to an **informal letter (Resources 1 and 2)**.

After identifying the main features of the informal letter, Mrs Mwasala focused on the content. She showed samples of personal letters to her students, and explained that the content of letters to and from friends and relatives focuses on personal matters, making them less formal than business letters. However, she pointed out, they still follow a certain format, including the address of the writer, the date, introduction, body and conclusion.

Then she asked each student to write a letter to a relative or a friend. Later, working in groups, the students read, discussed and edited their letters. The final drafts were compiled in a class book.

In the next lesson Mrs Mwasala taught her students the format and content of formal letters. She brought along samples of formal and

business letters (**Resource 3**), and also newspaper cuttings of job advertisements.

She asked students in their groups to read the job advertisements and find the following information:

- 1 The name of the company, institution or agency advertising the job.
- 2 The qualifications they were looking for.
- 3 The personal details of the candidate the advertiser was looking for.

Then Mrs Mwasala gave samples of formal and business letters to the students (job applications) and asked them to note the pattern/format of the letters.

In the next class, Mrs Mwasala had the students draft a letter of application in answer to the advertisement they had read the previous day. They were told to use the format of the sample letters. For the content, she asked them to use the information they had noted in the previous class.

The letters were so good that some students obtained temporary jobs during their school holidays on the strength of these letters.

Points to ponder

- 1 Do your students write letters? Have you asked them to bring their own personal letters to the class and used these to teach?
- 2 Since people rarely write personal letters nowadays, do you think we should stop teaching this and concentrate on official letters only? Why, or why not?

Activities

Activity 1: Communicating effectively: Writing a business letter



Activity 1

- For this activity, put the students in groups and give each group at least three different types of letters — a job application, a personal letter and a letter of complaint.
- Ask them to identify which of the letters are personal and which are official, and to mark the differences between personal and official letters.
- Use their feedback to discuss the format of a business letter (i.e., a letter written for official purposes such as job applications, complaint letters, etc.). Draw their attention to the particular differences in the format, such as the date, the salutation, the subject line and so on. Let representatives of each group write on the board one part each of a business letter.

- To make them more familiar with the format of official letters, give them an activity to do in pairs (**Resource 4: Format of a business letter [worksheet]**). Using the sample official letters given in **Resource 3** to guide them, have them practise parts of the format, as given in the worksheet in **Resource 4**.
- As part of the feedback, remember to point out that there are no fixed rules in letter writing; there are only conventions that allow people to communicate with the least amount of confusion. For example, the North American convention is to write the month before the date, whereas in the British tradition the date precedes the month. For example, 12 April 2010 or 12.04.2010 is the British format, and April 12, 2010, or 04.12.2010 is the North American format, with the abbreviated form leading to possible confusion with 4 December 2010 for British people. To avoid this, it is better to write the date as 12 April 2010.
- For the next part of the task, give the students information about the content of a letter they will write with a partner. The letter will:
 - be addressed to their Sports teacher Ms Caroline Mandela,
 - make a request to cancel morning practice the next day, and
 - explain to her that the principal has asked them to sort and keep the newly bought books in the library.
- At the end of the activity, have the pairs exchange their draft letters and make corrections under your supervision.
- As homework, they should add, delete or modify their letter as suggested, check for spelling and grammatical errors and make the letter ready for submission.

Activity 2: Communicating with wider audiences: Writing a notice



Activity 2

As you are aware, the noticeboard of an institution is usually a regularly visited area. Much communication between authorities/employers and students/staff/employees is conveyed through the noticeboard. Notices can be for various purposes, such as the announcement of events, reminders, information about lost and found goods, and so on.

When teaching students how to write a notice, we need to keep in mind the style: the format, the sentence structures, the manner in which important information is highlighted and so on. For this activity, bring copies of notices from your school noticeboard (or you can design your own notices), preferably announcing events that are of interest to students (for example, sports/co-curricular activities). (See **Resource 7b** for a standard notice.) Make sure your samples have similar formats so that it is easier for students to list the important features of a notice.

Also bring samples of official letters to contrast the style of a notice with that of a letter.

Before showing your students the sample notices, have a class discussion on the ways in which people share written information with a large number of people at the same time. You could begin the discussion by asking them how their school communicates to them important information about co-curricular activities, exam schedules, competitions or exhibitions to elicit the word *notice* from them. Draw their attention to why letters, emails or other similar ways of communicating cannot be used in such situations (explain that these are ways we communicate with one person or a limited group of people we know personally or professionally).

For the activity, ask the students about the kinds of topics that we find in notices (lost and found, announcement of events, reminders of deadlines, warnings, etc.). Once you have a list of their contributions, choose a topic for the class activity (preferably something familiar to them, such as a lost-and-found notice).

Break the class into groups of five. Give each group a sample notice and a sample letter.

Ask the groups to list points about the format of the notice. Their points should include the structure, how contact details are given (see **Resource 7a**), and so on. After ten minutes, collect their feedback and write the points on the board.

Alternatively, you can use the sample notice in **Resource 7b** for a similar task. For this task, rewrite the contents of the sample notice in essay form (i.e., without breaking it into headings, sub-headings, capitalisation, etc.). Have the students work in pairs and give them this copy and the sample notice. Let them study the two formats and decide which one is suitable for a notice, and which is more suitable for giving information in a different form. This task should make the students aware of the special format and content style of notices.

The students should now be ready to write a notice for their class noticeboard. Have the students work in groups to design different types of notices: a lost-and-found notice, one announcing a competition, another issuing a warning about late arrival for morning assembly and so on. Have the groups exchange their notices and edit them. The groups should then take their own compositions back to make final copies, which can subsequently be put up in the class display board.

Activity 3: Communicating effectively: Writing a report



Activity 3

As you are aware, a report is a short and concise summary of an event. However, a professional report includes much more than a summary; it has tables of figures, diagrams, analyses of the event and a bibliography listing the documents consulted during the writing of the report.

At this level, your JSS students need not learn the details of writing a professional report. But it is important for them to practise summary writing for real-life purposes, one of which is report writing. You can have them practise the skills of report writing by using newspaper reports as a model. A newspaper report is aimed at a general audience and so presents important events in a concise way, using simple vocabulary and structures. Note also that newspaper reports are usually written in the **passive voice**, because the focus is on the event that occurred and its effects. For example, headlines frequently begin *Three killed in road accident.../World chess champion Vishwanathan Anand's citizenship questioned...* and so on, because the person behind the action is less important than the event itself.

The following activity is designed to help your students practise writing a simple report for a general audience. Before you begin, bring to the class a selection of newspaper reports like the one in **Resource 5**.

- To begin the activity, put up on the board the two headlines given above, and ask your students to guess where they might see such sentences.
- Then, alongside each headline, place the same sentence in the **active voice** (*A bus driver killed three people in a road accident.../The government home department questions the citizenship of world chess champion Vishwanathan Anand*), and ask them what is different in each pair of active and passive sentences. Ask them about the difference in **structure** (passive or active), **the focus** (the action itself/the doer of the action) and **style** (use of numerals and short sentences, inclusion of only important facts, no personal opinions, etc.).
- Announce that the headlines they studied were from **newspaper reports**, and that they are going to learn how to write a report. With their input, draw up a list of points to remember while writing a report; for example, include only important points, use passive structures where possible, keep the important points in the correct sequence, avoid personal opinions and so on. For the activity, divide the class into groups of five, and give them sample newspaper reports as a guide. Then give them a passage and ask them to draft a short report on it. Make sure that for half of the groups, the passage is in list form (a list of important points) (see **Resource 6a**), and for the other half, the passage should be in essay form (see **Resource 6b**). The first (list) will need to be *expanded*, while the second (essay) will need to be *shortened*. This means that half of the groups will have an *expansion* activity, while the other half will have a *contraction* activity. This allows you to address both types of report writing.

Once the drafts are ready, have the groups exchange their drafts with one another, and suggest corrections in the content and style of each draft report, wherever necessary. Afterwards, have a class discussion on the suggested corrections to highlight the different strategies they needed to use while *expanding* information from list notes, and *contracting* information from an essay format. Again, review the techniques of writing a report that they discussed before they began the activity.

- To complete the process of writing, give the groups their drafts back for editing and final submission with the necessary corrections. Have them compare their report with the original essay/list they received so that they can check the information is correct and in order.
- As a homework assignment, you could ask them to read that day's newspaper or listen to a news item on television and write a report on it for the next class. This individual follow-up activity will give your students an opportunity to practise their newly acquired report writing skills.

Unit summary



Summary

In this unit you learned how to develop your students' skills in writing formal letters and how to use questioning techniques to guide students in making good summaries or reports. The activities can also help you expand your students' vocabulary.

Reflections



Reflection

- Did the students write good formal letters?
- Did you complete the activity within the planned time?
- Did the students enjoy the lesson?
- Which part of this unit would you like to modify to suit your classroom situation?

Assessment



Assessment

- What other forms of official communication should we teach JSS students?
- Can you design an activity to teach students how to write a bio-data sheet? Do you think this would be a useful exercise for your students?

Resources

Resource 1: Writing informal letters



Resource 1

Most people have either written or received an informal letter from a relative, a friend or an acquaintance. An informal letter is often written for the purpose of communicating with someone we are close to, or are familiar or comfortable with.

Informal letters are therefore less structured and personal. However, informal letters still follow a certain format, including the address of the writer, the date, an introduction, the body and a conclusion.

The introduction is usually in the form of a greeting, self-introduction and very short summary of the main topic of the letter.

The body usually consists of the writer's message, along with any extra details he or she may want to convey.

In the conclusion the writer wraps everything up. This is the place to sum up the main idea of the letter, thank the recipient for their time, wish the recipient well and/or ask any questions.

Resource 2: Sample informal letter



Resource 2

Tabora

12/11/2009

Dear Susan,

How are you?

I hope you are fine. I am fine too.

I know it has only been two months since I was transferred to this school but it feels like such a long time since the last time I saw you. How are you enjoying school these days? Have you made new friends?

So far my experience with Mkombozi Secondary School has been great! I have managed to make new friends. Although there is no beach close by I am enjoying nice shades of mango trees. I've been playing lots of netball and I'm also learning to play soccer. Soccer is a bit tough and requires more energy but we have a good coach.

On the weekends I visit with my friends or go gardening with Mummy and Hamza. Dad and Mum have acquired a small plot and we are all excited about it. If you come to visit you will eat mangoes from our garden. We have two mango trees in our plot.

I have come to like this place but I wish you were here to share it with me. I may come to visit during the mid-year vacation. Do you think you'll be around? If you are, we could spend some time together catching up!

Please write and tell me what is happening over there.

With love,

Sophia

Resource 3: Writing formal/official/business letters

1 Sample official letter



Malaika High School
P.O BOX 114576-12378
Kyemole, Kenya
July 20, 2006

*The Head Prefect
Mwaka Secondary School
P.O BOX 23456
Bukoba*

Subject: Preparations for the District Netball Tournament

Dear Ms. Ashuru Hasani

This is further to our meeting of last week in which we agreed to hold a series of meetings over the next two months to review our experiences with the preparations for the District Netball Tournament. As discussed at that meeting. The objectives of our reviews sessions will be to:

- Review and assess the overall effectiveness of the training programme;
- Identify and document strength and weaknesses of the programme;
- Propose some solutions to address areas of weakness;
- Develop an approach and action plan for next month's practice programme;
- Select the students for our ward team.

As agreed, meetings will be held every second Thursday from 9:00 a.m. until noon, and the location will alternate between our two schools, the first one to be convened here at Kabanga School on August 14, 2009.

As discussed, at the end of the process, Jamila Kisanga will be our coach. As requested, a copy of her C.V. has been enclosed.

I trust I have covered all of the points that we discussed. If you have any question or would like to add anything please give me a call at +2540203533944.

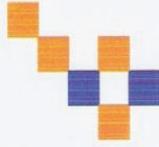
We look forward to seeing you at the August 14TH meeting.

Sincerely,



Alinda Kato
Head Girl
Malaika High School

2 Sample business letter



TANGERINE SYSTEM SOLUTIONS LTD
P.O. Box 20704 – 00100, Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: +254 20 353 3944, 20 250 8839
Email: info@tangerinegroup.co.ke
URL: www.tangerinegroup.co.ke

November 24, 2009

Ref: TSS/REC./VOL.1/10373
Mr. Mwinyinja Hali
P.O BOX 4598
Dares Salaam

Dear Sir,

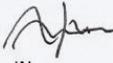
RE: Your application for the Position of Supplies Officer

We acknowledge receipt of your application for the position of Supplies officer in our company.

This communication is to invite you to the interview session that will be held on Monday, 13TH January, 2010 at our main office, Southgate Centre, Mukoma Road, Nairobi.

The interviews will start at 9:00 am.

Please come with your original certificates.

Sincerely,

JNvua
Jamal Nvua
Supplies Manager,
Tangerine System Solutions
P.O. Box 20704-00100

Resource 4: Format of a business letter (worksheet)



Resource 4

Here are some ways of writing the important information in a letter to an employer to apply for leave. Looking at the format of the sample letter you have been given, select the appropriate forms by circling them.

1	Name of addressor:	Rodney Hubner Mr Rodney Hubner R. Hubner
2	Date:	18 th July, '10 18.07.2010 18 July, 2010 2010.07.18
3	Subject line:	I'd like to go on leave Application for leave of absence Applying for leave Prayer for granting leave of absence
4	Salutation:	Dear Sir My dear Sir Dear Mr Rodney Hubner Dear Rodney
5	Introduction:	We would like to inform you that... This is to acknowledge... I hope you are well... The reason I'm writing to you is...
6	Ending:	Bye for now. Sincerely/Yours faithfully. I remain,

Resource 5: The language of newspaper reports



Resource 5

Transcript

Report on the Manila hostage drama: *The Hindu*, Tuesday, 24 August 2010, Manila.

Seven people were killed on Monday in the Philippines when an ex-sacked police officer seized a tourist bus and opened fire at his hostages before he was killed by police.

Six of the dead were Chinese passengers held for more than 10 hours inside the air-conditioned bus in a seaside park in Manila City, according to doctors at two hospitals where they were brought.

The hostage-taker, dismissed police officer Rolando Del Rosario Mendoza, was also killed in an exchange of gunfire with the police assault team, authorities said.

There were 15 Chinese tourists and a Filipino driver being held in the bus when the violence erupted.

The driver escaped from the bus when Mendoza began to open fire in an angry outburst after seeing his brother, who was helping in the negotiations, dragged away by police.

Six Chinese hostages survived the assault but suffered various injuries. One woman cried hysterically as she was helped out of the vehicle, whose glass windows were shattered.

Interior Secretary Jesse Robredo said the government was “saddened” by the violent end to the standoff, which began more than 10 hours earlier.

Armed with an M16 assault rifle, Mendoza seized the bus and demanded that authorities reconsider his dismissal from the force in February 2009 due to extortion and harassment.

He warned authorities of violence if his demand was not met.

There were 25 people inside the bus when it was seized, including 20 Chinese tourists, a travel guide from Hong Kong and four Filipinos.

Six Chinese tourists, including three children, and three Filipinos were subsequently freed unharmed as “gifts” to negotiators, said Manila City Vice [Police Chief] Isko Moreno.

Before Mendoza opened fire, a Chinese woman told DZXL radio station that she and her daughter were among the hostages.

“We are okay but we are afraid,” she said.

The hostage-taking played out on live national television, giving Mendoza a chance to see most of the movements of the police from inside the tourist bus.

The Hong Kong government said it had chartered a plane to take relatives of the dead and injured holiday makers to Manila. — DPA



Audio

Resource file

See in the enclosed DVD an audio recording of the activity:

- Scripts\Module4\Unit3\Activity3\Resource5\Audio\The Language of Newspaper Reports.mp3

Resource 6a: Topic for report writing (list)

Resource 6a

Annual School Sports Day

- 1 Inaugural function: flag hoisting by principal, speech by principal, welcome address by vice principal, declaration of Games open by Chief Guest the Honourable Governor (9:00 a.m.), Assembly Hall.
- 2 Announcement of Schedule and Agenda by Sports teacher, students arranged around the playground according to classes. (9:30 a.m.), Assembly Hall.
- 3 First set of events: (10:00 a.m. to noon.) Athletics (100, 200 & 400 m races, pole vault, javelin throw, high jump and long jump), Race Track.
- 4 Second set of events: (12 noon to 2:00 p.m.) Football, basketball and handball, Mini Field.
- 5 Lunch: (1:00 p.m. onwards.) Marquee (tarpaulin tent) outside Assembly Hall.
- 6 Third set of events: (2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.) Table tennis, badminton and chess, Indoor Hall.
- 7 Prize distribution: (4:00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m.) Declaration of Games Closed by principal, announcement and distribution of prizes by Chief Guest, Assembly Hall.

Resource 6b: Topic for report writing (essay)

Resources 6b

Annual School Sports Day

The Annual School Sports Day was inaugurated by the principal in the Assembly Hall at 9:00 a.m. today. The function began with the principal hoisting the school flag, and then gave a speech. This was followed by a welcome address by the vice principal, thanking all the guests, parents and students for gracing the occasion and participating. The Games were

then declared open by the Chief Guest — the Honourable Governor. The inaugural function was well attended, and ended on time. The principal then invited everyone to help themselves to refreshments and enjoy the sporting events. At 9:30 a.m., the Sports teacher announced the schedule and agenda for the day and gave instructions to each class about their allotted places in the grounds.

The Sports Day had several categories of events lined up for sports lovers. All the events were scheduled between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., with lunch served in a central marquee (tarpaulin tent) just outside the Assembly Hall, so that large numbers of people could dine at the same time. The first set of events was Athletics with track and field events: the 100, 200 and 400 metre races on the Race Track, pole vault and javelin throw on the far end of the track, and high jump and long jump events on the inner field. These events ran from 10:00 a.m. until noon, so that other events could be organised without delay. The days being shorter in the winter now, the school took care to organise the games well within daylight hours.

The principal organised the events in such a way that all the spectators could watch all the events, both indoors and outdoors. Athletics was followed by team sports — football, basketball and handball. The finals of these three sports were played between 12 noon and 2:00 p.m. in the Mini Field, and people were free to bring lunch from the marquee and have it on the grounds on the condition of no littering.

The last set of events was indoor games — table tennis, badminton and chess, which were organised in the school's Indoor Hall. The table tennis, badminton and chess games were played one after another, from 2:00 p.m. until 4:00 p.m.

The day went smoothly, with no major hiccups and just ten minutes of extra time. The prize distribution ceremony was held right after the events were over and lasted from 4:00 p.m. until 5.30 p.m. The Chief Guest, who had graciously stayed for the entire day, was called upon to award the winners of the various events. In the closing ceremony, the principal first declared the Games closed, and then asked the Honourable Governor to both announce and distribute the prizes to the winners. The ceremony was held in the Assembly Hall so that all the attending parents could proudly watch their children walk up to the dais to receive their prizes. The Chief Guest then thanked the organisers, participants and spectators for making the day a success, and admitted that he had enjoyed himself more than he had expected. The school authorities thanked the guest on behalf of everyone, and with this, the Annual School Sports Day came to an end.

Resource 7a: Important points about notices



Resource 7a

Notices, especially in schools, provide information about things lost and found, events that have happened or are about to happen, meetings, functions, tours, fairs, exhibitions, camps, etc., being organised or postponed, new developments in the institutions or new rules and so on.

- Notices should contain only the relevant information in simple language.
- A notice should provide details of the following:
 - 1 What is the information.
 - 2 Who is giving the information.
 - 3 Who the information is intended for.
 - 4 What is the action to be taken.
 - 5 Date, time and venue, if it is about an event.
- Notices should use CAPITAL LETTERS for the word *notice*, the name of the school, the heading, and the name and designation of the contact person.
- The heading must be eye-catching.

Resource 7b: Notice for a debating competition



Resource 7b

N O T I C E
LITTLE FLOWER SCHOOL, ADDIS ABABA
JOIN ONE JOIN ALL! EARN NAME AND FAME!

Date: 12 September 2010

Little Flower School is organising an Inter-School Debating Competition for Junior Secondary students. Interested participants should register their names on or before 30 September 2010. The first prize is \$1000/- and a trophy. All competitors will be awarded certificates of participation.

Date: 15 October 2010 Time: 11:00 a.m.

Venue: School auditorium

Last date for registration: 30 September 2010

For more details contact the undersigned at his office between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., Monday to Friday.

Signed/-

Richard Kimolo

(RICHARD KIMOLO, DEBATING SECRETARY, LITTLE FLOWER SCHOOL)

Teacher question and answer



Feedback

Question: Would it help if I brought actual samples of official documents such as job advertisements in newspapers, bank forms or application forms of colleges or companies? How can I use these in the class?

Answer: Bringing actual documents (also called *authentic materials*) to the class is in fact a desirable strategy for effective teaching. Actual documents are interesting for students as they give them a taste of real-life communication. Commonly available books on letter writing or notice writing do not give students the experience of real communication, so devising pair- and group-work tasks to help students respond to such forms or job advertisements will be good classroom activities.

Unit 4: Effective Writing across the Curriculum

Introduction

One of the skills that students need to develop to perform well in higher studies is the ability to write essays on academic topics, including scientific reports, analyses of historical/political/social events, summaries of discussions and notes on lectures or texts. Students who acquire better writing skills in their early years of education therefore have better performance records at higher levels. This unit on writing across the curriculum aims to help you develop your students' skills to communicate effectively in writing for academic purposes.

Unit outcomes



Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit you will be able to:

- identify strategies for developing your students' ability to compose written texts for academic purposes,
- introduce your students to the steps that need to be followed in writing a technical report, and
- organise visits (e.g., to the library or museum) and develop investigation techniques to guide your students in identifying sources of information.

Terminology



Terminology

- Essay:** A composition in prose, in which a writer discusses a topic, usually restricted in scope, or tries to persuade the reader to accept a particular point of view.
- Report:** An account or statement describing in detail an event or situation, usually as the result of observation, inquiry, etc., such as a scientific report or a report on an academic event.
- Note taking:** The process of writing down the important points from a lecture or a written text for future reference.

Teacher support information

Writing an essay or a report is a process. It is unusual for anyone to be able to compose a text in one sitting, either with pen and paper or at a computer. The process begins with brainstorming ideas to include in the document, sequencing/removing/adapting them, making a draft, editing the content for grammar and style and then putting together a final work. (See **Resource 1a: Steps in essay writing.**)

It is also important to note that even though you can write different compositions, essays and reports, they all comprise four major parts: the title, the introduction, the body and the conclusion. (See **Resource 1b: Four major parts of an essay or report.**) It is also important to note that in order to write a good essay or report you need to have useful information to communicate.

Case study



Case study

Asha Kalunde is an English Language teacher at Kijiweni Secondary School in a remote district of Kabaji. One day the head teacher showed her a clipping from a daily newspaper that invited students in JSS to participate in an essay competition. Ms Kalunde hoped she could inspire her students to participate, and when she informed them about it they were very excited. In fact, they wanted to select the topic and start writing right away. Ms Kalunde explained that writing a good essay needs preparation, so that the content can be communicated in the most effective way. She reminded them that the first step towards writing a winning essay was to collect information on the topic, and then brainstorming on how best to express the ideas selected. She also added that more steps were required before finalising the composition, such as editing it for grammar, vocabulary and style. She asked the class to brainstorm on where they could get information. The class identified different sources of information, including people, the library, websites, newspapers and textbooks.

Unfortunately, apart from the small room that the Kijiweni school had converted into a school library, there were no library facilities in the district. At the school they had electricity from solar energy, a computer and a printer, but they did not have Internet access. However, a mobile library visited the district every Wednesday. The class decided to work as a team to access various sources of information.

After some discussion they selected two topics for their essays. Then they divided themselves into groups. Each group was assigned the task of collecting information from different sources. Some had to identify and interview people whom they thought knew the topic well. Others visited the mobile library and borrowed some books. A couple of students went with Ms Kalunde to one of the offices in town that had Internet access and downloaded relevant information onto a flash drive. They then printed off their information and put it in the school library. Within a week they had collected enough information for their essays.

Their efforts proved to be well worthwhile. Their essay won the first prize because it had all the relevant information written in the most precise and interesting manner.

Points to ponder

- 1 Does your locality have facilities like the ones described in the Case Study above for students to acquire information? Does your school have arrangements for taking students to places such as the library?
- 2 How helpful do you think modern technological tools such as the Internet are for learning purposes? Do you use Internet resources yourself to acquire information? Would you encourage your students to use it to enhance their knowledge of school subjects?

Activities

Activity 1: Writing an essay



Activity 1

As preparation for this activity read **Resource 1a: Steps in essay writing** and **Resource 2: Forms/Kinds of essays**.

- Show the students the video on travelling to a foreign country and have a class discussion on this topic (what to expect, how to prepare, how to interact with locals, cultural knowledge required, etc.).
- Announce that they are going to write an essay with the topic Travelling to a Foreign Country.
- Let the students brainstorm on the topic so that they can list the important points they are likely to include in the essay.
- Now assign one major point (e.g., what to expect, information about local culture, flight details) to each group and ask them to decide on the sub-points that will go into a paragraph on the main point selected. Encourage them to collect the relevant information from various sources such as library books, Internet articles and conversations with people. (This will have to be done outside class hours or as homework.)
- In the next class, begin with a review session on the various points, and allow the students, in their groups, to make their own decisions about which points to keep and which ones to reject. In their groups, ask them to arrange the points in the order in which they would want to include them in the essay.
- In their groups, they should also order the (sub-)points; that is, decide which point should come first, which should follow, and so on.
- Have the groups create a first draft of the essay. One group can do the introductory paragraph and another the concluding paragraph, and the rest of the groups can work on elaborating the points selected (see **Resource 1b: Four major parts of an essay or report**).

- Help the groups compile the paragraphs into one complete essay, assigning paragraph numbers. Photocopy the draft of the essay to give a copy to each group for editing, or display each paragraph on a screen for group editing. Alternatively, you can edit the first paragraph, showing them how to make corrections in grammar and style, and then let them edit the rest. Show them or give them a list of semantic markers (e.g., *firstly, however, on the other hand, in other words, to sum up*) that they can use in their essay for a smooth flow of the ideas. Once they have finalised their drafts, you can compile the edited versions into one final copy and ask one of the students to read it out. The whole process will be time-consuming, but your students will enjoy being given the responsibility of correcting and editing an essay. The exercise will also give them practical experience in learning the process of essay writing.

Activity 2: Writing a scientific report



Activity 2

As preparation for this activity, show students the video on Biology Experiment: Osmosis. Have a class discussion after the video on how they would report on this experiment.

Read **Resource 3: Science experiment: Osmosis**. Ask the students to brainstorm on the parts of a scientific report. The discussion should generate expressions like *observation, findings, materials required, equipment used, procedure* and so on.

- Give the students Worksheet 1 (**Resource 3**) on the report on the experiment described in the video. Working in groups, their task will be to (i) put the paragraphs in the correct order and (ii) match the headings with the paragraphs. Have a feedback discussion on why it is necessary to use this kind of format, and not an essay format. Encourage them to express their own arguments about the differences in the styles of a narrative/essay and a scientific report.
- Now distribute Worksheet 2 (or project it on a screen) and have the students discuss the differences in style between the original report and this one. Your feedback should note that both styles can be used in this type of report, depending on why the report is being written. The sentence structure used in the original report is that of a **directive**, because the style is in the form of *instructions*, while the second (Worksheet 2) uses **modal verbs** because it *demonstrates* how the experiment can be conducted. In the next class, the students should be ready to write their own report. To take them through the steps in writing a scientific report, use the same strategies described above. For example, have the students write a report title “Air Is Essential for Burning.” First have them brainstorm on the materials required, the steps involved in conducting the experiment and what would be the findings. **Remember the focus here is not on conducting the experiment, but on writing a report on it.** Once the students have come to a consensus on the materials, procedure and findings, separate them into groups and have them write a report, using any one of the formats

described in **Resource 3**. After the students have completed the report, ask them to edit and proofread their work before submitting it.

Activity 3: Taking notes



Activity 3

Note taking is a very useful academic exercise because it allows one to keep a concise written report of what one has heard or read. It helps one recall and review a lecture or any other discourse in a systematic manner.

Most of us take notes when we are reading or listening to something important, and we tend to develop our own methods of note taking. Research shows, however, that if we learn to take notes *systematically*, following a *process*, we will understand and retain more information for later use.

The process of note taking begins even before we actually listen or read. People can take notes faster, and with better understanding, if they simply spend a minute thinking about the topic they are going to hear or read *before* the actual note taking begins. The process ends with the reconstructing of the text or speech from the notes. The following activity aims to take the students through certain important steps of note taking.

- Choose a passage for note taking, keeping in mind the level of your students and their interest areas. (You can also play the audiotape of the sample passage in **Resource 4: Natural lighting for energy conservation**, or read the transcript aloud.)
- Before the students listen to or read the passage, ask them to think of two questions that they think the passage will answer. For example, before listening to the passage in **Resource 4**, we could ask questions like: (i) *Will the passage define “energy conservation?”* and (ii) *Will it give us tips on using natural lighting in our homes?* The important thing here is not whether they have asked “intelligent” questions, but that they have begun to think about the topic, thus preparing themselves to listen/read more efficiently.
- To help the students prepare to take notes, have a class discussion on **semantic markers** (practised in **Unit 2**), and on how they should train themselves to listen to these markers when taking notes because they help the listener/reader navigate or move easily through the passage. For example, the expression *however* signals that the speaker/writer is going to say something that contradicts what they said before; *firstly*, *secondly*, etc., help us list the points to give some order to the content.
- Also remind the students that using *abbreviations*, *listing* and *numbering* helps to speed up the note-taking process and will help them organise their notes systematically (see **Resources 5a** and **5b**).
- Read out the passage and let the students take notes using the strategies described above.

- Put the students in groups and have them reconstruct the passage from their notes, finalising the details by comparing notes with each other.
- When they are ready, read out the passage once again and let them check the details and modify their summaries.
- Have a feedback session so the students can say if they found the techniques useful, and if their experience helped them remember important information better.

Unit summary



Summary

In this unit you learned how to assist your students in writing good essays and scientific reports, and taking notes. You also used investigation techniques to help your students collect information from various sources. These activities have given your students an opportunity to practise the processes involved in composing a variety of written texts.

Reflections



Reflection

- How helpful was the case study?
- Can you think of a similar case study?
- Do you think your students will enjoy going through the preparatory steps involved in making a draft of a written composition for academic purposes?

Assessment



Assessment

- What other kinds of academic writing do your students need to learn? Can you think of an activity to teach; for example, preparing a morning assembly speech?
- What difficulties do you anticipate while teaching writing skills? How important is a strong vocabulary for formal writing? Should we design activities to improve students' formal vocabulary, or do they expand their vocabulary naturally?

Resources

Resource 1a: Steps in essay writing



Resource 1a

- **Reading widely:** For the proper preparation of essay writing, it is crucial to have read widely about the topic. This is the first essential step of good essay writing.
- **Choosing a subject:** The candidate should choose a subject with which he or she feels comfortable, knows something about, or has already thought about.
- **Drawing up a plan:** It is very important to prepare a mental plan after choosing the subject. Planning helps keep the essay writer on track and minimises the chances of digression or irrelevance.
- **Being concise and to the point:** There is an important caveat for the writer of an essay: the word limit. The writer should plan to cover everything he or she thinks is relevant, but with precision and conciseness.
- **Learning to write a good topic sentence:** The topic sentence defines the subject matter of the paragraph. All the sentences in a paragraph should support the topic sentence. The topic sentence can be at the beginning or at the end of the paragraph.
- **Writing a good introduction and conclusion:** The topic of the essay needs to be introduced in such a manner that it gives an impression that the writer has a clear understanding of the central point of the subject. Similarly, the conclusion leaves a lasting impression, and so it should summarise the important points well.
- **Using language appropriately:** An essay writer should use simple and straightforward language; that is, vocabulary and structures that present the ideas in a clear and interesting manner, without long-winded explanations in flowery language. Moreover, semantic markers such as *however*, *although*, *on the other hand*, *for instance*, etc., should be used to help the reader navigate easily through the essay.
- **Division of the essay:** The essay needs to be divided into paragraphs, with clear introductory and concluding paragraphs. Care should be taken that the paragraphs develop ideas logically, and with adequate illustrations, and that they avoid the repetition of ideas that appear elsewhere in the essay.

Resource 1b: Four major parts of an essay or report



Resource 1b

- **The title:** The title states the focus or the subject you are writing about.
- **The introductory part:** This normally defines, describes or explains the key terms of the topic at hand.
- **The body:** This is where the discussion of the topic centres. It should be well organised into paragraphs, with each paragraph preferably containing one idea. If the idea is complex and requires elaboration, it should be subdivided logically into several paragraphs. Semantic markers like the ones listed above should be used to join paragraphs.
- **The conclusion:** The conclusion either summarises the main points of the essay or gives opinions and recommendations.

Resource 2: Forms/Kinds of essays



Resource 2

We know that essays normally address a major question on a particular topic. They may seek to explain, describe, define or give a point of view.

Often it is the question that the essay seeks to answer and how it addresses that question which differentiates forms or kinds of essays. The various kinds of essay include **descriptive** essays, **cause and effect** essays, **comparison** essays, **argumentative** essays and essays of **definition**.

Descriptive essays

These seek to answer the “what” questions. In a descriptive essay, the writer may start with something obvious like the physical appearance of an object or subject; then they may include inner or hidden features like attitude, values or temperaments. They may also make associations with the immediate environment of the object. Depending on the field/subject area, the writer may also include scientific or sociological explanations. The major objective of the descriptive essay is to use language to make the reader see, feel and understand an object, activity or event.

Cause and effect essays

These seek to answer the questions of what happened and why it happened. The writer of a cause and effect essay explains the link between the process and the result, giving the most reasonable and convincing explanation. He or she can also explain how action X leads to event Y (for example, how the process of boiling water causes it to turn into vapour).

Comparison/Contrast essays

These seek to explain how two things are similar or different. An essay of comparison shows how two things are similar, and an essay of contrast shows how two things are different. In this kind of essay the writer states and explains those features that are alike and those that are in contrast.

Argumentative essays

These seek to discuss issues by providing plausible opinions on a subject. The writer of the argumentative essay includes data/evidence to support his or her views on the subject. This means the writer has to consult reliable sources of information and become knowledgeable about different sides of the issue. He or she also needs to use persuasive language to convince readers that the writer's views are the most plausible.

Essays of definition

This type of essay seeks to clarify a particular term, concept or idea. Essays of definition provide answers to various questions including what, how, why and when, so as to provide a complete understanding of the subject. The writer shares his or her knowledge on the subject in a clear and precise manner, and includes only important and relevant information.

Resource 3: Science experiment: Osmosis



Resource 3

This Resource contains a link to a video on a biology experiment, a sample report on the experiment and Worksheets 1 and 2 for students. Before beginning the activity, watch the video and go through the report and worksheets. They have been designed to actively engage your students in the process of writing a scientific report, so that rather than *being told* how to write a report, they *experience* the procedure themselves.

Report on a biology experiment: Osmosis

Investigation: What is osmosis?

Materials and equipment required: A raw potato, a boiled potato, two petri dishes, a knife, a peeler, table salt, water.

Procedure: Cut the boiled and raw potatoes into two equal halves. Remove the peel from the base of each half. Use the peeler to make a small hollow on the broader side of each potato half. Pour an equal amount of water in the two petri dishes. Stand the base of each potato half in the two petri dishes. Put $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of table salt inside the hollow of each potato half in the petri dish. Leave the two samples for two hours. After two hours, observe the two samples carefully.

Observations: The hollow of the raw potato is filled with water while that of the boiled potato contains no water.

Report: Osmosis is the process of movement of water molecules from an area of higher concentration of water molecules to an area of lower concentration across a selectively permeable membrane.

The process of osmosis can be observed by using a potato as a model of a cell membrane. The concentration of water molecules is higher outside the hollow of the potato half and the concentration of salt (solute) is higher inside the hollow of the potato half.

As a result, water molecules move from outside the potato into the hollow of the potato half through the raw (living) cells, which act as a selectively permeable membrane. Water accumulates inside the hollow. The boiled potato half has only dead cells, so no osmosis occurs.



Video

Resource file

See in the enclosed DVD a video recording of the activity:

- Scripts\Module4\Unit4\Activity2\Resource3\Video\Writing_a_Science_Report.mp4

Worksheet 1

A raw potato, a boiled potato, two petri dishes, a knife, a peeler, table salt, water	Investigation
Osmosis is the process of movement of water molecules from an area of higher concentration of water molecules to an area of lower concentration across a selectively permeable membrane. The process of osmosis can be observed by using a potato as a model of a cell membrane. The concentration of water molecules is higher outside the hollow of the potato half and the concentration of salt (solute) is higher inside the hollow of the potato half. As a result, water molecules move from outside the potato into the hollow of the potato half through the raw (living) cells, which act as a selectively permeable membrane. Water accumulates inside the hollow. The boiled potato half has only dead cells, so no osmosis occurs.	Materials and equipment required
What is osmosis?	Procedure
The hollow of the raw potato is filled with water while that of the boiled potato contains no water.	Observations

Cut the boiled and raw potatoes into two equal halves. Remove the peel from the base of each half. Use the peeler to make a small hollow on the broader side of each potato half. Pour an equal amount of water in the two petri dishes. Stand the base of each potato half in the two petri dishes. Put $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of table salt inside the hollow of each potato half in the petri dish. Leave the two samples for two hours. After two hours, observe the two samples carefully.

Report

Worksheet 2

Report on a biology experiment: Osmosis

Investigation: What is osmosis?

Materials and equipment required: A raw potato, a boiled potato, two petri dishes, a knife, a peeler, table salt, water

Procedure: Cut the boiled and raw potatoes into two equal halves. Remove the peel from the base of each half. Use the peeler to make a small hollow on the broader side of each potato half. Pour an equal amount of water in the two petri dishes. Stand the base of each potato half in the two petri dishes. Put $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of table salt in the hollow of each potato half in the petri dish. Leave the two samples for two hours. After two hours, observe the two samples carefully.

Observations: The hollow of the raw potato is filled with water while that of the boiled potato contains no water.

Report: From this experiment we can conclude that osmosis is the process of movement of water molecules from an area of higher concentration of water molecules to an area of lower concentration across a selectively permeable membrane.

The process of osmosis can be observed by using a potato as a model of a cell membrane. The concentration of water molecules is higher outside the hollow of the potato half and the concentration of salt (solute) is higher inside the hollow of the potato half.

As a result, water molecules move from outside the potato into the hollow through the raw (living) cells, which act as a selectively permeable membrane. Water accumulates inside the hollow. The boiled potato half has only dead cells, so no osmosis occurs.

Resource 4: Natural lighting for energy conservation



Resource 4

Transcript

Today I'm going to briefly touch upon natural lighting for houses.

You are all aware of the negative effects of global warming, and one of the ways we can contribute to reducing the emission of carbon dioxide and other harmful gases into the atmosphere is by using less electricity. In this talk, I'm going to mention four ways in which we can use natural lighting more effectively in our homes.

Maximising our use of natural light will not only help us save on electricity bills, it will help eliminate germs and dust mites too. Allowing more light into our homes will therefore enable us to lead healthier and better lives. In other words, it has added advantages — it will reduce our energy use and expenses; and in addition, healthy living will ensure that our hospital bills come down too!

Here are four ways in which we can use natural lighting in our homes.

Firstly, paint the interior walls of your home in lighter (pale) shades. This ensures better reflection of light from the walls, and makes the room look brighter. You can also use mirrors to reflect natural light off the walls, especially in darker rooms.

A second option is to install large windows, especially in houses that do not allow a lot of light in. The windows should be taller rather than wider: this is another “trick” for ensuring more light enters the room.

Another healthy habit is to remember to keep windows and blinds open longer on bright, sunny days to admit as much light as possible. Even if you have air conditioners installed in the rooms, it is always advisable to keep windows and doors wide open for some time to prevent carbon dioxide from building up in the rooms.

There are many other ways we can save power by increasing the amount of natural light in our homes and workplaces, but today I'm going to end with just one last suggestion. In your homes, make sure that your work areas, such as desks and kitchen sinks, are situated close to sources of natural light. This is good for your health too, and will save a lot of power.

In short, I've given you four tips on energy conservation through the use of natural light. If everyone followed these simple measures in our homes, imagine the amount of collective savings we would make! Our duty, therefore, is also to make others aware of these simple steps. Spread the word — make your neighbours, family and friends more eco-friendly.



Audio

Resource file

See in the enclosed DVD an audio recording of the activity:

- Scripts\Module4\Unit4\Activity3\Resource4\Audio\Natural_Lighting.mp3

Resource 5a: Commonly used abbreviations and symbols in note taking



Resource 5a

When we are taking notes, especially from a lecture, we do not have the luxury of taking down every word — the speaker cannot wait while we write!

The most sensible approach is to use abbreviations and symbols where possible and to leave out words that do not contribute to the meaning.

Here is a list of commonly used abbreviations and symbols:

Words	Abbreviation	Word	Symbol
For example	e.g.	Percentage	%
That is	i.e.	Because	∴
Versus	vs.	Therefore	∴
Compare	cf.	Greater than	>
Note well	N.B.	Greater than or equal to	≥
In the same place (from text already quoted)	ibid	Lesser than	<
In the work cited	op. cit.	Lesser than or equal to	≤
Post script	PS	Equal to	=
Carbon dioxide	CO ₂	Not equal to	≠
For	4	And	&
To	2	At the rate of	@
From	frm	Proportional to	~
Important	imp	Parallel to	
Great	gr8	Negative	-ve
Air conditioned/er	AC	Positive	+ve

Resource 5b: Listing and numbering in note taking



Resource 5b

Note taking is an exercise in summarising the main points of a lecture or written text for future reference. It is not unusual to refer to notes quite some time after we first heard or read a text. It is natural, in such a case, to forget related matters such as the number of main points discussed, the sub-points of each point, the important statistics and so on. To minimise the burden of remembering all this information, we can use a system of listing through *numbering* and *spacing*. For illustration, here are the notes on the passage in **Resource 4** above, showing the use of abbreviations and symbols where appropriate, as well as numbering and spacing:

Passage: Natural lighting for energy conservation

- I. Intro: -ve effects of global warming
 - a. reduce CO₂ + other harmful gases
 - b. use less electricity
- II. natural light^{ng}: advntges
 - a. saves elect. bills
 - b. removes germs, dust mites
 - c. healthy, better lives
 - d. reduces hosp. bills
- III. 4 ways of using nat. light^{ng}
 - a. paint int. walls pale, light shades
 - i. reflects light
 - ii. rooms look bright
 - iii. use mirrors
 - b. install large windows (esp. in dark houses)
 - i. tall windows, not wide, 4 more light
 - c. keep blinds, windows open longer on bright days
 - i. lets out CO₂, even in AC rooms
 - ii. uses less elect., saves power
 - d. work areas (desks, sinks) – near sources of nat. light
- IV. Summary:
 - a. 4 tips on energy consrv^{tn}
 - b. collective savings of community
 - c. inform family, friends, neighbours

Teacher question and answer



Feedback

Question: Apart from scientific reports and experiments, what other forms of academic writing should I teach for other subject areas?

Answer: There are several kinds of academic writing that students use in other subject areas. Some of the ones you could use are: *comparing and contrasting two kinds of terrains/vegetation/seasons* (Geography), *defining and illustrating geometrical shapes* (Mathematics) or *discussing the cause and effect of an event* (Social Studies or History).

Unit 5: Promoting Creative Writing

Introduction

Creative writing is writing about events in an imaginative way. Novels, plays, short stories and poems are some examples of creative writing. We often think creative writing can only be done by “experts” — that is, poets, playwrights and novelists. Interestingly, however, creative writing can actually be cultivated through classroom writing activities. Students learn to write creatively by reading and analysing the works of experienced writers and by writing stories, poems or plays of their own. This helps them to acquire both the language (vocabulary and structures) and narrative skills (making an interesting beginning, using dialogue skilfully, weaving in contemporary, everyday events to sound more natural, etc.) that they need.

This unit is about how you can promote creative writing amongst your students. It aims to help you and your students explore how a narrative can be developed into an interesting story, or how the words we use every day can be arranged into a rhyming poem. The unit should help you encourage your students to explore and write descriptions that appeal to the senses, arguments that are convincing and narratives that relate ordinary events in an extraordinary way. Your task is to help your students notice what makes the texts creative rather than a collection of ordinary factual information.

Unit outcomes



Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit you will be able to:

- help your students to use their experiences and local environment to develop their creative writing skills,
- guide your students to develop their ability to write stories using the techniques of re-telling a story, and
- enhance your students’ ability to write creatively through the technique of shared writing.

Terminology



Terminology

Short story:	A short story is a short work of fiction that is usually written in prose, often in narrative format. This format or medium tends to tell a story in lesser detail than longer works of fiction, such as novels or books.
Novel:	A novel is a long narrative in literary prose.
Drama:	Drama is a type of fictional text that tells a story through dialogue between characters. Unlike novels, drama uses set directions in place of descriptions, and is divided into scenes and acts rather than chapters.
Simile:	A comparison between two things (objects or events) made in an overt and obvious manner, using words such as <i>like</i> or <i>as</i> : <i>As fast as the wind</i> , <i>majestic like a lion</i> , etc.
Metaphor:	The word <i>metaphor</i> is from the Greek meaning <i>transport</i> . A metaphor makes a comparison between two things (objects or events) by transferring the qualities of one to the other in a non-obvious manner. For example: he is <i>lion-hearted</i> /her <i>mousy nature</i> /the <i>black sea</i> . In the first example, the quality of <i>bravery</i> of a lion is transferred to the person, the second one transfers the <i>timidity</i> of a mouse to the girl's character, and in the third example, <i>black</i> is used for its negative characteristics such as <i>dirty</i> , <i>destructive</i> and <i>angry</i> .

Teacher support information

Creative writing is considered to be any writing — fiction, poetry, non-fiction, drama. etc. — that falls outside the bounds of normal professional, journalistic, academic and technical forms of writing. Works in this category include novels, epics, short stories and poems (see **Resource 1: Why and how to teach creative writing**, and **Resource 2: Kinds of creative writing**). A creative writer often gives his or her readers pictures to see, sounds to hear, or things to taste, feel and smell. Note that creative writers look for words that help us to see and hear what they have seen, heard or imagined.

A writer can tell us about the things he or she has seen or imagined by using descriptive words such as *shining*, *narrow*, *huge*, *small*, *glowing*, etc. He or she may also use phrases or expressions like *the road was a ribbon of moonlight*, *the wind was a torrent of darkness*, *his heart was jumping*, etc. Expressions like these are called **figures of speech**.

A number of teaching techniques, including story retelling and shared writing, can help you develop your students' creative writing skills. (See **Resources 3a and b** on shared writing).

Case study



Case study

In an effort to develop her students' creative writing skills, Mrs Rweza, a secondary school teacher, decided to use the story re-telling technique. She prepared herself by reading several stories and picking one that she thought was suitable to read to her class.

During the creative writing lesson, she invited her class to listen carefully to the story. After the story was read, Mrs Rweza guided her students in discussing the important parts of the story. She used questions such as *How does the story begin? What happens in the middle? What is the problem? What causes a problem? How does the story end? What are the descriptions of the characters in the story? Is the main character a hero, a villain or a victim? Who sorts out the problem?*

Working in groups, the students also discussed and reached a consensus on what they would include or exclude if they were to reconstruct the story, and why.

At the end of the first lesson, Mrs Rweza asked the students to write their own version of the story as their home assignment.

In the next lesson the students discussed their stories with their partners. Then Mrs Rweza asked some students to present their stories to the class.

She was amazed by the descriptions, arguments and explanations that the students wrote. She realised that this was an effective strategy for developing creativity and imaginative thinking in students.

Points to ponder

- 1 Is telling stories the only way of developing imagination? What other strategies do you find useful for developing your students creative skills?
- 2 Group composition techniques are thought to be useful ways of encouraging students to share their creative ideas. Do you agree? What advantages can you see in making students develop their creativity through group activities?

Activities

Activity 1: Promoting creative writing through shared writing



Activity 1

- As a preparation for the activity, select two or three short stories and read **Resources 3a, 3b and 4**.
- During the lesson, guide your students through reading the selected stories and discuss what they are about. What have the writers of the stories done to make the stories interesting? Which words or phrases have the writers used to describe the characters or events in their stories?
- Then announce to the class that they are going to write their own story as a class activity.
- Ask the students to brainstorm and decide what they would like to write their class story about. The story can be about animals, people, plants, minerals, countries, cities... anything.
- When a consensus is reached, ask the class to choose a main character.
- Let the students discuss and decide on what will happen to the main character.
- Split the students into mixed-ability groups and ask each group to brainstorm and create one event. The events can include how the main character gets into problems or encounters obstacles/how the character finds the solution to the problem/what happens when the solution is found. Guide the groups in drawing illustrations suitable for their parts as well.
- Ask representatives from each group to read their parts to the class.
- Join the parts of the story together and let the class re-read the story in groups to ensure that it is coherent.
- Edit the class story and display it in class.

Activity 2: Developing imagination



Activity 2

Present the following story to your class:

A short, thin man was standing in front of a big box. His big eyes were popping out and his mouth was full of saliva. He was thinking, "This is my catch! I will no longer be hungry, skinny and weak."

Suddenly a large woman appeared from nowhere. She lifted the heavy box as if it were empty, and ran away with it as fast as the wind. Before

the little man could say anything, two policemen came running up behind him and asked, “Have you seen a big box anywhere?”

He looked at the policemen and then turned around again, but the woman and the box had disappeared.

- Put the students in groups and have them think of answers to the following questions:
 - 1 Where do you think the story could have taken place?
 - 2 What do you think was in the box?
 - 3 Why do you think the policemen were interested in the box?
 - 4 What do you think happened to the large woman and the box?
- Ask the students to use their answers to complete the story.
- Have them edit and proofread their stories in their groups.
- Let some students volunteer to read their work to the class
- Have the groups make a final draft and display their story in class.

You can also use this technique to teach students to write different kinds of passages.

Activity 3: Writing a rhyming poem



Activity 3

Provide a selection of poems for your students and have a class discussion on what is special about them.

Your objective is to have your students identify points such as unusual combinations of words, use of rhyming words, special comparisons like similes and metaphors, and so on, with examples from the poems.

The students now need to practise using their imagination to compose something creatively. You can begin with simple activities such as making a list of rhyming words, then combining or using them in creative and unusual ways and making short verses with them.

As a first step, ask your students to write five words that end with the same sounds; for example, *beat, eat, seat, heat, meat/set, net, bet, let, whet/hen, den, ten, wren, Zen*.

Let the students use the words in interesting and usual expressions that describe something (object or action) creatively; for example, similes such as *burning like heat* or metaphors such as *an icy sheet*.

Guide the students in writing five short sentences that end with the rhyming words.

Guide the students in discussing in groups what appears to be special about their sentences.

As a homework assignment, ask your students to write two verses of a poem of their own.

Unit summary



Summary

This unit has familiarised you with the techniques of developing creative writing skills in your students. These techniques included retelling a story orally and in writing, as well as the process of shared writing. Your students will also have learned how to practise writing short stories and simple poems.

Reflections



Reflection

- Has this unit added anything to your knowledge about creative writing and how to promote it amongst your students?
- Do you think you could have done it better? How?

Assessment



Assessment

- What is the most exciting thing you have learned about creative writing?
- How would you like to share it with other teachers?

Resources

Resource 1: Why and how to teach creative writing



Resource 1

What is creative writing?

Creative writing is any composition — fiction, poetry, or non-fiction — that expresses ideas in an imaginative and unusual manner.

Creative texts are texts that are non-technical, non-academic and non-journalistic, and are read for pleasure rather than for information. In this sense, creative writing is a process-oriented term for what has been traditionally called literature, and includes novels, epics, short stories and poems. Creative texts may be descriptive, narrative or expository, based

on personal experiences or popular topics. Any kind of writing that involves an imaginative portrayal of ideas can be called creative writing.

Why should we teach creative writing to students?

Creative writing sharpens students' ability to express their thoughts clearly. It encourages them to think beyond the ordinary, and to use their imagination to express their ideas in their own way. Learning about creative writing also makes students familiar with literary terms and mechanisms such as sound patterns or metaphors. This, in turn, can help students to improve their command over the resources of language — for example, vocabulary, sentence patterns and metaphorical expressions — when composing their own creative work.

It has also been argued that creative writing helps develop critical thinking skills, as students learn to question and to “think outside the box.” The ability to evaluate a piece of literary work improves students' problem-solving abilities too.

Approaches to teaching creative writing

The teaching of creative writing basically focuses on students' self-expression. It is taught by taking students through a series of steps that demonstrate the *process* of writing. As a first step, students are introduced to a range of fictional and non-fictional texts, with their attention being drawn to the distinctive structural and linguistic features of each text. They are also sensitised to the *purpose*, *audience* and *context* for which specific texts are written. The students are then given practice in the use of linkers, connectives and other semantic markers that are used to connect and present ideas logically in a text. Typical semantic markers in narrative texts are words such as *because*, *although*, *when*, *where*, *since* and so on; they perform various functions in the text, such as showing time relationships, cause and effect relationships, conditions, sequence of events and so on. The students are then gradually taught to dramatise events by:

- establishing a landscape or context,
- developing dialogues,
- establishing characters using descriptions of appearance, mannerisms, etc., and
- developing an appropriate vocabulary (e.g., formal versus informal words and phrases, colloquial terms, terms of endearment).

Lastly, students are helped to express more complex and layered meanings in stories that:

- combine outside events with personal experiences,
- dramatise inner feelings, and
- contain reflections and commentary.

Resource 2: Kinds of creative writing



Resource 2

Creative writing usually includes **descriptive**, **expository**, **narrative** and **argumentative** texts.

In a **descriptive** text, a writer gives his or her readers pictures to see, sounds to hear, and things to taste, feel and smell. **Expository** writing defines, explains or describes how something is done or how something happens. A **narrative** describes an event chronologically, usually with a beginning, middle and end. An **argument** is intended to convince others of something or to persuade them to do something. The following are examples of different types of creative texts.

A sample descriptive passage

Soil is a dynamic medium in which many chemical, physical and biological activities constantly occur. Soil is a result of decay, but it is also a medium for growth. The characteristics of soil change in different seasons. It may alternately be cold or warm, and dry or moist. When the soil becomes too cold or too dry, biological activity becomes slow, or stops altogether. Biological activity speeds up when leaves fall or grasses die. Soil chemistry thus changes according to season, and the soil adjusts to different climatic conditions, temperature fluctuations and the amount of moisture in the atmosphere.

A sample narrative passage

When I was a child I always wanted a dog, but my mother refused, saying she didn't have time to look after it and we didn't have space for a dog to run around. When I was 14 we moved to a bigger house with a big garden, but Mother still refused to let me have a dog. One day a friend of ours brought us a puppy that he'd found abandoned by the side of the road. He was adorable! He had big brown eyes, velvety ears and a happy smile. I pleaded with Mother to keep him. Eventually she gave in to my promises of looking after the dog, working hard at school and taking on extra chores.

I called the dog Murphy. He was very loving but also very energetic and I found that I had to spend two hours a day running with him and playing with him. One day he escaped out of the garden and killed our neighbours' chicken. I felt ill with anxiety in case Mother made me give him away — or worse, have him put down. Luckily our neighbours loved dogs and told us not to worry about it. They asked only that Murphy not be allowed to escape from the house again. We promised that we'd do our absolute best to make sure he didn't sneak out and cause more trouble.

One day, when I was 19, I came home to find Mother sobbing. Murphy had spotted a cat in the street and had squeezed out of an open window to chase after it. In his excitement he didn't see a car coming. The driver didn't have time to stop and he hit Murphy. Our only consolation was that Murphy died instantly and didn't suffer. I was surprised by how

upset Mother was by Murphy's death. She always said she hadn't wanted a dog but when he died she was the one who seemed to miss him most.

(Written by Lesley Cameron, Maple Ridge, Canada)

A sample expository passage

Liberia

The settlement of Liberia was founded in 1822 by freed blacks from the United States of America. It was organized by the American Colonization Society—a body of white Americans who believed the increasing number of freed blacks in the southern states was a danger to the maintenance of other blacks in slavery. Representatives of the Colonization Society forced local African chiefs in the Cape Mesurado area to sell them land by threatening them at gunpoint. In the decade that followed, further settlements of freed blacks from America were made along the coastline from Cape Palmas to Sherbo island.

Though originally organized by American whites, educated blacks soon took over administration of the settlement. In 1847 they declared their colony the independent republic of "Liberia." (The name was derived from the Latin word *liber*, meaning "free," from which are also derived a number of English words such as "liberty" and "liberal.") It had a constitution modelled on that of the United States and its capital, Monrovia was named after the American president, Monroe.

(Excerpted from *History of Africa* by Kevin Shillington (p. 241), from the website north.mpls.k12.mn.us/uploads/2010_03_19_liberia_qs.doc)

A sample argumentative passage

Capital punishment: Is the death penalty effective?

Imagine a good friend of yours. Better yet, imagine a loved one, perhaps a little brother or sister or son or daughter. Now try to imagine life without them, simply because someone took away their life, and the murderer thought that they were above the law. What if someone took the life of your child or loved one? What are we to do about the person(s), such as these murderers who decide that they can take a loved one's life? Obviously, anyone who takes one's life, other than in self defense, should not ever be let out into everyday society to function in everyday life. Those that prey on the weak will always prey on them. A majority of those convicted and sentenced to capital punishment have been found to be "repeat offenders that continually prey on the weak and innocent".

Some statistics

* Thirty-seven out of fifty (37 of 50) states in America currently hold laws authorizing the death penalty.

* Currently there are more than 2000 people on death row.

* Because of various legal interferences, a majority of executions will be stalled.

One argument cited against capital punishment is the **deterrence factor**, which is the likeliness of someone not to commit a crime as a result of being aware of the consequences of the crime. But many argue that the death penalty does not deter. Punishment is socially valuable because it deters criminals from repeating their crimes and may keep others from repeating the same acts. If the deterring effect misses its point, it is the fault of the justice system. At its current standing, the system is viewed as a joke because no one takes it seriously. Both the lengthy time and the high expense that result from innumerable appeals, including many technicalities which have little nothing to do with the question of guilt or innocence, have made everyone make fun of the justice system. If the wasteful amount of appeals were eliminated or at least controlled, the procedure would be much shorter, less expensive and more efficient.

Many argue that the death penalty violates human rights. Yet they do not question the reason or action that got the convict on death row in the first place. Every person has an equal right to life, "until they take another's life, then all bets are off". Society does not understand that when a convict on death row is executed it is because they themselves took some innocent person's life. The only impression given about the death penalty should be the fact that murder is a crime punishable by death. The main purpose here is to instil fear in other people, to show that this will not be tolerated and that justice comes first, always.

(Adapted from "Free Capital Punishment Essays — Is the Death Penalty Effective?" <http://www.123HelpMe.com/view.asp?id=10284>)

Resource 3a: Using shared writing



Resource 3a

The point of using a shared writing strategy is to make the writing process a shared experience, making it visible and concrete while inviting students into the writer's world in a safe, supportive environment. At the same time, it gives teachers the opportunity of direct teaching of key skills, concepts and processes. All aspects of the writing process are modelled, although not always all at once. At the lower grade levels especially, teachers can concentrate on one or two key aspects of writing in short, focused lessons.

Using student input, the teacher guides the group in brainstorming ideas and selecting a topic. As a group, they talk about topics, audience, purpose, details they will include and other considerations. As the group composes the text, the teacher asks probing questions to bring out more detail and to help students make their writing more interesting and meaningful. The tone of this discussion should be collaborative rather than directive. The teacher might say something like, *I wonder if we should add more details here. How might we do that?* rather than *We need to add more details here.*

While some pieces will be short and completed in one lesson, others will be longer and may continue through several days' lessons. This allows students to see that writing can be an extended, ongoing process, and it

also allows the teacher to train the students to look at their work critically through strategies such as the periodic re-reading of one's work before resuming writing and completing the composition. Some teachers include a few well-chosen, purposeful errors during drafting to facilitate the later editing stage.

Writing with the class or group, the teacher also has an opportunity to highlight and model the revision process, helping students add to or take away from their text. The group may also decide to change words, text order or other aspects of the writing to achieve their intended meaning. The teacher will often ask questions to help the students focus on communicating their message clearly and concisely. If needed, the teacher can help guide the group in adding detail, taking away unnecessary and confusing words or passages, or changing the structure of the text to clarify meaning.

The teacher can also use the shared writing strategy for editing text and focusing on mechanics and conventions such as spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar. The structure of the text — that is, paragraph division etc. — is also a focus in this stage, as it is in the drafting and revising stages.

From <http://www.teachervision.fen.com/reading-and-language-arts/skill-builder/48883.html?page=2>

Resource 3b: Using the shared writing technique in class



Resource 3b

Start by drawing on previous knowledge of stories and wondering/brainstorming what kind of stories and characters the students like. (In shared writing, to wonder constantly is a strategy for fulfilling the most important function of the activity: to encourage and shape the students' ideas about how they might express themselves best, and then how it will be written down, as in a book or on paper.)

When a consensus is reached about the type of story — for example, the class likes stories about animals — the class must then choose a character — for example, a cow.

Then the students should think of what exciting event will happen to this cow. They should agree on the event; for example, *the cow gets lost in a forest*. They should choose this event from all the ideas put forward by the students. This is another important lesson for students when writing creatively — many ideas are generated but only some can be selected and followed up.

Split the students into five mixed-ability groups. The groups take turns to help compose a part of the story and to illustrate their pages. This allows the students to focus their attention on the various elements of the structure of the story as they work through it.

All this shaping and teaching is done through the teacher “wondering.” The development of the setting, opening and resolution occur as the writing occurs. Working with small groups gives the teacher the opportunity to emphasise story coherence — the way each part follows

from, develops or resolves what has gone before. Re-reading the story is important to assess whether it makes sense and to ensure that each contribution fits in.

Resource 4: Sample process of shared writing



Resource 4

Step 1: Introducing the main character

The cow lived in a village near the Serengeti National Park.

Step 2: Some events leading up to a complication

The cow jumped over the fence.

Step 3: More complications

It ran away to the forest that surrounded the village.

Step 4: Wondering

Wonder how we could make the ideas sound like a book. Did the cow try to get back to the village? Did anyone see the cow and try to bring it back? Or did the cow get lost?

Step 5: A new complication

The cow met a lion.

Step 6: The complication is developed through as a series of obstacles arise

The lion roared.

Step 7:

The cow cried “moo” and tried to run away.

Step 8:

The cow ran deeper into the forest and jumped into a river.

Step 9:

It saw a crocodile.

Step 10: Beginning of the resolution

The cow jumped out of the water.

Step 11:

The cow wanted to go home.

Step 12: Possibility of a solution

It saw a bus and wanted to get into the bus.

Step 13: Unforeseen obstacles get in the way

The bus driver told it off because cows were not allowed on buses.

Step 14: Solution

The cow ran home.

Teacher question and answer



Feedback

Question: When I ask students to use their imaginations and creative abilities to compose something, I find they simply copy passages from prose or poetry texts they have. How can I motivate them to think on their own?

Answer: One of the reasons students feel anxious about producing their own texts is because we *test* them rather than *teach* them composition. For example, we say *Write an essay on such and such a topic/Write a poem and bring it to class tomorrow* without showing them *how* this is to be done. The activities described above try to address this problem by taking students through the process of creative writing, beginning from the formulation of ideas to making a draft. If you follow this strategy in the class and take students through a step-by-step demonstration, their inhibitions will gradually disappear.