

Things to Consider for Students While Writing in ELT Classes

Gülşah Demirci

Anadolu University, School of Foreign Languages, Eskişehir/Turkey

Abstract

As a productive skill, writing in ELT classes is regarded as a challenging issue for both most of the language teachers and students. Taking writing into our consideration, it is clearly seen that there are various types of texts such as letter, e-mail, paragraph, essay, story, and etc. depending on the level and competence of the students. These types are the key source of the contribution of the writing process in most of the institutions. They give chance to the students to produce the language they are learning in an effective way. First of all, this study aims to be a guideline to show the requirements expected from the students by using the writing criteria applied at Anadolu University School of Foreign Languages in Eskişehir, Turkey for all levels. In the second place, this study sheds light on the detailed description of the components that are included in the criteria. Lastly, it gives the basic information about the essential tips for learners in order to enhance their writing skills. With the help of this study, it is aimed to ease the burden of educators who would like to teach writing in a more effective way and to make students aware of their possible mistakes while producing their texts.

Keywords: writing skill, writing criteria, language learning

Introduction

Writing, considered as a productive skill, is based on vocabulary, grammar, and semantics, which are the same structures of speech mostly within a language system by using a certain system of signs or symbols. As it combines different components of a language, it is regarded as a demanding issue for both teachers and mostly language learners.

From the perspective of teachers, teaching writing and evaluating it can be regarded as a complicated process. As students have problems with writing as a skill, most of the teachers have some challenges while teaching them. The low readiness level of the students causes extra burden for teachers. Furthermore, many teachers assign writing tasks to students; however, due to the intensive curriculum they sometimes do not have enough time to provide them with comprehensive feedback, which is necessary for them to improve their writing skills. Also, teachers are inclined to encounter some problems when they attempt to evaluate and grade the papers because an appropriate and standardised criterion is needed.

On the other hand, with regards to students, it is inevitable that some specific problems, such as inadequate development of analytical and cognitive skills, insufficient vocabulary and writing mechanics, can be listed as the reasons for the failure in writing skills. Moreover, it is clearly seen that there are various types of texts such as letter, e-mail, paragraph, essay, story and etc. depending on the level and the competence of the students while learning writing skills. This variety is likely to be another burden for students to try to cope with the requirement of the organization of different texts and the appropriate tone they are supposed to have. In addition to this, it can be claimed that another important challenge for language learners is lack of writing practice since it is something rarely implemented in high-school or earlier education because of the education and examination system based on multiple-choice mostly. Lastly, one of the most important challenges for students is that they are not aware of the requirements and expectations existing in the writing criteria used in the grading process. For this reason, they are unable to produce a text as sufficient as expected.

Taking all the possible reasons into our consideration, we can arrive at a conclusion that writing is a demanding skill for language teachers and especially language learners in many aspects.

Things to Consider for Students While Writing

Since writing is a challenging skill for students, special attention is needed in order to make them focus on this skill more and feel more eager to produce a well-organized text by being aware of the components of the writing criteria.

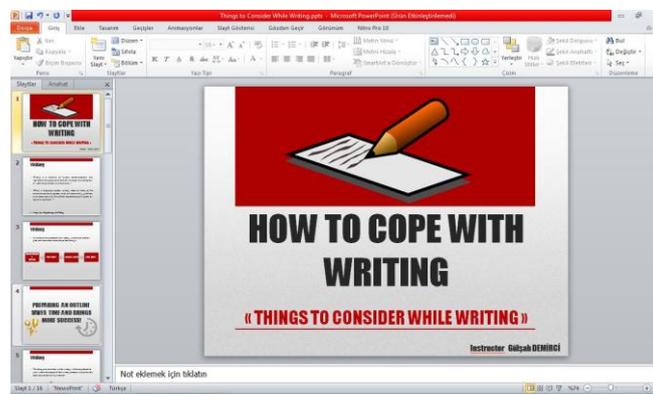
Scope and Methods

With the help of this study, it is aimed to ease the burden of educators who would like to cope with writing in a more effective way by using a specific criterion and specially to make students aware of their possible mistakes while producing their texts in parallel with the requirements and components of the criteria. This study can be considered as a guideline to

show the requirements expected from the students by using the writing criteria applied at Anadolu University, School of Foreign Languages in Eskişehir, Turkey for the students from all levels. In the second place, this study sheds light on the detailed description of the components that are included in the criteria.

Within the frame of extra-curricular activities of the Student Unit of Prep-School at Anadolu University, several writing activities were organized during 2016-2017 Academic Year Fall Term, 2017-2018 Academic Year, Fall Term and Spring Term and 2018-2019 Academic Year Fall Term. The dates of these activities were arranged in the early weeks of the terms in order to raise awareness among our students about the writing assignments which they are obliged to complete during the relevant term and to make them aware of the requirements related with the writing criteria. In these activities, students were informed about the things to consider while writing via presentations and some exercises.

Figure 1: Presentation Made



Source: (Anadolu University, School of Foreign Languages, Student Club Inventory)

Materials: Writing Criteria Used

There are four basic components, which are Content, Organization, Grammatical Competence and Lexical Competence in the writing criteria used. Each of these components includes five descriptors that range from five points to one point. For the evaluation process, the highest point that a student can get is twenty points. The exam questions and the types of the text can vary by levels. Two teachers grade each paper by using the same writing criteria. It is important for students to be used to these criteria and understand them in a detailed way in order to stay away from the possible mistakes they can make before producing their texts.

Content and Relevant Things to Consider for Students

The first component existing in the writing criteria is Content. The detailed descriptors can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Content

Component	Descriptor	Grade
Content	Addresses the topic with a wide range of details (explanations and/or exemplifications)	5
	Has some components of 3 and some components of 5	4
	Addresses the topic with moderate details with a few repetitions and/or some points are considered irrelevant.	3
	Has some components of 1 and some components of 3	2

	Is unable to include most of the details; and/or most details are irrelevant and/or mostly repeated.	1
--	--	----------

Source: (Anadolu University, School of Foreign Languages Writing Criteria v4.-T)

When content is taken into consideration, it is seen that this component is related with the details that students are supposed to give by using explanations and/or exemplifications about the relevant topic without repetitions. Thus, students should bear in mind that they should understand the question correctly, address the task and topic well, and give enough details, examples and explanations.

Organization and Relevant Things to Consider for Students

The second component existing in the writing criteria is Organization. The detailed descriptors can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Organization

Component	Descriptor	Grade
Organization	Establishes an effective organization of ideas with a wide variety of cohesive devices (transitions, sequencers, linking devices, referring expressions and punctuation)	5
	Has some components of 3 and some components of 5	4
	Establishes a moderate organization of ideas with a moderate variety of cohesive devices (transitions, sequencers, linking devices, referring expressions and punctuation)	3
	Has some components of 1 and some components of 3	2
	Is unable to establish any organization; no variety of cohesive devices (transitions, sequencers, linking devices, referring expressions and punctuation)	1

Source: (Anadolu University, School of Foreign Languages Writing Criteria v4.-T)

As is seen, organization is related with the ability of establishing an effective flow of ideas with a wide range of cohesive devices, such as transitions, sequencers, linking devices, referring expressions and punctuation. Therefore, students should focus on coherence and unity by considering that putting and sequencing their ideas in a logical and meaningful order is significant. They should also check if they are able to use the connectors/linkers in an accurate way. Using punctuation markers accurately and appropriately is also important for them.

Grammatical Competence and Relevant Things to Consider for Students

The third component in the writing criteria is Grammatical Competence. Its detailed descriptors can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Grammatical Competence

Component	Descriptor	Grade
Grammatical Competence	Uses a wide variety of language forms appropriately and accurately.	5
	Has some components of 3 and some components of 5	4
	Uses a moderate variety of language forms; and/or there are a few inaccuracies.	3
	Has some components of 1 and some components of 3	2
	Uses almost all language forms inaccurately; and shows no variety.	1

Source: (Anadolu University, School of Foreign Languages Writing Criteria v4.-T)

Grammatical Competence is not only about using language forms accurately and appropriately, but it is also linked with the mastery of using various grammatical forms. For this reason, students should not forget that focusing on only the accuracy will be insufficient. They had better use appropriate language forms as many as possible within the frame of their syllabus.

Lexical Competence and Relevant Things to Consider for Students

The last component in the writing criteria is Lexical Competence. Its detailed descriptors can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Lexical Competence

Component	Descriptor	Grade
Lexical Competence	Uses a wide variety of vocabulary appropriately and accurately; and/or shows a good control over spelling and capitalization.	5
	Has some components of 3 and some components of 5	4
	Uses a moderate variety of vocabulary; and/or there are a few inaccuracies; and/or shows a moderate control over spelling and capitalization.	3
	Has some components of 1 and some components of 3	2
	Uses almost all vocabulary items inaccurately and shows no variety; and/or shows no control over spelling and capitalization.	1

Source: (Anadolu University, School of Foreign Languages Writing Criteria v4.-T)

Lexical Competence does not only mean using vocabulary accurately and appropriately, but it also means the variety of vocabulary. The requirement related with the lexical competence is also a good control over spelling and capitalization. It is highly suggested that students should try to use vocabulary as much as possible in parallel to the words covered in the units of their course materials by concentrating on their spelling. Students should also pay attention to the capitalization rules.

Exceptions and Relevant Things to Consider for Students

There are also some exceptions stated in the writing criteria. These exceptional situations are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Exceptions

Exceptions	An answer is
1.	graded 1 out of 20 (5 out of 100) if it has no relevance to the question and/or does not deal with the task at all.
2.	graded 1 out of 20 (5 out of 100) if it has only too few sentences (i.e. the student does not attempt the task within the requirements of the task).
3.	graded 1 out of 100 if the student submits a blank answer sheet (i.e. the students writes his/her name or just brainstorms in phrases and/or fragments).
4.	negotiated if the discrepancy between the two graders is higher than 2 points.

Source: (Anadolu University, School of Foreign Languages Writing Criteria v4.-T)

Depending on the level, the tasks and exam questions can vary. For this reason, the exceptional situations also require detailed interpretations in order to be able to make the grading process and expectations from the students standardised as much as possible. The interpretations of exceptions are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Interpretations of Exceptions

Interpretations of Exceptions	
1.NO RELEVANCE TO THE QUESTION	completely OFF the content/topic (i.e. ON the content/topic yet OFF the focus/task: CONTENT: 1, ORG, GR. COM., LEX. COM. graded accordingly in terms of the outcomes/ task requirements/ language expectations/ prompts, if any) (i.e. If in separate sentences or in lists rather than a text, or a paragraph rather than an essay or vice versa, etc.: ORGANIZATION: NOT MODERATE (1-2), CON., GR. COM., LEX. COM. graded accordingly)
2. WORD LIMIT	Word limit is the “ between ... and ... words ” (i.e. There is NO specific NO of minimum words ; depending on the task, too few sentences might as well vary)
3.BLANK PAPERS	With just names on and/or some sort of brainstorming in phrases/fragments): 1 out 100 - NOT 1 out of 20/ 5 out of 100
4.NEGOTIATION	3+ point discrepancy between two graders

Source: (Anadolu University, School of Foreign Languages Writing Criteria v4.-T)

As it can be understood from the Table 5 and Table 6, the texts that students write should not be off topic. The content they produce and the focus they have should be related with the task and the topic. If they do not follow these rules, they should know that they will be graded accordingly.

Discussion

This study has been conducted as a guideline for students to consider the things they need to know about before producing a text. Further studies can be conducted to determine whether the academic success levels of the students increase after they get informed about the writing criteria in a detailed way. In order to check this, a comparison is needed between the grades of the students without knowing about the writing criteria and the ones knowing about them. By means of this analysis, whether there is a meaningful correlation between the awareness of the criteria and the academic success of students in terms of writing skill will be found out.

Conclusion

It is an undeniable fact that students have difficulties in writing skills as they find it challenging. Students are in need of more practises in terms of writing in the class and/or out of class. With the help of this study, it is aimed to make students aware of their possible mistakes while producing their texts. It is also stated that making students know about the writing criteria including content, organization, grammatical competence and language competence eases the burden of educators who would like to teach writing in a more effective way. When the detailed descriptions of the components existing in the writing criteria are explained to the students before they are assigned a task, the awareness level of the students will increase. In this way, it is possible that students might be inclined to produce a text in a better way and this could contribute to enhance their writing skills.

Acknowledgment

This paper is an output of the studies conducted at Anadolu University, School of Foreign Languages during 2016-2017 Academic Year Fall Term, 2017-2018 Academic Year, Fall Term and Spring Term, 2018-2019 Academic Year, Spring Term in different levels.

References

- [1] Halman, R. (2004). *Principles of teaching English*. New Delhi: RAJAT Publications.
- [2] Holec, H. (1981) *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- [3] Mallia, Joseph. (2017). Strategies for Developing English Academic Writing Skills. *Arab World English Journal(AWEJ)*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 3-15.
- [4] Rao, V. Chandra & Durga, Ms. (2018). Developing Students' Writing Skills in English-A Process Approach. *Journal for Research Scholars and Professionals of English Language Teaching*, iss. 6, vol. 2, pp. 1-5.
- [5] Tribble, C. (1996). *Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.