



International Academic Conference on Teaching, Learning and Education

Writing with Colors

Tony Minotti

Osaka Shoin Women's University, Japan

Abstract

Learning English as a second language is a challenging endeavor, a strong desire and commitment from the student is needed. Unfortunately, today the importance of proper writing skills has deteriorated with the introduction of social media. These days, people have become sloppy in their writing with the addition of abbreviations such as LOL (laugh out loud) or BFF (best friends forever), to name just two. It has come to the point where the reader must be able to decipher special codes to understand the meaning of a simple message. This paper introduces several techniques using colors to help students improve their writing abilities. By using colors teachers can concentrate on specific language areas, this technique is not limited to any specific level of ability, but can be incorporated into any lesson. Also, students can learn a useful habit, with the use of colors a student will recognize a remember parts of speech based on the color scheme of the writing. Finally, the teacher can recognize weak points of the students and concentrate on those areas. When grading an assignment, the teacher can review and correct work more efficiently and with fewer explanations by looking at the position and colors that were used in the task.

Keywords: language area; grammar; scaffolding; assignment; shortcuts



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Introduction

Given the rise in the popularity of social networking applications on people's smartphones, as well as people's desire to be heard and understood by their peers, the importance of the use of proper writing for people to be understood has also increased. These days, people have become sloppy in their writing with the addition of abbreviations such as LOL (laugh out loud) or BFF (best friends forever), to name just two. It has come to the point where the reader must be able to decipher special codes to understand the meaning of a simple message. The frustration experienced by the reader and the writer's fear of losing 'views' on any given platform have opened up an opportunity for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers to implement new teaching methods to help students with their writing. According to Boughey, a person who learns how to write correctly will improve their overall language skills as well:

...writing implies the successful transmission of ideas from an addresser to an addressee via a text, and this exchange of information becomes a powerful means to motivate and encourage the development of language skills. (Boughey, 1997)

Techniques introduced in the early stages of writing will help the student to be more confident in using proper English in his or her writing, as opposed to using abbreviations to express their thoughts. When considering a system to implement with students, it must be remembered that any new system should be easy for the student to understand. According to Peregoy, any implemented system should also be an efficient means for the teacher to reach his or her goal and it should motivate the student to use the acquired method (Peregoy, 2001). With these goals in mind, a creative way to help students in their writing is by using different colors to help them understand the writing process. By implementing a color-based system into the classroom, teachers can create an energized atmosphere conducive to language acquisition and retention. Using different colors to explain different writing points has several benefits for the teacher. First, using writing from specific writing points allows the teacher to concentrate on and emphasize specific areas of language, while also helping the student to learn a useful writing tool. Second, using this method helps the teacher to recognize weak areas and revisit specific points of contention.



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Concentrating on Specific Language Areas

Through the use of colors, a teacher can target specific writing points. The color method is not limited to the student's level or the complexity of the grammatical concept. For example, a beginner student might need to focus on the concept of nouns, so the student would be taught the definition of "noun". The student would then complete some worksheet exercises where he or she would have to underline the noun in a sentence using a specific color (e.g., red). In the next lesson, the grammatical concept would be expanded through scaffolding. The teacher would teach the student the definition of "verb" and give the student a worksheet where he or she would need to underline the noun using a specific color and the verb using a different color. The scaffolding technique would be further used to expand each lesson. By the end of the process, the student would be able to construct a simple sentence using different colors for each part of the sentence. As Philip Dave Ambard states:

The use of colors can be applied to any level of learner. Beginners that are learning the "be" verb, nouns, verbs, and or adjectives can be taught to use different colors to help them understand specific points. This also works for intermediate to advanced students where students would use colors to differentiate things such a topic sentence, the body of a paragraph, and the concluding sentence of a paragraph. (Ambard, 2004)

By concentrating on specific writing and grammatical concepts through the use of colors, the teacher can help the student learn a new useful habit. This also helps the student feel more comfortable in his or her writing. As (Leki,1992) stated, "...the more students feel inadequate to the task, the greater the chances are that they would not perform well."

Learning a Useful Habit

Another benefit of using colors in writing class is that the students learn a new useful habit that they can apply independently. When the teacher introduces a writing idea or concept and the student practices it in a worksheet using colors, the teacher is able to not



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only teach a beneficial habit but also give the student a way to express him or herself. An example of this would be using connector words such as “but” and “and”. Using a worksheet, the teacher would explain the differences. The worksheet would have two simple sentences and the student would then insert the connector using a pre-determined color. The student would then be asked to create his or her own original sentence using a different color to show what the connector should be and where it should be placed. For more advanced students, the teacher might give students a worksheet with jumbled sentences where each word is a different color to help the student create sentences. The students would then create sentences based on the color of the words—for example, noun (red), verb (blue), and adjective (green). Once the students complete the activity, the teacher would give them a new set of sentences. The second set of sentences would appear in a monotone color. The students would need to create the sentences and then underline the correct parts of speech in the correct colors. In step three of the process, students would create original jumbled sentences and hand them to a classmate. The classmate would then create sentences coloring the different parts of speech accordingly and return the sheet back to the first student. The student would then correct and explain any mistakes on the sheet. In the final stage of this activity, the student would create a paragraph based on the parameters given by the teacher. The student would write the paragraph, color the writing concepts taught by the teacher, and the teacher would correct any mistakes. As Tribble expressed:

By generating and encouraging interactive writing, not just texts per se to be read and graded by the teacher, our students will gain self-confidence, fluency and autonomy, and they will be stimulated to express their own authentic voices in the process of text production. (Tribble,1996)

The result for the students is that they will be able to visualize in their minds where each part of the sentence belongs while they write. The student is not the only benefactor in this process. There is also a benefit for the teacher, who is able to recognize where students are succeeding and where they need help.



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Recognizing weak points

Through the use of colors in writing class, the teacher can review and correct assignments more efficiently and with fewer explanations. In a regular writing class, it takes the teacher significant time to read, understand, and correct work created by the students. One particular difficulty, in many cases, is that the teacher must guess or assume the meaning of the text written by a student. Implementing assignments with color-coding can eliminate most of the teacher's guesswork. For example, an upper-level student may be asked to write a paragraph and a closing sentence for that paragraph. While the student may be able to write the paragraph, there could be instances where the teacher is not 100% sure whether the student understands what is being taught. If color-coding is used for the paragraph, however, the teacher can quickly see if the student did the work correctly and, more importantly, if they understood the idea that the teacher is trying to impart. If the teacher notices a pattern in the classroom where students are missing specific points, the teacher can re-teach those points. Additionally, if part of the lesson is not properly understood, it will be easier for the teacher to notice this and help students better understand the material.

Conclusion

Recently, English language learners have started to take shortcuts in their writing. One reason for this phenomenon is the explosion of phone applications. Nowadays, students use abbreviations for many words. It has come to the point where many messages are misunderstood and/or illegible. To combat this negative trend, English language teachers must find creative and interesting methods to capture students' interest. The use of different colors to help students understand, implement, and create material is one such interesting method. By using colors in their studies, students can concentrate on specific language areas and learn a useful writing habit. At the same time, teachers can recognize and remedy any weak areas that arise in their students.

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International Academic Conference on Teaching, Learning and Education

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