

Writing with Style: Two Useful Strategies for Students

Steven Kenneth Ahola
steboahola[at]hotmail.com
Kansai Gaidai University (Osaka, Japan)

This lesson plan offers teachers two strategies dealing with repetition and sentence variety that they can incorporate into their writing lessons.

Introduction

In her book *Rethinking Foreign Language Writing*, Scott (1996) urges the teaching of writing strategies: “Teachers need to help students develop effective strategies for each phase of the writing process” (49). During the revising and editing phases of the writing process, students have an opportunity to examine their drafts more closely. For example, they may focus on grammatical errors, vocabulary problems, or organizational issues. The time the students spend revising and editing will more than likely improve their drafts. This lesson plan offers teachers two useful strategies dealing with word repetition and sentence variety that they can incorporate into their writing lessons.

Lesson Plan

Levels: Intermediate and advanced

Materials: Two sample paragraphs illustrating the writing problems that the strategies will attempt to alleviate.

Preparation

It might be beneficial to write some sample paragraphs showing the problems associated with word repetition and a lack of sentence variety.

Strategy 1: First Word Repetition

Background Information

Students often have a tendency to begin their sentences with common words such as the, there, and I. When the students write papers with such repetition, their sentences may have a negative effect on the reader; the reader may find the writing immature and boring. This strategy provides an easy way for students to identify patterns of repetition in their drafts.

Step 1

Introduce the strategy by providing a sample paragraph with sentences beginning with the same word. Read aloud the sample paragraph and then have the students write down the first word that begins each sentence on a piece of paper.

Step 2

Instruct the students to look at the words that they have written down in order to identify something interesting about their short list of words. Hopefully, the students will identify that some words are repeated. Inform the students that such repetition can often make a writing piece boring.

Step 3

Ask the students if they can think of a way to change the sentences in order to lessen the first word repetition. If the students cannot think of any ways, then you could suggest that they combine two similar sentences with a conjunction such as and or but. Another suggestion is to revise the sentences so that the sentences begin with a different word.

Step 4

Allow the students time to examine their own drafts for first word repetition by writing down the first word for each of their sentences. If they discover some repetitive words, then they should revise those sentences.

Strategy 2: Sentence Variety

Background Information

Sentence variety means the length (the number of words) of the sentences in a writing piece. Due to their limited English proficiency, some EFL writers may write only short sentences. This simple strategy will help students to determine whether their drafts include sentence variety.

Step 1

Provide the students with a sample paragraph that lacks sentence variety. After reading the paragraph aloud, the students should count the number of words in each sentence and write the number above the sentence.

Step 2

Ask the students if they notice any similarities between the numbers they wrote down. They should be able to determine that some of the sentences have the same word count. Explain to the students that writers often vary their sentences in order to keep their readers from getting bored. Thus, encourage the students to include a mix of both shorter and longer sentences in their drafts.

Step 3

Brainstorm some ways to revise sentences that lack variety with the students. They may offer suggestions such as combining shorter sentences in order to make one longer sentence or dividing one longer sentence into two shorter sentences. Another suggestion is to add more information to the shorter sentences.

Step 4

With their own drafts, the students should count the words in each of their sentences. If there are many sentences with a similar word count, then they should revise them.

Conclusion

The two writing strategies described above can be administered in any writing class. A major benefit of both of them is that they are able to “flesh out” problems with word repetition and sentence variety quite easily. When I have introduced these strategies in my classes, my students are usually surprised at the number of times they repeated the same words at the beginning of their sentences. Further, they are surprised when they discover their sentences lack variety. Perhaps, the students you teach will have a similar reaction. And, hopefully, they will apply these strategies in all their future writing pieces.

Reference

- Scott, V.M. (1996). *Rethinking Foreign Language Writing*. Boston, M.A.: Heinle & Heinle.

<http://iteslj.org/Lessons/Ahola-WritingStrategies.html>