Interactive Writing in the EFL Class: A Repertoire of Tasks

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Writing in the EFL Situation: Theoretical Perspectives

Writing plays an important role in our personal and professional lives, thus, it has become one of the essential components in university English for General Purposes (EGP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) curricula. Its multifarious pedagogical purposes range from reinforcement, training and imitation (generally in the early stages of instruction) to communication, fluency and learning (at intermediate and more advanced levels) (A. Raimes 1983, 1987). In this article, we will concentrate on the last three purposes, namely, communication, fluency and learning, since we consider writing as a tool for the creation of ideas and the consolidation of the linguistic system by using it for communicative objectives in an interactive way. From this perspective, 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 (C. Boughey 1997).

We favour a process approach to teaching the writing skill from the outset (T. Hedge 1988, R. White and V. Arndt 1991, A. Raimes 1993) since its social orientation becomes visible and highlights the writer-text-reader interaction, thus purpose and audience are all important in the production of discourse while the functional dimension of communication is reinforced. As students need to be familiarised with specific discursive conventions and constraints when addressing a new or unfamiliar readership, we also adhere to a genre approach to the teaching of writing (J. Swales 1990). The social purposes of a communicative event exert a powerful influence on the textual choices a writer makes and, for this reason, the students should be made aware of the sets of schemata which determine both the content and the form of the texts they will be asked to produce. So preparation for the tasks will comprise exposure to authentic material plus a thorough discourse analysis of the different genres before they set out to develop their own texts . Recent analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of the process and the genre approaches reveal the convenience of adopting a complementary position which combines the tenets of both theoretical orientations (R. Bamforth 1993, R. Badger and G. White 2000).

In the traditional paradigm, a preoccupation with 'the composition' and 'the essay' at the expense of other types of writing, plus a strong concern for usage over use seemed to be the golden rule. Our contention is that positive results accrue from the implementation of a discourse-oriented writing approach once our students have acquired an effective command of the foreign language in a range of familiar situations and have a good operational performance--intermediate level or beyond. In this context, assigning tasks which pose 'real' problems to solve is a challenging option to keep their motivation high and create a sense of achievement (C. Tribble 1996). 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.

Making Writing Interactive

Writing is an interactive process by nature since it evolves out of the symbolic interplay between writer, text and reader. By making conditions more 'authentic' than the ones in traditional classroom tasks, an awareness of audience, purpose and intentionality is reinforced. While planning a written piece, the writer is constrained to consider the audience and to adopt a reader-oriented approach so as to achieve a persuasive, emotive or objective function. Interactivity can be promoted in the writing class by implementing some of the suggestions that follow (adapted from L. Hamp-Lyons and B. Heasley 1992):

Group-brainstorming on a given topic
(i.e. Students work cooperatively and write down all the ideas that come to mind in connection with a topic).

Whole class discussion of how a particular text might need adjustment according to the audience it is addressed to.
Collaborative writing
> (i.e. Students work together to write a previously agreed text).

Whole class text construction and composing on the blackboard.
Writing workshop or in-class writing
> Students consult each other and co-construct texts while the teacher moves around listening to their comments, providing feedback or answering questions on grammatical patterning, lexical items, the force or validity of an argument, the order of presentation of the information, organizational aspects, use of detail and so on. The teacher keeps track of their progress and works out a record of most frequent questions, doubts and inaccuracies for a future 'error analysis session'.

Group research on a text topic
> Students divide out the responsibility for different aspects of the information-gathering stage on a certain topic. They then pool their results and work together to plan a text, which may be collective or individual.

Peer-editing
> Students exchange their first drafts of a text and point out changes which are needed to help the reader (e.g. better organization, paragraph divisions, sentence variety, vocabulary choice). They can also act as each other's editors spotting vocabulary repetitions, grammatical infelicities, spelling mistakes and so on.

Whole class examination of texts produced by other students (with names removed, photocopied or displayed on an overhead projector) for the purpose of analysis of specific aspects
> (e.g. development of ideas, text structure, cohesion or grammar or adequacy to context).

Specification of an audience and purpose of a text by making the situation 'real'
> (e.g. exchanging e-mail messages with other English-speaking students, sharing information about a topic another class is actually studying, producing a class newspaper to be read by family or friends, outlining the explanations of a game which will then really be played, among many other possibilities).

Interactive writing becomes thus value-laden, communicative and purposeful; at the same time, it enables the students to permanently challenge their current language practices and gain the most from the experience. Making writing interactive requires imagination on the part of the teacher, but is rewarded by the creativity and enthusiasm that most students display in response.

A Task-based Discourse Approach to Writing

Our discourse approach to writing follows a task-based framework which aims to encourage classroom interaction so as to maximise opportunities for students to put their language to genuine use and to create a more effective learning environment (J. Willis 1996:19). The focus of the tasks can vary, ranging from an emphasis on discursive skills (selection of topic, disposition of the information, complexity of utterances, lexical choice or tone of the text, according to the students' developmental stages) to a more functional focus (informing, persuading, requesting, entertaining, convincing and so on) . The combination of skills is fostered, depending on the task and its complexity, so that along the drafting-writing-revision procedure, listening, speaking, reading and writing will overlap and intertwine, involving thinking, talking, consulting sources, doing research, peer-editing, interacting in groups and the like. On some occasions, cultural aspects are at play and students may need some help to get familiarised with specific conventions and constraints in the target culture: the key elements are a clearly defined content and the adequate rhetorical schemata . In all cases, the situation has to be made clear to the students, so that they can determine roles, conditions, effects on the interlocutor and standards to be achieved. The tasks we suggest and outline below refer to activities in the real world that the learners typically do in their everyday L1 lives and reflect some canonical 'homely' genres in particular discourse formats -- formal and informal letters, opinion pieces and stories -- which serve a truly communicative goal.

The Tasks: Writing for Different Audiences, Purposes and Roles

What follows is a handful of ideas we have explored, experimented with and experienced in the EFL classroom. These tasks call for the activation of strategies for invention and discovery. They are rhetorically based, since they entail an in-depth consideration of many discourse criteria, such as audience, purpose and format. Besides this, they also involve the intuitive as well as the rational intellectual faculties in a recursive rather than a linear way: students are forced to examine different aspects of their linguistic knowledge and exploit it to convey the meanings they wish to express. It is hoped that some of the learning and communicative activities in this potpourri will work for your writing classes as well as they have in ours.

1. A Letter to the English Teacher

This writing activity is suitable for all levels of proficiency since the students' pieces will provide data as to their needs and interests at the beginning of the course, as well as to the evaluation of their own learning process on its completion. The teacher will certainly get some interesting feedback from this student-centred quiz that will offer the possibility of introducing changes, adjusting and improving content selection and methodological procedures. Besides, it can work as a great motivational force for students who are lagging behind and need to catch up since they will have to think critically about the relationships between the course and themselves.

Instructions

[Beginning of the term. First class]

Write a letter to your language teacher. In it, introduce yourself and provide some information about your likes and interests. State your objectives and expectations from this course.

[Mid-term evaluation]

Write a letter to your language teacher. In it, evaluate your linguistic experience so far this year. State the most interesting or valuable aspect of the course. Also provide some topics that you would like to cover this year, which skills you would like to reinforce, which activity was the most interesting and which was the least attractive.

[End-of-term evaluation]

Write a letter to your language teacher. In it, provide your personal comments about the course and the development of your EFL skills. If you were the teacher, what would you do differently?

2. Sending a Letter Abroad

This task is suitable for young students at intermediate levels, who are generally fascinated at the 'miracle' of receiving news from English-speaking people through pen-pal groups or letters sent to an organization. When they realise that they can actually 'do' things with words, their confidence and motivation increase enormously and they feel the satisfaction of achieving an apparently impossible goal. For example, before or after working intensively on a unit on ecology and the environment, the writing task below may add some interest and stimulate a lot of further discussion and project work.

Instructions

Are you interested in protecting the environment? If so, here is a challenge. Go through the following 'ecological' addresses. Choose one and write a letter asking for information about the organization, aims and objectives. Explain that you are a students and tell which school you go to. Then request brochures, booklets or posters containing the on-going research and campaings they have recently launched to do something about the environment.

GREENPEACE
1436 U Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009
U.S.A.
Fax: (202) 462-4507

ANIMAL PROTECTION INSTITUTE OF AMERICA
2831 Fruitridge Road
P.O. Box 22505
Sacramento, Calif. 95822
U.S.A.
Fax: (916) 731-4467

NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST THE MISUSE OF PESTICIDES

701 Street S.E.
Suite 200
Washington, D.C. 20003-2841
U.S.A.

The assignment has two stages:

1. Prepare the letter and submit it to your language teacher, who will check for grammar and vocabulary inaccuracies.
2. Send the letter by e-mail, fax or snail-mail. If you get any material, let us know so that it can be discussed in class.

If you get an answer, you'll get extra credits for your assignment. So rack your brains to make the letter as interesting as possible. Good luck!

This task can easily be adapted to different situations. For those students who are about to stretch out in other directions after the course or wish to embark on programs to improve their overall performance in an English-speaking country, here is an alternative.

Would you like to get up-dated information about intensive English programs in the USA or in the UK? Here are some addresses. Write a letter asking for information on the courses offered, their description, duration, costs, accommodation facilities, application procedures and any other detail that you consider relevant.

INTERNATIONAL HOUSE
106 Piccadilly
London W 1V 9FL
England

YALE UNIVERSITY
Yale Summer and Special Programs
246 Church St., Suite 1015
New Haven, CT 06510-1722
USA

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
Box C
Department of English as as Second Language
2130 Fulton Street, LM 142
San Francisco, CA 94117-1080
USA

For trainees who are about to graduate and start working in 'the real world', an interesting option is to help them get in touch with some publishing houses so that they can get information on the latest teaching material on the market. Some addresses can be supplied by the teacher and they can also be encouraged to surf the Web to make further contacts. Other possibilities include writing to tourist boards, embassies, museums and charity organizations.

3. Writing a Letter to the Author of a Story

Short stories provide stimulating ways to explore the potentialities of the linguistic system, and their inclusion in the language class in English training centres is common practice nowadays. After a detailed analysis of text structure and global meanings, summary writing and dramatization, for example, an extension task might include writing a letter to the author providing some kind of response, with comments on how the students felt after reading the story in question.

Instructions

After reading *The Fun They Had,* write a letter to the author, Isaac Asimov, expressing your views on it. Explain your feelings towards the main character and provide your opinion about the central theme of the story.

- *The Fun They Had* is about a student, Margie, who lives in the year 2155 and has a computer as a teacher. Everything goes on well until the day when she finds a book about school in the past.

The World Wide Web offers numerous sites with stories written by young authors in different parts of the globe, and this opens up new possibilities to enhance the students' written expression as well as their cultural awareness.

4. E-mail Writing

The development of new virtual spaces for communication has favoured the emergence of e-mail writing, a hybrid genre that combines features of both written and oral discourse. After analysing some samples in class and exploring the formal characteristics and some of the linguistic strategies displayed in electronic discourse, the students can be invited to try their hands at computer-mediated-communication. Their data will provide the right corpora for comparison and contrast between spoken and written discourse, spotting the politeness codes, the language registers, the nettiquette codes, the expression of emotions using emoticons and the like. An alternative is to encourage students to use e-mail and computer networking in a collaborative fashion for formal and informal consultations among themselves and with the teacher (M. Warschauer 1995).

Instructions

Have you got an Internet connection at home? Do you have e-mail access? Are you an e-mail enthusiast? If so, this is the right writing project for you. Would you like to contact e-mail key-pals? Surf the Web and make a link with partners from other countries and cultures!. Pluck up courage and give it a try. We'll have our own school up in lights.

You should collect all the e-mail you send and receive in a file, which we will check every fortnight. You are absolutely free to choose your own key-pal. The only requisite is that you should communicate with him/her at least once a week. We will not be critical about your messages since we are interested in developing your motivation to write in English. So relax, meet a new friend and start writing. You will get credits for your extra effort. Good luck!

5. Films

Here we start with audiovisual input using a film that deals with love and human relationships. After a thorough discussion of the whereabouts of the characters, the analysis of the setting, main events, message and so on, the students are asked to establish a connection between the story and themselves. The focus is on critical and analytical skills while reporting about and reflecting on their own experiences, feelings and ideas.

Four Weddings and a Funeral

Tell us about Yourself

Choose one of the following topics and write 100-150 words. Your production will be shared with your classmates in the next month's issue of THE BOX, our class magazine.

- The perfect match / the ideal partner / the other half
  - Have you found him/her? Qualities you look for? Ways to find out if you like or love somebody: physical attraction? Intellectual communion? Just a look? Energy?
- Your first boyfriend/girlfriend: How did it all start? Was it similar to the film in any way?
  - Write about your first meeting with the person you now love or like very much. Describe the situation and your first impressions.
- If you are already married, tell us about your wedding day. If you are single, tell us about your expectations: Religious ceremony? White dress? Big party? Honeymoon on the Caribbean? Secret marriage: just you and your partner? Blue jeans? No party? Honeymoon by a river? List of gifts? Money as a gift? No marriage at all?
- Do you believe in eternal love, i.e. that you will love your partner and that he/she will love you till death separates you? Is it possible or is it just a human law to organize society in a better and perhaps, simpler way?

Reviews, Stories and Opinion Articles

Choose one of the following topics and write 100-150 words. Your production will be shared with your classmates in the next month's issue of THE BOX, our class magazine.

- Do you consider the film 'Four Weddings and a Funeral' too far-fetched? Write a review pointing out any flaws you can find in the story or the characters. Submit it to the editor of our class magazine for publication.
- Write your own short story in which a coincidence either brings a young couple together for the first time, or enables them to meet again after a sad and disagreeable parting. Submit it to the editor of our class magazine for publication.
- What do you hope for in the person you might eventually marry? Write a short article in which you describe in detail the qualities you look for in your ideal partner.
- Write your own imaginary poem looking back on forty years of marriage. Submit it to the Editor of the Poets' Corner Section.

Have you made your choice? Fine! Do not forget to provide a title.

Other favourite 'love comedies' that have been used as springboards to the development of written expression are: Only You, When Harry Met Sally, My Best Friend's Wedding, The Mirror Has Two Faces and As Good as It Gets, inter alia.

6. Providing an Alternative Ending

Some students love to play professional writers and indulge in the sophisticated use of words to shock their audience which is their own classmates, in this particular case. This writing activity is based on a reading stimulus (an open-ended story) and its presupposes the class discussion of the issues at stake, the reconstruction of the semantic shemata of the text in question, plus an evaluation of the situation at the end and a subsequent hypothesis as to the way it may go on. The skills involved in this task are reading, speaking and writing.

Instructions

Participate in the *First Contest of Short Story Endings*. Continue developing *Lamb to the Slaughter* (by Roald Dahl) in one more paragraph. In it, provide an alternative ending and illustrate it with some original artwork. A student committee will select the most creative piece and the author(s) will receive a miniature lamb as a gift.

- *Lamb to the Slaughter* deals with the relationship between a pregnant woman and her husband. One day, he returns home from work and tells her that he's leaving her for good. Her unexpected reaction allows us to discover another facet of her personality.

Other stories with open endings or with unexpected twists in the end that require the reader to take an active part in the overall interpretation are: Charles (Shirley Jackson), Embroidery (Ray Bradbury), Compassion Circuit (John Wyndham), All Summer in a Day (Ray Bradbury), The White Bungalow (A. J. Alan), When We Dead Awaken (Ronald Duncan), Hills Like White Elephants (Ernest Hemingway) and The Interlopers (Saki), among many others. Students may be required to make the end explicit in some cases or to provide optional endings in others.

7. An Introduction to an Anthology of Short Stories

To give our students a real purpose and to raise motivation, it is useful to specify other audiences that might benefit from reading their texts. An end-of-term task might be the compilation of a set of short stories for a wider audience, not just to be read by other students and to be evaluated by the teacher. Problem-solving requirements like this make demands on the students' intellectual and reasoning powers, and though challenging at first, they are engaging and often satisfying to complete. This writing task involves a combination of cognitive skills such as reading and text-finding, evaluating and comparing alternatives, carrying out some prior investigation on genre or text type, agreeing on a course of action, meaning-construction and composing, deciding on text features, evaluating prior knowledge, voice, perspective and context.

Instructions

A relatively simple way to have your name on a book is to become an editor and compile other people's work. However, this task is not that easy, since you have to provide reasons for every choice you make. You are now in charge of compiling a set of short stories which will be read and discussed in the English II class next year. The collection of material can be arranged on:

- a thematic basis. For example, our current short story booklet is organized round the following topics: children vs. adults (block 1), technology and the future (block 2), crime, punishment and the law (block 3) and love and marriage (block 4), on different styles of writing (e.g. quality of language, imaginative energy, emotional force)
- level of complexity and degree of popularity among students
- unusual and strange characters
- any other criterion that you consider appropriate. You already know the English II class you are a member. There are also anthologies galore in the library that you can browse to get further ideas.

After selecting the pieces, write the introduction to the anthology, in which you should give the reader a general idea of the content. If necessary, suggest an order for reading these stories. Tell your reader which story you enjoyed most and explain why. Give the book a title. You can work in twos to make the task more enjoyable. Here is an example of a compilation based on a thematic organization:

- The Unicorn in the Garden (J. Thurber)
- The Colonel's Lady (W. Somerset Maugham)
- The Gift of the Magi (O. Henry)
- Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's Coat (R. Dahl)
- The Escape (W. Somerset Maugham)
- Here We Are (D. Parker)
- Country Lovers (N. Gordimer)

These clearly have one underlying theme, love, and its many facets: end of love due to lack of magic, love destroyed by infidelity, love stronger than anything, love that ends in marriage and love that dies out because of lies and quarrels. We can also get a glimpse of the role women and men play in our society and observe them in different situations and from diverse perspectives.

8. Journal Writing

This instance of personal, expressive writing based on experience or recollection offers very good insight on the students' own perception of their learning process By reflecting on their own lives or on their linguistic progress they will 'discover' some of the dos and don'ts of language choice and use. Additionally, they will gradually gain independence from the teacher and autonomy in their learning. Learning journals, in particular, are multidimensional self-evaluations that create a visible record of the students' linguistic growth and stimulate the development of meaning-making strategies, critical thinking and habits of reflective questioning. The underlying metacognitive process that takes place during writing involves cumulative mental operations (e.g. reflection, analysis and interpretation) which encourage the appraisal of the steps and the strategies that evolved along the learning process. This task is highly recommended for students with low morale who feel they are not making much progress in EFL learning .

Instructions

Have you ever kept a journal? I guess so. Autobiographical discourse is something some people embrace and love. If you haven't yet done so, why don't you give it a try? Here are some guidelines.

The idea behind this journal is that you write something in it every day. You are free as to what to write. For example, you can jot down what you have done that day, your plans for tomorrow, poetry, a story, complaints, how difficult English is, your reflections on an experience that struck you, current news items, your fantasies, a letter, a quotation that caught your attention, the lyrics of a song you love (with a few comments of your own) and so on. An alternative is to keep a record of your language learning experience so far, the new words you've learned, the progress you've made, the difficulties you've encountered and how you've overcome them. This reflection on your own language learning ability will provide a good forum to 'discover' your ideas and express them with the confidence that what you write will not be viewed critically.

Your journal will be collected once a fortnight. Your teacher will read it and just circle the 'serious mistakes' (concord, verb tense, verb form, word category and the like), unless you decide to keep it private. If you have questions or ask for a comment, we promise we will respond. Try as much as possible to incorporate the new words and expressions that you are learning into your writing. Play with the language, and don't be afraid of making mistakes. Explore, experiment and experience. This is the golden rule. If you are doubtful about how to use a word or expression, try it. You can clear up your doubts with a good dictionary!.

Have fun. You will certainly enjoy reading your journal in a few years' time. A plus is that ou will get credit for your effort.

At an elementary level, journal writing can be implemented as follows (adapted from D. Nunan 1988):

Keep a weekly diary with the following information:

In class last week

- Some things I learned:
- Some things I didn't understand:
- Some things I liked:
- Some things I didn't like:
- Some things I want to study:
- Some things I need help with:

Outside the class last week

- I spoke English (where? to whom?)
- I listened to English (what? when? where?)
- I read English (what?)
- I wrote in English (what? to whom?)

We will check your diaries once a week and give feedback. Besides, you will get credit for your extra effort!!! Catch the hot potato, take up the offer and have fun...

9. A Personal Anthology

This activity has been very successful in our language courses at all levels of proficiency, and the students' copious comments have allowed us to get into the fascinating world of multiperspectivity. At the same time, getting to know about their likes and preferences has provided us with interesting raw material to adapt our teaching style to their own learning strategies. Adjustment to our students' entusiasm and interests may require a readjustment of our own priorities at a given moment in the academic year and this flexibility will, in turn, help us improve our own performance while catering to their needs and interests.

Instructions

- You will be the editor of your personal anthology, that is, a compilation of those works that best reflect your own personality, interests and tastes. It will then be shared with the class, so that you and your classmates can get to know each other better.
- This compilation should contain:
  - Works by well-known or professional writers which have touched your soul:
    - Two poems
    - Two articles
    - One short story
  - Work by fellow students or classmates:
  - Two works of your choice (compositions, reviews, short articles, reports - at least 200 words each)
- 3. Stick to the following guidelines:

- ❍ The title page will include the title you have created for your anthology, your name, class and year.
- ❍ he table of contents must be clearly organized by genre, topic or some other logical pattern. Title, author and page number will be given for each work.
- ❍ The preface will introduce your anthology. It should reflect your thoughts, observations, and/or feelings about the works you have chosen and the reasons for choosing them. The preface will be 2-3 pages long.
- ❍ All works will be neatly typed and pages will be numbered consecutively.
- ❍ The bibliography delineating your sources will appear at the end of the anthology. It should be prepared according to formal guidelines and organized alphabetically by authors' last names.

All the material included in your anthology should be different from the texts discussed in class. So pluck up courage and become exploratory readers. Move in the directions indicated, and, in case of trouble or doubt, just ask your teacher, who will give you a helping hand. Work your fingers to the bone when writing your preface and make the most of it. This anthology represents YOU.

You should enjoy carrying out this activity. Your classmates and I will certainly enjoy going through it since it'll broaden our own reading, while allowing us to get a glimpse of your interests and choices.

10. The Writing Portfolio

What happens when the students receive their written work back? Do they take some time to have a look at mistakes and slips? Do they make sure that they understand the teacher's comments and objections? Not always. The writing file or portfolio is meant to be a compilation of all their production plus their own reflection and self-assessment for further reference and future work. The idea behind this meta-communicative task is to encourage the students to monitor their own progress and their linguistic-strategic development over time. Towards the end of the course, the file will contain edited exponents of many different types of writing (descriptions, narrations and so on) and varied formats (letters, diary pages, reports and the like) with comments, memory aids and notes that represent an attractive 'document' of academic life. Going through their own material from time to time will allow the students to evaluate their learning process and eradicate errors. In case of doubt about the teacher's final decision on their performance during the year, they may be asked to submit their portfolio for global assessment of the strategies implemented.

Instructions

Compile and organize your written production in a portfolio, which will be checked periodically. Make sure you understand your teacher's objections and provide the right choice to all the errors that the teacher has spotted. Keep a record of your own progress and rewrite your work when necessary. Towards the end of the academic year, we will analyse the linguistic strategies you have developed during the course.

You should also include some personal comments in each of the compsitions. For example, you can write down the points you need to reinforce, something you learned, the mistakes you should not make again and so on. The following questions may be of some help.

1. Was this piece easy or difficult to write? Why?
2. How many times did I revise it before handing it in?
3. Did I receive any responses or suggestions from the teacher or peer editor? Did he/she like my work?
4. Did I try something new such as an expression, a lexical item, a verb pattern?
5. What should I change or improve to make my writing more appealing to the reader?
6. How does it compare to other pieces I have written?
7. What did I learn from this composition?

Remember that we will always praise what you do well while pointing out what can be improved. Also keep in mind that there is a positive relationship between good writing and increased reading experience. So the more you read, the better you will write.

Concluding Remarks

The approach outlined emphasizes the discursive and cognitive aspects of the development of the writing skill. Essentially, writing is

considered a problem-solving activity in which the writer faces two main tasks: generating ideas and composing them into a structure adapted to the needs of the reader and the goals of the writer, with adequacy to the context of situation. Because our objective is to highlight the discourse dimension, the discussion focuses on the effectiveness of the message as a whole, the linguistic strategies and resources utilized, the lexical options made, the writer's focus and perspective and so on. Less attention is paid to accuracy in grammar though it is certainly true that without a solid basis of the formal linguistic system, the students cannot hope to develop into effective writers. But it is our view that error-free writing is less important than writing which addresses the topic clearly, develops it in a rational and relevant way, adds persuasive evidence when necessary and takes into account the needs of the reader. Our experience agrees with the findings of many research studies which conclude that once students are writing fluently and confidently, they will be more inclined and more able to write accurately (R. White and V. Arndt 1991, C. Tribble 1996). The tasks outlined above and the general framework of reference may provide an invigorating effect on classroom writing practices and contribute to the development and reinforcement of the students' individual and social identities through functionally oriented texts.

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The bibliography below may serve as a useful stepping-stone for those teachers who are interested in the rationale and possibilities of implementation of portfolios and computer-mediated-communication in the EFL classroom.

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The following links have been very useful when carrying out the tasks outlined above.

- Greatest Films. http://www.filmsite.org/ (specializes in detailed summaries of classic American films) (Task # 5).
- Internet Movie Database. http://www.msstate.edu/Movies (contains information on over 40.000 movie titles including foreign films) (Task # 5).
- InterText: The Online Fiction Magazine. http://www.intertext.com/ (contains over 200 mainstream, science fiction and fantastic stories by contemporary authors) (Tasks # 3, 6 and 7).
- OnLine fiction magazine. http://www.etext.org/Zines/InterText (plenty of virtual short stories written by contemporary authors) (Tasks # 3, 6, 7 and 9).
- Student Stories. http://www.scoe.otan.dni.us (contains edited stories written by American students) (Tasks # 3, 5 and 9).
- The Internet Movie Database. http://us.imdb.com/welcome.html/ (search results provide plot summaries, list of cast members, movie trivia, viewers ratings and recommendations) (Task # 5).

- Topics Online Magazine. http://www.rice.edu/projects/topics/Electronic/Magazine.html (site for ESL/EFL students to publish their writings) (Task # 5)
- Volterre Web Links for Learners. http://www.wfi.fr/volterre.weblinklearners.html (contains e-mail writing projects) (Task # 4)
- Writing for the World. http://icarus.uic.edu.~kdorwick/world.html (contains links to student writing on the Web) (Task # 5).

http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Massi-WritingTasks.html