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IMPROVING THE WRITING SKILLS OF 1ST YEAR IT STUDENTS

Listening, reading, writing, and speaking are the four main language skills. These abilities are classified as either receptive (or passive) or productive (or active). Listening and reading are considered receptive skills because they require students to receive and comprehend language. On the other hand, speaking and writing are productive skills that require students to generate their own language.

The students of International Information Technology University (IITU) undergo to different English courses to enhance their skills and be ready for their future profession. Most of the courses offered by the Department of languages are connected to improving their writing abilities, with this, it is really a great challenge to teachers to devise different teaching strategies and methodologies to extract the writing skills of the learners and develop them to the fullest.

The article deals with the English language essay writing techniques which are used in teaching English language to IT students in their first year of study at university as the initial step to their profession oriented English language course program. The essay writing course program is taught at International Information Technology University (IITU) in Almaty to the 1st year Bachelor degree Intermediate level students. Writing has always been seen as an important skill in teaching and learning English language. This importance is due to the fact that it reinforces grammatical structures and vocabulary that educators strive to teach their students.

In order to improve writing skills of English language learners, educators must consider new and innovative methods for their instructions. Using the controlled approach, this study analyzed the validity of different teaching strategies and methodologies to see the progress of students during the Teacher Supervised Independent Study (TSIS) 1st and 2nd attestations guided essay writing and independent essay writing during Mid-term and Final examinations for the Academic Year, 2021–2022. The goal of this paper is to provide successful teaching approaches for improving the English language writing skills of 1st year Intermediate level students. The findings suggest that through the use of different approaches such as brainstorming, hamburger method, modeled writing, interactive writing, guided writing, this goal can be attained.

Key words: essay writing, skills, approaches, English language, teaching, learning, course, program.

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«Ақпараттық технологиялар» мамандығының 1 курс студенттерінің жазу дағдыларын жетілдіру

Тыңдалым, оқылым, жазылым және айтылым – негізгі тілдік дағдылар болып табылады. Бұл қабілеттер рецептивті (немесе пассивті) немесе өнімді (немесе белсенді) болып табылады. Тыңдалым және оқылым қабылдау дағдылары болып саналады, өйткені олар студенттердің тілді қабылдауын және түсінуін талап етеді. Екінші жағынан, айтылым және жазылым – бұл студенттерден өз бетінше сөйлеуді қажет ететін өнімді дағдылар.

Халықаралық ақпараттық технологиялар университетінің (ХАТУ) студенттері біліктіліктерін арттыру және болашақ мамандығына дайындалу үшін әртүрлі ағылшын тілі курстарынан өтеді. Тілдер кафедрасы ұсынатын курстардың көпшілігі олардың жазу дағдыларын жетілдірумен байланысты, сондықтан студенттердің жазу дағдыларын қалыптастыру және оларды толыққанды дамыту үшін мұғалімдерге әртүрлі оқыту әдістері мен әдістемелерін жасау басты міндет болып табылады.

Бұл мақалада университеттің «Ақпараттық технологиялар (АТ)» мамандығының 1-курс студенттеріне ағылшын тілін үйретуде олардың кәсіби бағыттағы ағылшын тілі курсының

бағдарламасына алғашқы қадам ретінде қолданылатын ағылшын тілінде эссе жазу әдістері талқыланады. Эссе жазу курсының бағдарламасы Алматы қаласындағы Халықаралық Ақпараттық Технологиялар Университетінде “Intermediate” деңгейдегі бакалавриаттың 1 курс студенттеріне арналған. Жазылым дағдысы әрқашанда ағылшын тілін оқыту мен үйренудегі маңызды дағды болып саналады. Эссе жазу маңыздылығы мұғалімдердің өз студенттеріне үйретуге тырысатын грамматикалық құрылымдары мен сөздік қорын жақсартуымен тығыз байланысты.

Студенттердің жазу дағдыларын жетілдіру үшін мұғалімдер оқытудың жаңа және инновациялық әдістерін қарастыруы керек. Бақылау әдісін пайдалана отырып, бұл зерттеу студенттердің 2021-2022 оқу жылының 1-ші және 2-ші аттестацияларында алған қорытынды бағалары, аралық және қорытынды емтихандар кезінде жазылған эсселер студенттердің үлгерімін көру үшін әртүрлі оқыту стратегиялары мен әдістемелері талдайды. Бұл мақаланың мақсаты “Intermediate” деңгейдегі 1-курс студенттерінің ағылшын тілінде жазу дағдыларын жақсарту үшін оқыту тәсілдерін ұсыну. Қорытындылар бойынша миға шабуыл, гамбургер әдісі, имитацияланған жазу, интерактивті жазу әдістерін пайдалана отырып, алға қойылған мақсатқа жетуге болатынын көрсетеді.

Түйін сөздер: эссе жазу, дағдылар, әдістер, ағылшын тілін үйрену, оқыту, курс, бағдарлама.

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Совершенствование навыков письменной речи студентов 1 курса специальности «Информационные технологии»

Основными языковыми навыками являются – аудирование, чтение, письмо и разговорная речь. Эти способности классифицируются как рецептивные (или пассивные) или продуктивные (или активные). Аудирование и чтение считаются рецептивными навыками, потому что требуют, чтобы студенты воспринимали и понимали язык. С другой стороны, устная и письменная речь являются продуктивными навыками, которые требуют от учащихся создания собственного речи. Студенты Международного университета информационных технологий (МУИТ) проходят различные курсы английского языка, чтобы улучшить свои навыки и подготовиться к будущей профессии.

В статье рассматриваются техники написания эссе по английскому языку, которые используются при обучении английскому языку студентов специальности “Информационные технологии (ИТ)” на первом курсе университета в качестве начального шага к переходу к профессионально-ориентированной программе курса английского языка. Программа курса по написанию эссе преподается в Международном университете информационных технологий (МУИТ) в Алматы для студентов 1 курса бакалавриата Письмо всегда считалось важным навыком в преподавании и изучении английского языка, что связано укреплением грамматических структур и словарного запаса студентов: Цель статьи – обобщить успешный дидактический и методический опыт по улучшению навыков письма на английском языке у студентов 1-го курса уровня “Intermediate”. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о том, что с помощью различных подходов, таких как мозговой штурм, метод гамбургер, смоделированное письмо, интерактивное письмо, управляемое письмо, цель может быть достигнута.

Ключевые слова: написание эссе, навыки, подходы, английский язык, преподавание, обучение, курс, программа.

Introduction

The course LAN6001A Academic English (Intermediate level) is designed to help the students develop their English language competence for their current and future academic studies at International Information Technology University (IITU). The course focuses on building up general/academic vocabulary, raising their grammar accuracy and developing academic Listening, Reading, Writing

and Speaking skills. Intensive classwork is accompanied by self-study activities in the form of SIS (self-checked language and grammar exercises plus project presentation), and TSIS (academic speaking and writing). The goal of the course is to develop strategies to improve English reading, writing, listening and speaking skills and to build up techniques required in an academic setting. The course objectives are to raise the students’ grammar accuracy level; to build up students’ academic

and professional English language competence; to develop the students' academic listening and note-taking skills; to develop the students' academic reading skills of skimming for general comprehension, scanning for specific information; to teach students to write opinion essay; to develop the students' skills of speaking on a wide range of academic topics; to foster the students' interest in learning, develop their logical and critical thinking, creativity, leadership, decision-making, problem solving and teamwork abilities. By the end of the course the students will be able to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words, correctly use the studied grammar constructions; demonstrate general and detailed understanding of oral speech in academic situations; demonstrate the skills of skimming and scanning texts with high frequency academic and general language; write opinion essays; speak on academic topics using the studied language (Academic program of LAN6001A Academic English course, 2021) [1].

This article focuses on improving students writing skills and the results of it. First year students of IITU have to take Academic English course in the first semester before taking the English for Specific Purposes course. Students are taught how to write an essay in Academic English course.

Materials and methods

There are several ways to prepare students in their writing activities. One way that teachers can help students before they start writing is by eliciting their prior knowledge. This can be done through brainstorming. Online Oxford Learner's Dictionaries defines it as a way of making a group of people all think about something at the same time, often in order to solve a problem or to create good ideas (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2022) [2]. By this, it makes sure that everyone is in the same boat in order to integrate new information into pre-existing knowledge structures, which activates long-term memory of the learners. Another way is to introduce the hamburger method for essay writing. The image of a hamburger serves as a graphic organizer. The top of the bun is referred to as the thesis, and the bottom as the conclusion. The sandwich of meat, cheese, and vegetables serve as the essay's supporting evidences (Loewus, 2022) [3].

Aside from this, a modeled writing can be used. While composing a text in front of the class, the teacher speaks out loud as the teacher writes. This

gives students the opportunity to hear the thought processes involved in the writing process, such as topic selection, how to start the piece, and how to find interesting vocabulary. Revision and editing are also a part of the modeling writing process (Graves, 1994) [4].

In addition, the teacher can also present the interactive writing. To write a text, the teacher and students collaborate. At key moments, the teacher demonstrates letter and word writing to the students. On the text's content, the teacher and the students work together. They should collaborate to help students build words through the study of sound, improving their letter knowledge and acquainting them with a variety of sight words. Students are encouraged to search, check, and confirm while writing interactively (McCarrier, Pinnell, Fountas, 2000) [5].

Moreover, a guided writing is vital to achieving a good writing. With students who have similar needs, the teacher works one-on-one or in small groups and provides support as they write. With the help of this activity, students receive targeted writing instruction so they can write on their own (Cunningham, Allington, 1999) [6]. Teachers can determine whether additional instruction is required based on the results of these activities.

Literature review

A student's essay is an independent written work on a topic proposed by a teacher, containing the student's subjective considerations on the topic as a whole and/or on its individual aspects and issues. The topic can also be proposed by the student, but it must be agreed with the teacher. Writing an essay is extremely useful because it allows the student to learn how to formulate thoughts clearly and competently, structure information, use the main categories of analysis, identify cause-and-effect relationships, illustrate concepts with appropriate examples, analyzing their conclusions; master the scientific style of speech.

The main unit of the essay organization is a paragraph consisting of an introduction sentence (topic sentence), an argument sentence (supporting sentence), a review sentence and a concluding sentence (final sentence), in which a conclusion and explanation of the point of view are made (Oshima, Hoag, 1991) [7]. So, there are main three parts in essay writing, an introductory part, main part and conclusion part. These parts do not stand out in the text in any way, but their presence creates the

logic of the text. The introductory part is intended to interest the future reader in the problem posed. One of the common techniques is to start an essay with a question that will be answered later. In any case, the introduction should create a certain emotional mood, a desire to read the text further. In the main part there are several judgments on the topic of the question. Usually, the main part has several subparagraphs, each of which consists of three sections: thesis (proven judgment), justification (arguments used to prove the thesis), sub-conclusion (partial answer to the main question). Various life situations, opinions of famous people, etc. can act as arguments. The argumentation is structured as follows: first a statement is given, then an explanation to it follows, an example is given, on the basis of all this a final judgment and conclusion is made. The final part contains a summary of the conclusions on the issue under consideration. The author returns to the problem and makes a general conclusion on it. The purpose of the final part is to create a general picture, to give integrity to the whole text, to unite all thoughts.

A good essay should clearly express the views of its author without deviations from the topic, be logically structured, and not contain grammatical and spelling errors. The standard volume of an essay is 250-300 words. According to researchers the types of essays are the followings:

- narrative;
- descriptive;
- discursive;
- argumentative (Stephens, 1999:140) [8].

In addition, the following criteria are applied to the essay: compliance with the task, disclosure of the content, correct structure, variability, diversity of lexical and grammatical material, coherence (Egurnova, 2014:661) [9]. Typical mistakes of learners are the followings: incomplete disclosure of the topic while writing an essay; inconsistency in the presentation of thoughts; lack of examples or their insufficient number; some grammatical errors and poor vocabulary.

As mentioned above, macroskills are composed of listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Nowadays, written communication is crucial for both social and professional reasons, particularly in the workplace. There are numerous different text types, some of which we use frequently and others less frequently. Written communication can be considered as the following: e-mails, shopping lists, letters, stories, letters, text messages, reports, minutes of meetings, postcards, diaries essays, etc.

Because there are many different reasons why we decide to write a particular text, we employ a variety of writing techniques to effectively communicate our message.

Since teachers frequently lack the skills to improve their own writing, writing is one of those skills that are frequently regarded as being challenging to teach. However, it is still a crucial skill. Some students may require improvement to communicate more effectively in English with friends, at work, or for academic or professional purposes.

There are ways to incorporate activities that will help students' writing skills even though it's sometimes thought of as a solitary activity into your lesson. But first, let's look at what it means to write in a foreign language. Since we have more time to plan, organize our information, take our time, and check for errors or inaccuracies when writing than when speaking, writing requires very different mental processes. But there are also difficulties because writing well requires consideration of numerous factors. Both the purpose of our writing and the target audience must be taken into account. This will affect the register, style, and structure of our writing in addition to its content. There is much more going on than just creating sentences with proper grammar.

Before, While, After Writing

Before Writing

Students can learn new skills and be challenged to use language they might not otherwise use through both creative and "real-life" writing. Before assigning a writing task, as with any other skill lesson, you must properly lead in.

This could be accomplished by having students read a text that piques their interest, such as an introductory article or a short story, or by engaging them in a listening or speaking activity.

You might then want to look at some sample or model answers and engage in a variety of activities that analyze the good and bad points, as well as the key elements in each. After that, you can begin a discussion about writing ideas or things to include; don't just leave students with a difficult task without any inspiration.

While Writing

The stage that follows is frequently overlooked but absolutely necessary for any good piece of writing that is planning. Students should be encouraged in the following points and these are purpose, register, content and structure. Students who write appropriately and in a clearly structured

manner receive a high percentage of marks on many English language proficiency exams. This means that even if your students struggle with accuracy, if the other elements are completed well, they can still receive high marks.

Begin with a broad outline, then ask students to carefully consider what they want to say in each paragraph and how they intend to say it. Starting by brainstorming relevant vocabulary and expressions can be beneficial.

After Writing

Surprisingly, many students do not proofread their work after finishing it! This is a major blunder because even native speakers make mistakes when writing because they change their minds halfway through a sentence and don't go back to adjust everything else. Obviously, your students will not have enough time during exams or timed exercises to complete a full re-draft, but you can encourage them to do so for other writing assignments you assign them. It is hoped that it will raise their awareness of ways to improve their own writing.

Make sure learners are thinking about the task as a whole and asking themselves questions like, 'Have I really answered the question here?', 'Is it too formal/informal for the audience and purpose?', and 'Does it follow a clear and logical structure?'

Following that is proofreading, or checking for errors/mistakes. This is important even for timed writing activities because students must allow enough time to review their work. When you look at the text as a whole, it can be difficult to spot errors because there is so much to take in. Instead, it can be beneficial to have students go over what they've written several times, each time focusing on a different aspect.

They could, for example, read through once to check for verb-noun agreement (i.e., have they written 'she go' instead of 'she goes'), once more for prepositions, once more for correct word order, and so on. This allows the student to concentrate and spot errors more effectively. Reading each line backwards to really concentrate on each word is another good technique for checking for errors and helping students focus if time allows. It's all too easy to become engrossed in the language and lose sight of the other aspects of the writing process. You should also award points for how well they responded to the question, whether the text develops clearly and you can identify a structure, and how appropriate the register is.

Writing may be the most difficult skill for students of Foreign Languages (FL) to master

(Nunan, 1999) [10]. Effective strategies and activities for developing students' writing skills can be implemented to hone their writing skills. To function properly, your students must be exposed to a variety of writing strategies and activities. Your goal should be to engage, productive, enjoyable, and enjoyable them.

According to research, many learners do not use many strategies when writing in L2. The reasons are obscure. Anyway, here are some strategies that some students employ. The following can be introduced to students who have few or no strategies for improving their writing:

- Rewriting spelling patterns to embed the word structure in their mind
- Copying pieces of text
- Writing numerous sentences with the structures newly studied
- Practice by translating a piece in their L1 into English (and sometimes using a translator tool to check it)
- Note-taking to increase their practice in writing
- Seeking amusing punctuation examples, where the punctuation changes the meaning, so that they can grasp the differences that punctuation can make
- Writing word connections and phrases down for later use
- Consulting textbooks and dictionaries
- Summarizing a larger piece of text
- Highlighting little chunks of language that they can later use in writing

As for strategies, choose passages, topics, and exercises that are participatory, interesting, and enjoyable. Here are some practical, tried-and-true suggestions:

1. Copying text (for beginners)
2. Classification: For example, students are given three headings, such as classroom, my kitchen, and a fruit shop, as well as a separate list of words, such as teacher, fridge, tap, banana, and so on. They must write the appropriate words under the appropriate heading. You could also add a question mark heading where they write silly words from your list that don't fit under the other three headings, such as a blue elephant, a square football, and so on.
3. Sentence Completion: Learners may be given alternatives to choose from, or they may be required to complete the sentences on their own.
4. Writing Predictions: Young learners typically predict what will happen next in a story orally. With older students, this could be done in writing. You

could pause the story at various points and ask them to predict what will happen next.

According to Choo, Generation Z is now more accustomed to creating text that is loose but abundant in video, captions, and images (Choo, 2010:166) [11].

It is worth to mention also, Dudley-Evans and St John suggest the following approach to writing:

- develop rhetorical awareness by looking at model texts;
- practice specific genre elements, particularly moves and writer stance;
- carry out writing tasks showing awareness of the needs of individual readers and the discourse community and the purpose of the writing;
- evaluate the writing through peer review or reformulation (Dudley-Evans, St John, 1998) [12].

Research results and discussion

During the Academic Year 2021-2022, 25 groups of students from various streams enrolled in Academic English. The evaluation parameters of the learners comprised of different components and one of them was essay writing. The essay writing was tailored for the students to hone their capabilities to express themselves through written form. Such skills focused on the following: writing fluency. This is an important aspect of writing ability and development because students can determine and

connect their sentences and identify whether their text has a good flow. Through this, students can logically and intuitively weave together all the elements of writing logically. The next was writing structure. A 250-word or more should be organized well. Text structure should be formed properly rather knowing where to place your introduction, body paragraphs and conclusion as these parts are very basics. This includes knowing which point you will prove in which area of your writing. And as a part of developing their writing skills, vocabulary and word choice should be taken into account. Since writing is a form of communication, therefore students must be skilled at using words and stringing them together to convey their point. Knowing multiple synonyms for one word or being conversant with advanced vocabulary items does not constitute having a diverse vocabulary. Collocations and connotations are vital to improving the one's writing and at the same time the grammar and spelling. And these lead to the criteria on how the students were assessed.

The essay writing progress of the students were determined in three categories: Teacher Supervised Independent Study (TSIS) which corresponded to 15% of their total score, here the students were guided by the teacher while producing their essays, on the other hand, during the mid-term (100% of their total score) and final examinations (100% of the total score) essay writings were independently done by the students.

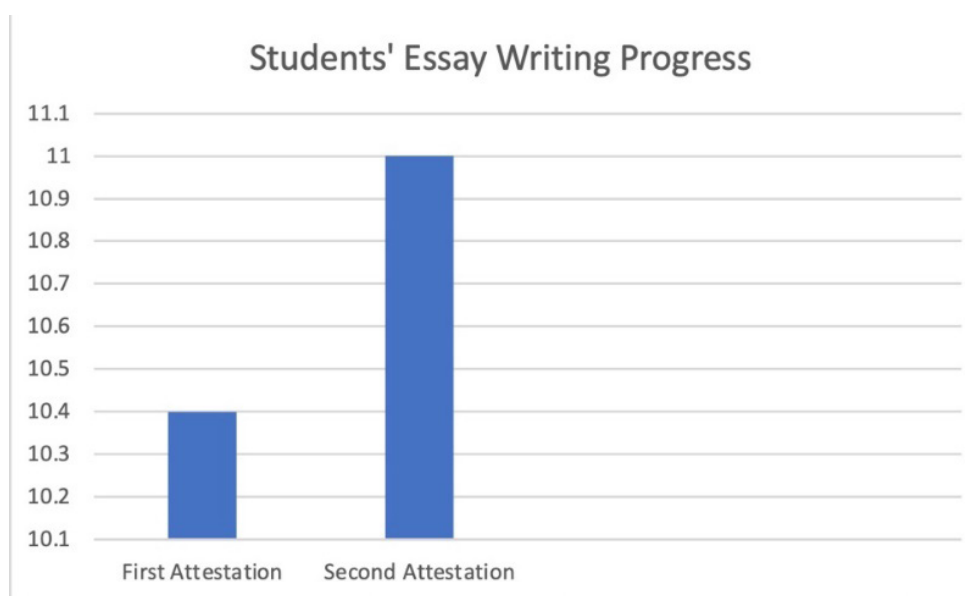


Figure 1 – TSIS during 1st and 2nd attestations

The Figure 1 shows the comparison of essay writing progress of the students during the first and second TSIS evaluation. This means that the writing skills of learners enrolled in Academic

English have improved from 10.4% out of 15% during the first attestation to 11 % out of 15% in the second attestation. It slightly increased by only 0.6%.

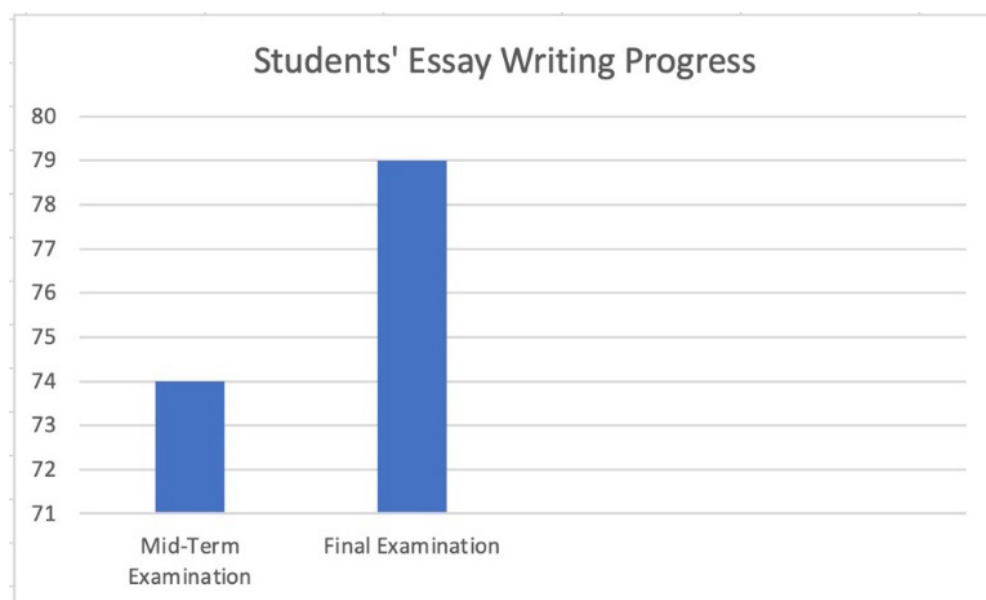


Figure 2 – Mid-term and final examination essay writing

The Figure 2 shows the comparison of essay writing progress of the students during the mid-term and final essay writing examinations. This means that the writing skills of learners enrolled in Academic English have improved from 74% out of 100% during the mid-term examination to 79% out of 100% in the final examination. It slightly increased by only 5%.

The 25 groups of students who were enrolled in this course successfully gained knowledge to effectively strengthen their skills in writing. Although there was a slight improvement in the learners' writing skills in preparation for their future profession, we can say that the methodologies and strategies used to boost their writing skills are quite effective. All students passed the mandated requirements as prerequisite for the next semester's English course. The guided writing practices for TSIS during 1st and 2nd attestations intensify their productive skills- which is writing, in preparation for Mid-term and Final examinations. The independent essay writing examinations during mid-term resulted in a 74%, indicating that all students passed the test, and it increased by 5% in the final examination, giving them a total of 79%, indicating that all students successfully passed the test. Nevertheless,

the approaches used were appropriate for the learning and teaching of writing skills.

Conclusion

Based on the data presented above, it is clear that the essay writing activities incorporated into the parameters of Academic English course is effective, albeit with only a slight improvement. We can also say that a lack of experience in writing in general and/or a relatively short period of time using different approaches may have an impact on the entire writing process (students were only exposed to them in just one semester). Another point to consider is the leveling of the students. Some of them were misplaced and this may affect the result of the groups.

Moreover, teachers should ask students to reflect about what they wrote and ponder things to improve and have an open discussion regarding this matter. Through this process, students can be enlightened on how their essays can be better to achieve a certain standard of good essay. Structuring a small group discussion around a writing task will benefit all. Another thing to contemplate on how to improve their writing is to use peer response groups. Teachers

may divide the class into three groups and ask them to bring a rough copy of the essay. Teachers should provide students with criteria for critiquing their work. The most crucial phase in any response exercise is for the students to identify the strongest element of the paper and explain to the writer why it worked so well.

To sum up, different approaches such as brainstorming, hamburger method, modeled

writing, interactive writing and guided writing were introduced to students, we also recommend that learners should be given home tasks related to essay writing in order not to neglect its importance. A follow up essay writing activity at home is vital to practice the skills gained at the university and discuss its outcome during the next meeting in the classroom setting.

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