

Developing writing skills

WebQuest Description: This is your chance to investigate something that interests you. Research a topic. Find an issue that you want to explore. Investigate the Explore More Web site. And create a newspaper section that you can show to your family and friends.

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum: Foreign Language

Keywords: writing, newspaper section, issues of interest

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Introduction

What you are doing on your WebQuest. Dear Rookie Reporter, Think you're ready for a challenge? I want to review your responsibilities for our special section in the Explore More News. You realize that most of our readers wouldn't know a glow-in-the-dark bunny from a field of Bt corn. A wind turbine from a windmill. A fish kill from a fish net. The water cycle from a bicycle. You need to explain why they should care and why these are problems we need to tackle. First, you are going to find an issue that interests you. Then you are going to research your topic and write an article. This is going to require your best reporting skills. I want our readers to know who is involved and what the issue is. You'll report on the topic, or write a human interest article or investigate a major issue. We go to press as soon as you finish. So go get your pen and paper and get to work. Sincerely, I. M. Thiboss Managing Editor, Explore More News

Tasks

I want you to learn about an issue related to one of the Explore More Web sites. You need to know who is involved, what is involved, why it is an issue, and all its future possibilities. You are going to take that knowledge and create an Explore More newspaper that contains one of the following three articles. You will write a general news article, a human interest article, or an issue article. In other words, you are going to select a topic, identify an issue related to that topic, investigate the people, information, problems and views related to this topic, and create an article that will let our readers know one of the following:

1. What the topic is. (This is the general news article that introduces the basics of the topic.)
2. Who is involved in this topic. (This is the human interest article that profiles an expert or stakeholder involved in the topic.)
3. What is an interesting or important issue of this topic. (This is an in-depth investigation of a compelling issue that relates to your topic.)

A few reporting tips: Remember, the topics are genetic engineering, energy, working landscapes, or water quality. Examples of sub-topics within each major topic might be cloning, laws or agriculture in genetic engineering. The issues are the really hot items. They might be "Should cloning be allowed for endangered species?" or "Should the federal government restrict medical research involving genetic testing?" or even "Will genetically engineered crops help or harm the environment?" Use your best reporting skills and look for the facts. Report what is true and be fair with your coverage of the subject. This is not your opinion, but rather the facts, statistics, and examples you've learned in your research. After you're done writing, you'll have an Explore More News article ready to publish!

Process

There are several basic steps you will need to accomplish.

1. First, choose one of the Explore More topics and look through the Web site to get familiar with the topic of your choice.
2. Investigate the sub-topics of your chosen topic. What interests you? environment? people? medicine? laws? business?
3. Pick an issue that interests you. Remember, an issue is one of those burning questions that really get people thinking about your topic.
4. Remember to think about your audience. Your audience will be the readers of the Explore More News. Ask yourself: Who is my audience? What do they need to know? Why should they care? Are they students? Adults?
5. Follow the instructions for one of the three articles (below).
6. Write your articles and have fun!

Explore More News Assignments (choose one)

General News Article:

1. Choose a topic—select one of the Explore More Web sites for your research.
2. Investigate the topic and sub-topics involved.
3. What general facts, information, statistics do you find? What are some of the major concerns about this topic?
4. Write an article that would explain the topic to readers.

Human Interest Article:

1. Stakeholders are people who have something to lose or gain. When you think about your stakeholders, ask yourself why they care about your topic. They might have social, economic, political, religious, personal, or cultural reasons for feeling as they do. Find out about these people and how they feel. Look for people who have different opinions and views on your topic. What are your stakeholders' viewpoints? Why do they have these viewpoints? Make sure to look in the Viewpoints sections for video clips and transcripts. Research other sources for different viewpoints. (The other Web links are a great place to start.)
2. Find a stakeholder with an interesting viewpoint. Find out the background of the stakeholder and the "why" behind the viewpoint.
3. Write an article that explains the stakeholder's situation and viewpoint in a fair and unbiased manner. Use quotes, facts, examples, and statistics where needed.

Issue Article:

1. Skim through the Website to find the issues that interest you.
2. Take notes on issues that you find during your pre-research.
3. Do not limit yourself to what you see listed as an "issue." Choose something that interests you.
4. Write your issue as a question and then define your issue by explaining what it is to the reader.
5. Write an article that reports your issue. Find out the what, who, when, where, why and how of it. Explain what the issue is, who is involved with this issue, why this is an issue, and why people should be interested in this issue (what causes people to have an opinion).

Evaluation

You should now have a pretty good understanding of one Explore More topic or one issue related to that topic. You have truly written an Explore More News article of great value to your readers. How do you think new research will change your issue? Can you see your topic changing as laws change or technologies develop? Write your opinion and post it on your Facebook page or on the blog of the class. The evaluation criteria for your articles are listed in the rubric below. Your articles will be graded according to these criteria.

Category and Score	40	60	80	100	Score
Knowledge Gained	Several students in the group appear to have little knowledge about the facts and the technical processes used for the newspaper.	Most students in the group can accurately answer most questions related to a) stories in the newspaper and b) technical processes used to create the newspaper.	All students in the group can accurately answer most questions related to a) stories in the newspaper and b) technical processes used to create the newspaper.	All students in the group can accurately answer all questions related to a) stories in the newspaper and b) technical processes used to create the newspaper.	60
Who, What, When, Where & How	Less than 75% of the articles adequately address the 5 W's (who, what, when, where, and how).	75-89% of the articles adequately address the 5 W's (who, what, when, where and how).	90-99% of the articles adequately address the 5 W's (who, what, when, where and how).	All articles adequately address the 5 W's (who, what, when, where and how).	40
Articles - Supporting Details	The details in more than 25% of the articles are neither clear nor pertinent.	The details in the articles are clear and pertinent 75-89% of the time.	The details in the articles are clear and pertinent 90-100% of the time.	The details in the articles are clear, effective, and vivid 80-100% of the time.	40
Articles - Interest	The article does not contain facts or figures that might make it interesting to read.	The article contains some facts or figures but is marginally interesting to read.	The articles contain facts, figures, and/or word choices that make the articles interesting to readers.	The articles contain facts, figures, and/or word choices that make the articles exceptionally interesting to readers.	80
				Total Score	

Conclusion

Writing, like all other aspects of language, is communicative. Think about what we write in real life. We write e-mails, lists, notes, covering letters, reports, curriculums, assignments, essays perhaps if we study. Some of us write articles or work on blogs, forums and websites. A few write stories and poems - but very few. All of these writing tasks have a communicative purpose and a target audience. We need to make a distinction between writing to learn (other things, like structures, spelling and vocabulary) and learning to write. If we understand this distinction then the communicative purpose of writing will be clearer. We need to work hard on developing ways of responding to the content - the message - and not just the level of language. This can support an emphasis on the importance of writing for a real audience, but we do also need to find real audiences for learner writing. This could include ourselves if we can respond as readers, other learners and groups, and public forums such as blogs, websites and letter pages. We need to find ways to integrate writing with other skills and activities, giving it more relevance and importance - and also making it more interesting. We need to use meaningful, realistic and relevant writing tasks, based on our learners' needs and interests. We may need to design individual tasks based on what individual learners need to write. In addition we should talk about writing with our learners, how we write well, why we write and for who, and what makes it difficult. Learner training like this can provide valuable support and motivation. Please have a look at the following websites. You may find the writing tips interesting. <http://breakthroughthinking.com/?gclid=CKyQoMLy3roCFYIF3godjVIAAdw> <http://www.articleteller.com/how-to-write-an-article> <http://www.dailywritingtips.com/writing-for-magazines/>

Teacher Page

There are lots of reasons, as there are lots of ways to make the writing we do with learners more communicative. Why writing is difficult to teach. Some solutions. Ideas for communicative writing tasks. Conclusion. Why writing is difficult to teach. By its nature, writing is often a solo activity, done silently, involving physical effort and taking a lot of time. This may not make it attractive to learners or teachers as a classroom activity. In addition to this, writing is difficult, even in L1. There are linguistic, psychological and cognitive problems involved, making teaching it and learning it a considerable challenge. It is also important to remember that many people never write anything of any length in their daily lives, or anything using paper and a pen, or without using a spellchecker. But this is often what we ask them to do in English. Responding appropriately to writing that learners give us is time-consuming and taxing, whether we are addressing errors or the content. We often have to work as hard as our learners have done. Our response is also often dictated by our concern with sub-skills and so correction is often at this level rather than at that of communicative competence. This is aggravated by the fact that it is not easy to evaluate this competence, especially formally - as can be seen in the complexity of

the speaking criteria for exams such as IELTS and Cambridge Main Suite. In addition, it is important to recognize that learners are equally concerned about correctness in writing at a sub-level, in areas such as spelling and punctuation. This is especially true when compared to speaking. This inhibits communication. The kinds of tasks we set learners may not be motivating, relevant or indeed very communicative. Writing is rarely incorporated into a lesson, ending up relegated to homework - which reduces the possibilities to be communicative. We need to give learners tasks that are intellectually satisfying, especially when writing. Adult learners become aware of their limitations very quickly when they try to express complex ideas on paper. As a final note coursebooks don't necessarily always help us develop writing. We need materials that provide relevant, real and communicative practice. This is rare.

Standards

12 th grade

2.2 Presentation, oral/written, of movies, books, events, experiences, expressing feelings/personal reactions related to these

2.3 Presentation, oral/written, of clear and detailed descriptions on subjects related to fields of their own interest and specialization

2.4 Fill-in application forms and writing functional texts, respecting the specific rules.

Credits

First of all I would like to thank to our trainers in London for helping us to get the basic information about creating a webquest. The course I attended in London, between 27th October-3rd November 2013 was Integrating technology in English language instruction. I would also like to thank the person who posted a lesson plan on the following website:

http://www.iptv.org/explore/Resourses/news_webquest_short.cfm#intro. I used most of that information to create my webquest.

Other

Be bold! Be ingenious! Be curious! Give it a try!