

How to do 'Guided Writing' in English class?

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English learning in elementary schools is mainly focused on developing students' listening and speaking abilities, however, more and more emphasis and efforts have been laid on reading success and basic writing skills. Reading success leads to skillful writing, if teachers can build up a friendly and supportive reading environment to help students read in groups or independently. Post-reading activities may consist of retelling the material and basic writing. Due to diverse language levels among students, teachers might confront a certain degree of anxiety about classroom activity design; how to come up new teaching ideas every time just to keep students on the track. Through various group activities and guided tasks in class, teachers might find it a relief to conduct a successful English class.

Guided writing is considered a good way to help students to be creative, and to form an independent writing habit. Elementary level learners know very limited words and basic grammar rules, teachers need to be highly aware of students' ability and always encourage any attempts. In order to extend students' thinking, to urge students to revise and edit their own writing and to create individual written texts, there are some guidelines for teachers to follow. A well-organized activity is the corner stone of a successful writing class!

First of all, choose a writing focus. Writing focuses include some conventions such as spelling, punctuation, spaces and capitalization, while clarifying and extending ideas can be others. For example, "This is a book." is a direct descriptive sentence, by adding more words in it, however, the sentence becomes longer, and the meaning, deeper and wider: "This is an **interesting** book." Or "This is a book **about animals**."

Organizing and planning the structure is another writing focus. Although elementary level students know little about a formal English essay format, they do have a clear idea about what a good article should consist of three main parts: Head (Introduction), Body, Tail (Conclusion). Teachers may simplify and narrow down the focus to paragraph writing, which is now to be seen very often in the textbooks for higher graders. Topic sentences are here to be introduced to students for in English writing, just to state what the main points are. Introducing the ideas about sentence structures is also a must. 6 grade students have learned at least 300 words,

including verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs (time/places). Ask students to sort the words into categories or word chunks in a grammatical order: Adj., N., V., Adv. (place), Adv. (time). By doing this, they will gradually notice the word chunks make a sentence! The outcome can be hilarious sometimes and students just love it!

Some other writing focuses are narratives, reports, expositions and procedures; teachers still need to consider your students' level before moving onto complicated steps. After one writing focus is chosen, teachers should explain why it is important to follow certain rules, which leads to successful writing.

Then, encourage students to give it a try. In case some slow learners can't catch up with others, teachers may group students, or ask advanced learners to help their partners. While the class is doing the task, teachers are recommended to move around the class and monitor the whole process. Give assistance and guidance whenever it's needed. Students can do a lot better if they feel safe and supported during writing.

Third, select a topic (e.g. All about me, My family, My favorite sports, A trip to ...). Guided questions and thinking maps are very useful if teachers want to show students how to elaborate on a certain topic. Here's an example:

Topic: All about me

◎ Guided questions

1. What's your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Are you a boy or a girl?
4. When were you born?
5. How tall are you? How much do you weigh?
6. Where do you live?
7. Where do you go to school?
8. What do you like to eat?
9. What colors do you like?
10. What sports do you play?
11. What do you like to do after school?
12. Do you have a pet?
13. How many family members do you have? Who are they?
14. What do your family do?
15. What do you want to be?

.....

(Add more questions according to students' level and interests)

◎ Bubble map (以下主題畫成六個大的 bubbles)

My Family

(Father, Mother, sister, brother, dog, cat, etc.)

Me

(name, age, sex)

Hobbies

(sing, dance, draw, rollerblade, swim, play the piano, etc.)

My Dream

(doctor, singer, nurse, teacher, etc.)

Favorites

(pizza, coke, PSP, movies, books, etc.)

My Features

(long/short hair, big/small eyes, big/small nose, etc.)

My name is _____.

I'm a _____. (boy/ girl)

I'm _____(years old).

I'm _____.

I have _____.

I like _____.

I can _____.

I want to be a/ an _____.

(Thinking maps are very useful tools for clarifying ideas. There are 8 kinds of them, for further information, visit the website: <http://www.thinkingmaps.com>.)

Students may answer the guided questions in complete sentences or just fill in the blanks to finish their own self-introduction. Moreover, they may also create TWO-WORD RIDDLES! See as follows:

**A boy
Big eyes
Sports player
Pizza monster
Future Coby Bryant
【Guess who he is!】**

After students complete their work, gather all the riddles and mix them up. Randomly pick one and read it out loud, then ask students to have a guess. Throughout this process, students will get to know each other better, especially when it's the beginning of a new school year..

In the end, teachers may want to know how much students have learned. To evaluate students' progress, aside from monitoring during the process, teachers also need to keep records of students' development, gather their work samples, and help them to form portfolios. Post up students' masterpieces on the walls and hold a gallery walk, or ask them to recite their work in front of the class, then, conduct free polls or set a ballot box to vote for the best work. Invite students to be part of the evaluation instead of being an outsider of all time.

By doing this, writing can be more fun and creative, and students are encouraged to be more involved and responsible for their own learning!

Enjoy writing!