

Writing as a Language Learning Skill and an Effective Communicative Skill for Engineering Students

Dr. T. Kranthi

*Associate Professor of English, Department of Applied Sciences and Humanities
MVSR Engineering College, Nadargul, Hyderabad, Telangana*

Abstract -

Teaching English to the undergraduate learners is not just teaching the LSRW skills. In the global scenario, where communicating effectively is the prime requirement, stress is more on the integration of the four skills. Writing is the most complex skill both in terms of learning the (target) language and (productive) language as a means of communicating effectively.

Unlike oral communication, written communication cannot be complemented through non-verbal cues. So, a message should be drafted and re-drafted to achieve the element of clarity.

Hence while teaching written communication skills, stress should be laid both on the importance of learning sub-skills of writing and writing for effective communication.

This paper attempts to enable the learners to understand the difference between writing as a language learning skill and a skill for effective communication language and list some strategies of enabling the learners to understand the importance of writing for effective communication.

Key Words: Language Skills, Cohesion, Courtesy in writing, general and technical writing

At secondary school, English language is learnt at the basic level. Students learn and practice more of grammar and vocabulary as a process of learning a language. At this stage writing mostly complements listening (writing as the teacher dictates) and reading (for writing tests and exams). At a later stage, it is used as a productive skill where students start writing paragraphs and essays which fosters their thinking skills. They gradually learn how to express themselves at a slower pace (as compared to spoken language) by refining the language which involves drafting and re-drafting. This is basically a language-learning skill.

At under graduation, where learners learn to express their ideas/concepts on their own, language is used for communicative purpose. They understand the importance of communicating effectively, and this is

when a teacher becomes a mere facilitator. The learner is expected to write with clarity and precision, using the mechanics of writing, using proper grammatical sentences and vocabulary.

Hence, it becomes mandatory for the teacher to bring out the specific difference between writing as a language-learning skill and as a means of effective communication.

While enabling the learners to develop language for professional purposes in an ESP context, it is advisable to adopt a procedural approach to develop the writing skills of the learners because writing is a skill that can be mastered gradually.

Step 1: At first, the difference between speaking and writing as productive skills is discussed. While speaking, at times, only words or phrases can be used instead of complete sentences, especially in connected speech. We tend to use informal language which is complemented with body language and tone. Also, an immediate feedback can be taken during listening-speaking process.

While writing, one should keep the reader in mind to draft a message, as it is neither complemented by body language and intonation, nor is there a possibility of immediate feedback. Hence, the first draft can never be the final draft, one needs to write a message again and again in order to make it a proper means of communication.

It has been observed that students are not giving much importance to writing as they prefer to use AI enabled tools. At this point, students are asked to write a paragraph/ essay giving them 5/10 minutes during the teaching-learning session. The time is restricted to exactly 5 minutes to improve their concentration levels.

As Robert Gunning says,

If the reader does not understand what one writes, he /she is not supposed to be dumb.

If the reader misunderstands one's message, the writer is dumb.

Now, let us analyse the purposes for which engineering graduates need to be efficient in writing;

- Creativity: Employ a unique way of producing a written document, for example, drafting a resume
- Writing to persuade someone- for example, suggesting or recommending a new procedure for better sale promotion
- Interpersonal Communication: any piece of letter or e-mail
- Description – for example, describing how to perform an experiment
- Writing clear instructions – for example, drafting a user manual

Hence, the following steps can be followed to make the learners understand the intricacies of professional writing

Step 2: In ESP situation, letters, memos, reports etc., are easy to read if they are divided into short paragraphs

Hence, the students are then taught the importance of organising a message in the form of a paragraph. For this

- Students are made to organise jumbled sentences in order. (appendix 1)
- They are then taught the importance of using cohesive markers to bring out the connection between the ideas/sentences in a paragraph using connectives and transition words.

While discussing the use of cohesive markers, the use of conjunctions and disjunctions

Disjunctions are also explicit markers which also connect sentences but they connect two or more alternatives:

I don't know *whether* he comes alone *or* along with his wife.

Pronouns and definite articles can also be used as connectives:

Pranita invited me to the party. *She* said that she has invited only 50 people.

Yesterday, I saw a tiger in the zoo. The tiger was getting restless.

- Then they are made underline the cohesive markers of a given paragraph (appendix 2)
- Once they understand the use of cohesive markers, they go back to write a paragraph

based on the sentences they have organised, (appendix 1) using proper connective markers.

Step 3

Once the students understand the importance of paragraphing, the process of paragraphing is taught for writing essays, letters, reports etc.,

- Each paragraph should have a topic sentence to get a gist of it. Hence, the students are asked to pick out the topic sentence from the given paragraphs.
- The importance of organising an essay/letter/report into three parts – introduction, body and conclusion- is explained.
- The learners are then asked to write an essay on any topic
- They are then asked to write a formal letter. During this process, clear instructions are given to them regarding the organisation of the letter:

-Paragraph 1: Purpose of writing the letter with reference to a previous correspondence, if any.

-Paragraph 2: The actual message to be transmitted

-Paragraph 3: What action does the writer expects the reader to take after reading the letter.

Step 4

- The importance of being courteous while writing letters is emphasized at this stage. Also the need for beginning the letter with a polite statement/pleasantry exchange is explained. (appendix 3)

Step 5

- The difference between writing a personal letter and a business letter/report is emphasized.
- Care should be taken, especially while drafting a business letter, because it is a form of communication written by an authorised person. The signature of the person along with the designation makes all the difference. One becomes responsible of the content of the letter as it becomes a *document* once it is signed.

Moreover, with the advent of internet, writing is gaining more prominence – text messaging, blogs, social media etc., - hence, a message should be drafted more carefully as a message is sent at the click of a button and cannot be retrieved back. As it is a permanent message, one needs to spend time to draft the message properly.

- Step6

Principles to be followed while drafting a business letter.

Accuracy of Information: A business letter should include accurate information. For example, a letter placing an order should include a tabular column with complete details/specifications. (appendix4)

-A business letter should be as brief and precise as possible. Students are given a paragraph and are asked to condense it.

For this, the three steps are discussed with examples:

Elimination: Eliminating the repeated ideas or sentences.

Substituting: Using one-word substitutes wherever necessary.

Synthesis: Combining two or more sentences into one.

- Step 7:

1. Clarity in expression is important, *in terms of sentence formation* and the use of *punctuation marks*

The learners are asked to bring out the ambiguity in sentences (appendix 5)

2. Avoiding Redundancy: They are asked to rewrite the sentences removing redundancy
3. No piece of unnecessary information is included.
4. It should be drafted from third person point of view, without any scope for personal feelings.

In the above mentioned manner, A proper course in writing skills course for engineering students must bridge the gap between professional communication and technical proficiency focusing on clarity, conciseness, and audience awareness

Appendix 1

Put the following sentences in the correct order in produce well organised paragraph.

1. For the first four days everyone was happy.
2. There were 1,320 passengers in the ship.

3. There was a swimming pool on the ship, a cinema, good food.

4. The Titanic never reached New York.

5. On 10th April 1912, the huge ship left England for New York.

6. It was 269 meters long and weighted more than 46,000 tones.

7. The Titanic was the biggest ship of the world.

8. Suddenly it hit a big iceberg at 11.40 pm on the fifth day of the journey.

9. It made a 100 meter hole along the side of the ship.

10. The ship was going fast in the dangerous area .

11. Everyone was enjoying and looking forward to arriving in New York

12. The water started coming into the ship and the Titanic started to sink.

Appendix 2

Underline the cohesive devices in the following paragraph:

A dog can be taught many tricks to obtain rewards of food and praise. In order to make the final stages of training work best, the trainer must withhold the reward till the animal has successfully performed the entire behaviour it has learned. Instead, if the trainer were to continue to reward the initial lying-down behaviour over and over to get the most food and affection. Similarly, children will not leave their baby talk and use the adult language if their parents continue to reward that behaviour by responding to it.

Appendix 3

Courtesy in Letter Writing

Compare the letters given below and explain the difference in terms of expressing the message

Text A

Dear Mr. Huxley,

I am writing to say how angry I am about the punishment my son, Christopher Booth, got last week for not handing in certain bits of homework on time

Both Christopher and me reckon that the punishment (two-hours detention) is out of order, and I am gonna tell you why.

For the first five weeks of this term, Christopher done his homework very conscientiously. Believe you me, he used to spend minimum two hours every evening on his various assignments. Bit by bit, though, he got fed up with the fact that certain teachers barely glanced at his work he had done- just giving him a tick, for example, at the end of a two-page essay.

He now feels that it is a complete waste of time spending hours on his homework, yeah, if it is not going to be marked proper.

I wanna sort this out pronto, as Christopher is now feeling very unsettled at school. I am free on Thursday morning. Is that a convenient time for me to see you so that we can thrash this out?

Yours,
Margret Booth.

Text B

Dear Mr. Huxley,

I am writing to express my concern about the punishment my son Christopher Booth, received last week for not handing in certain pieces of homework on time.

Both Christopher and I feel that the punishment (two hours' detention) is unfair, and I would like to take this opportunity to explain why.

S.No	Items	Quantity	Catalogue No.	Offer Price	Total
1	Camel Office Files	100 pieces	5	150/- each	
2	Steindler Pens	25 pieces (from the selected catalogues)	20, 25, 31 and 37	25/-, 40/-, 55/- and 20	
3	Decorative Accessories	4	18	3,000/-	

Payment will be made by DD drawn from AB Bank once we receive the items at our office. We request you to send the stationery by 20th May, 2021.

For the first five weeks of this term, Christopher did his homework very conscientiously. I can assure you that he used to spend at least two hours every evening on his various assignments. Gradually, however, he became disheartened by the fact that certain teachers barely glanced at the work he had done – merely giving him a tick, for example, at the end of a two-page essay.

He now feels that there is little point in spending hours on his homework if it is not going to be marked properly.

I am keen to resolve this matter as quickly as possible, as Christopher is now feeling very unsettled at school. I am free on Thursday morning. Would that be a convenient time for me to see you so that we can discuss this matter in greater detail?

Yours sincerely
Margaret Booth

Appendix 4 – Elements of Placing an Order

The Sales Manager
AK Shyam& Co.
36, Chandpole Bazaar
Jaipur

Dear sir,

Sub: Placing order for the required stationery items – Reg.

This letter is in response to the telephonic conversation and subsequent mails. We are opening our office in a prime location of the city. We would like to place an order with you for stationery items for our office. Please ensure the following items are of the highest quality and latest trend.

Regards

Appendix 5

1. Problem with the structure of the sentence

Ex: 1 which is better? S1 or S2?

S1: you are doing this course in your own time but at the expense of your department in order to learn English.

S2: In order to learn English, you are doing this course. The course takes place in your own time but at the expense of your department.

Ex: 2 : Analyse the following sentences and bring out the ambiguity in terms of meaning:

Miners refuse to work after death

Killer sentenced to death for second time in 10 years.

Local high school dropouts cut in half

Ambiguity because of improper punctuation

Analyse the following sentence and correct them using proper punctuation marks:

After the construction workers finished eating rats emerged to look for the scrapes.

Avoiding Redundancy: Rewrite the following sentences removing redundancy:

- Mr. and Mrs. Raul Francis are proud to announce the birth of a baby girl, Irene Agnes
- Free gift
- Added extra
- Added bonus
- Will Singh's income be sufficient enough for you both?

REFERENCES

- [1] Functional English for Communication by UjwalaKakarla, LeenaPundir Agrawal, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 2024
- [2] Basic Technical communication Skills for Technology (second Edition) byAndrea J. Rutherford, 2006, Pearson Education Inc.
- [3] Effective Academic Writing (Second Edition) by Alice Savage and Patricia Mayer, OUP, 2023
- [4] Effective Academic Writing (Second Edition) by Alice Savage and Patricia Mayer, OUP, 2023
- [5] Teaching English-II by Dr. J E Vallabi, Neelkamal Publications Pvt. Ltd. Hyderabad 2013.
- [6] The Technique of Clear Writing McGraw-Hill Book Company, USA, 1952