

## STRATEGIES OF WRITING SKILLS USED BY THE STUDENTS AT THE UNDERGRADUTE LEVEL

**K. Poomalar**

Asst Prof of English,  
M.Kumarasamy College of Engineering,  
Karur, Tamil Nadu

### **Abstract**

Writing skill is a productive skill in the written mode and a skill that enables an individual to write accurately, lucidly, coherently, grammatically and legibly for effective communication with ease and speed. Writing well is an art that everybody should master in order to be successful.. The art of writing is not something that is taught seriously to us in school. But it is essential in order to excel at both academic and professional levels. Good writing skills are important for college student which is required for getting a job, be it a summer job, part-time job or a regular job after completing college. These days, the employers look for good verbal and writing abilities in the candidates. Every profession requires effective communication, and good-writing skills . So, It has become mandatory that the students at the undergraduate level should master the Writing Skill to have a bright future. In order to master the writing skill, there are many strategies which would assist the undergraduate students .Some of the strategies are Planning, Generating ideas, Organizing ,Revising ,monitoring ,Reader-consciousness etc. It is assumed that if the students are trained to use strategies ,then their writing will be improved. Students should be made aware of those strategies of writing skills by the teachers. This paper investigates the writing process of the undergraduate students.Based on their Writing ,the students are categorized as HAs (High Achievers in English i.e good writers in English) and the LAs (Low achievers in English i.e poor writers in English) and this paper also brings out the strategies used by both HAs and LAs .

**Keywords:** Writing, Strategies, HAs, Las

**INTRODUCTION:**

It is a known fact that in the effective use of any language, the four basic communication skills such as Listening, Reading, Speaking & Writing play a vital role. Of the four, writing is a skill that is acquired through the diligent acquisition and sustained application of the three other skills. “Thinking” is an unspoken and less mentioned skill that monitors and tutors all the four language acquisition skills. Writing plays a predominant role in our day today life. Writing provides a relatively permanent record of information, opinions, beliefs, explanations, theories in time (history) and space (letters, books, documents etc.). It is the primary basis upon which one’s work, learning, and intellect will be judged—in college, in the workplace, and in the community. Writing expresses who one is as a person. It makes one’s thinking visible and verifiable.

The art of writing is slowly slipping away in the modern computing age. Nowadays, most people do not write much in day-to-day life and in a way, a great deal of what we write includes brief notes, answers for the questions, diary-entries, letters etc. Creating a strong foundation of writing skills in high schools prepares them for success after graduation. Not only is writing an important academic skill, but it is also an important skill that translates into any career field. Nearly all professions require some form of writing on the job. For example, doctors and nurses write medical reports on patients; accountants and business managers create financial reports; engineers and software technicians write instruction sheets and user manuals; nearly every worker in all business fields composes emails and other forms of written communication for customers, clients, and co-workers. Ultimately, the number of job tasks that require writing is countless. Since writing is used in all fields and jobs, it is a skill that all students and workers should learn and become better at.

**IMPORTANCE OF GOOD WRITING SKILLS:**

Good writing skills are essential mainly for the professional growth. It is the core aspect while writing resumes, communicating with clients about products, building customer relationships etc. Even while writing resumes, clear and well written sentences highlighting your experience, qualities and character, will gain confidence of the recruiter. But the institutes teaching spoken English are not focused on developing writing skills of individual. A person who wants to speak English fluently should know that they must first have good command over written English. Once your written skills are good, automatically your verbal skills will be good. Students with good writing abilities have an edge over the others. They generally score better than the other students as they can effectively convey what they have learnt in the written examination.

Whichever course one may pursue in college, the importance of writing well cannot be undermined. For e.g. an engineering student should have knowledge of technical writing as he/she may be required to write technical documents - in college, while training and after joining a job. Similarly, a science student might be required to write research papers. For writing research papers, it is necessary that you are able to put forth the right facts and information. Also, the research paper should be free from spelling and grammar errors. If you are not a good writer, then you will not be able to accomplish this task properly.

Good writing skills are also required for getting a job, be it a summer job, part-time job or a regular job after completing college. These days, the employers look for good verbal and writing abilities in the candidates. Every profession requires effective communication, and good-writing skills are a must. These are required for making presentations and reports and are handy for communicating through e-mails.

**WRITING STRATEGIES:**

Oxford (1990b) stated that Strategies are specific actions, behaviours steps or techniques that students employ –often consciously-to improve their own progress in internalizing, storing, retrieving and using the L2. O’Malley and Chamot 1990, Wenden 1991, Wenden and Rubin 1987 stated that Strategies are tools for active self-directed involvement that is necessary for developing L2 communication ability .Oxford comments that plenty of learning strategies exist and many are well recognized and used regularly by students. Researches carried out in the field of strategy use have shown that the conscious and appropriate use of strategies is related to language achievement and proficiency. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) observe that research on the second language and learning strategies throw light on the fact that more effective language learners use more effective strategies than less effective learners and that the effective learners use a variety of strategies.

Oxford (1993) comments that we should involve students in determining which strategies are most appropriate for them with different types of tasks and help the students in building ‘a repertoire of strategies’ that will support their learning efforts. He also stated that Research on strategies use have shown that effective training helps learners in understanding how to use a particular strategy and how to transfer it to a new situation.

This section deals with the study of the writing process of the students at the undergraduate level. The students were spilt based on their writing as HAs(High Achievers in English) and the LAs(Low Achievers in English). The purpose is to understand the writing process which will help in knowing why the LAs have difficulties while composing. By examining the writing of HAs and LAs, it is revealed that the HAs used a number of strategies while composing whereas the LAs used only a few strategies or used them differently. Research has supported the effectiveness of using strategies to improve the writing skills. The most general finding is that the use of appropriate strategies leads to improved proficiency or achievement overall or in certain areas. . Flower and Hayes (1981) introduced a theory of cognitive process involved in composing, based on their work with protocol analysis. Observing the cognitive process taking place in the students while writing, they have identified a number of strategies. They suggest that one major advantage of identifying these basic cognitive processes is that we come to know the strategies used by the good and the poor writer. With this perspective reports has been obtained from students on the process that was involved.

With the above perceptions in view, strategies used by the HAs and the LAs were examined in order to find out whether the LAs used strategies while writing or not and if they were different from that of the HAs .It was also felt that the identified strategies used by the HAs could be listed. It is assumed that if the LAs could be trained to use strategies ,then their writing could be improved.

It is proved that the HAs used strategies more in number than the LAs. The HAs. used a greater variety of strategies than the LAs. Also the HAs were conscious of the use of the strategies and were able to report the strategies they used, whereas the LAs were unaware of the strategies. They did not know what strategies they used and could not describe their strategies.

The HAs applied appropriate strategies to the task requirement. The LAs used inappropriate strategies, which were few in number and this is one of the reasons for their poor writing skills. Some of the strategies identified after evaluating the answer scripts of the undergraduate students are Planning, Retrieving ,Goal setting, Monitoring, Organization, Revision etc.

The following are the strategies identified from the writing of the HAs and the LAs.

### **1. Planning Strategies:**

Planning is one of the strategies used by all the students. The LAs plan less than the HAs. The HAs planned at the prewriting stage and as they composed also but the LAs planned only during the prewriting stage and some LAs did not plan at all. Flower and Hayes (1981) have evolved some strategies by observing the cognitive processes taking place in the students while writing. Planning is one of the strategies mentioned by them, which is commonly used by writers. The writing of the HAs reveal that in the planning process, the writer forms an internal representation of the knowledge that will be used in writing. Flower & Hayes, 1981:372 said that Planning or the act of building this internal representation involves a number of sub processes. The most obvious is the act of generating ideas, which includes retrieving relevant information from the long-term memory.

### **2. Strategies for Generating Ideas:**

Retrieving information from long-term memory is one of the strategies for generating ideas elaborating. The HAs retrieved information from short-term Memory (STM) as well as from long-term memory (LTM) whereas the LAs provided information only from STM.

Retrieving information from STM and LTM helped in generation of ideas. This helps them to elaborate and extend the concepts they have formed. The writing of the LAs display redundancy. They reiterate more of previously introduced information than do the good writers. Thus the HAs could provide more ideas and a variety of ideas. They also view the topic from different perspectives. As the LAs lacked this strategy, they fell short of ideas and often repeated the same ideas.

### **3. Goal-Setting:**

Most of the HAs had a clear idea of the purpose for which they were writing. Some students reported that their purpose was to help the reader if the reader faces the same difficulties which they had experienced. One student said that his purpose was to inform and advise the reader if put in the same circumstances. Some others pointed out that their purpose was to help and inform the reader. This helped the HAs in goal setting. Goal setting is another major strategy, which helps not only in organizing but also in elaboration. Goal setting is an on-going, moment-to-moment process of composing.

### **4. Organization:**

The HAs were very conscious of organization in the prewriting stage and as they composed. Flower & Hayes, 1981 commented that The process of organizing appear to play an important part in creative thinking and discovery since it is capable of grouping ideas and forming new concepts more specifically, the organizing process allows the writer to identify categories, to search for subordinate ideas which develop a current topic and to search for super ordinate ideas which develop a topic.

The above perspective shows the importance of organization, which the LAs totally lacks. HAs are also able to generate ideas, explore the ideas, and bring cohesion in their writing. Cohesion is considered to be an important aspect of writing by the teachers. This aspect is lacking in the LAs as they do not organize their ideas and do not link them properly. Due to this they ‘jumble up’ the ideas and often repeat them.

### **5. Reviewing:**

Revising and evaluating are two sub-processes of reviewing. All the HAs were observed evaluating their work. They judged whether a particular idea should be mentioned or not. When they had various view points; they made an effort to point out which one should be included in their writing. They usually included those ideas, which were relevant to their purpose. They observed that the expert writers focus on the meaningfulness of their text, as they compose while the inexperienced writers focus on mechanical aspects such as handwriting, spelling, or grammar, This is evident from the response of the LAs .

### **6. Recursiveness:**

Recursiveness was observed among the HAs to generate ideas or change the sequence or order of ideas but the LAs were concerned about spelling, grammar and form of writing.

The process is one of accumulating discreet words or phrases down on the paper and then working from these bits to reflect upon, structure, and then further develop what one wants to say. It can be thought of as a kind of “retrospective structuring”; movement forward occurs only after one has reached back, which in turn occurs only when one has some sense of where one wants to go. Both aspects the reaching back and the sensing forward, have a clarifying effect.....rereading or backward movements become a way of assessing whether or not the words on the page adequately capture the original sense intended.

Thus writing is a cyclic activity. The writers keep moving from one process to another and back throughout the writing activity. The process of recursiveness is well captured in the following lines: Murray, 1985 stated that The writing process is not linear, moving smoothly in one direction from start to finish. It is messy, recursive, convoluted and uneven. Writers write, plan, revise, anticipate and review through the writing process, moving back and forth among the different operations involved in writing.

### **7. Monitoring:**

Monitoring is a strategy used by the HAs as they compose. Editing and altering was done by the HAs. These were on going processes. Monitoring also helped them in organizing.

### **8. Reader-Consciousness:**

The HAs gave great importance to the reader/audience. The HAs were conscious of the reader all the time as they composed. They were also very clear who the reader would be and so what sort of information was expected from them. The LAs on the other hand never thought of the reader and at the most the teacher was the only reader who would assess their work. The HAs wrote for a variety of audience and made a conscious effort that their writing would benefit the reader. This gave their writing various dimensions. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) have observed that accurate understandings of the audience is necessary for successful communication at all level of writing.

One of the strategies, which were used by all the students, is linking their personal experiences to the topic. The HAs were able to bring forth many points by adopting this strategy. The LAs also used this strategy but were not able to generalize the points.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Thus the LAs (Low Achievers in English) have to be aware that there are strategies which could improve their writing skills. And also they should have the confidence that they can improve

their writing skills through instruction and training of strategy use. As Carver (1984) suggests that the teacher could make learners aware of learning strategies, through discussion and comment. Teachers should help the learners to decide which strategies they personally find most helpful while working with tasks. The students must be trained in the use of strategies especially in the area of second language. Instruction and training in the use of strategies will improve the writing skills of the LAs.

**Work Cited**

<http://www.skillsyouneed.com/writing-skills.html>

<http://web.ntpu.edu.tw/~language/workshop/read2.pdf>

<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/356600?sid=21105038469551&uid=2&uid=4&uid=70&uid=3738256&uid=2129>

<http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/samples/cam031/89009770.pdf>

<http://cwpfairfield.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/hairston-and-winds-of-change.pdf>