



LANGUAGE AND CULTURE BULLETIN

Information and Tips from the Office of Multilingual and Multicultural Programs

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EXPOSITORY WRITING ACTIVITIES

This *Bulletin* describes activities to practice, summarize, or expand student writing in the content areas. The activities are categorized as *reading/writing responses* and *content dictations*.

READING/WRITING RESPONSES

1. Prompts. In having students respond to what they have read, provide a variety of verbs, prepositions, subordinators, and/or sentence starters to encourage variety in their writing. The following are examples:
Verbs: *compares, explains, demonstrates, identifies, etc.*

Prepositions: *if, instead of, throughout, despite;*

Subordinators: *although, whatever, whenever, etc.*

Sentence starters: *"This reminds me", "The problem", "I'm surprised", etc.*

Mix and match combinations of the above for students to use in their writing.

2. Jigsaw Sentences. After students have read a text, divide the sentences of a content paragraph into halves, and mix.

Then have them match the sentence halves together, followed by ordering the sentences together into coherent paragraphs.

3. Find and copy. Provide specific directions for students to follow in responding

to their reading.

Example: *"Find the words in the sentence that describe the characteristics of plants;"* or *"Write out the sentence that tells about how much coffee Brazil produces each year;"*

4. Free Response. In helping students focus on their thinking about what they read, provide the following kinds of directions:

-*What are the things that you like or dislike about the events?;*

-*Write one question about what you do not understand in the passage;*

-*What does this remind you of in your own life?; and*

-*How does this make you feel?, etc.*

5. Summary. For independent readers, have students summarize a text by writing a sentence paraphrase for each paragraph; for struggling readers, teacher places each paragraph of a text on an overhead transparency, elicits key words from each sentence in that paragraph, and assists students in writing a one-sentence summary of the paragraph.

6. Reducing. Students copy a paragraph and eliminate all unnecessary words and phrases to arrive at the core of the content.

7. Guided Expansion. Students are provided with a simple declarative sentence written on the board with a lot of space between words. Students are asked to suggest additions to the sentence, using one or more of the following: adjective, adverb; relative clause with *who, that, which*; a subordinate clause with *because, when, if*; a comparison (*like, as if, as . . . as . . .*); or *wh*-questions. Write the suggestions on the board and ask the students where they should go in the original sentence. Here is an example:

Original: *Clouds gather moisture.*

Expanded: *Cumulus clouds gather enough moisture which falls as rain.*

8. Sentence Synthesis. Students construct meaningful sentences in a quick write fashion, using three or four words from a content reading passage. The teacher selects the words that summarize the main idea of the reading. The students use the words to construct meaningful sentences.

Example: *separation, Constitution, branch*
Student sentence: *Separation of powers in the Constitution divides power among the branches of government.*

9. Frames. Frames are skeletal paragraphs that contain information. The student is given a paragraph in which information needs to be provided. Students return to the reading and plug in the missing information.

Example (frames in italics):

President Franklin D. Roosevelt governed the United States from 1936 to 1945.

CONTENT DICTATIONS

Students can practice writing through variations on a basic dictation. The following examples highlight some examples:

1. Whistle gaps. Dictate a paragraph, but instead of saying a specific type of word (content-related, transition word, etc.), whistle to indicate a gap for students to fill in.

2. Paragraph gloss. Read a paragraph

once, with students listening only. Then have them reconstruct the sentence, first individually, then in small groups.

3. Mutual Dictation. Prepare copies of alternating 'A' and 'B' texts based on a content passage. Pair students each with a separate form and have them dictate the missing phrases back and forth to each other.

4. Moving Dictation. In pairs, students take turns going to a centrally located place in the room where there is a posted content passage with numbered sentences. Partner A walks to the passage, memorizes sentence 1, then returns to dictate this sentence to partner B. Partner B then walks to the passage and memorizes sentence 2, returns to dictate to partner A. Each takes turns until the passages have been dictated.

Descriptions, reflections, reports, journals, research, and opinions are but a few of the many writing tasks which students engage in across the content areas. Writing a response to reading clearly engages students in direct and specific use of the language of the content; dictations such as those described above can lend variety to the use of content language. The activities suggested above help to enhance learner practice with content language in an indirect manner. When used, these activities should always come *after* content has been taught and serve as reinforcement of the content information while engaging in the language of the content. This will help foster a more conscious application of accurate written language while simultaneously reinforcing content learning.

SOURCES:

Davis, Paul and Rinvoluceri, Mario (1988). *Dictations: New Methods, New Possibilities*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

White, Ronald V. (ed.) (1995). *New Ways in Teaching Writing*. Arlington, VA: TESOL.