

RECOMMENDATIONS ON TESTING THE WRITTEN SKILLS

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Abstract: *This article presents ideas about recommendations on testing the written skills. Various kinds of tests may be recommended in teaching writing to measure pupils' achievements in penmanship, spelling and composition.*

Exercises for beginning writers should build on material which is already familiar to the students. The pre-writing phase should contain a lot of oral work and the actual writing done by the students should be limited and controlled in various ways

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In teaching writing the following tests may be recommended to measure pupils' achievements in penmanship, spelling, and composition.

The teacher measures his pupils' achievement in making English letters in the right way by asking individuals to write some letters on the blackboard. Or else he may ask the pupils to write some letters which he names in their exercise-books. Then he takes the exercise-books for correction.

The teacher measures his pupils' achievement in penmanship and spelling by administering dictation tests or spelling test. The teacher dictates a word, a phrase, or a sentence standing in front of the class for the pupils to hear him well. If the teacher dictates a sentence, it is not recommended to repeat it more than twice. Constant repetition of the sentence prevents pupils from keeping it in memory. If the dictation is based on a text whose sentences are logically connected it is necessary to read the whole text first and then dictate it sentence by sentence. When the pupils are ready with writing, the teacher reads the text once more for them to check it.

It is important to determine the amount of material that might be included in a dictation. This depends on the form, the stage of teaching, and the character of the material itself. In the 5-6th forms a dictation should not be long. It should take from 5 to 10 minutes. In the 7-10th forms a dictation may be longer, and it may take 15-20 minutes. The amount of material included in a spelling test may be approximately as follows: 5th form-20 words; 6th form-30 words; 7th form 50-60 words; 8th form 60-70 words; 9th form 70-80 words; 10th form 80-100 words. [1, 276]

A spelling test may be given either at the beginning of the lesson, or in the second half of it. Thus, if the teacher handles the class well, it makes no difference when he gives it. If he does not handle the class well enough to hold his pupils' attention, it is better to administer a test in the second half of the class-period, the first half of the class-period being devoted to some other work. Otherwise he will not succeed in making his pupils work well. They will be excited because of the test.

The teacher measures his pupils' achievement in composition:

- by asking them to write a few questions on the text;
- by answering questions (the questions are given);
- by making a few statements on the object-picture or a set of pictures given;
- by describing a picture illustrating a situation or topic in written form;
- by writing a few sentences on a suggested topic;
- by giving a written annotation on the text read;
- by writing a descriptive paragraph;
- by writing a letter. [2, 185]

In conclusion, it should be said that everything a pupil writes as a test must be easy for him because he is asked to write only those things which he already knows thoroughly.

It cannot be stressed strongly enough that none of the above types of tasks can be used as tests if the pupils were not taught to do them in the process of learning the target language.

There is one more problem which deals with writing that is the correction of mistakes in pupils' exercise-books.

Modern methodologists believe that the essence of correction lies in the fact that a pupil must realize what mistake he had made and how he must correct it. That is why many teachers and methodologists, both in this country and abroad, consider that the teacher should just mark (underline) a wrong letter, or a form, or a word, etc.

In this way he will make the pupil find the mistake and correct it. Learners must acquire the habit of noticing mistakes in their own writing. This habit can be acquired if pupils are properly trained, if teachers will develop these habits in their pupils. The training that will help pupils to become aware of their mistakes has to be gradual and continuous. When a pupil is made to find his mistakes and correct them, he has to apply his knowledge in spelling, vocabulary, and grammar of the target language and this is far more useful for him than the corrections made by the teacher. The effect of the teacher's corrections on the pupils is usually very small. Therefore, pupils should be trained to correct mistakes that have been made. The better the teacher trains his pupils, the less work he will have to do in the marking.

Consequently, training in penmanship implies: visual perception; observations accompanied by some explanations on the part of the teacher; practice under the teacher's supervision in class, and independently at home.

In spelling instruction, the teacher should take into consideration the difficulties of English Spelling and instruct pupils how to overcome these difficulties. The following exercises may be suggested for the purpose:

Copying. The aim of this exercise is to allow the pupils to practice what has been taught in Listening and Speaking. Writing does this because the movements of the muscles of the hand are now called in to help the ear, the eye and the muscles and nerves of the throat and tongue.

The "look" and the "feel" of the word are used to help the memory (F. French).

For better assimilation of the spelling of words, it is recommended that various associations should be established, such as:

a) associations by similarity in Spelling:

within the English language {room, spoon, moon; thought, bought, brought; night, right, light} between Eng. & Russian words - биография-энтузиазм
biography - enthusiasm

b) associations by contrast in spelling:

two - too spelling alone distinguishes these

see - sea homophones

one - won [3, 124]

Much care should be given to the words, whose spelling does not follow the rules for example, daughter, busy, sure, usual, colonel, clerk, soldier, etc. Pupils master the spelling of such words by means of repetitions in writing them.

Copying may be carried out both in class and at home. In copying at home, the following tasks may be suggested:

a) underline a given letter or letter combination for a certain sound;

b) underline a certain grammar item; c) underline certain words depicting, for example, the names of school things.

Dictation. This kind of writing exercise is much more difficult than copying. Dictation is a valuable exercise because it trains the ear and the hand as well as the eye; it fixes in the pupil's mind the division of each sentence patterns, because the teacher dictates division by division. E.g.:

Tom and I go to school/ together.

Dictations can vary in forms and in the way they are conducted:

(a) Visual dictation as type of written work in intermediate between copying and dictation. The teacher writes a word, or a word combination, or a sentence on the

blackboard. The pupils are told to read it and memorize its spelling. Then it is rubbed out and the pupils write it from memory.

(b) Dictation drill aims at consolidating linguistic material and preparing pupils for spelling tests.

(c) Self-dictation. Pupils are given a text (a rhyme) to learn by heart. After they have learned the text at home the teacher asks to recite it. Then they are told to write it in their exercise-books.

Writing sentences on a given pattern. The following exercises may be suggested:

(a) Substitution. Mick has a sister. The pupils should use other words instead of a sister.

(b) Completion. E.g. He came home late because...

(c) Extension. Ann brought some flowers (adjective before flowers)

Writing answers to given questions. The question helps the pupil both with the words and which the pattern required for the answer. The object of every kind of written exercise mentioned above is to develop pupil's spelling in the target language and to fix the linguistic material favourable conditions for developing their skills in writing compositions.

By composition in this case we mean pupil's expression of their own thoughts in a foreign language in connection with a suggested situation or a topic within the linguistic material previously assimilated in speech and reading.

In teaching compositions, the following exercises may be suggested:

1. A written reproduction of a story either heard or read.
 2. A description of a picture, an object or a situation.
 3. A descriptive paragraph about a text, or a number of texts on a certain subject.
- Pupils may be given concrete assignments.
4. An annotation on the text read.
 5. A composition on a suggested topic.
 6. Letter writing. Pupils are usually given a pattern letter in English, which shows the way the English start their letters and end them. [6,45]

Various kinds of tests may be recommended in teaching writing to measure pupils' achievements in penmanship, spelling and composition.

Exercises for beginning writers should build on material which is already familiar to the students. The pre-writing phase should contain a lot of oral work and the actual writing done by the students should be limited and controlled in various ways. Here are some suggestions for beginning writing activities.

Have pupils dictate the first part of a story. After three or four sentences have been dictated, give the students the story to complete independently in writing.

- Give students copies of cartoons from which the characters' dialogue has been omitted. Have them compose orally, experimenting with various things the characters might say, and then write their ideas on the cartoons.
- Have students invent and act out brief social exchanges: asking directions, making a purchase in a store, greeting someone in the street, ordering food at a snack bar. Then have them write this dialogue form.

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