



A STUDY TO DEFINE THE WRITING OBJECTIVES IN ACADEMIC WRITING

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ABSTRACT

The greatest challenge any English language teacher faces is to teach effective English writing. It has become a challenge because the traditional methods of teaching have not been showing promise in helping the students acquire good vocabulary and sentence construction skill. Good writing skills has proved to be the deciding factor in the process of career building of the students. Lot of research has been done, and even today, is taking place in the field of writing skill acquisition. The researchers have come up with many new ideas. In some cases the researchers have suggested implementing the traditional methods with a scientific approach. And one such method is “Extensive Reading” and sound knowledge and understanding to define objectives in any academic writing task. This article is a discourse in understanding the objectives of academic writing.

INTRODUCTION:

Academic Writing is a major area in which all students (including faculty), of all ages and backgrounds need to gain proficiency. With the swift development in Science and Technology, it is imperative that students learn how to present their projects, assignments, papers, et. al. in an organized and scholarly fashion. As much as we focus on Listening, Reading and Speaking, another aspect that is of great importance is that of Writing (Academic Writing).

The current trend of Universities across the globe of presenting Science and Technology to the public necessitate that we also inculcate the same in our students. Consider ‘Science Communication’ for example. Students of major Universities are constantly involved in busking and communicating the various aspects of Science to the public. It would do no harm for us to instilling similar proficiency in writing in our students.



How do we set objectives so that our students can embellish their writing skills?

WRITING OBJECTIVES:

The primary focus of this presentation is to discuss Objectives related to Writing. Although the objectives set herein are intended for writing purposes, the same may be applied to a more widespread context. It is assumed that needs assessment, goal analysis, instructional analysis, context analysis and overall learner analysis precede what is being set forth in this presentation.

A set of clear objectives will give any instructor a sound basis for developing adequate skills (in writing or any other area) in the learners. Before preparing your own objectives, it is important to firstly understand what an objective can/should or cannot/should not contain. Objectives should consist of 3 main components:

1. Performance
2. Conditions
3. Criterion (*Mager, 1984*)

PERFORMANCE: As we understand the term describes actions that the learner is expected to perform. It should be measurable and observable. For example:

- Be able to ride a bicycle
- Be able to paint a picture of an animal
- Be able to write an essay
- Be able to answer questions

In each of the tasks mentioned above the performance of the learner can be observed. If there is no visible performance, then it cannot be considered an Objective. Therefore, ensure that for each objective that you set forth, the learner is able to demonstrate the same in a visible manner.

Don't set objectives such as:

- Be able to appreciate music
- Be able to understand physics

These are abstract conditions and cannot be visibly observed, thus they are not objectives.

CONDITIONS:

Again, as the term implies, this defines the situations/circumstances which will affect the performance. In other words, this component describes to the learner/student what will be or will not be available for them to carry out the performance. For example, if the objective said, "Travel to Hyderabad from New Delhi in two hours," that could probably be done if one is flying on a plane.

However, if the conditions were changed then the performance becomes difficult to say the least. For example: "*Travel to Hyderabad from New Delhi in two hours by road in a car,*" or "*Travel to Hyderabad from New Delhi in two hours by using your two feet!*"

Always consider and contemplate the conditions which the learner will be faced with before setting your objectives. What will be available to the learner, what will the learner not be allowed to use, what are the real-life conditions under which the performance must be delivered? Based on this information, clear conditions must be set forth, such as:

- Using a screwdriver and pliers, install a ceiling fan
- Without the use of class notes, compile an essay
- Given a bicycle and a smooth road of 100 meters, ride the bike to the end of the road and back
- Using the guidelines provided, write a formal e-mail to a prospective employer

The examples given above are clear objectives with conditions. Thus, the circumstances that would surround the learner must always be considered in setting objectives.

CRITERION:

The term is self-explanatory and indicates the criteria that must be met if a performance is to be accepted as satisfactory or otherwise. Stating a criterion allows the students to know what is expected of them and how well they must perform in order to be considered competent.

It is essential also to come up with a rubric or a means of assessment in evaluating and considering a performance. We will also discuss this shortly. But it needs to be mentioned that there are some performances in which a certain amount of error may be overlooked and some in which there would be no scope for error. For example:

1. A tailor stitching clothes (a certain amount of error may be acceptable)
2. A doctor stitching up a patient (no error is acceptable)



It must also be remembered that only criteria that is important must be imposed. For example:

“Given a computer with Word processing software, write a simple letter. There should be no spelling, grammar or punctuation errors.” (Mager, 1999)

This clearly sets forth the PERFORMANCE that is expected, the CONDITIONS that apply and the CRITERION that is implemented. The OBJECTIVE is to have the student/learner write a letter with no errors. Two other areas that would be applicable to the CRITERION are:

1. Speed – There might be time limits (such as: within two hours, etc.)
2. Accuracy – Giving a range of acceptable performance (such as: no more than two errors, etc.)

Another example of an OBJECTIVE that contains all three components – PERFORMANCE, CONDITIONS and CRITERION: “Students will be able to tell the time to the nearest minute on an analog clock!”

- PERFORMANCE – “tell the time”
- CONDITION – “analog clock”
- CRITERION – “to the nearest minute”

A poorly written objective of the above would be: “Students will know how to tell time.” (ITMA, 2015)

A point to be added further in CRITERION is that of assessment or rubric. A rubric is a scoring tool that teachers use to assess students’ learning, using a set of standards or criteria. When rubric is settled and communicated to the students in advance, the grading process is clear and transparent to all involved. (Lewis, 2015)

A sample table is provided below in order to give you an idea of how or on what parameters rubric may be agreed-upon:

LEVEL	LEVEL ATTRIBUTES	KEYWORDS	EXAMPLE OBJECTIVE	EXAMPLE ACTIVITY	EXAMPLE ASSESSMENT
Knowledge	Recognition, retention and recall of information	Recite, List, Match, Quote, Identify	'CAN DO' statements	Group/Individual activities	Oral testing by questioning
Comprehension	Understand what the facts mean	Describe, explain, paraphrase	'CAN DO' statements	Group/Individual activities	Writing an essay
Application	Correct usage of facts	Apply, illustrate, use, demonstrate	'CAN DO' statements	Group/Individual activities	Paper based test
Analysis	Breakdown supplied information into component parts	Classify, categorize, analyze	'CAN DO' statements	Group/Individual activities	Assignment on differences
Synthesis	Combine parts of information to make a whole	Compose, design, generate, develop	'CAN DO' statements	Group/Individual activities	Project work of composing or designing
Evaluation	Judging the value of the information or ideas that were taught	Determine, compare, contrast, evaluate	'CAN DO' statements	Group/Individual activities	Give a problem and ask for solution(s)

(Stewards, 2015)

CONCLUSION:

This presentation is intended to encourage and edify our faculty to set effective objectives in instilling appropriate knowledge and skills in our students, in the discipline of writing. As was astutely iterated by Edward Bulwer-Lytton that “The pen is mightier than the sword,” indeed writing skills are very important to one’s scholastic arsenal. (Wikipedia, 2015)

In conclusion, when compiling objectives, it would do well to remember:

1. **Outcome vs. Process** – Teaching is only the process, but the actual intent is to facilitate learning. So it must be remembered that learning is more important than teaching or rather, the outcome is more important than the process.
2. **Specific vs. General** – If there is no clarity or if the objectives are not specific then they are useless. Be specific so that objectives can be accomplished without any distraction or confusion.
3. **Measurable vs. Immeasurable** – Measurable objectives can be observed. They are visible and tangible. Keep objectives measurable.



4. **Students vs. Instructors** – Lastly, it is imperative to remember that objectives must be student-centered. They must demonstrate the student's performance, not the teacher's.

With these words, may we engage in our student's lives in a manner in which we see them achieving the objectives set forth and accomplishing great things thereby! Especially in relation to Academic Writing!

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