

Block

**4****WRITING SKILL**

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## BLOCK INTRODUCTION

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In the language development process children develop writing ability much later than the listening and speaking skills. Infants, who are surrounded by print and observe adults around them engage in writing, begin their journey much before they are formally initiated into the process of writing in schools. As infants grow they instinctively begin to draw and scribble illegible forms.

There are five units in this Block. In **Unit 1: The Mechanics of Writing**, we begin with pre-writing skills to familiarize you with the stages a child goes through in the early writing phase and the skills she develops during this phase. Features of handwriting development, handwriting conventions, stages of spelling development, approaches to spelling development and some common rules governing spelling are other points of discussion in this Unit.

In **Unit 2: Creating a Writing Environment** we suggest ways to enable a writing environment in a second language classroom. What is it that motivates a young child to write? What is a meaningful writing programme? What is the role of the teacher?

In **Unit 3: Types of Writing in the Elementary School**, we discuss the different types of writing that can be done at the elementary level, the criteria for selecting suitable writing tasks for different levels of learners and the need for providing a context for written work.

In **Unit 4: The Writing Process with Beginners**, we made you aware of the current trends in teaching writing. We emphasized that there is now a shift from the product to the process. We have shown you how to use the process approach in teaching writing to beginners.

There is a need to give the learners feedback on their strengths and weaknesses so that they can improve their writing skill. Through the process of evaluation a learner gets feedback on her writing skill. **Unit 5: Assessing Writing** provides you an understanding of the different aspects of evaluation, the role of the teacher as evaluator, the importance of learner self evaluation and peer evaluation. Some methods of evaluating writing and marking strategies are discussed further in this Unit.

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# UNIT 1 THE MECHANICS OF WRITING

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## Structure

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- 1.1 Introduction
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- 1.5 Some Other Writing Conventions
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Suggested Readings
- 1.8 Answers

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you should be able to:

- understand a child's developmental level with regard to handwriting, spelling and punctuation skills;
- plan suitable teaching-learning strategies for developing handwriting, spelling and punctuation skills; and
- respond to the special needs of individual children, by providing the required additional support.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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The primary goal in teaching handwriting or penmanship is to produce efficiently, a free flow of ideas onto paper, with a minimum attention to its mechanics. Handwriting, spelling, punctuation and other writing conventions must be viewed as a part of the process of writing. They are like the vehicles that carry information to its destination. They need to be looked at in the context of the development of writing skills as a whole, and not in isolation. This is because these are merely the tools that give more meaning to what a child writes. If a child's writing is purposeful and driven by a need to communicate, the child will make every effort to overcome illegible handwriting or poor spelling as it becomes hindrance. If these become the main focus of learning, they can become major obstacles. Many children believe that they are incapable of writing simply because they are not able to overcome problems of handwriting or spelling. On the other hand, some children may get good marks on spelling tests, but make a large number of spelling

errors while writing a composition, because writing a composition requires that they give attention to several things at the same time, which they are not able to do. It is therefore, important to look at the development of these skills and conventions within the context of the development of the writing process.

In this unit we shall make an effort to look at the factors which are important for the development of some of these writing tools or conventions. We will also see how their development can be enhanced in a meaningful way.

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## **1.2 PRE-WRITING SKILLS**

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Children start to learn about writing long before they go to school. They begin by imitating the adults around them. Early writing is simply expression; it is the sheer joy of expressing in a new form. There is no real audience. This early writing goes through the following stages :

- scribbling
- drawing
- approximate forms that resemble letters
- pretend writing (using letter like forms and scribbles)

A little careful observation will show that the young child is awkward in her hand movements in comparison with an older child or adult. The child's movements are less steady, less accurate and slow. The young child needs to go through experiences which enhance her finer finger movements, her eye hand coordination and other skills which build up the base for the development of later hand writing skills. This pre-writing stage is important because children develop certain skills which assist the development of later writing skills. Many of these need to be reinforced through activities in the primary years. Some prewriting skills are given next, along with a few suggested activities for their development.

- a) **Development of spatial relations** - i.e. through a series of activities and experiences children begin to grasp concepts such as **above, below, next-to, between, before, after** and so on.
- b) **Left to right progression** - children begin to grasp the fact that writing in English progresses from left to right. This can be reinforced by moving a finger along print while reading, making them join dots from left to right or go through a sequence of picture stories from left to right. Most children however, pick up notions of left to right progression in writing on their own, through their varied experiences.
- c) **Classifying and categorising** -children begin to group objects or pictures with common characteristics. They learn about which things belong together. Initially they group objects, then pictures; later they are able to group colours and symbols. This is useful for alphabet learning at a later stage. For example, letters of the alphabet can be introduced in categories.

some are tall - b d f h k l t

some are small - a c e i m n o r s u v w x

some fall - g j p q y

- d) **Visual discrimination** -(finding likenesses and differences)

For example - finding the odd one out in a set of three pictures

- matching picture cards
- noticing symbols that are different

b b b d b b b d

c c c e c e c c

m n n m n m n n

- matching a letter of the alphabet to the same letter in a series

a a e c o u

h b h l k h

p f t b p q

- e) **Fine muscle control**- i. e. the control over finer finger movements. Children need activities which strengthen their finger muscles, as this helps them to gain a better control. Some suitable activities are given below:

- cutting along a line
- stringing beads
- action rhymes using the fingers
- finger painting
- clay/ plasticine modelling
- working with dough
- threading / sewing
- paper tearing and mosaic work
- weaving

- f) **Eye-hand co-ordination** - Some suitable activities for developing eye-hand coordination are:

- colouring inside a small shape
- tracing along a pattern
- continuing a pattern drawing
- pattern writing and calligraphy
- cutting along a line
- pasting inside a shape

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## 1.3 HANDWRITING

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### 1.3.1 Features of Handwriting Development

When a child first puts a pen or pencil on paper she begins the journey with a highly conscious participation in the writing process. Slowly, with time and experience, the shaping of letters into words and sentences becomes automatic. Initially children move through the space on paper making letters one after the other. This motion is called praxis.

Scientific studies have sought to describe the features of handwriting movement, rather than advocate one method over another. They have, however, thrown some light on the characteristics of efficient movement. Two features which come into play are :

- A) the amount of pressure exerted; and
- B) the use of space.

A) **The Amount of Pressure Exerted**

First let us look at how the pressure exerted affects handwriting. When we write a letter or a word, the pressure of the fingers on the pencil is continuously changing. The change in pressure corresponds very closely with the forms being produced. If the pressures are wrong in force or timing, the movement goes astray and the form is distorted. Writing pressure is controlled by shifting the pressure from larger muscles to the smaller muscles of the fingers. As the pressure shifts to the smaller muscles the writing becomes more efficient. In the first stages of writing, there is great elbow movement along with movement of the whole body. Gradually, with more and more writing experience, there is reduction in the elbow movement, and an increased efficiency of the thumb and forefinger, and the speed and ease of the writing improves.

Small muscles begin to work effectively under the following conditions:

- 1) **Placement of work:** The paper needs to be slightly right of the mid line and turned at a forty-five degree angle. In this way it is possible to maintain small muscle control from the top to the bottom of the page. Otherwise, as the writer moves down the page and the hand gets closer to the body, the pressure of the large muscles comes to play. Pressure increases and the writing becomes inefficient.
- 2) **Arm and wrist placement on the table:** If the arm and wrist are not in motion, but on the table, then the action of the larger muscles is diminished, and the work of the fingers comes into play.
- 3) **The pencil must be held at an angle to the paper:** This reduces the full downward thrust and gives the right pressure.
- 4) **Developing the right grip** greatly assists the child to control the smaller muscles and therefore the amount of pressure exerted. While teaching a child how to hold a pencil, ask the child to hold the pencil loosely between the thumb and index finger supported by the middle finger. Sometimes children hold their pencil too tightly, or too close to the tip. The pencil should be held about an inch from the tip. Some children hold a pencil like a spoon for stirring. Gently help children to correct their grip. Many children will have developed their own grip before coming to school. If it is not too awkward, and if the child is comfortable, do not change it. Medium soft pencils are recommended till class five.
- 5) **Body position:** Proper body posture greatly affects the development of handwriting. Leaning heavily on a desk, or sitting in an incorrect position affects legibility. Proper posture for development of handwriting involves the correct desk-chair height, how one sits, desk size and top slant, paper position, and how one places the writing hand and arm.

All the above factors help the child to learn to develop a control over the small muscles of the fingers. The student has to learn to make a complicated series of pressure changes in order to produce correct forms. The pencil continually speeds up, slows down or pauses as the pressure changes. It takes a lot of practice by the learners to make these delicate changes so as to form the letters accurately.

B) **The Use of Space**

New space, as in a blank piece of paper, places great demand on a young writer.



Young writers must relate the space of their own bodies to the space on the paper. Young children gradually begin to understand the space (the paper) they are dealing with in relation to their own bodies. At first children do not make any differentiation between drawing and writing. Later writing begins to be represented by continuous scribbles across a page. In the beginning unlined paper gives the children a surface free of restrictions when the attempts to write are unformed and immature. The larger the space, the easier it is for the child to explore it. In some places broadly spaced lines are introduced to allow a child to control her muscles to explore.

A teacher who provides many opportunities for space exploration through art-work, movement, and pattern writing does contribute to the child's development. Initially if a child is given a blank paper she will make a chain of letters at almost any angle. The lack of ability to suppress large muscles and gain control over small muscles makes it difficult to use space with precision. As writing begins to convey meaning, words and sentence units lead to different kinds of spacing and use of space. At first children run words and sentences together. As language develops and meaning increases, spaces begin to appear as something tangible to the child.

The important thing to remember is whether the problem is to do with pressure or incorrect use of space, it will have an effect on composing. Any of these factors lead to slowness in writing, which in turn affects the quality and content of writing and therefore the child's attitude towards writing. When there are problems with handwriting, writing itself may be affected.

### 1.3.2 Some Hand-writing Conventions

In handwriting or penmanship instruction, the main concern is the legibility and efficient production of written symbols. It is important that we develop the skill of handwriting to the point where the very process of writing does not detract from the thinking process of the writer. A child who has difficulty with the mechanics of writing often avoids writing tasks. Some important writing conventions that children need to follow are:

- a) **Letters formed correctly:** It has been found that errors in the formation of certain letters account for a large proportion of illegibilities. These letters are e, n, d, t, r, i, a, h, and b. Special attention needs to be given to see that all letters are correctly formed. A school needs to make a decision on the formation of letters and see that there is consistency, particularly in letters such as f, z, x, g. It is important that all the teachers form these letters in the same way.
- b) **Letter sizing:** It is customary to teach large writing in class I, and to reduce the size gradually in the following classes. The use of the four lined copy with red and blue lines is recommended as it assists the children in the formation of tall letters, small letters as well as letters that touch the bottom line such as y or g.
- c) **Slant of letters :** Letters should slant in the same direction.
- d) **Spacing between words:** The most common errors in spacing are either crowding of lines or crowding of words in a line. It is important to ensure the right amount of space between words and between lines. Initially children can be asked to leave one finger space between words.
- e) **Legibility:** The first essential feature of good handwriting is legibility. This depends upon the formation of individual letters, although words can often be recognised even if some individual letters are not perfect. If, however, wrongly formed letters are detected before they have become habits, they can be easily corrected.

- f) **Spacing of letters within a word:** Children need to appreciate the fact that each letter needs to occupy a certain space within a word, so that the word is a readable unit. Sometimes children crowd in a few letters and give too much space to others. This is also connected to the fact that there should be uniformity in the size of letters.
- g) **Alignment:** Children need to be aware of writing along lines or between lines. They need to also be able to appreciate the slant of each line in relation to the page.

### 1.3.3 Choosing a Suitable Script

The questions regarding the suitability of a script is seen under two main issues, firstly, those concerning the vertical versus the slanting writing, and secondly those concerning that of manuscript versus cursive writing.

The issue concerning vertical handwriting vs. slanting handwriting has been pretty well settled in favour of writing with a moderate slant. This is the most widely approved style by researchers as well as by teachers.

As far as the second issue is concerned, there are two forms of handwriting which are being taught in most primary schools. Manuscript handwriting is the print form in which letters of the alphabet are written separately. In the cursive form the alphabets are connected so that it becomes a flowing form. Other forms which try and amalgamate the best features of both these forms have also been experimented with. Choice of a suitable script is divided into three camps, those who use manuscript exclusively, those who use manuscript for the first two to three years and then switch to cursive, and those who use cursive exclusively. There is however a general agreement that manuscript is the most commonly taught form to beginners. The use of manuscript as a beginning style is advocated on the ground that it is easier to learn. Since the letters are like the printed letters that children see in books, they are easier to recognise. The letters are also easier to write because the movement of writing a word is divided into a succession of separate movements, instead of being a complex movement in which the joinings of the letters are added to the letters themselves. Research has shown that a child does a good deal of writing in the first two classes when she uses the manuscript style.

While writing separate strokes is easier to learn, writing words with a continuous stroke is more efficient after it has been learned. In manuscript writing, longer pauses are made in writing the letters separately. This slows down the writing. With cursive writing however, what is gained in speed is often lost in legibility. Opinions regarding the manuscript cursive controversy remain divided. It appears that expert opinion, common practice and research evidence favour the initial teaching of manuscript followed by a later transition to a cursive form. This transition is recommended in the second or third class.

With regards to the selection and suitability of a script, the most important fact is the need for a policy of consistency within a given school system. Once a school has opted for a particular script, it must be followed in school and at home with the support of parents. Handwriting instruction should be included as an integral part of the school curriculum. It is important to separate transcription from composition. Children should not become anxious about their handwriting, because this can become a deterrent. The more the children write, the better they will write.

Perhaps, a writing evaluation form could take into consideration the factors listed below:

**MY WRITING**

1. Shape of letters  
(Letters to work on)
2. Size (Letters to work on)
3. Spacing within a word
4. Spacing between words
5. Slant
6. Joining of letters
7. Neatness of page

**Check your progress 1**

**Note:** Write your answers in the space given below:

- 1) What is the teachers' role in helping a child develop a good handwriting?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

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**1.4 SPELLING**

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Learning to spell is a developmental process. Like learning to speak it unfolds over time. A typical view is to look at 'spelling' as rote memorization with spelling books and word lists to be assigned, tested and marked. Research evidence has clearly indicated that children don't learn to spell by memorizing word lists. It is a much more complex process. In order to be able to represent language in a visual form with the use of graphic symbols i.e. letters of the alphabet, a child needs to use the written language. The child needs to explore the various patterns that form English spelling and develop an understanding of English spelling. This can only come about if children are actively involved in the process of learning a language. This means children should feel free to experiment with form, format, spelling and punctuation. They should make mistakes and learn to correct them as a process of refinement. Expecting a child to produce exact, correct language places a great pressure on her, and makes the writing tasks awesome and daunting.

**1.4.1 Stages of Development in Learning Spelling**

Looking at children's writings at various stages of development helps a teacher to understand the developmental nature of learning to spell.

**Stage 1: The Spelling babbler:** This is the pre-communicative spelling stage. Children learn about letters of the alphabet and combine them to form words. This is done purely for the delight of writing words. Letters of the alphabet are combined into word-like units. The sounds do not match the letters. The words are not readable because the letters do not represent sounds, but the child knows that print represents words. For example: wft huk olngot rt ftggh dfgth swztk Ardghjtgll and so on.

## Writing Skill

From this early pre-communicative stage the child slowly progresses towards conceptualising letters that represent sounds. This brings us to the next stage.

**Stage 2: Invented spelling:** This is the point at which letters are used more consistently to represent words. Five general stages of invention have been noted:

1. Use of the initial consonant to represent a word. For example G (GRASS).
2. Initial and final consonant GS (GRASS)
3. Initial, final and interior consonant GRS (GRASS)
4. Initial, final and interior consonants with a vowel place holder i.e. the vowel is incorrect, but in the correct position.  
- GRES (GRASS). The spelling at this stage is semi-phonetic.
5. Transition to conventional spelling – GRASS

This stage occurs as children become independent in reading and writing, and they attend more and more to printed words. When children at this stage recognise the differences between their own invented spelling and the conventions of literacy, they begin to acquire the desire to attain the conventional form. Those words that are not familiar continue to be represented with the prior invented approach. More and more words however begin to be spelt conventionally. The child constructs a phonetic system initially but soon this gets replaced by new spelling strategies with a greater reliance on visual memory.

### 1.4.2 The Informal Approach

Spelling is not considered a passive process. It is dynamic and complex. Purposeful writing is considered to be an important key to learning to spell. As a child engages in more and more meaningful writing activity she begins to invent spelling. In order to invent spelling the child uses what she already knows. The child thinks about words and generates new words. The child is actively involved in the process of spelling.

#### Some Guidelines for an Informal Approach

- Teach spelling as a part of the whole curriculum. Capitalize on opportunities to have children write and spell in other situations than the writing class i.e. in maths or science lessons.
- Have children write frequently. Children invent and refine spelling using the skills they acquire when they write. Spelling practice occurs through free writing when children write labels, lists, stories, songs, recipes. The important thing is to make the writing activity purposeful.
- Encourage children to invent spelling for words they may not have learned to spell. Inventing spelling allows children to engage in thinking about how a word sounds, and learning to transfer those sounds into letters. As they progress with these skills they begin to include vowel blends such as ea, ee, oa, ou and so on. They also begin to look at consonant blends such as br, cl, st, etc., as well as digraphs th, wh, ch, sh, etc., which represent a single sound. They begin to demonstrate their acquired skills, of processing sounds in the words they write.
- De-emphasize correctness, memorization and writing mechanics. Adjust your expectations for correctness to fit the child's level of development and make allowances for inexperience and mistakes.

- Respond to children's writings in ways that help them discover more about spelling. In your response build interest in words, make word study fun, play spelling games, answer questions about spelling and teach spelling skills. Help young writers develop a positive spelling consciousness. Poor spellers need to be provided with a broad repertoire of spelling strategies. Among these are:
  - Being able to learn to sense when words are misspelled.
  - Being able to use a beginner's dictionary.
  - Making lists for high-frequency words that are often misspelled.
  - Seeking adult help.
  - Being able to use the context and meaning to determine the spelling.

The following practices create problems for poor spellers:

- Too many red marks and corrections
- When help is not given in context i.e. attention is not given to the context or
- Subject matter of the written task is ignored, but only spelling is corrected.
- When the child does not get enough opportunity to do meaningful writing.

The informal approach towards spelling is based on the premise that spelling is for writing. Children may achieve high scores on phonic inventories or weekly spelling tests. But the ultimate test is what the child does within the writing process. If a child writes daily, the teacher can concentrate on the content and once or twice a week, on spelling. But if the child writes only once a week then spelling becomes the teachers' primary focus. More time for writing gives the teacher more time to help children take responsibility for their writing. Children are helped to re-fine their first drafts. The first draft should be looked upon only for its context. It is in the final draft that spelling needs to be emphasized because by then the child is eager to share her writing with an audience and has a high stake in her writing.

Spelling becomes important for two reasons. The first is that the writer may then put it behind her to focus on the content. The second is that when the spelling is poor, the reader may not be able to go beyond the irregularities to view the main focus of the message.

Beginning spellers should be free to invent spelling when they write. There is no evidence that invented spelling becomes habitual. Poor spellers may however, habitually misspell certain words. Children who are encouraged to invent spelling refine those spelling and progress developmentally towards correctness. It is perfectly acceptable to display a young writer's piece of writing with some invented spelling. As a speller matures, emphasis on correctness should increase. Final drafts of composition or stories should ensure correct spelling.

It is important to make parents observe children move through the developmental stages of invented spelling. They should understand that invented spelling does not lead to the formation of bad spelling habits. When children encounter new information about standard spelling, they readily modify their hypotheses and have no difficulty in adopting standard spelling. Ultimately the speller is able to use information from visual memory, as well as the knowledge of phonetic, contextual and meaning relationships to determine the correct spelling of a word. But the process takes time. Important foundations of learning to spell are set with the use of invented spelling.

## Special Needs of Second Language Learners

As has been described earlier, writing requires the encoding of one's language knowledge into representative graphemes. To spell not yet memorised items, a child writes the letters according to how she perceives sounds of the letter sequences. So the phonological system has some influence on learning to spell. There is evidence to indicate first language interference. The confusion between 'v' and 'bh' heard in the spoken English of speakers from Bihar and Bengal or in the 's' and 'sh' sounds is an example.

The teachers' own attitudes towards the children's mother-tongue, and the teachers' own language competencies in the second language, in this case English, require consideration. Teachers need to be sensitive towards native language influences. In the case of some children, for example, persistent absence of past-tense markers 'ed' may be due to the first language interference. The instructional approach then would be to emphasize the meaning of the marker rather than the sound. It would be important to give the children extra practice in this area.

Assuring through instruction that all students understand how to mark important grammatical distinctions (such as tense, number and aspect) in their spelling requires systematic instructions in cases where there is first language interference. By classes three or four, all students should be expected to observe these writing conventions. Since there is considerable emphasis on word analysis in the primary classes, mismatch between the children's and teachers' language may cause problems unless the teacher clarifies the underlying phonological system. For those teachers who have nonstandard speakers in their class, points of potential confusion in lessons involving phonological knowledge including spelling could be predicted, and instruction should be designed to eliminate them.

### 1.4.3 The Formal Approach

Research indicates that a formal spelling programme should begin only when a child is ready to spell both intellectually and emotionally. Some of the characteristics of readiness are:

1. The child should be able to write and name all the letters of the alphabet correctly.
2. The child should be able to copy words correctly.
3. Be able to write his or her name without copying.
4. Be able to read at a second class level.
5. Be able to enunciate words clearly.
6. See that words are composed of different letters.
7. Have a beginning phonetic sense and be able to recognise the common letter-sound combinations.
8. Be able to write a few simple words from memory.
9. Be able to ask for words which are required while writing and be able to express a few thoughts in writing.
10. Demonstrate an interest in learning to spell.

If a formal spelling programme is started too early, children may become very negative about learning to spell.

In the context of formal spelling instruction, there are six procedures that receive research support:

- Allot sixty to seventy five minutes per week to formal spelling instruction.
- Present the words to be studied in a list or column form.
- Give the children a pre-test to determine which words in the lesson are unknown. Have them study the unknown words, and then administer a post test.
- Have the children correct their own spelling tests under the teachers' direction.
- Teach a systematic technique for studying unknown words.
- Use spelling games to make spelling lessons more fun.

For most children effective methods for studying unknown words would include visual inspection, auditory inspection, kinesthetic reinforcement and recall. Two examples of effective techniques are:

- A)
1. Look at the word carefully
  2. Say the word
  3. With eyes closed, visualize the word
  4. Cover the word and then write it
  5. Check the spelling
  6. If the word is misspelled, repeat steps 1 to 5
- B)
1. Pronounce each word carefully
  2. Look carefully at each part of the word as you say it
  3. Say the letters in sequence
  4. Attempt to recall how the word looks, then spell it
  5. Check this attempt to recall
  6. Write the word
  7. Check this spelling attempt
  8. Repeat the above steps if necessary

Simply writing the words in question a certain number of times is not a good procedure for learning misspelled words. Long periods of spelling instruction do not increase spelling competence. It is better to have short and interesting sessions. High frequency words and often misspelled words from the children's writings should form the basis of building up word lists. Teach only a few rules and use the recommended practice for teaching those rules. It is important to generate a high interest amongst the students by

1. Showing the student the importance of correct spelling in practical and social situations
2. Providing the student with an efficient method of word study
3. Limiting spelling vocabulary to words most likely needed by the student. The words are selected on the basis of frequency of use by children, degree of difficulty, universality and application to other academic subjects
4. Encourage a feeling of pride in a correctly spelled paper
5. Ask students to study only those words which she is unable to spell

### 1.4.4 Some Common Rules

Students should not be asked to memorize rules, and time should not be wasted on rules if the student can already spell the word. If a rule is being taught it should be taught inductively rather than deductively i.e. a short discussion of words like the one misspelled, and allowing children to discover the generalisation, is far better than teaching rules when the students do not see the **need** for a rule. Remember:

- a) Teach only a few rules and include only those that have no or few exceptions
- b) Teach a rule only when there is a need for it

Some rules that are based on research findings are of value to the speller are as follows:

1. Rules governing the addition of suffixes and inflected endings are:

- a) Words ending in silent 'e' drop the 'e' while adding a suffix or ending beginning with a vowel, and keep the 'e' when adding an ending beginning with a consonant.

bake      manage  
baking    managing  
baker      management

- b) When a root word ends in 'y' preceded by a consonant, the 'y' is changed to 'i' in adding endings unless the ending begins with 'i'.

fly          study  
flies        studying  
flying      studios  
studies

- c) When a root word ends in 'y' preceded by a vowel, the root word is not changed when adding suffixes or endings.

play        monkey  
playful    monkeys

- d) When a one-syllable word ends in a consonant with one vowel before it, the consonant is doubled before adding an ending beginning with a vowel.

run        ship  
running   shipping  
shipment

- e) In words of more than one syllable, the final consonant is doubled before adding a suffix or ending if

1. the last syllable is accented
2. the last syllable ends in a consonant with a vowel before it
3. the ending begins with a vowel

begin                  admit  
beginning            admittance

4. The letter 'q' is always followed by 'u' in common English words.

queen, quiet, quench, quest, question, quaint



5. No English words end in 'v'  
love, glove, give, have, alive, leave
6. Proper nouns and adjectives formed from proper nouns should begin with capital letters  
America, American
7. Most abbreviations end with a period.  
Nov. Dr. Oct.
8. The apostrophe is used to show the omission of letters in contractions:  
don't, haven't, isn't, didn't
9. The apostrophe is used to indicate the possessive form of nouns but not pronouns.  
boy's, its, dog's, theirs
10. When adding 's' to words to form plurals or to change the tense of verbs, '-es' must be added to words ending with hissing sounds (x, s, sh, ch).  
glass      watch  
glasses    watches
11. When 's' is added to words ending in a single 'f', the 'f' is changed to 'v' and '-es' added  
half      shelf  
halves    shelves
12. When 'ei' or 'ie' are to be used, 'i' usually comes before 'e' except after 'e' when sounded like 'a' (Note these exceptions: leisure, neither, seize, weird).  
believe    thieves

It is useful if words are arranged under predetermined spelling rules to demonstrate phonetic or structural generalisation. This helps children to see certain patterns in the spelling of words in the English language, and makes it much easier to learn these.

### Check Your Progress 2

**Note:** Write your answers in the space given below:

- 1) How should the mechanics of writing such as handwriting and spelling be taught?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

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## 1.5 SOME OTHER WRITING CONVENTIONS

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Recent research shows that 'learning to write is like learning to talk. Children observe others writing, try it out themselves, practice, experiment, take chances and gradually learn conventional rules. As hypotheses are generated and tested, mistakes are made and must be accepted as a part of the child's growth process. Writing is a complex task. It involves pragmatics (rules of the language relative to a particular context), semantics (saying what is meant), syntax (the smooth flow of the message) and graphics

**Writing Skill**

(representing the message through graphic symbols or alphabet). Letter naming and letter combinations is only one of the skills. The broader task that lies before a child is to understand how written language functions as a symbol system.

When young children invent their own writing, they deal with the conventions of spacing and punctuation and grammatical structure rather idiosyncratically. Like spelling, as children become more confident with their writing skills they should be encouraged to use writing conventions.

**Punctuation**

Punctuation in writing is parallel to the intonation and suprasegmentals of oral language. The essence of punctuation is to make markings in writing that will signal some of the boundaries that are marked in oral language by intonation. How should the teacher inculcate the concept of punctuation in the children? The teacher should point out the beginnings and ends of sentences with exaggerated intonation. After reading the sentence these boundaries should be made explicit by calling attention to and naming the full stops and the capital letter. Following this introduction, the teacher may redo the activity on a worksheet, showing where to punctuate on the blackboard. Students should be encouraged to figure out why the full stop is used in some instances and the question mark in others. Finally, the teacher should show children how to use the knowledge about punctuation in editing their work.

Until the last two decades, penmanship was given a great deal of importance. It is considered less important now, with the focus having shifted to the meaning in a piece of writing, and hand-writing being viewed as a tool which helps the child to convey or communicate that meaning. The quality of written work particularly the neatness, the precision in formatting and correct grammatical usage are still important conventions. Children should be allowed to refine their own writings through a process of editing and revising so that the final draft shows an appreciation of some of these basic writing conventions like neatness, punctuation, correct spelling, formatting and correct grammatical structure. The teacher deals with these skills one at a time. Whenever necessary, structured activities or worksheets are given to reinforce a particular convention or skill.

**Check Your Progress 3**

**Note:** Write your answers in the space given below:

- 1) How should a teacher deal with errors?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

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**1.6 LET US SUM UP**

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The child acquires certain tools of writing, such as handwriting, spelling, punctuation and some other writing conventions organically, as a process of growth and development. There are developmental patterns in the acquisition of these abilities and skills. Understanding these developmental patterns help a teacher to provide activities which assist this process. It enables a teacher to build up basic prerequisite skills, necessary

for the development of more advanced and complex skills later on. It also helps teachers to take a more holistic view of writing, and not get bogged down with the correction of spelling and handwriting, but give as much or more importance to the ideas and thoughts that the child is trying to convey. Errors are viewed as clues which indicate the stage the child is at. They become a natural part of the growth process. They help a teacher to plan for special requirements of some children. This is crucial as it gives a child the support she may require without making writing a daunting and difficult task.

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## 1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## 1.8 ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- Being aware that these skills develop as a part of an organic developmental process.
- These skills should not be taught in isolation but as a part of a meaningful writing activity.
- Expectations from children should be realistic bearing in mind the developmental level of the child.
- Children should be encouraged to enjoy a writing activity by experiencing their progress.
- Formal spelling and writing should not focus on tedious drills, but should be made enjoyable. Copying words and focusing on mechanics doesn't ensure the development of these skills. These should be done only to reinforce a child's natural development.
- Purposeful and frequent writing is the key to learning to spell and write conventionally.
- The teachers need to be sensitive to the needs of those children where the first language is creating interferences.

## Check Your Progress 2

1. The teacher must take care not to confuse the tools of writing with the writing itself. The message that the child is trying to convey is of primary importance, the writing, spelling and grammatical structure are aids.
2. The teacher must give the children freedom to write knowing that:
  - s/he can go back to the writing to change and correct
  - knowing s/he'll have help with the correction
  - knowing that her/his ideas are more important **than** the mechanics
  - knowing that s/he won't be branded "slow" or "dumb" if s/he needs to re-write.
3. The teacher should spare the red pen - sit with small groups and discuss errors. Use a pencil.
4. Teach children to do their own checking. Begin with the whole group identifying and correcting structural or mechanical problems. Then give specific tasks to small groups.
5. Identify mechanical skills and watch out for chances to reinforce these skills one at a time.
6. Return to those skills repeatedly. For example children should get ample opportunity to use a newly acquired spelling in their own work.
7. Talk about mistakes as a normal part of the process. Make it clear that all writers work with dictionaries and grammar books. Correcting, editing and refining are part of the writing process.
8. The teacher gives children a range of purposeful writing activities at least once a day.
9. The teacher provides formal support when the children require it.
10. The teacher plans a range of open-ended writing tasks which help children to plan and encode messages, and produce appropriate written forms of what they want to convey. The children can write letters and actually post them, they can make lists, they can write experiences and share these, they can record events on a calendar.

As far as possible all writing should be with a willing supportive audience, either the teacher, the peers, parents or the whole class.

## Check your progress 3

Recent research interest in spelling and the mechanics of writing has brought about a change in how teachers need to view "errors". Errors are considered a natural part of the learning process, and as indicators of the child's learning process. They provide information to the teacher about the areas of strength and weaknesses of the children in the class. They are not something that a child needs to be afraid of. The child's development needs to be examined by looking at the patterns in children's errors across age and time. It is vital to realise that there are developmental stages in the acquiring of different skills and conventions. Some errors are a reflection of the developmental stage the child is at, and will disappear as the child proceeds to the next stage. It is important to

look at errors as clues which tell us the stage at which the child is. The teacher needs to allow children to display writing with some errors which are natural at that particular stage. This makes the child feel actively involved with the writing. We often come across beautiful samples of absolutely correct writing which is put up on school display boards. Much of this writing is really the adult's effort. In the process of refining the child's writing, it often becomes the teacher's work, and the child does not actively identify with it. Acceptance of the child's work, as it is, and then actively involving children in refining it, is a crucial factor in encouraging children to write. Periodic analysis of errors for patterns helps and suggests the kind of formal intervention and instruction that would be useful for the class. Just as the preschoolers' invention of spelling demonstrates their phonemic understanding, so their errors while attempting conventional spelling demonstrate their knowledge. It is for the teacher to use this understanding in designing suitable activities. The teacher needs to constantly look at the kind of errors that are being made, and on the basis of this provide the support that may be required. Children need to learn the process of self-evaluation, namely, that often a piece is rewritten and in that rewriting errors are corrected.



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## UNIT 2 CREATING A WRITING ENVIRONMENT

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### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Special Needs of Second Language Learners
- 2.3 Creating a Natural Language Learning Environment
  - 2.3.1 Some guidelines
  - 2.3.2 Some underlying principles
- 2.4 Motivating Children to Write in the Second Language
- 2.5 Providing Meaningful Experiences and Using Them
- 2.6 Developing a Writing Programme
- 2.7 The Role of the Teacher
- 2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9 Answers

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### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit, we aim to explore suitable ways of stimulating and encouraging children to write in their second language i.e. English, within the Indian context. After you complete this unit you should understand how to:

- create a conducive environment to motivate children to communicate and gradually express themselves through written English.
- provide suitable experiences to generate purposeful writing activity.
- develop a writing programme within the context of the primary school curriculum.

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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Learning to read and write is a process of experiencing language. Children learn to talk in a language by participating in communicative interactions. They receive feedback about what they have said and discover whether their meaning has been understood. They learn to refine their language to be able to convey their meaning adequately to a particular audience. Once a child has begun to communicate orally in a language, writing can be introduced as an additional form of communication.

Most importantly, writing is the physical expression of thinking. The close relationship between writing and thinking makes writing valuable. As young children struggle with what to put down next, or how to put it down on paper, they often discover a new way of expressing an idea. Sometimes they rethink the idea itself. The child also begins to realise the power of written words, as vehicles which communicate our thoughts to others. She discovers a real need to find the right word or construct a correct sentence. Often, it is indicative of a search for meaning and reveals the amount the child knows. Thus writing is closely related to the inner processes within a child's mind i.e. the internal

manipulation of external experiences. In addition to this, writing reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary that we have been teaching our children.

Initially children communicate their experiences and ideas in a variety of ways such as through talking, through actions or through drawings. Writing, the use of a sophisticated, abstract and complex symbol system, gradually gains importance as the child grows older.

As with most forms of expression, writing will not flourish unless it gives the child some form of satisfaction. Initially, the fact that the writing exists, that it is finished, may be enough to make the writer feel that the effort to produce it has been worthwhile. But such satisfaction is shortlived. The more important satisfaction comes from the need to communicate to somebody. Therefore, meaningful writing activity comes from a sense of wanting to convey something to a real audience. For writing to grow and flourish, the classroom environment should provide plenty of opportunities for communication in a naturalistic way. It is in such non-threatening environment that children begin to experiment with and explore an unfamiliar language and discover the strategies that allow her to be an effective language user. Another dimension of writing, and of the kind of satisfaction it provides, is a psychological one. Writing is a part of personality development, and is a tool of self-actualisation, just as art and music.

As mentioned above, reading and writing are linked. The developing writer must read what she has written and be able to assess her own writing. This can be developed by the teacher on the basis of the specific needs of learners at different stages. We shall look at some ways of doing this in later units. In this unit we shall limit ourselves to the creation of a conducive classroom environment for writing. It is by creating a natural language environment in which children are enthusiastically experimenting with written language first children then teacher can help children become confident and successful writers. We shall now look at how a teacher can provide this environment.

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## **2.2 SPECIAL NEEDS OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

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Initially, bilingual children seem to acquire two sets of lexical items (one of their first language, and the other of their second language), and one syntactic system. This has been noticed more so in cases where the second language is being developed under natural conditions. Slowly, however, with greater exposure, children begin to acquire the second syntactic system. This is an important stage of transition from the mother tongue to the second language. For children who do not have support in the second language at home, acquiring functional competency in the second language may not be so easy. The teachers' own attitude towards such children is of great importance. The transition to the second language happens gradually. Until the child feels confident in the second language, she is going to keep drawing support from her mother tongue. Since we function in multicultural classrooms, it is a challenge to us teachers, to make sure that all the children in the class feel confident to use their mother tongues, whenever the need arises. Not only does this enrich the class environment, but it also gives the children a strong foundation from which to launch into the second language. Acceptance of dialectical renderings or metaphorical usages not known to English, are important. This in fact enriches the English in use, and links it to the children's lives, making it more meaningful. It is therefore important that the teacher should examine her own attitudes towards the children's native languages.

The teacher also needs to be sensitive to possible areas of mismatch between the child's own language and the second language. She should look out for areas of confusion

**Writing Skill**

and provide special formal instruction in these areas. For example, the influence of the first language (mother tongue) often leads to the incorrect placement of the verb in a sentence in English, for children who come from a Hindi speaking background. The teacher in this case should give the children additional practice to overcome this problem.

If the writing process is to develop naturally, then it is important to allow some mother-tongue usage until such times as when a child has enough mastery over the second language to not require the mother tongue. There is a gradual transition from one to the other, and we need to facilitate the transition by providing suitable vocabulary or structures, wherever required.

We may also need to accept that in a social environment such as the one we have in India, a certain amount of lexical borrowing and even code-switching is inevitable in written English as much as in spoken English. This phenomenon needs to be understood by teachers, in terms of its use for communicative purposes. Really speaking, the need to develop writing is as crucial in the mother tongue as it is in the second language. What children learn about writing in the second language will help them in developing their writing in the first language and vice versa. This is how the two languages can support each other. Children will need to develop an awareness of the reasons why it is important to write in both languages – and the different contexts and situations in which writing is done. This awareness can develop by providing a secure and stimulating natural environment for language learning which pertains to both languages.

**Check Your Progress 1**

Give three reasons why children need to learn to write:

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.....

.....

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### **2.3 CREATING A NATURAL LANGUAGE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

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If we look at second language learning as it occurs in the natural environment, it becomes clear that the processes for the development of communication abilities develop so long as the environment provides the necessary stimuli and experiences. The most important feature seems to be that the learner *needs* to use the second language for communicative purposes. This does not mean that a teacher is redundant or not required. The classroom is often called an artificial environment for learning and using a second language. However, linguists have realized that the classroom is a real social context in its own right, where learners and teachers enter into real social relationships with each other. Language structures and communicative functions are not bound to specific situations, once they have been mastered, they can be transferred to contexts other than the one where they were initially acquired. Structures and skills acquired by a second language learner in classroom interactions can be transferred to other kinds of situations and the other way round. The important thing is for a teacher to try and use all the opportunities that a classroom provides for real communication.

In this way the teacher utilises the natural learning environment within the classroom. Given this general view, it is important to realise that the natural language environment



allows children to explore a variety of forms of writing, with a variety of different purposes. Broadly these may be categorized into three major categories:

1. **Transactional forms:** This is speaking/writing concerned with getting things done. It involves giving information, instructions, notes, giving messages, writing notices and other similar activities which attempt to advise, persuade or inform others.
2. **Expressive forms:** This is language which is close to the self, used to reveal the nature of the person. It is a free flow to ideas and feelings.
3. **Poetic forms:** Here the language used is fashioned in particular ways to make a pattern. Language in this form is used as an art medium.

Any contrived writing experiences for children, within a classroom should ensure exposure to all three forms. It has been pointed out earlier that children learn to write through meaningful writing. The teacher's aim is to create a classroom environment in which children write about things that matter to them. The teacher would support them with suggestions of suitable form, vocabulary or writing conventions.

A peep into most existing primary schools does not reveal an environment of the kind described above. The classes appear to be very structured and teacher-directed. Student talk and student interactions are minimal. 'Being quiet and listening to the teacher', create a climate of controlled order, in which a child is not free to explore language. Written work is limited to the text book and work book exercises or structured compositions, letters or paragraph writing. For real language learning to take place, it is essential to create a climate where children feel free to use the language in its various forms in meaningful ways. It becomes the role of the teacher to create situations in which a child is required to interact and communicate with a real audience. We shall now look at some suggested guidelines for doing this.

### 2.3.1 Some Guidelines

1. **We need to build our writing programme and the classroom environment around the child's need to convey something to a recipient audience.** The primary drive for wanting to write comes from the need to communicate or convey an idea. In the process of exchanging written interactions, the child learns to understand other people's writings while they begin to understand what the child has written.
2. **We need to understand the importance of experimentation and risk-taking in the process of learning to write.** In an environment where children are not anxious about making mistakes, they explore the language in various ways. Through invented spelling, imitations of adult writings and their own inner drives, children step into unfamiliar language areas. As they use the language, as they write and speak and read in it, they become better equipped i.e. they acquire new linguistic abilities. Their mistakes help a teacher to provide the formal instructions they need.
3. **We need to understand that children progress in different ways and at different paces.** Each child brings to her writings a rich background of experience. Whether this experience is supported by a literate background at home, or whether the child comes from an oral tradition – these factors will influence the child's writing.
4. **We need to support children's experiments.** Children must feel comfortable exploring the written form of the second language. They must relate to it and feel a sense of ownership about their writings, without being afraid to make mistakes. It

is through this that each learner discovers the strategies that allow her to be an effective language user. Every time a teacher sets a topic, asks for a particular rhetorical form or expects accurate spelling and punctuation to take precedence over meaning, she is not giving children the opportunity for experiencing and experimenting with the language.

5. **We need to lead the children gently into the arena of writing in the second language.** Since most children are reluctant to take risks and experiment with an unfamiliar language - the teacher designs writing activities which begin within a structured framework. Gradually as the child acquires competence over the lexical and syntactical structure of the second language, more open ended **communicative** activities are taken up. Use of the mother tongue is also allowed with gradual insistence on second language usage as the child becomes more confident.
6. **We need to recognise the importance of having audiences.** Writing involves a constant sharing with others; talking and sharing about ideas and getting a feedback on ideas is important. Children need to write for many different purposes. They need to write for real audiences – for themselves for both younger and older children, for adults they know and for some general unknown audience as well.
7. **We need to provide demonstrations of what is involved in being a writer.** In order to help children develop as writers, we need to share in the writing process by being writers ourselves. By providing demonstrations of writing in action, by being partners in the creating process, we do more to help children figure out how to be writers in this way than all our correcting of their mistakes can ever hope to do.

### **2.3.2 Some Underlying Principles**

It would be wise for a teacher to keep the following in mind:

1. Whether the child is writing in her mother tongue or in the second language, the child writes best about something she knows or has experienced or cares about.
2. Once a child has acquired confidence in the usage of a language, she should be free to choose what she wants to write about.
3. There is no single correct style of writing.
4. Children own their pieces of writing. Teachers must respect this. Teachers do not have a right to mutilate a child's piece of writing with red marks. The teacher must focus on the content of the children's writing i.e. the ideas, the expressions, the details and the flow of ideas. These issues are more important than technical matters like writing conventions, or correct spelling and neat handwriting.
5. Children should be allowed to use invented spelling. The teacher and other children help the child to arrive at conventional spelling. The teacher however, needs to be sensitive to the special needs of non-standard speakers and provide the additional help they require. Formal structured reinforcement is provided from time to time.
6. There is no absolute level of proficiency that the child must attain. The teacher rejoices with each child at the progress she makes from any given point.
7. The teacher should also write some pieces with the children so that she can share the child's difficulties and triumphs.

## 2.4 MOTIVATING CHILDREN TO WRITE IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE

In the kind of environment which will best provide opportunities for writing, there must be exposure to many different sorts of written texts. This means that children need to read many different kinds of writing in order to learn the diverse forms that writers use for presenting their ideas. Today, children can see around them various signboards, posters, banners and advertising hoardings wherever they look. They also see a lot of written material on computer and mobile screens. Then there are pamphlets, menus in restaurants and during home delivery, labels and instructions on gadgets, cans, packets and boxes. All these are types of texts which children read all the time. These are materials from day to day life, as important in making up a child's world view as are magazines, newspapers and books. In due course, they become the raw materials for writing. Generally, visual stimulation in the classroom plays an extremely important role in generating ideas for writing.

How can this wealth of reading material be exploited for writing purposes? Much of it remains in the background till it is consciously picked up and brought to the attention of the young learners, 'framed' in a prominent way so that the language comes to the foreground.

Display boards in the classroom are very helpful in this regard. Different kinds of interesting written materials, including the children's own writings can be collected and displayed. If there aren't enough display boards, the backs of old calendar papers can be pasted and used to pin the written material on. Interesting pictures on various topics can be put up and changed frequently so that the children's level of interest is maintained. The displayed material should be at the child's eye level. Children may not be able to read everything that is put up but if the display is attractive, children are drawn to it. From these displays, they learn new words, new formats, and how they can write things in different ways. In fact, there should be a fairly large amount of blank space on the display boards along with some colour pens or markers, where they can add a comment or write a few words. Items from the displays can be taken up from time to time, the children's attention drawn to the subjects on the displays and become the subject of discussion. Then the displayed writings can be changed, perhaps once a week or at least once every ten days. Children start getting excited about new displays and look forward to the change. The pieces of writing and visuals displayed earlier can be saved and can be repeated after some time. Children love to recall something they have seen earlier. Repetition has tremendous value too. Ask children to help put up the displays so that a range of text types is included. Involve parents wherever possible and advise them to have a wall at home where children can put up their work, whether it is drawing or writing.

Just as visuals are important, listening also gives stimulus for writing. Audio clues can be suggested. Since we now have multimedia, and many classrooms even in state run schools have some kind of computer facilities available, these can be optimized for creating a writing environment. The language of much of computer and mobile applications is English (though not solely, and choices in a child's first language are also available) and there are formats such as Blogs, Twitter, Whatsapp, Facebook on social networking sites that involve writing. Instructions to find a particular picture or piece of information from the internet can be posted on the display board; children read the instructions and find the visuals etc., on the computer. Descriptions, reporting of events, captions given to photographs, jokes and snippets of poetry can be posted by children on the internet on the shared sites. Children will gain vocabulary and sentence formation, but more

**Writing Skill**

importantly, will learn modes of interaction through writing which is being done in digital formats.

Above all, the classroom atmosphere has to be friendly and non-threatening. Children can choose whether to formulate their responses in speech or writing in English, or to translate from and into their first language while they discuss, share, exchange ideas meaningfully, whether in pairs, in groups or with the whole class. If children can communicate orally with ease, the teacher can convince them that they have something to write about.

To achieve this, the children’s ideas cannot be blocked, no matter how farfetched they may be. In situations where a few children dominate classroom conversations, pairings can be done where such children talk with the shy ones. Other devices, for example, a mock press conference on some particular issue of interest to children can be held, in which some children ask questions, and the confident ones answer. Others can write notes of this conversation, or can record it on a simple data recorder or mobile phone, and then write a summary of the session, which can be put up on the display board or the internet site. Simple classroom debates, word games, guessing games, work as good starters for writing activities. As children begin to explore the new language with fun and enjoyment, they begin to gradually feel free to use it.

**Language tasks in the second language:** Keeping in mind the need to motivate the second language learners for writing within a conducive writing environment, we have to choose language tasks accordingly. Let us consider how we might motivate these learners to develop the vocabulary and structures they need for writing.

**Vocabulary:** Children need to develop a vocabulary base, which can be used in their writing. The following are samples of some activities that can be used as suggestions for developing a child’s vocabulary in English, to enable the child to take part in subsequent writing activities.

1. **Word ladders:** choose a word from a page in the text book and write it in the middle of the blank page. Ask the children to confine themselves to certain pages of the lesson and find words that begin with the ending letter of the previous word. These are written in a ladder form as shown. Once children get stuck with ending letters, they turn to the beginning letters. See the illustration. See who can make the longest ladder. Let the children use as many words from their ladder to write a story/ poem/limerick. See who can use the maximum number of words.

	F	A	T	H	E	R						
	E					A						
	L					C						
G	O	A	L			E	A	G	E	R		
E										U		
T										N	O	W

Children can be asked to work in pairs. To make word ladders more challenging, restrict the words only to nouns, or verbs, etc. Experience shows that children do not tire of word ladders!

Extend this activity by asking children to find synonyms or antonyms for the words in the ladder.

2. **Fuzzy words:** Explain to the children that when we describe an object, person or place we must try and use clear descriptive words. Give them a short descriptive paragraph. Ask them to replace all the fuzzy (unclear) words like *nice*, *good*, and *bad* with exact words. Help them do this together. Let the children share the exact words and make a list. Now let them become fuzzy word spotters. Every time anyone in the class hears or reads a fuzzy word, let them note it on a fuzzy word page and find a more suitable word. Share the lists or put them up for display on a chart. Watch the children's collection grow!
3. **Sense Words:** Let the children think of an object or event they want to write about. Let each child then make a 'sensory chart' around it, to find suitable words that tell how it looks, sounds, smells and so on. This could initially be done on the board as a while class activity. Later children could work on sense words in groups. These words could then be used by children in their writing. Words must come from children. Let them find words.

Examples of sense words for RAIN are given in the chart below. These words were generated with children from Class four.

WORDS	SIGHT WORDS	SOUND WORDS	SMELL WORDS	TASTE WORDS	TOUCH
RAIN	FALLING	SSSHH	COOL	CLEAN	WET
WATER	POURING	PITTER- BLURR	FRESH MUDDY	WET COOL	DRIPPING STICKY
	USHH FLASH	DRIP-DROP SPLISH SPLOSH			

4. **Rhyming words:** Let children make rhyming words chains. Begin with a word, let the next child add a rhyming word, then the next. The child who gets stuck starts with a new word. Let children make chains and write their rhyming words. Let them use these words in little rhymes.
5. **Topsy-turvy ads:** Let each child bring an advertisement with not too much writing on it. Let them change every word that they can with its opposite. Let them re-write their funny ads and put them on display. Let the children read the different ads and see which is the funniest one.
6. **Who am I? Riddles:** Children love making riddles. Give them a simple format to begin with, such as:  
 I am \_\_\_\_\_.  
 I am \_\_\_\_\_.  
 I am \_\_\_\_\_.  
 What am I?  
 Let children make their riddles in class and then ask each other the answer. See who has the one that's most difficult to guess.
7. **Questions:** Give the children a word, for example 'tomorrow'. How many questions can they think of, that have the answer tomorrow.
8. **Thematic words:** Draw a happy world and fill it up with happy words. A sad world with sad words and so on. Extend this to words that describe oneself when one is happy. Write about something that made you happy and so on.

**Writing Skill**

9. **Favourite words:** Let each child write any five favourite words. Let them show how many different things they can do with their five favourite words.

There are endless word games, word puzzles and word activities.

Use ideas from the class, from the children to create activities to suit your purpose. 'Making friends with new words' can become an ongoing class activity. Children could be asked to display their new words in interesting ways, on the bulletin board. They could also be asked to make their own dictionaries, and keep adding new words. Try and use the new words in a follow up writing activity so that the children become familiar with them. Let the children have the final choice of what they'd like to write. Let there be many kinds of writings at the same time. Let children work in groups and help each other. Offer help and support whenever it is asked for.

**Sentence structure:** The following activities are suggested as illustrative of ways in which awareness of sentence structures can be developed:

1. **Expanding a sentence:** Take a short sentence. 'I am thin'. or 'This is a boy'. Ask the children to add words to go on stretching the sentence, see how long they can make it.

The sentence must continue to be structurally correct. Similarly, expansion of newspaper and TV headlines and even of SMSs will provide interesting contexts for sentence expansion.

2. **Completing the sentences:** Each sentence has a beginning which needs a particular element to continue and complete it e.g. if, that, when, about, etc. This can bring about discussion on why a particular choice has to be made:

I wondered .....

I noticed .....

I couldn't really understand .....

I remember .....

I began to think .....

I was surprised .....

I wish .....

I love the way .....

I hate .....

I wish .....

3. **Reordering** parts of a sentence and putting jumbled sentences in order gives the knowledge not only of sentences but also of cohesion. An example:

Rearrange the following sentences in sequence:

- a. I made coffee and was able to find some biscuits.
- b. Then Jagan lay down on the sofa with his shoes still on.
- c. As soon as they came in, they ordered me to make something to eat.

- d. Jagan and Piyush knocked at my door that evening.
- e. Piyush sat down on a chair and began to eat the biscuits.

From a relatively structured language environment, children should be gradually led on to open ended writing activities where the choice of the topic, the genre, the audience is made by each child after she is made aware of the possibilities.

**Check your progress 2**

- 1. How can a writing environment be created in the classroom?

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.....

.....

- 2. Give suggestions for:

- a. Providing visual input in the writing environment

.....

.....

- b. Using multimedia in the writing environment

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.....

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**2.5 PROVIDING MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES AND USING THEM**

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The linear model for language development, which assumes that skills are acquired sequentially i.e. listening →speaking →reading →writing has changed now. The newer more flexible model is that of learning to read and write as naturally as one learns to listen and speak, that is, integration of skills. Recent research has begun to realize the weakness of the traditional text book based, teacher-centred classroom. Any practising teacher knows that real, meaningful writing is seldom practiced in a traditional classroom. “Writing” instruction in the class consists of workbook exercises, filling in blanks, answering questions and practicing writing. Children may be asked to write a paragraph or composition on a given topic, within a pre-determined framework. There isn’t enough opportunity to use the language in a meaningful way. Children also do not get a chance to explore and discover the patterns of words, of sentences, and the rules that make the language a coherent system.

Writing, like the whole of language, is ‘learning how to mean’. We need to have something to write home about’, something to share. It is here that the real challenge lies. The task of the primary school teacher is to provide a range of experiences across the curriculum. These experiences must be provided by opportunities to recreate and relive the experience through drama, music, painting, discussions, reading and writing. (Graffiti, for instance, is an interesting combination of painting and writing). Stimulating experiences which touch the emotions of wonder, interest, curiosity, concern and joy, which involve the whole body of the child and draw her into interaction with others should form the core of every literacy programme. The more varied and numerous these experiences are, and the more couched they are in language, the sounder the language base that the

children will develop. Subsequently, the teacher must support these experiences with suitable vocabulary and descriptive words to build up the good language base. Reading and writing then follow naturally.

A multicultural society such as ours offers a variegated environment – a wide variety of dress, festivals, food and life styles. Images, symbols and metaphors from one language creep into another and bring in a new variety and richness. The experiences may vary. It could be a walk in the rain, a film, a visitor to the class, may be a pet, an interesting science project, map reading, a cooking experience with the help of a mother, celebrations of birthdays and festivals, putting up a special programme for grandparents, a visit to an exhibition, making of a model, a craft activity, poster making, a debate in school, a puppet show. All these can be tapped by resourceful teachers, who can turn every opportunity into a language experience. It is important to talk about these experiences, to share them and follow them up with a writing activity. This could be a thank you letter, it could be an article for the school magazine, and it could be a description for a friend. In fact, the writing can be simultaneous with the activity, for example, writing the recipe for making a burger or noodles, instructions for making a model etc. The important thing is to make the writing activity a task with a purpose. It must be written for someone with whom the child wants to communicate.

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## **2.6 DEVELOPING A WRITING PROGRAMME**

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In the real world, there are often rigid guidelines imposed by state educational policies, by school managements or other policy makers and educators. Teachers' performances are measured by the "syllabus coverage" and performance on achievement tests. Teachers struggle to mark all the checklists, cover all the books and workbooks and prepare children for their examination. Children are busy studying their subjects and focusing on specific skills, rather than actually practicing reading and writing in meaningful ways. We continue to search for ways and means of making adjustments in our existing curriculum to find a place for meaningful reading and writing activity. But if a teacher is convinced that it is important, it can be done. To develop a meaningful reading and writing programme one requires:

1. A daily time slot of preferably 45 minutes to 1 hour
2. A calendar of experiences.
3. Parental support
4. Conviction

Some Practical suggestions:

- a. An activity based programme is not more expensive if one taps the available resources effectively. Walking trips to the neighbourhood, parent's help, old magazines, books and calendars are all resources that help. Use the wasted paper from photocopiers and printing presses to write on.
- b. A class of 50 students is certainly daunting. To ensure that the teacher does not back out from activities and revert to rote teaching, the school climate needs to be supportive. When all their colleagues are taking the children to the local market or the nearby post office or planning unusual creative work, the new teachers are quickly caught up in the atmosphere. Such an atmosphere however, cannot be created by a single teacher; it has to be the joint effort of the entire school, and needs to be reflected in the school's policy. Parent volunteers are a wonderful resource. They can be tapped to accompany the children on field trips, celebrations,



cooking experiences. A register can be maintained to ensure that parents are available whenever an experience is planned. In fact some functions can be planned and organised entirely by parents. This has been found to be very effective as parents also begin to get actively involved in the learning processes of their children.

- c. Some activities are not possible to conduct with 50 students. Dividing them into smaller groups becomes necessary. By the time they are in Class three, a group of four children can satisfactorily complete an activity on their own. The teacher must give clear instructions and then move from group to group helping and supporting. For younger children, parent volunteers or senior students would be required to help, otherwise the teacher is compelled to stick to more structured activities.
- d. Any activity based learning is noisy. We know that language cannot be learnt silently. So we simply have to accept the fact that if we are to use the language experience approach, the noise level will be high.
- e. A calendar of experiences needs to be worked out and planned within the timetable. It can be linked up with other subject areas and project work. Children need to get clear instructions. There must be a discussion before and after. The experience must be followed up with activities which lead to writing. The following template is suggested for the teachers to follow for making a writing focused activity:

**Level** (grade, class, elementary or intermediate)

**Topic** (theme, subject)

**Function** (to inform, persuade, describe, explain, complain, etc)

**Form** (text type e.g. letter, paragraph, list of instructions, etc)

**Context** (who is being addressed, in what situation)

**Procedure** (instructions to be given by the teacher, sequence of activities such as discussion, making notes, etc., time taken for each stage.

**Correction of written work:** It is not possible for the teacher to look at every piece of writing that every child does, particularly if the class is large and the children are going to write at least four times a week, if not daily. Children need to be actively involved in the process of correction and evaluation, in fact these skills are an essential part of the writing process. Children at the elementary school level can be taught these through a writing programme which allows them time for drafting, revising and proof reading. (Suggested ways of doing this in the class have been discussed in the unit on evaluation).

While correcting written work, the teacher would need to look at the content, the format, the appropriateness of the writing style to the type of text, lexical and grammatical items. She would take up individual discussions whenever required. She would not put red marks all over the writing, but would write comments in the margin in pencil. She could also use a coded system of correction with different symbols to indicate different kinds of corrections. The children should be made familiar with this, and could also use it while doing self correction. The teacher would base formal instructions on the insights she gains about the children's linguistic needs after she has gone through the children's writings. Children requiring special attention would be taken up separately.

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## 2.7 THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

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The teacher needs to perform various roles in order to create a stimulating classroom environment which promotes writing.

## Writing Skill

The teacher needs to:

1. Help students think about their topics before they write by talking about them with her or with one another. Exploring their topics through talking helps students:
  - a. organise their thinking about what they want to say.
2. Encourage children to write about what is meaningful to them. Keeping diaries and journals helps children to choose topics which they care and feel about. A degree of tolerance is needed if the children's free expression is to be encouraged, as children will often come up with slang, swear words and inappropriate language behaviour, which is bound to happen.
3. Move about the room as students write, responding to their work while it is incomplete. Ask students questions that help them discover where their meaning is incomplete or their content disorganised. When they have communicated well, show them your appreciation. Encourage children to talk about their writing, it helps them to clarify their thoughts and ideas.
4. Help students to see one another as writers and assist one another with their work. Even very young children can listen to or read someone else's writing and respond to it intelligently. We need to help children respect each other's writings and offer helpful suggestions. This process helps children to develop critical abilities. Occasionally, it is a good idea for a teacher to have a demonstration for the whole class, where some children's writing is discussed. This helps children to know what to look for in a piece of writing.
5. Prepare a writing folder for each student. Preserve all drafts of all the students' work in their individual folders. Children can see their own progress when their writings are arranged in a chronological order. This is very encouraging for students as they begin to view writing as a growth process.
6. Provide real audiences. This has been discussed at length earlier. Sometimes children write for themselves, but more often they write to communicate with others. Writing is more likely to be improved when it is written to be read by a real audience. This also generates a greater involvement in the writing.
7. Relate language study to real language use. When children have a need to use something they are more apt to remember and use it. Writing for a meaningful purpose encourages children to make sure that their writing serves the purpose it is intended for or in other words the target audience is able to receive what the child wants to convey. This pushes children towards learning the conventions of standard language use. The teacher also needs to draw children's attentions to these conventions from time to time either through formal instructions or informally through individual discussions.
8. Use a variety of evaluation tools. Students improve as writers when they write frequently. The teacher needs to evaluate the children's writings in a variety of ways – first, by noting the characteristics of their writing while it is developing and second, by keeping copies of all their work readily available, so that it is possible to note each child's progress and instructional needs. Responding to children's efforts as they write helps to improve their writing.

### Check Your Progress 3

What are the main features of a good writing programme?

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## 2.8 LET US SUM UP

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We look at writing as a more sophisticated tool of communication than speech. It gives children an opportunity to communicate their thoughts and ideas more precisely and effectively to a specific audience. In this unit we stressed the fact that a good writing programme builds on the innate desire of a child to communicate. It needs to tap the child's urge to write about things that are meaningful to her. The classroom environment needs to recreate a natural and non - threatening environment, which allows freedom to the child to communicate purposefully, without getting totally bogged in the mechanics of writing. The teacher certainly needs to provide extra support. Writing is also greatly enhanced in a stimulating environment, where children have rich resources of experiences, displays, discussions, etc, from which to draw ideas for writing. Such a programme requires an optimum use of material resources, and a motivated and resourceful teacher, who is enthusiastic about writing, and brings this excitement into the classroom in various ways.

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## 2.9 ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- Writing is a form of communication that involves the written word. It permits children to communicate over time and space.
- It also benefits thinking. Children learn to focus and reflect upon their thinking. Written words can be inspected, reconsidered, rearranged. Students can explore their feelings and deal with real life experiences through writing.
- Writing can be a means of self-development.
- Regular purposeful writing leads children to recognise and learn standard grammatical forms and standard usage.
- Research indicates that children who learn to write also become better readers.

### Check Your Progress 2

1. A favourable environment for writing in the classroom is one where children can communicate freely, exposing their real feelings, where the act of telling what one is really thinking and feeling is treated with the utmost respect, where children are not afraid and anxious about making mistakes, but instead are being constantly guided to learn from their mistakes.

In such a writing environment there is:

- acceptance
- open communication
- absence of stress

## Writing Skill

- lots of stimulation through displays, activities, and meaningful experience.
- 2. a. Suggestions for visual input: Photographs, cartoons, sketches, paintings, realia (actual objects such as toys, etc).
- b. Suggestions for use of multimedia: Turning off the sound, seeing the visuals only, and then reconstructing/dubbing the visuals, later comparing the versions.

### Check Your Progress 3

The two most important features are time and support.

Learning to write well requires time. It requires writing frequently, preferably every day.

Writing must have a chance to grow – to change, to be revised. The ability to use standard grammatical forms and standard usage does not develop in a day or two, it takes months and months of constant usage. Good writing involves integrating thinking and language with the purpose for writing.

Writing also requires support. Teachers can offer support in the following ways:

- i. talking to children about the content of their writing, before, during and after the actual writing has taken place, helps children to clarify their thoughts.
- ii. providing meaningful experiences which stimulate ideas for writing.
- iii. providing a real audience as well as real reasons for writing. This makes it worthwhile for students' to improve their writing.
- iv. helping children choose topics, by getting them to write about things they know and care about. This helps a child to discover own voice as a writer.
- v. relating the study of punctuation, spelling, language conventions to language use. Standard usage and editing skills are best learnt when their study relates to communicative purposes.
- vi. sharing the excitement of writing. The teachers' eagerness sparks the children.
- vii. respecting children's writings.
- viii. encouraging inventiveness.
- ix. providing a free and non-threatening environment in which children can write without stopping to correct. Very often children's ideas come faster than their thoughts. They go back subsequently and revise, correct and redraft the writing.
- x. caring about writing and using all possible resources, ideas and materials to create a rich and stimulating writing environment.

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## UNIT 3 TYPES OF WRITING AT THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Writing in the Early Stages
- 3.3 Selecting Suitable Writing Tasks
- 3.4 Devising Communicative Tasks
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 References and Suggested Readings
- 3.7 Answers

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit we shall familiarize ourselves with the different types of writing that can be done at the elementary level in school. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- select suitable writing tasks for different levels of language learners;
- select or devise writing tasks which are realistic and meaningful;
- provide a context for written work;
- decide on the kind of support a particular group of learners need; and
- equip the learner for a particular writing task by providing adequate support.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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Let us begin with attempting to understand the role and purpose of writing in the early years. Does it have a place in the child's early development, as much as play, or art, or music? How does writing relate to a child's cognitive development? The answers to these questions will determine how writing is to be taught in the elementary school. We cannot simply assume that children will be interested in writing, but we do know that it is one of the most significant forms of self expression known to humankind since languages developed as a symbolic system. We also know that writing is related to the cognitive development of a child, a part of the process of defining and exploring the world. It involves thinking, visualizing and problem-solving, along with the necessary motor skills. It is a way for the child to communicate thoughts, observations and impressions which grow progressively more complex.

A: Gita has written the poem.

B: She wrote it yesterday.

C: Rahul has stitched his shirt.

D: He stitched it yesterday.

However, there is also a social purpose to writing. The young learner does need help with the structure of the language, but along with the learning of structures and vocabulary, the development of awareness of communicative purpose, context and audience is also essential in writing. In the above exercise, learners are likely to focus on the structures. In the next example we relate the same structural facts to a communicative function:

A: By the way, has Gita written the poem for the school assembly?

B: Yes, she wrote it yesterday.

C: Has the tailor stitched the school uniform shirt yet?

B: Yes, he stitched it yesterday.

The items serve to illustrate communicative facts as well as structural facts. In addition, there is also a cognitive aspect, concerned with the generation of ideas, activation of observation, asking of questions and formulation of answers, and other mental exercises such as logical thinking, conceptualizing, generalizing, visualizing, etc.

The questions for the teacher are, therefore: what do the young writers need? How do we provide for their needs?

In this unit, we shall look at the types of writing that can be done at the elementary level. These are basically of three kinds: **controlled or guided writing, communicative writing activities** which make writers aware of communicative purposes and functions; **open or free writing** which develops freedom of expression and fluency.

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## **3.2 WRITING IN THE EARLY STAGES**

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The important factors which affect writing at this stage are:

a) **The child's developmental level**

The writing level in the mother tongue will influence writing in the second language. If the child has not mastered organisational skills or cohesive devices required for a continuous piece of writing in the first language, it is not likely that she will be proficient in writing activities in the second language. It is unlikely that a five year old child will be able to write a report on an activity, whether in the first language or the second language. The child at this stage does not have the language competency to be able to do so. Such a task would be developmentally inappropriate. Whereas if the same child were asked to write a few sentences, describing an interesting activity, it is much more within the range of the child's level, and given some support such as suitable vocabulary, it is likely that the child will be able to write this. What is essential is that writing tasks need to be geared to the child's overall developmental level regardless of which language the child is writing in. If the child has mastered certain grammatical structures or writing conventions in the mother tongue, research findings indicate that these are likely to be transferred to the second language quite smoothly. The problem arises when the rules and conventions of the second language are different and first language transfer creates difficulty. Here the teacher needs to give special support.

b) **The amount of language available with the child**

Writing tasks have to be related to the amount of language which the child has at her disposal. In the early stages of a language course, the principle factor which affects both the quantity and the kind of writing that can be done is the small amount of language available to the child. This is language which to a large extent has been acquired orally and perhaps through a small degree through reading. Writing tasks need to be geared

to the language available with the child, so that the child feels encouraged and motivated to try out more such tasks.

Gradually the teacher needs to provide opportunities to strengthen the amount of language available.

Keeping the above in mind, **the type of writing activities** which may be undertaken at an early stage with young second language learners are:

### **A) Writing at the sentence level, within the context of a text:**

#### **(i) Sentence writing using a visual**

A simple picture is drawn on the blackboard or fixed on the bulletin board. An interesting photo can also be put up, perhaps of a house, or of birds or animals.

Children are asked to write five or ten words about the objects in the picture. They are asked 'which words have you written?' and the words are put on the board.

Then the children are given some sample sentences, using the context of the picture. For example :

- a) There **is** (a book) **on** the table.
- b) There **is** a pencil **near** the book.
- c) There **are some** books on the chair.

Ask the children to write similar sentences within the context of the picture, writing about other things they see in it, using the words collected on the board and structures which have already been given, as in sentences a-c. The children thus 'create' their own sentences. They are being made to 'think' in the second language using a visual cue. The teacher is able to assess whether the child can handle certain grammatical skills, in this case number and prepositions. The activity should be so structured that the children are in no doubt about what they have to write. They should not be asked to 'describe' the picture, (which is a very general kind of instruction) but should be required to write a given number of sentences, each of which is numbered. The important thing is that the activity requires each child to do her own thinking. The sentences can then be shared and evaluated as a whole class activity. Some sample sentence structures can be given, but allow children to imbibe this. In other words, even if a child writes a sentence like - 'book table is on,' accept it. The sentence is clear enough to express meaning. Remember the child is also dealing with interference from the mother tongue, which may have a completely different grammatical structure. Give the child a little time to absorb the sentence structures in the new language. Make sure that the child is actively creating her own sentences and not just blindly copying your sentences. Our purpose is to make the child an active user, and the child needs to feel that the sentences are her creation. Gently guide the child, through exposure to correct sentences, to absorb correctly framed sentences.

A variation to this activity is to get the child to observe a more complex situation such as the classroom or the playground and repeat the above activity within this context. It is however better to give children a very narrow focus in the beginning.

#### **(ii) Writing a dialogue**

In the early stages, it is useful to provide writing activities which will enable children to handle in the written form, material which has been learnt orally. This can be done most meaningfully in the form of short dialogues.

**Writing  
Skill**

- a) **Provide a model dialogue** together with key words which the children can use to compose similar dialogues. For example, read this dialogue:

A: Give me the jug, please.

B: Which one?

A: The red one, on the shelf.

B: Here you are!

A: Thank you very much

Now use these keywords to write similar dialogues.

- a) Book/blue/in/drawer
- b) spoon/small/on/plate
- c) look/cloth/behind/table

The best way of doing this activity is to pair off children and let them make a simple finger puppet. Give the children one set of key words at a time, and using these let the puppets have a dialogue. Then let each pair write down the dialogue. Do a demonstration at the beginning. If some children extend the dialogue beyond the key words, praise them so that other children are also encouraged. The activity becomes fun, and at the same time provides an opportunity for using dialogues. It could lead to the creation of a puppet play. Try and think of other real situations where children can practise dialogues. Create your own activities. Remember it is often not at all easy to handle a group of forty little ones playing with finger puppets. Sometimes it works out better to take the children outside. However these are challenges that we need to be aware of, and try and deal with.

**(iii) Role play**

Most children love acting. Give them very simple situations from day to day life. For example, a shopkeeper and a girl buying sweets. Let two children come to the front of the class, and have a conversation. Giving cue cards often helps to give these conversations a meaningful direction (e.g. names of some particular sweets, flavours, how much they cost, etc). Let the rest of the class note the conversation. The teacher could make positive suggestions after the role-play. Once the class has been exposed to the form of role play, these could also be taken up in pairs by all the children, and the teacher could go around, and help with some language where ever it is required. The children could then be asked to write a similar dialogue for a different situation – a doctor and a patient, a shopkeeper and a customer, two friends on the phone, a parent and a child, a teacher and student and so on. Give some suggestions of the type of language which they may use. For example: How about..., Have you ever..., Maybe..., Please may I..., Thank you...

We need to keep in mind that there are some very shy children, who would hate coming in front of the class and may not take very easily to role play. Make sure you know the children in the class, and be sensitive to such children, by not asking them to come in front in the first instance, and gradually give them a chance later after they gain some confidence.

**(iv) Writing simple rhymes**

Give the children some practice in using rhyming words. Children love making rhyming



word chains; these rhyming words can then be used in sentences. If you like, you could give the children an incomplete simple rhyme structure, let them add their own endings and complete it, for example:

### Activity 1

In every week there are seven days

Which I can use in many ways.

On Monday I can.....

On Tuesday I can.....

On Wednesday I can.....

On Thursday I can.....

On Friday I can.....

On Saturday I can.....and.....

Give the children a rhyming pattern. Let them draw to make their poems more meaningful or set this to music. Changing words of songs is another similar and effective activity.

#### (v) Change familiar songs or rhymes

Let the children take any of their favourite songs or nursery rhymes and change the words. Children have a lot of fun doing this particularly if they actually get to sing these. Some examples are:

Based on “Old MacDonald had a farm”

“Our school had a class eeeyaeeyaohh

And in the class we had some fun

eeeyaeeya ooh

with a ha ha here

and a ha ha there

here a ha there a ha – and so on.

Children can even use rhymes or songs from their mother tongues and change these to English. These should be very simple ones. For example: ‘*nadi kinare tokra tha/usme munnu baitha tha*’ – the teacher can suggest words like ‘basket’ ‘sit’ and ask children to make the rhyme in English.

### B) Activities to practice sentence linking and sequencing

Our goal through these types of activity is to familiarise the children with cohesive devices which are used in composing a text. They can then begin to combine structures which they have learnt orally to form an acceptable sequence in writing. For this purpose, in order to make any headway, it will be necessary to introduce a selected number of linking devices and to practise these through writing. It is up to the teacher to decide when and how many of these devices to teach. These might include:

conjunctions – until, although, so, when.

sequencers – then, first, next, after that

linkers – moreover, however, therefore, so that

**Writing Skill**

**i) The teacher would initially give some sentence level practice**

Ask the children to combine simple sentences using the given linking device e.g.

I went home. I had dinner (then).

I was happy. I heard the sad story (until), and so on.

This kind of activity is largely mechanical and does not require the children to think about the meaning. Next they may be asked to choose linking devices which need a little thought

For example:

Rahul	sat	it became dark
waited	until	the sun had set
watched	the bell rang	
played	his mother called him	

The child has to think of a meaning relationship between the two clauses.

**ii) To make the activity more meaningful, short texts like these can be embedded within the context of a longer one (e.g. a letter, a dialogue). For example:**

Ask the students to complete a short text, using suitable linking words or phrases from the given list. (choose a letter, a joke, a short one paragraph story, etc. so that while choosing the word, the child has to keep the meaning of the whole piece in mind).

5, Nehru Place  
Geeta Chowk  
New Delhi

6. 3. 2xxx

My dear Buchi,

You have begun to write in a very neat handwriting. In your last letter you asked me why I never wrote in my own handwriting. Well my handwriting is very scrawly..... I never bothered about it in school, .....one can read it. I always have to use word processor.

..... the other day, I wrote a message for my neighbour's daughter. It said 'tomorrow is a holiday', .....she read it as 'tomorrow is a poll day'. Do you know what poll day means? ..... she didn't, she decided to find out the next day in school. Can you guess what happened?

Write soon. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

All the best

Mamu

**Complete the letter given above. Use suitable words or phrases from the list given :**

however            by the way            so            because            well  
therefore            although            maybe            perhaps

Notice that an exercise like the one given above, in the form of a complete text, also serves to introduce the students to such points as the layout of a letter, different modes of address and salutation. This could be done as a whole class activity on the blackboard, and then children can be asked to copy it into their notebooks.

### C) Activities to practise sentence linking and ordering in a paragraph

The students are asked to form texts by reordering sentences given in a 'scrambled list'. While the purpose of this activity is to get students to think carefully about the most appropriate order, it must not be allowed to become a simple puzzle. To help students the opening sentence may be indicated. They should work in pairs to discuss various possibilities. For example, they can be given a set of sentences which are not in a logical order, or are jumbled up. They are asked to put these sentences in the proper order:

1. Dogs love to fetch things
2. Besides, it doesn't matter very much if the stick gets lost.
3. It should be the right shape and size to fit in the dog's mouth.
4. A stick is the best thing for a dog to fetch.
5. Most people love to throw things for a dog to fetch.
6. It is better than a bone, because a dog does not want to give the bone back to the thrower.

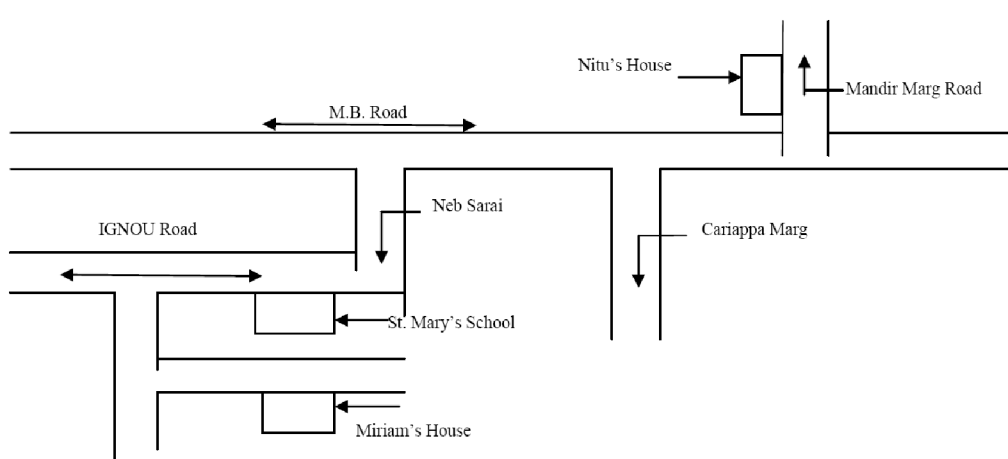
It must be remembered that such activities are based on reading the sentences and this integrates reading with writing.

### D) Other activities

Visual material can be given and the children asked to do a writing task. For example

#### i) Using simple maps

Ask the children to use the map given to write simple directions from Nitu's house to Miriam's house. This is a very good activity for reinforcing 'left/right/east/west, etc. Ask the children to use link words like – first, next, then, finally, after that, before.



**Writing Skill**

Students could be asked to write directions from the school to their home (if it's not too complicated) or from school to a local market for a child who is new in the class.

**ii) Expanding notes**

- a) One fine day, Rahul decided to go for a walk. However, the walk did not turn out to be pleasant. This is what Rahul wrote in his diary that night.

*Sunday 16th June What a day! Blue sky - lovely weather. Decided to go for walk. Met Sunil. Saw guavas on tree. Threw stones. Mali got furious. Chased us. Fell and hurt my knee. Reached home tired and sweaty. Amma got angry. Went off to sleep. Woke up with a headache.*

Write out the diary entries in full sentences. Link them wherever possible with some of the sentence openers given below:-

Anyway .....I suppose .....of course .....just to make things worse .....after that, ..... perhaps

Start like this:

It was such a lovely, clear day on Sunday that I decided to go to the park for a walk....

**iii) Completing descriptions**

Two children Rahul and Geeta had got lost at a school *mela*. To help find them, the teacher asked their friends to write their descriptions. Based on the information given fill in the form below:

Name :Rehman

Age :6 years

Complexion: Fair

Hair :Black, curly, short

Special marks: One front tooth missing, large ears, small dark spot on left cheek

Weight: A bit plump

The name of the lost boy is ..... He is ..... old and is 4ft..... He is ..... in complexion with ..... curly hair which ..... He has ..... and a ..... on his ..... He is .....

Now write the description of Geeta using these notes

Name: Geeta

Age: 8 years

Complexion: dark

Hair: Light brown, long hair tied up in two plaits

Special mark: nil

Weight: Very thin.

While the first piece of writing is guided. The second is not. This activity can be done in different ways.

Children can be given a simple picture instead and asked to do a guided piece of writing. After which they use another simple picture to do another piece of writing on their own. Using a picture to plan a description is a useful technique for helping students see the importance of logical development in a picture.

#### iv) Using experiences for writing

The children could make a simple paragraph on some topic of common interest or concern. For example they could find out how many children like watching the TV programme 'Balveer'. The findings could go up on the board with the name of each child on a slip as;

Likes watching TV	Does not like watching TV	Hates TV
Pia	Mona	Ramona
Anu	Asif	Luke
Rahul	Gurjlt	
Anita	Sadiq	
Raju		

Such exercises provide a lot of practice for making comparison – *fewer, more, most, least, less, a few, also, maybe, perhaps, could be*. Children could be given a format to fill in. On the basis of this, they could prepare a very simple class report and put it up at the parents meeting.

#### v) Making a plan

The children could be involved in planning a picnic, a walk or some experience which they are going to have. The class could be broken up into small groups.

Group 1 - can decide on things they “will” need to take

Group 2 - can decide on places they “can” go to

Group 3 - will decide how they would go and so on.

Each group will need to arrive at a consensus and present their ideas and suggestion in a given format. Such activities give practice in the use of the future tense “can”, “will”, “shall”, and so on.

Similarly writing about a past experience helps to reinforce “past tense”. The teacher could give a framework and suggest uses so that special grammatical structures can be reinforced. For example - ask the children to read the following paragraph and select the correct verb form.

Yesterday our class **went/gone** to the Children’s Book Trust Library.

In the library we **saw/seen** lots of books.

Our teacher **gave/given** us lots of different kinds of books to look at.

We **asked/ask** questions about the library.

We **saw/seen** the different sections.

I **like/liked** the big reference books a lot.

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There **was/were** Dolls Museum in the same building.

I **enjoy/enjoyed** the visit to the library.

It **was/is** very useful.

While the exercise is given in the form of sentences, these sentences all connect to form a paragraph, and have a definite order. Now ask the children to write a similar paragraph using the words *went, gone, saw, seen* and the *past tense of action words using -ed*. Give the children a beginning. For example:

Yesterday we went for a walk to the park. ....

vi) **Asking questions:** If a child cannot ask questions, she cannot learn more. A child is naturally curious, and should be given exercises in which asking questions is a part of the activity. Situations in which questions of different types: yes/no, wh- (what, where, when, how) can be asked about a place, a person, an event e.g. while writing about 'My Village', the input can be in the form of questions:

Is there a school in your village?

Is there a hospital in your village?

The child can give answers beginning with 'yes' or 'no'

Then they can ask the similar questions to others and write down the reply. Then, a set of single words regarding the village can be put up on the board, and children make up questions, e.g. on 'Clean Toilets', '*Panchayat*', 'Crops', they should ask questions starting with 'where', 'what', 'why':

What is a *Panchayat*? What does it do? What should it do?

Questions are complex forms in terms of language, but vital, as children become aware of their environment and society in this way, and begin to explore their world.

Therefore the teacher has to distinguish between:

- Tasks in which information is provided, language has to be added.
- Tasks in which language is given, information has to be provided.

All the grammar practice is given in context. The teacher gives extra practice in particular skills, or structures before a written task. She needs to prepare a format of the written task that the children would need to use. After the class has done their written work, if the teacher still feels the need to reinforce a particular grammatical structure more practice could be given, followed by a written activity which allows children to use their newly acquired grammatical knowledge with the context of a written task. This allows the teacher to ensure that some amount of learning has taken place.

**Check Your Progress 1**

1. What are the reasons for giving a text as a basic format for developing functional competency and reinforcing grammatical structure in the second language?

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2. What is the teacher's role in guiding writing tasks?

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### 3.3 SELECTING SUITABLE WRITING TASKS

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Children need to do various types of writing in English. In schools where English is the medium of instruction, a lot of written work done in other subject areas would be in English. For example word problems in mathematics, report writing for social studies, writing up science experiments, and so on. Children would also be doing a lot of writing for their own enjoyment or for social interaction. This would include creative writing such as poems or stories, or transactional writing such as giving instructions, writing messages, writing letters or notices, writing reports. In schools where the medium of instruction for other subject areas is the mother tongue, the second reason for learning English i.e. social interaction would become more important, especially since English is a major language of communication in our country, particularly between regions. While selecting suitable writing tasks, we need to do an analysis of the language demands and language needs of our learners.

**Language demands** refer to a learning activity irrespective of the learner, and are a statement of the language skills any learner needs in order to be able to perform the task successfully. Language demands are established on the basis of the analysis of school learning tasks. This kind of an analysis is often done inadequately or casually in the course of daily or weekly preparation and teaching. From time to time, however, it needs to be done carefully. For example, if the children are writing for a class debate, they may need support or reinforcement of grammatical structures which would enable them to give opinions such as: 'in my view', 'I feel' 'according to me', etc. They may need practice in logically presenting views. They may also need to differentiate between facts and opinions. Thus the language demands refer to the language requirements of the whole class, as viewed together.

This is easier said than done, however, as perception of logical relationships, differentiating between facts and opinions etc., involves not just grammar, but thinking, so attention is to be given to development of abilities such as critical thinking and analysis. These also go side by side with the development of world knowledge, and social awareness.

**Language needs** refer to the individual learner and are a statement of what she needs to be able to do with language in order to perform a given activity or range of activities successfully. In other words, different learners will have different needs with respect to the same activity. Normally, the term 'language needs' refers to those areas of school language use in which the individual learner needs support. For example, spelling, or in the use of the past tense. The teacher in this case would give extra practice to the individual child either through dictation or a worksheet or by directing the child to a suitable exercise in the workbook. Language needs are established on the basis of the analysis of a child's performance in an activity or a range of typical activities. Language needs are visible, for example through errors – 'I am came yesterday' (in such a case the child requires additional practice in the use of simple past tense); they are also visible through omission or lack of variety in speech or writing. Second language learners often tend to repeat the same sentence patterns particularly while writing. With young

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children we often find over generalisations of a newly acquired grammatical structure or patterns, for example when children just learn the 'ed' form of regular verbs in the past tense, we often come across words like 'bringed', 'knowed', 'gived' and so on. The learner in this case needs special reinforcement in the past tense forms of irregular verbs.

Language demands and needs can be expressed in a variety of ways. To assess the language demands of a class and the language needs of a child we need to look at:

1. **Skills:** the 'classical' four language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing – the combinations in which these skills occur naturally i.e. talk (**LS**), or note taking (**RW**) and sub-skills, for example grammatical accuracy, letter formation, word recognition.
2. **Function:** i.e. the communicative purpose of a given piece of writing. For example, defining, describing a process to a friend, writing a story for a younger child. The communicative function often determines the choice of the writing form.
3. **Concepts:** in young children language plays an important role in developing basic concepts of number, shape, size, spatial relationships, time, direction and so on. Lack of understanding of basic concepts is often due to misunderstandings on account of insufficient language. Difficulties in maths are often due to this.
4. **Style:** i.e. the degree of formality and their characteristics e.g. more formal academic writing, less formal personal language. It also has to do with the appropriateness of the language to the particular form of writing, as well as the child's own particular way of expressing ideas.
5. **Grammar:** i.e. accuracy in the use of grammatical rules as well as conventions. Children often need additional practice, for example in the correct usage of irregular verbs or frequently confused words or commonly misused forms.
6. **Lexis:** accuracy in word recognition and in the productive use of the word, as well as richness in the variety of available vocabulary.
7. **Sounds/spelling:** accuracy in the production of sounds and sound patterns, spelling and spelling patterns.
8. **Discourse:** the ability of a child to understand or produce a stretch of language through the control of linking devices so that there is a logical flow in the writing. In other words, the ability to organise a piece of writing appropriately with attention to sequencing and correct order in the flow of the writing.

Looking at the varied language needs and demands, the most favoured approach to teaching of writing has been one where a teacher takes up various kinds of guided and controlled exercises in the beginning. These are designed to lead the children gradually and systematically towards free expression, by equipping them with functional competency in the second language. Earlier approaches attempted to isolate the various difficulties involved in the production of a text and to present these separately, one by one to the children in a systematic way. For the most part, these included practise of different grammatical structures or language conventions, such as spelling or punctuation. Recent approaches of teaching writing have seen a shift towards using the text as the basic format for practice even at the early stages. The aim of writing is seen as the ability to write a text, therefore providing guidance, and grammar practice within this context is found most useful.

We have mentioned earlier that often children are able to produce a correct sentence or spelling when dealing with an isolated sentence, but while writing continuous text they



make mistakes. This is because writing a text demands attention of several aspects of writing at the same time. Language practice within the text is found to be most relevant and useful. While this does not rule out some sort of sentence practice, which may be necessary for the mastery of certain types of compound and complex sentence structures, we do not suggest an approach which will take the children in easy stages from sentence practice to the production of a text. Instead we use the text as the basic format for practice and within it's framework all the devices required for good writing i.e. organising, grammatical structures and lexical devices. By using texts (letters, notes, even dialogues in the early stages) as our basic practice format, rather than some other unit such as the sentence or even the paragraph, we can make the writing activities much more meaningful for the students and thereby increase their motivation to write as well. The text provides the setting within which they can practise, for example sentence completion, sentence combination, paragraph construction, in relation to a longer stretch of writing.

While selecting suitable texts for guided writing tasks, one needs to keep the following factors in mind:

### **1. Variety**

Children need a wide exposure to different forms of written texts, which are appropriate for different communicative purposes. If the children have only seen descriptive and narrative prose in their text books they cannot be expected to produce other varieties of the written language, such as letters, poems or reports.

### **2. Context**

We need to not just teach different kinds of writing, for example: narration, description, etc. but we need to see that these are practised within the wider context of a text. For example, a letter may involve some description, and some narration, while a report might provide a setting for writing. Writing about a possible happening on a future date e.g. 2150 AD, or making plans for a school trip would give practice in writing in the future tense.

### **3. Interest**

Writing tasks should suit the children's interest. Fun and humour interest little children. Allow them to use nonsense words in rhymes. Let them imagine and describe impossible events, for example, what would happen if they went to a school in the sky? Children enjoy make-believe. Allow them to write about things that matter to them. Provide them with language which they really need in their daily lives. Begin with the child at centre then choose tasks that would concern and interest the child.

### **4. Realistic or authentic settings**

All too often writing tasks lack reality for the children because they do not give them the feeling that they are writing for somebody. The writing is done solely for the benefit of the teacher who "corrects" it. It becomes important to identify those forms of writing which are most likely to be relevant to the needs of elementary school children such as various types of personal communication (diaries, journals, notes, messages, greetings) and more formal communication – such as writing simple stories and letters. While doing so, the tasks should be integrated into real life concerns and explorations, as illustrated in the previous section.

### **5. Support**

We should remember that writing tasks are generally imposed on children. Children

**Writing Skill**

who are beginners may not have the relevant ideas, or be sufficiently stimulated by the task to think of ideas. This is further compounded by their inhibitions in using the second language. Writing activities therefore need to be supported initially by providing controlled, structured tasks. Gradually the tasks should give children more opportunity to do their own thinking. At this stage the tasks are linguistically guided. i.e, the children are given some stimulus such as a visual or notes or a framework, and using that support they do their own writing.

At a more advanced stage when children are ready to take on writing on their own, they should be introduced to the writing process, initially through guided, whole class writing in which every child in the class is involved in one piece of writing. Later the children start doing individual process writing, and support is given by the teacher at the pre-writing stage in two ways. Firstly by creating a suitable climate through discussing experiences, displays or brainstorming sessions. Secondly, by equipping the children with suitable vocabulary, grammar and organisational skills such as linking devices or formatting which is specific to that form of writing.

**6. Sympathetic attitude**

We cannot expect a high level of proficiency from second language learners particularly at the initial stages. We should not look so much at what the children have failed to achieve, but rather at what they have succeeded in doing.

**7. Flexibility**

Handling a large class of forty or more young children in an active learning situation is not easy. Especially in the case of very young children, as they are not socially equipped for group work, and need constant individual attention. We also find that the class dynamics varies from one section of the same class to another, or in the same class from one day to another. On one day the children will work in a very focused manner, and on another day they will be very distracted. We need to set rules with the children and see that these are enforced, but more importantly, if an activity is just not working on one day, or the children are too hyper, drop the activity, and switch to something more suitable. This kind of flexibility is required particularly when we are dealing with large numbers.

**Check Your Progress 2**

How do we decide if a particular writing task is suitable for a particular class?

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**3.4 DEVISING COMMUNICATIVE TASKS**

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In the early stages of writing, writing activities are still to a large extent serving to reinforce oral work, and children are getting familiar with the change between spoken and written forms of language. However, it is important to show the students that writing can be used for the purpose of communication. The activities which are set up for this purpose are necessarily simple in form and limited in scope, but they will motivate the children towards learning how to express themselves through writing. Some examples are given below:

- i) **Ask the children to write instructions which other children in the class (or the teacher) have to carry out.** For example:
- a) Take your bag and put it in front of Renu's chair.
  - b) Stand up, put your hands on your head.

The children may be asked to write a sequence of instructions to be carried out. This is a useful device for practising items such as First, next, then, etc.

First stand up

Then go to the front of the class

Next, draw a circle on the board.

Finally make it into a smiling face.

Each child could give instructions to some other child.

Later, these instructions could be related to making some simple object. The children would need to follow these instructions. All the objects that have been created could be displayed. There could be a follow-up discussion on which children were able to make these objects, which children were not. Why? Which were good instructions and so on.

- ii) **Ask children to write simple notes to each other,** with one compliment. Give them a format.
- iii) **Make a tree in the corner of your class.** Let each child cut out of a green leaf and write a little 'thank you' note to the tree for some special things that each child is grateful for. Let these be very personal notes. Let children express their feelings in their own way.
- iv) **Similar 'thank you' letter' could be written to helpers of the school, or to a special friend.**
- v) Make 'celebrations' and 'festivals' to become occasions for writing. Let children **write special poems or messages.** Let them make their messages unusual.
- vi) **Use thematic bulletin boards:** For example summer – make a sun. Give each child a strip of paper to make a ray. Let each child write a message from the sun to the earth or let each child write a message to the sun on the ray. Rainy season – make a rainbow. Let children write their wishes on the rainbow. They could write little limericks on cut out raindrops, to make a rainy scene.
- vii) **Have a section on riddles.** Let five different children put up riddles. Make sure that the riddles are the children's own creation. Change the riddles every two to three days. See who is the best at answering riddles. Children could make riddle books.
- viii) **Ask students to describe someone in the class without giving the person's name.** The children could then guess. The children must remember not to write hurtful things.
- ix) An exciting idea that works very well in a class is to **start a pen-friends club.** This pen-friends club is however one with a difference. Ask each child to think of any other country, other than her own that she'd like to belong to. Each child should then give herself an imaginary name and an address. It should sound authentic.

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These should be written up on slips of paper and put in a box. Ask children from another section to do a similar exercise. Let children then exchange boxes. Children could then pick up a slip. Each child could then write to her pen friend in the next section.

Ask children to gather as much information about the country they've chosen, so that they can write about it. Set up mailboxes outside each class, so that the children can receive letters. Interesting letters could be displayed.

- x) **Holiday correspondence between children in the class** can be set up in the same way. Ask the children to bring the letters they enjoyed reading. These can be shared after the school reopens. It's a good way of catching up on what children did during the holidays. **A scrap book, containing pictures of places, friends, pets, etc. along with captions or small comments** will be very interesting. These days, children can make an e-scrapbook on their computers or mobiles and share with their friends. Writing means the same thing, whether it's on paper or on screen, though the mechanics are different. Certainly, children, who are technologically savvy, find it very exciting to use computers to share their ideas, and lives with others.
- xi) **Diary Writing** can be very exciting for children, if they make it a meaningful personal communication. They could be taught to not just focus on what they did, but their feelings, any bright ideas, any strong reactions – things they liked, didn't like or were upset about. They could copy out some lines from a story book – a description that was thought-provoking, a funny joke, a poem. Have one diary sharing day in the month, when any child could volunteer to share any special moments, thoughts or feelings from their diary.
- xii) **Give 'mock dictation'** to the class in the form of a short letter. The children are asked to play the part of secretaries who are not very good at dictation but do not want to admit it! While the letter is being dictated, they should try to note down, rather than write out in full, as much as they can. The children are then divided into small groups, with four or five in each group, and asked to compare their notes and write up the letter.

Activities like the ones given above help to put writing in use in a game-like context. They help to make children excited about communication through writing and help in breaking down inhibitions about using the second language. This is a very important step. Once the children become familiar with second language in real contexts – they achieve fluency and accuracy much faster. Such activities also take away the boredom and tedium which "learning through drill" often brings about.

**Check Your Progress 3**

Suggest an activity for a classroom of beginners which demonstrates the communicative purpose of language.

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### 3.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have discussed stages in the development of writing in the elementary school, and how we may select suitable writing tasks at this level. We examined how written tasks differ from speech, and why it is useful to have the text as a basic format for language practice, and provide guidance and support to second language learners. Lastly we looked at the kind of communicative activities that can be practiced to make writing interesting for the young learner, as well as developing the skill of communicating in writing. This sets the foundation for the more complex forms of critical and expository writing that the child will be expected to do in later stages in her education.

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### 3.6 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Some ideas for the activities which have been suggested have been borrowed from:

Byrne, Donn (1979). *Teaching Writing Skills*. London : Longman.

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Pinter, A. (2006). *Teaching Young Language Learners*. Oxford: OUP.

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### 3.7 ANSWERS

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#### Activity 1

In every week there are seven days

Which I can use in many ways.

On Monday I can do what my mother says.

On Tuesday I can run with the waves.

On Wednesday I can hide in the caves.

On Thursday I can enact some plays.

On Friday I can look for jays.

On Saturday I can draw and lastly on Sunday, do what my father says.

#### Check Your Progress 1

1. Exposure to the written form of language by itself is not enough. Children have to be made aware of how we communicate through the written medium and how this differs from speech. In particular, they need to be shown that any piece of writing, whether or not it is addressed to a specific reader has a communicative function. They need to understand how the resources of the written language are used to fulfill this purpose.

We have seen that writing at least in any significant form, involves the ability to organise sentences into a coherent whole or text. Most writing practice therefore

## Writing Skill

starts with the aim of teaching those devices of the written language which are needed to be able to write various kinds of texts. The practice of these devices should also, as far as possible, be within the framework of a text which has a definite communicative goal, so that the learners see the purpose of what they are writing.

2. Guidance in writing tasks, particularly in the early stages is essential. It helps the child to acquire linguistic competency i.e. suitable vocabulary, grammar and writing conventions over a period of time. There is a range of support the teacher can offer and this would depend entirely on the needs of the class. The ultimate discretion of the type of support to offer is with the teacher. It is a good idea to move from controlled writing – where the children are given an example and asked to reproduce the same type of writing – to linguistically guided writing where children are given some support, for example a picture, or notes and they write within a broad framework. Once the children have acquired enough functional competency they could be given freer writing tasks. Initially the teacher would be required to take this up as a whole class activity, so that each stage – the specific purpose, grammar usage, organisation of ideas, linking devices, formatting, etc. could be discussed. Once the children are ready to do individual writing, this kind of support would be given by the teacher at the pre-writing stage. The teacher can give additional formal grammar practice as and when the need arises.

### Check Your Progress 2

The writing task that is selected should be suitable for the developmental level of the children. It also needs to take into account the amount of language available with most of the children in the class. There is no point in giving a class of beginners a report to write. They will not be able to do it. They need something like simple instructions or notes to write. These can be in a guided form. The teacher should focus on the needs of the learners while selecting a task, so that it helps them to acquire greater functional competency and gives them practice in the areas where they are weak.

The writing tasks should be given in realistic contexts, so that they are meaningful and provide variety. Language learning takes place very efficiently when it is relaxed and enjoyable. Games are found to be very effective. The tasks should not be in the same form every time. Children need variety. They need to do different kinds of writing, with different functions. This equips them to deal with real situations.

The writing tasks should take the interest of the children into account. There is no point in asking a class of six year olds to write a report on eve-teasing, it is not something they know or care about. But they should relate to their immediate environment – the plants and animals, family, friends, food, toys, games, pet, etc.

### Check Your Progress 3

Writing instructions can be made into a communicative activity. We get children to work in pairs, and ask each child to write a simple instruction for her partner. The instruction should be one that the partner has to actually follow. For example: Put your hand in your bag, or sit under the table. The children then switch and the other partner writes out the instruction. Such an activity is purposeful because it has to make the meaning of the instruction clear, so that the other child can follow it. It is also very enjoyable, and yet it makes children realise the importance of writing clearly. It helps children see the communicative function of language in real life, and therefore the need to achieve a level of functional competency so that we are able to communicate effectively.

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## UNIT 4 WRITING PROCESS WITH BEGINNERS

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### Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 The Writing Process and Process Writing
- 4.3 Process Writing with Beginners
  - 4.3.1 Pre-writing
  - 4.3.2 The Writing Process
  - 4.3.3 Some Important Aspects of Process Writing
- 4.4 Feedback as Part of Writing
- 4.5 The Teacher's Role in Process Writing
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Suggested Readings
- 4.8 Answers

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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We have been looking at controlled writing tasks, which are often given with the purpose of helping children arrive at some amount of functional competence in the second language. In this unit, we shall discuss how we can help children to gradually progress toward free writing. We shall look at the various stages of the writing process that a writer goes through to produce a finished piece of writing. We will understand the approach called **process writing**, and how we can adopt this approach in devising classroom strategies for writing. After you have gone through this unit you should be able to:

- Understand the writing process.
- Help each child to understand and internalise the importance of each stage of the writing process.
- Help children develop the skills of reflecting and reviewing their own and each other's writing, i.e. acquire the skills of self-evaluation.
- Structure suitable process writing activities for a class of beginners, and adapt these activities according to available resources and children's responses.

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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Writing begins when we want to express and share our feelings, concerns, opinions, views and through this we try to understand our lives and ourselves. We want to write about things that we care about. Yet we find that very few students in school really like to write. It is seen as a great burden. All along, it is assumed that children should write full-fledged essays, paragraphs and letters, which are big tasks for anyone to accomplish. We might ask ourselves the question: How many *teachers* like to write? We know the answer. However, students are not only expected to write, but are often prescribed

## Writing Skill

predetermined frameworks and formats suggested by the teacher. The topic is chosen by the teacher, it is discussed with the whole class, some points and suitable vocabulary are written on the board, and the writing begins. These essays and paragraphs have very little to do with the children's own lives. The topics are common, oft-repeated and do not really concern a child. 'Rainy season' or 'My Favourite Hobby' need not be what is uppermost in the child's mind. So children write quite mechanically. Quite often, every essay or paragraph in the class reads the same. In turn, the teachers get bored with correction. They find that the majority has produced what has been 'told' to them, or even, in some cases, dictated.

Within this kind of a classroom, talking to children about revising their writing or redrafting or working at various writing styles or new formats has absolutely no meaning. It will only be viewed as an added burden, an additional chore, and if anything, add to the child's dislike of writing. What all the children will probably end up only checking for full stops and capital letters or perhaps spelling mistakes. What needs to be done to make writing meaningful is to tap the child's natural urge to write.

When we begin to work with inexperienced writers, who are writing in their second language, our first concern is to get them to produce written language. We can't teach them about improving their writing until they can produce it with relative ease. As with writing, frequent opportunities for writing are the single most common recommendation for increasing the fluency of writers. While instruction, conferencing and evaluation may prove helpful, nothing is as valuable as the actual writing practice. The more the children write, the freer they get, and the less they worry about making spelling mistakes and errors. Secondly students can be more fluent if they write on topics (usually self-selected) about which they have some knowledge or which emerge from their own experiences. Students' expressions of ideas on paper can only be fluent if they have plenty of ideas about the selected topic which they can draw on.

To try and be able to do this in a class of around fifty little children, with each one demanding attention, is a very challenging task. Probably what helps to make it work to some extent is our belief and conviction as teachers, that it is vital to allow each child the time and space to pour their smallest thoughts on paper. However small, these thoughts are precious. Slowly, this will help them to discover themselves, and see writing as something meaningful, as a tool that can help them communicate with others. Some things that we are going to look at in this unit may work with one class, but not with another. Within a class itself there will most probably be some children who work very slowly, or who are not receptive to these methods and therefore need more structured activities. These are all classroom realities that we will have to encounter.

We will need to change and modify approaches to suit our own needs, and learn from the experiences that work as much as from experiences that do not work. Talking and sharing with fellow teachers helps to develop methods that work. The primary driving force is of course, that as teachers we believe deeply in what we are doing. It is with this spirit that we are going to delve into these process writing methods. A deep belief, that children matter, what they have to say also matters. As teachers we have to find a place for all this, in the structured curriculum that we work with. Since we are working with little children, perhaps, from class three level onwards, to make the process writing approach practical we need to introduce it very gradually. It may begin by the whole class working together on a piece of writing that they have chosen to write about and is therefore meaningful to them.

This unit will take you through the various stages of the writing process by using examples of process writing and its transaction in the class.



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## 4.2 THE WRITING PROCESS AND PROCESS WRITING

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### The Writing Process

Like all communication, writing is a meaningful activity. ‘Writers don’t find meaning, they make meaning’ (Flower and Hayes). Making meaning is a process.

“It is the most natural thing in the world for the master potter to watch an apprentice at work, noticing what the student does and does not do with the lump of clay. Yet teachers are more apt to focus on the final products than on the processes that produce them” Lucy M. Calkins (1986). Much of the research and academic work in the field of writing recognizes that writers follow a process when they work, and when we begin to understand this process, we can help our students invent, use and adapt effective writing strategies (Murray 1982, Graves 1991). Product is not behaviour, nor does it represent what goes on in people’s minds. Yet in most of our language classrooms we tend to only look at the end products of writing. We give a lot of importance and credit to the end product. We expect children to produce a perfect piece of writing in one sitting. We do not allow them the process of revising, improving or rethinking about their writings. In the normal course, we always write a draft, rework it, maybe once or twice, we ask for feedback from others. Only after this whole process do we produce a final piece of writing. But by ignoring the process of development of writing, we prevent children from becoming actively involved with their writing. It can rightly be said: ‘take care of the process and the product will take care of itself’. If the process is successful, we end up with a product that clarifies what we know, that teaches us something and enlarges our experience.

Theorists have defined the writing process as different steps or stages that a writer goes through to produce a piece of writing. Broadly speaking, these are the stages of prewriting, writing and rewriting, editing and then producing the final piece of writing. Murray refers to these as rehearsal, drafting, revision and editing. Each stage is important. There are different skills required at each stage, and children need to go through each stage under the guidance of the teacher. The stages however do not always occur in the linear order given above, and there may be overlaps between them. At each stage, thinking is involved.

Murray (1982) in an article entitled, “Teaching the other self: the writer’s first reader”, views the writing process as ultimately an interaction between the two selves of an individual. The process gets internalised and the “other self” takes on the role that the teacher or peers had played. He says “The self speaks, the other self listens and considers. The self proposes, the other self considers. The self makes, the other self evaluates. The two selves collaborate.” We begin to think about our thinking. Through writing we can “re-see”, reshape and refine our thoughts. Lucy Calkins (1986) suggests “that it is useful at this later stage to view writing as a “process of dialogue between the writer and the text”. We ask the same questions over and over again, and we ask them whether we are writing a poem or an essay. By taking children through the writing process we help them to begin to think about and refine their writings. Initially we begin by taking the children through a fairly structured process of guided writing. Our effort is that slowly, with more and more experience the child should be able to internalise this process so that as Frank Smith (1982) explains “writing separates our ideas from ourselves in a way that it is easiest for us to explore and develop them”.

## Process Writing

We shall from time to time be referring to “process writing”. In order that we don’t confuse this with the ‘writing process’ it needs to be clarified that the former is an approach of developing writing skills, based on strategies that allow a child to proceed step by step through the various stages of the writing process. The “writing process”, however, refers to the process itself. Thus when we talk of a process writing class, we imply that it is a work on one piece of writing which continues through a series of writing classes, through which the child will get a chance to review, and refine a piece of writing. To ensure continuity it is important to set aside some time everyday for writing.

This approach to writing needs to be distinguished from one where the child is given a topic to write on, and the produced piece of writing is corrected by the teacher. As discussed earlier, such an approach has serious limitations as compared to the process based one. We shall try and examine this in greater detail.

While we spend a year or even two years doing process writing in fairly structured classrooms, our ultimate aim of taking children through this process is to let children become independent thinkers and writers. Once children have internalised writing as process it becomes important to allow them to proceed at their own pace, in their own way. Therefore in later years, i. e. at the middle school level, one would possibly find each child working at different writing forms and at a different stage of the writing process within the same class.

The children are introduced to process writing by undertaking at least one piece of writing as a whole class. Here the teacher keeps the entire class synchronised and working in unison. Through this, children understand the different stages of the writing process. They keep the writing at each stage in a folder, which helps them to see their writing progress.

While it is tempting to view the writing process as made up of discrete, linear steps this may not be so. There are often overlaps or sometimes children repeat an earlier stage or add on one of their own.

In this unit we shall explore the writing process through five structured stages i.e.

1. Choosing an idea or topic
2. Writing a draft
3. Revising
4. Proofreading
5. Making a final copy for display or for a predetermined audience

We shall also look at the pre-writing activities and support that the teacher needs to provide before the writing process begins. We must also keep in mind **the special needs of second language learners**. We also need to keep our multicultural, large class and fairly structured context in mind, and see how we can use these methods effectively within these contexts. We also need to be aware that the great advantage that process based methodologies can offer is to allow each child her own way of expressing thoughts and ideas. Within a multicultural context it means that it provides an opportunity for children to write in their local idioms, and tap the richness of their social and cultural backgrounds. Such an approach gives recognition to the child’s cultural heritage and environment, and adds to the child’s strength.

This is in contrast to an approach where there is only one single accepted form and style of writing, which may be unfamiliar to a number of children in the class who come from different social backgrounds and which may make many children feel unsure and insecure. A sense of alienation may creep in. Children may feel they are incapable of writing. These feelings become very deep and cause great harm to the child. They germinate in schools and classrooms which are not sensitive to the special needs of a multicultural class. There is need to acknowledge and provide space for each child to write in meaningful ways about things that are important for her.

We need to see how we can absorb process writing into our classrooms in workable ways. Within the context of our large classes for second language learners the most effective ways of looking at the stages of the writing process has been to break it into prewriting, choosing an idea, drafting, revising, proofreading, making a final copy and publishing or sending it to the intended audience. In such classrooms with second language learners, it may be necessary to first develop a functional competence in the second language by taking all the children through structured or controlled writing experiences in the initial stages. We have already examined various ways of doing this in the previous unit. This would, for example, mean exercises which require filling in functional words like auxiliaries, prepositions, articles and conjunctions. It would also involve exercises, as well as games and activities to enhance the child's vocabulary.

These should however be all done as a part of a purposeful writing activity, within a meaningful context. While they need to have something of a base in the second language before they begin process writing, it can also be the case that meaningful writing activities may provide the context for the learning of grammatical structures and vocabulary.

### Check Your Progress 1

1 How would you define the writing process?

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2 What are the requirements of a process writing classroom?

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Next, we shall now look at the various stages of the writing process, and some ways in which it can be introduced within the writing programme of a formal school. We shall go through a sample of process writing in detail, with a class of beginners, to get a feel of how it can be transacted within an elementary school curriculum in our Indian context.

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## 4.3 PROCESS WRITING WITH BEGINNERS

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In this section we shall take up the example of introducing process writing in a class of young children, as a whole class activity. We shall go through the various steps of writing a class story with one main idea. The children in the class will be required to

write a short story, in one paragraph, about an experience they have shared. Since the story is about a familiar event each child will be able to participate. As the children are taken through each step, it is expected that they will internalise the writing process, which they can later use independently. The children will go through the following steps:

### **4.3.1 Pre-writing**

This stage prepares children for the writing task to follow. In this case the children will be prepared with the requirements of the form that they will be writing in, namely a paragraph. The concept of the “main idea” of a paragraph will be reinforced.

Summary of the writing process:

1. Step one - Choosing a suitable idea
2. Step two - Writing the first draft
3. Step three - Revising the class story. The class revises the class story. They are taught how to “discuss” their ideas and suggestions.
4. Step four - Proofreading the class story. Children practice proofreading for errors in spelling, punctuation and capitalisation. They use the help of dictionaries.
5. Step five - Making a final copy for sharing.

We shall go through each of the above in detail.

#### **a) Writing about one main idea**

Introduce a paragraph as a group of sentences. All the sentences in a paragraph tell about one main idea. Children also need to know that the sentences in a paragraph follow some order. As a way of understanding the concept of order, give the children a set of drawings on the board. Let them find the one that does not belong. Read out a list of objects and let them call out the one that does not belong. For example chair, table, tree, bed. Next read out a paragraph. Ask the children to listen for the sentence, within a group of sentences that does not belong. For example:

Rahul went to the zoo. He saw many animals. The elephants were eating. They were eating leaves from the bamboo trees. The lions were sleeping. **Rahul has a pet dog.** The monkeys were playing. They were jumping from one branch to another. (The sentence that does not belong is in bold)

Ask the children which sentence does not tell us about the zoo. Ask the children why the sentence, ‘Rahul has a pet dog’, does not fit. Remind the children that all the sentences should be about one idea, which is called the **main idea**. Discuss with the children what the story is about. Ask them to individually add two more sentences. Let the children read out their sentences and decide whether they are suitable or not. Give the children some more practice, with other paragraphs.

#### **b) Writing a topic sentence**

After the children are clear about what a ‘main idea’ is, they need to be told that in most paragraphs, the main idea is stated in one sentence, called the topic sentence, which is generally the first sentence. All other sentences add a supporting detail. In the above paragraph the sentence Rahul went to the zoo, is the topic sentence. A useful writing exercise is to first give children practice in identifying topic sentences, followed by practice in writing topic sentences. Some examples are given below:

- i) Underline the main idea in the paragraph given below:

Friends are special people. They like to play the same games as you. They understand your jokes. They know when you are happy or sad without your saying it.

The main idea is: **Friends are special people.** Explain to the children that the first sentence gives the main idea of this paragraph, so we call it the topic sentence. Give the children more practice with other paragraphs, till they are clear about what is a topic sentence. The children also need to be told that it is not necessary for the first sentence to always be the topic sentence. Sometimes it can be the last or one of the middle sentences. For example in the paragraph given below the last sentence is the topic sentence.

We found a lost dog in our school. We put a note about the dog on a tree. It said the dog was white with black spots. Gita, the owner saw the note and came for the dog. We were sad to see the dog go. **We helped the dog to find its owner.**

Help the children to examine each of the other sentences to see what kind of details they are adding. It is useful to also give the children some paragraphs that do not have topic sentences, and ask them to write suitable topic sentences. An example is given below:

Manu and I always play together. We like the same songs. We like the same books. We even have the same favourite foods. He likes ice cream best of all, and so do I.

If you like you could give the children a set of sentences and ask them to choose a sentence that would be suitable as a topic sentence. For the above paragraph some sentences are listed below:

- a) Manu is my best friend.
- b) Friends like to eat ice cream together.
- c) Friends share a lot of things.

Before the children get into the actual writing you may want to give them some practice with writing sentences in order, using particular words. An example of an exercise is given below:

Read the following instructions for making a puppet. Write them in order. Start each sentence with an order word. Use the order words given below.

Paint a smiling mouth on the toe end of the sock. Stitch buttons on the sock for eyes. Put your hand inside the sock and make the puppet move. Take an old sock, buttons, thread and wool. Paste wool on the top of the head for hair.

Order Words: Then, First, Next, Last, Finally

Give the children more practice if you feel it is necessary.

### c) Getting ready to write

Ask the children to think about the special times they shared as a class, such as some of the outings or extra experiences they have had. It could even be something funny or something sad that happened in the class. Did they talk to others about it? Did they like sharing it? Tell the children that it is fun to also write about them. Tell the children that they are going to write a story together about one of these special times. Ask the children what they think may make a good idea for a class story (either things that have

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happened in the class or the class has done together). Tell them to form groups of four and brainstorm i.e. think of as many ideas as they can. They must select two ideas in their group. Help the children to understand that there are no wrong answers in brainstorming. Give the children a time limit of say 10 to 15 minutes.

Accept the ideas of all the groups and make a list. In the next class help the children to narrow down the list. Write the ideas on a chart paper so that they do not get rubbed. Praise the children for their many ideas. Ask them to think about the idea they most want to write about.

### **4.3.2 The Writing Process**

As the children we are working with are very young, we are limiting our story to one paragraph. At a later more advanced stage, when the children are ready for it, they are introduced to the different aspects of story writing and the different parts of a story. We shall deal with this in the next unit.

#### **1) Step one: Choosing an Idea**

Explain to the children that they will be choosing an idea from their list. Emphasize that choosing an idea is a very important part of writing. Later on they may be writing on their own and they would need to know how to choose an idea that is suitable. If their choice is not interesting for them, they will not enjoy writing about it.

Let the children answer the following questions:

- a. Would we like to write about this idea ?
- b. Do we remember enough about it?

Let the children narrow down their list. Encourage discussion. Help the children arrive at a conclusion. If the children are not able to decide on one final idea, have a class vote.

Let each child draw a picture about the idea. Although each picture will be different, it will help the children remember details. This could be done at home.

#### **2) Step two - Writing the First Draft**

Explain to them that writers write a first draft just to get their ideas on paper. Then they make changes later on to improve or correct their stories or paragraphs. Emphasize the fact that it is not important for a first draft to look neat. Words or sentences may be added or crossed out, or rewritten, if the writer thinks of a better way to say something. If you like, you could actually show the class samples of first drafts of reports or papers you or anyone else has written to illustrate the fact that a first draft is not a finished piece of writing, but it is merely a start.

When you begin a class story, tell the children to think of information and details that would help someone else “see” a picture of what happened. List all the ideas that children come out with, even the ones that do not tell us about the story. Let the children find these and circle them. Put up some discussion questions.

- What is the story about? (the main idea)
- Which sentence/sentences do not tell us about the story?
- Is there anything else someone would like to know or need to know?

- What other interesting things can we tell?
- How can we make the story seem real?

As the children continue to contribute to the story, write the sentences on the board where they will not be erased, or on a chart paper. If possible this first draft should show words and sentences that have been crossed out as the children change their mind. It need not be neat. As the class story develops, emphasize that this is just the first draft, and that changes can be made later. Let the children decide on a suitable sentence to introduce the story.

### 3) Step three: Revise the Story

Write the word 'revise' on the board. Explain to the children that 'revise' means 'to change'. Tell the children that they will now read their story again to look for ways in which they can change it to make it clearer and more interesting. They might need to add, change or take away words or sentences to make the story better. While revising put up the following discussion questions:

- Does the story have one main idea?
- Are the sentences in the right order?
- Does it have enough detail? Do we need to make it clearer or more interesting? How?
- Is there anything we need to describe?

Ask the children specific questions: for example, you may need to focus the children's attention on some information that is missing. Ask the children to supply the information, using the words that the children use. Emphasize that there is not just one way to revise the story. Point out to the children that there is a special mark to show where to add a word or words. It's called a caret.

Some writing researches have given a great deal of importance to the discussion that leads to revision. Gradually over time children would learn to discuss their writing in small peer-groups. Each child shares an early draft, or a paragraph and other children receive the piece by responding to the details. Slowly over time the children are helped to look beyond the content and formatting to the style of writing.

### 4) Step Four: Proof Reading

After the story has been completely revised, everyone in the class copies it out. Tell the children that there is one more step before they are finished with their story. They need to proof read it. Explain to the children that when they proofread, they check to see if they made any mistakes when they copied their stories. Children will want to make sure that their stories are neat and the sentences are written correctly so that everyone can read them easily. Explain to the children that when they proofread they should look for misspelled words, mistakes in capital letters and mistakes in punctuation.

Later on when children do their writing individually, they could do the proofreading in pairs or small groups. Two pairs of eyes are better than one! Children should be taught to use beginner dictionaries to check on spelling of words that they are unsure of.

### 5) Step Five - Make a Final Copy

Compliment the children on the good work they have done. Tell them that now each one of them would have a chance of making their stories look special. Each child could

think of different ways to show their story. It could be pasted onto an interesting shape in coloured paper. It could have some interesting drawings, it could be written on a cut out shape and so on. Display the children's stories, and let them admire each other's work.

### **4.3.3 Some Important Aspects of Process Writing**

The pre-writing stage is crucial in process writing. At this stage, ideas can be generated in a free or controlled manner. Brainstorming is a free exploration of all ideas, without dismissing or rejecting any. Each idea can be put on the blackboard or flip chart. Cubing can be done when a set of six questions about a subject or experience are put in the form of a cube (this is called cubing): what, who, where, when, how, why. The cubing technique can be applied to any subject. For example, a family photograph or picture from a newspaper can be taken and the answer to the six questions can be given using a few words. A spider gram can be made by putting the topic in the centre, and many spider legs coming from it can represent different ideas about the topic, conveyed in writing down a few words. Flow charts with blanks can be used, and filled in. The idea-generation can go along with writing a few words, filling blanks in the chart or table, filling words into the 'balloon' of a cartoon character, and so on.

Selecting some of the ideas generated, and making a few simple sentences and connecting them, is a stage that requires more guidance. The teacher needs to spend a few minutes with each child finding out about how she arrived at her idea, and how she had arrived at the decision of what to put in? What had been left out? Is there anything else the child could say? The important thing is to help children become clearer about their own ideas. Encouraging children to write about topics that matter most to them is probably the first step in getting children to care about their writing. The teacher would also need to go from group to group and help children share their writing process, to reflect on what they did, why they made a particular choice, whether they could add something else. While reading out and sharing their writing, children begin to get a feedback on their writing. Is the writing clear? Has the idea got across? The teacher also helps children to learn to listen to other children and to respond positively. Initially these discussions or 'conferences' are done by the teacher with two or three groups, one at a time in front of the whole class. The children slowly develop the skills to 'conference' with their peers, helping each other to revise and re-shape their writings, while the teacher moves from group to group. The children are taught to be open and receptive to the ideas and questions of their friends.

Once the children have been through this entire writing process as a group, they will be ready for individual writing. They can slowly begin to move beyond simple paragraph writing and try new forms of writing

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## **4.4 FEEDBACK AS PART OF WRITING**

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In process writing, error-correction in the traditional way (correction of the 'product') is not in keeping with the purpose of development of the children's own self-expression. Rather, feedback is to be given during the successive stages in the process itself. As the children work on their writings, the teacher discusses with them either individually or in small groups (depending upon the class size) the writing in progress. Through these discussions or "conferences", the teacher discusses the organisation of ideas, or she might help to extend the child's thinking about the topic. The teacher asks questions and makes comments that encourage the child to keep on writing. The teacher might make comments such as:



- Tell me more about what you are saying here.
- When you told me about your experience (journey, etc.) there were lots of details, but you haven't written very many of those details. Would you like to add anything?
- Are you happy with this part?
- What did you have in your mind when you wrote this sentence?

The questions the teacher asks will lead to an understanding in the child of her own process. These would be questions like:

- How did you decide on this particular topic?
- Is there some other information you'd like to put in?
- What else are you planning to put in? What questions do you think your readers might ask?
- Do your readers have enough details to incorporate?
- Are there places where you feel the reader might be misled?
- Have you chosen the most important aspects of your topic? How could you stress these and put other things into the background?
- What are you going to do next?
- Do you think the way you have chosen is working? Where did it not work so well? Where did you have problems?

The teacher helps the child-writer by asking questions which leave the final decisions of what to do, how to change, where to rewrite, to the child. The teacher helps children become "conscious creators" of their writings. It is useful for the teacher to sometimes have conferences with some children in front of the whole class. As children watch the teacher discuss children's writings with them, they learn how to look at each other's work and have peer-conferencing. While conducting a conference, the teacher has an opportunity to help the child consider what has been written and think of ways to expand or improve the piece if desired. This is done best by focusing on the meaning and clarity of ideas rather than the mechanics of writing.

Another benefit of the writing conference is that the children begin to model the same behaviour and questions that the teacher has demonstrated. Once children have acquired a certain degree of functional competence, say by Class four, they can begin to have peer conference or small group conference. They read or listen to each other's work for appreciation and to raise questions for clarification or to make suggestions for improvement. It is amazing how quickly some children learn to respond constructively and positively to each others' writings. There are however always some classes where the group dynamics and personality clashes take over, and children respond more on the basis of personal likes and dislikes, rather than the actual writing itself. These are all the ground realities that a teacher has to be ready for. Ultimately, it is really for the teacher to decide whether the particular group of children is ready to take up peer conferencing. Again, during both teacher's feedback sessions and peer discussions, the child's mother tongue can be used for ease of communication, and not only this, some ideas which the children express in their mother tongue can be utilized to bring changes in the children's writing. This gives the children a sense of the value of their mother tongue, and the advantage of being able to transfer ideas and skills from one

language to another. Even if they are not proficient in this transference, it does not matter, as the beginning made early will be fruitful in later years.

In the beginning a child is satisfied with what she has written and does not want to rewrite it. As children go through whole class writing and rewriting, they begin to absorb the process. They want to apply it to their own writings. It is only when they have reached this stage that ‘conferencing’ has a purpose. Most teachers improve their conferencing techniques with experience. There is no “right way” since each child and each teacher is different. Some children are very sensitive about their writing and need to be treated carefully.

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## **4.5 THE TEACHER’S ROLE IN PROCESS WRITING**

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Writing is fostered, it is not taught. A process writing class can be successful when the teacher creates the space and time for the children to explore their own ideas and ways in which these can be communicated. The temptation to step in and tell children what to do is very strong, and sometimes difficult to resist. We are often deeply conditioned to get children to produce beautiful end products, which have very little to do with them. The driving force of a process writing class is the teacher’s conviction that she is merely a catalyst who allows each child to unfold and gradually express ideas and thoughts in meaningful ways. There are various ways that the teacher can take to make these classes effective.

- a) **Managing the Writing Activity:** To initiate an activity on process writing in a class of 40 or more young children is extremely challenging. The exact type of activity and the kind of demand it places on the child must be planned beforehand, or the class may become chaotic and uncontrollable. As it is, children have a low attention span and tend to get distracted and diverted into other things very easily. However, if children are actively involved in what they are doing, half the battle is won. By the time they are in class four and five, it is also possible to make children work in groups, and take different responsibilities. Children at this age respond well to taking on roles and responsibilities, and becoming teacher helpers. With younger ones, getting them to work in pairs is a much better idea. There are initial teething problems – the class becomes very noisy, the children are confused and everyone wants to know what to do. The initial role of the teacher to bring writing into the classroom is a managerial one. Having very clear and specific instructions and rules helps a lot. It is a good idea to work the rules out with the children.
- b) **Pre-writing Support:** The teacher’s role at this stage is to plan suitable and effective pre-writing activities such as those of helping children generate ideas, depending on the topic that is to be written about. The children may need input in the form of words, and some grammar information. At this stage, the demands of a multilingual environment are such that children can use words and expressions from their own language as they are freely discussing ideas. Some of this is inevitable, and should be allowed to create a non-threatening and friendly environment. She needs to draw out children and elicit ideas from them. Some children would be shy and hesitant, and only very encouraging support, preferably in their mother tongue, can induce them to come out with their thoughts.
- c) **Assisting with Goal Setting:** When the children begin to write, the teacher’s role is to help them with goal-setting. Who are they writing for (audience), why are they writing (purpose) and intended effect (direction) are questions that only

the teacher can help them to be aware of. Even if it is a simple task of writing a note asking the principal for permission to go for a picnic, or a 'mother's day' card for mom, the purpose and effect of the piece of writing needs to be made very clear.

- d) **Drafting a Piece of Writing:** The teacher can give support and advice while the first, rough draft is being written, by suggesting some words, or helping to organize some simple sentences. Giving information about particular formats or conventions which they may need to use is required of the teacher.
- e) **Conferencing:** After the children have written their first **drafts**, the teacher needs to question them in ways that help them to reflect, review, and reshape their writing. The teacher does not give any direct suggestions, but tries to encourage the child's inclination to reassess and re-look at the writing. The teacher also equips the children to look at each others' writings, and encourages peer support.
- f) **Language support:** The teacher provides extra support in grammatical usage or spelling or any basic skill whenever the children require it.
- g) **Flexibility:** The teacher needs to be flexible and modify the writing process as well as the type of task to suit the specific requirements of a class. Timing is also very important. Some children may require more time to go through instructions, may ask for help again and again, and this has to be anticipated by the teacher.
- h) **Ownership:** The teacher needs to respect the child's ownership of a piece of writing. Thus the teacher can only make suggestions, ultimately it is up to the child to accept these or not. Opportunities to highlight children's writing by reading it to the class or displaying it need to be taken up from time to time.
- i) **Correction:** The teacher corrects one or two pieces per child per month, especially when it is done as an independent piece of writing. It is useful to do the correction of the proof read pieces of writing before the final copy is written, so that the teacher does not mutilate the final writing. They must be aware that the children are not going to be graded for their output and final product, but they will be told about the progress they have made through the writing process.
- j) **Natural process of Development:** The teacher observes and keeps in mind the little developments that take place in the child's creativity. While correcting, a teacher might praise a development or progress in invented spelling, while giving the correct one; or she may notice appropriate pauses, even though the child may not have used a certain form of punctuation. The teacher would allow a certain amount of invented spelling in the final copy, if she feels the focus of writing of a particular child needs to be on communicating an idea in a meaningful way. The teacher may want to deal with spelling and other conventions at a later stage.
- k) **Integration of Skills:** All stages of the process involve integrating writing with other skills, the teacher making sure that some discussion, some reading (whether of clues of a puzzle, visuals such as maps and pictures, or just a list of words) is integrated in writing at the pre-writing stage, or during preparation of a paragraph. 'Listen and write' type activities can be done, supplemented with some classroom chat after which the next stage of the writing can go on.

The teacher's role in process writing is above all that of a friendly guide who is always present to assist and support, but can withdraw into the background when the child wishes to express her own ideas in her own way.

## Check Your Progress 2

What is the role of the teacher in process writing?

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### 4.6 LET US SUM UP

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In the above unit we examined the various stages of the writing process. We also saw how these can be incorporated into classroom strategies through the approach of process writing. We looked at the advantage of such an approach as compared to a more traditional and product oriented approach. We looked at a sample of how this approach can be transacted in a class of very young children. It was suggested that with such a group of beginners it is useful to work through one piece of writing with the whole class. We also looked at the teacher's role at each stage, and the kind of support the teacher needs to provide. Within this context some management techniques were briefly discussed. It is ultimately the teacher's own convictions and beliefs that become the driving force of this programme. The teacher needs to be flexible to accommodate new ideas and change the writing programme if need be, depending upon the children's level of involvement.

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### 4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## 4.8 ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1 Recent research into writing has given us insight that good writers go through certain processes which lead to successful pieces of writing. They start off with an overall plan in their heads. They think about what they want to say and who they are saying it for. Then they draft out sections of the writing, and as they work on them, they are constantly reviewing, revising and editing their work. In other words these writers have a sense of purpose, a sense of audience and a sense of direction in their writing. With beginners, the process of planning, drafting and organising, revising and editing has to be encouraged, and at the same time, simplified. Rather than the product, **the process** that goes on in the creation of the child's writing gives real insights into how the child is thinking. Does the child have a sense of purpose and audience? Is the child able to convey this appropriately in the written form? Is the child able to structure these ideas in a logical sequence? The children acquire new skills as the need arises. Accuracy comes through rewriting and checking. Children learn to be precise and gain independence.
- 2 Firstly, daily writing is recommended. If this is not possible, then one must have a minimum of three 45 minute classes, preferably on three consecutive days to maintain continuity. In such cases, the teachers may need to integrate reading and writing work, so that these reinforce each other. Listening and speaking can also be integrated. The classroom needs to be friendly and non-threatening. It needs a lot of visual stimulation. There should be space for keeping paper and other writing materials, as well as a rack or cupboard for keeping the children's folders. Where they are not available, the teacher would need to see how best these can be met within the existing resources. If possible, it is ideal if there is one extra language teacher for primary school, so that the class can be divided between the helper teacher and the language teacher. Teacher trainees can also be given the chance to assist the teachers.

### Check Your Progress 2

The teacher's role is critical in a process writing classroom. You can build on the following points given in Section 4.5:

- Planned discussions and the interactions
- Exploiting the areas of the children's interests and encouraging writing from those interests.
- Helping a child to find ways to improve the writing, rather than correcting the end product.
- Presenting language inputs that children need, whenever the need arises, and the children are aware of the need.
- Keeping track of individual progress in several ways – by keeping the children's writings in folders that they can have access to, so that they can see their own progress over a period of time; by keeping notes after conferencing with the children about the children's skill levels so that these can be reinforced at suitable times.

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## UNIT 5 ASSESSING WRITING

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### Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Different Aspects of Assessing Writing
- 5.3 The Teacher as Evaluator
- 5.4 Some Methods of Assessing Writing
- 5.5 Some Possible Marking Strategies
- 5.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.7 Suggested Readings
- 5.8 Answers

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### 5.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit we shall explore some different ways of assessing writing, and their advantages and limitations. After you have finished this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand methods of assessing writing.
- Distinguish between strategies of evaluation which look at opportunities for improvement and self-evaluation as part of the writing process; and those that look at evaluation as an end product.
- Work towards a uniform evaluation and assessment policy in a school.

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### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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Evaluation is a general term which is understood as a process of ascertaining quality, value and level of achievement of work done. In a curriculum, from time to time, we evaluate everything: the teaching programme, teaching methods, text books and other materials, even the curriculum itself. The evaluation of learners is usually done through some form of testing, whether it is formal or informal. It brings to mind words like “marks” and “exams”, and these are a part of the overall assessment of a child’s performance. But it also implies the process by which the teacher corrects a child’s work, and gives feedback. Recent works on the development of writing skills in children emphasise the need to give feedback to children on their strengths and weaknesses, and to allow them opportunities for “improvement”. Evaluation is therefore seen as a process by which a teacher helps the child “improve”. Tricia Hedge, in her book on writing says, “marking is maximally effective in enabling students to improve only if it provides constructive feedback which can be channelled into the processes of redrafting and editing.”

While evaluation involves many processes, such as the setting up of a writing test or project, specification of time needed to complete it, frequency of such tests or projects, etc.; assessment being part of the evaluation process, involves the performance itself, and various methods of providing oral and written feedback to the students, grading the papers, giving opportunities for rewriting etc.

In one sense, teachers are always evaluating their pupils **informally** when they observe classroom behaviour. They can see the efforts made by a child, and this is worthy of attention, and needs rewarding through some kind of recognition and feedback, even if the ultimate product may not be so perfect. Evaluation is an important factor in creating the motivation to write. Every child will, at some stage, produce something that tells a teacher about her abilities, and this can provide the teacher with an opportunity to guide and motivate the child further.

However, assessment also needs to be formalized, as teachers' observation may occasionally be subjective. Moreover, children will benefit from the specific advice on their written work and provided with a chance to develop it in a better way. Formal criteria for assessment are helpful in this regard.

In **formal assessment**, teachers need to look at two aspects of the child's writing. The first are the skills involved in the process of composing, that is having a sense of purpose, a sense of audience and a sense of direction. The second group comprises skills connected with "crafting", that is the way a writer puts together the pieces of a text and chooses correct and appropriate language. Teachers can build up criteria which look into both these aspects. One possible way is to take four criteria: **accuracy**, **appropriateness**, **range** and **complexity**, and analyse the degrees of skills at three levels i.e. 'good', 'average' and 'needs improvement'. Within each of these, teachers need to spell out details of the expected writing skills. The child's writing is then assessed against this criteria, and suitable feedback given.

Before we proceed any further it is important to clarify that when we are looking at various aspects of writing evaluation, we are considering only sustained pieces of writing, such as paragraphs, narratives, poems etc. Writing at the sentence level is a useful exercise for reinforcing different grammatical structures, or for diagnosing weaknesses. However, it does not provide an opportunity to look at the child's grasp of the range and complexity of skills required to produce a piece of writing.

We must also continue to make a **distinction between process and product**, as discussed in the previous unit. Evaluation, as it exists in most primary schools in our country, today, looks at the end product, whether it is a paragraph, an essay or a poem or story. The child is given some predetermined topic, on which to write within a specified time period. The writing is then checked for spelling, grammatical structures, as well as for organisation of ideas, style, expression, vocabulary and so on. We often expect a young child, who is groping and exploring the world of written words, to produce a perfect piece of writing, without giving the child a chance to revise, edit or proofread. This is quite unrealistic, since even adults cannot produce a piece of writing in one go.

Throughout the units on writing we have emphasised the need to allow children to go through the different stages in the writing process. This gives a greater opportunity to the child to identify errors and correct them. It also allows the teacher to assess the developmental level of the child. All the above are features of a **formative approach** to assessment, as distinct from **summative** assessment, such as that which often occurs at the end of a course, and is given in the form of marks or grades.

Within this approach, **errors** are a part of the process of learning and development. They are like little clues which tell us the stage at which a particular child has arrived, and help teachers to decide and plan teaching/learning strategies which enable the child to progress to the next stage. Since errors are a natural part of learning they are not 'something to be afraid of', instead they indicate areas which need extra support. The most important aspect of this approach to error is that it emphasises positive feedback,

by not only focusing on the child's weaknesses but also on his strengths. It also provides ample opportunities for support and self-correction. The child is guided towards **self-evaluation** through the processes of drafting, revising, proofreading and editing before final piece of writing is produced. This encourages critical thinking and self-correction on the part of the child, and also helps the child to internalise corrections, since the child is actively involved in this process.

One question that may be asked is how feasible such an approach is within the context of a large class of fifty or sixty children. While admittedly, this is a daunting task, all these ideas have actually been tried out and been found to work effectively within a large class context. However, it is important to remember that these ideas are just suggestions of some methods that can be used for process-based evaluation. There is nothing sacrosanct about them. As teachers we need to take these into the reality of our situation, and see what works and what doesn't. We need to share our experiences with other teachers and perhaps, work out evaluation procedures that suit our situations and realities. It is also not the case that *all* children receive feedback *at the same time*. The teacher can use her judgement to stagger the process of giving individualized feedback to encourage self-evaluation at different times in the session.

Perhaps, the most important need of today is for teachers to become actively involved in creating methods that work in the classroom. This means that we need to constantly evaluate and reflect on our teaching and assessment methods. In our constant search for suitable and workable methods, it is vital that we share and talk about not just our successes, and about things that worked **but as much about things that didn't work**. We need to look positively at both successes and failures as an integral part of any growth process. Sometimes unsuccessful experiences reveal a lot. They tell us, for example, that our methods were, perhaps, unsuitable or the level was too high or too low for the children in the class, or that we need to give more attention to the grouping of children and the class dynamics, because there are many children who do not get along, and this might be creating blocks. In other words, we are able to look for reasons that some methods work and some don't. We are able to document these, and through these processes, we teachers become creators of our own programmes which are rooted in the realities of our classroom situation.

To help children improve and progress in their writing skills, it is important to allow children to do a lot of writing of different kinds. They need to go through the various stages with each piece of writing. However, since it is impossible for the teacher to look at each individual piece of writing, feedback on some writing tasks is given on a whole class basis and others may be evaluated through peer conferences. Not every piece of writing goes to the teacher. For individual assessment each child is asked to select a required number (two or three pieces) of his/her writings at the end of a term, to give to the teacher for evaluation. The advantage of this approach is that it strengthens the child's abilities for self-evaluation, since the child has to critically examine his/her own writings and decide which three or four pieces she thinks as good enough to go to the teacher to be evaluated. It also makes individual feedback from the teacher possible. The teacher can stagger the evaluation so that all the children do not hand in their writing together, but work according to a predetermined schedule, making sure that everyone has an equal opportunity.

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## 5.2 DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF ASSESSING WRITING

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Evaluation is a necessary educational process which prepares the students to face the



real world where they will be evaluated all the time. In the classroom, evaluation of writing helps students recognise their strengths and weaknesses, thereby improving their writing in the future. Some of the ways a teacher can help create a positive attitude about writing are as follows:

1. Communicate to your class that each student has good and relevant ideas to share.
2. Provide students with many writing activities to give them the security that familiarity brings.
3. Instill confidence by finding positive things to say about each piece of writing and by showing appreciation of it through displays, reading and sharing. (The actual evaluation of writing can be done by using several methods, some of which we will look at later on).

While making an assessment of a child's writing, a teacher needs to look at the following:

- a) **Accuracy** i. e. the grammatical and lexical structures/spelling/punctuation/handwriting. For the elementary level, it is fine if there are no confusing errors of lexis and punctuation, and handwriting is a bit shaky. These will be rectified as the child's writing develops. Grammar may not be correct at all times, but it does not affect the meaning of what the child is trying to convey
- b) **Appropriacy** i.e. the suitability of the language and format to the function of the writing as well as to the writer's purpose, and the layout should be appropriate. We cannot expect a great deal of subtlety and complexity at this level.
- c) **The range** i.e. the amount of language available, and whether the child is able to express herself/himself clearly through the choice of suitable vocabulary. This will naturally be somewhat limited, there will be repetition, and sometimes the lack of the right word will affect clarity.
- d) **Complexity** i.e. the extent to which a child is able to produce a coherent piece of writing with a logical order in the flow of events. At the elementary level, simple sentences with little attempt at cohesion are acceptable.

Encouragement in all the areas listed above, rather than punishment if the handwriting or grammar is shaky, will help the children. As mentioned earlier, students need positive feedback on the way their writing is improving. This may be given through comments at the end or through a grade. Each of these will have a different effect. The first one falls within **formative** evaluation. Giving comments and then allowing the child a little more time to work on those comments is positive in the sense that it offers an opportunity to the child to revise, and may even result in triggering more possibilities in a child's mind. This type of approach to evaluation will aid in the development of critical thinking in a child. Grading, as a kind of **summative** assessment, has its own advantage as it often gives the child a sense of achievement.

If the only feedback the students receive is negative, in the sense of corrections, with no encouragement or appreciation for trying, or no time to revise, the children may not want to write at all. A number of teachers have begun to feel that correction after the writing is over, is not very useful; instead children should be encouraged to revise and edit as much as possible during the writing. This helps the children to internalise the corrections as much as possible. Another form of feedback is to reformulate, or to give an alternative word or phrase with which to reformulate a whole sentence. It could be offered by the teacher in the form of a question or a suggestion, such as: '*Can we write it this in another way?*' This also offers possibilities for language development.

### Check Your Progress 1

Based on the above factors design a criteria sheet on a three point scale which can be used for assessment of writing skills of a group of children at the primary school level.

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## 5.3 THE TEACHER AS EVALUATOR

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The children look up to their teachers to give them the essential feedback that they require for their writing. It is a good idea for the teacher to be the sole evaluator at the beginning of the year to set the standards and to let students know what is expected of them. In fact, there should be transparency in the teacher's evaluation. Students should know what is expected of them rather than making a mystery of what the teacher wants, which leaves the students confused. Later, students should be allowed to take part in the evaluation process. It is important to note that evaluating writing is easier for the teacher if specific writing directions are given to the students when the writing task is given. Then the teacher knows exactly what to look for in the final draft. We discussed how this can be done through pre-writing activities. The following ideas may be useful in eliminating the negative aspects of teacher evaluation:

- The students can keep their writing in a folder and select the best from three or four writings to be turned in to the teacher for evaluation, thus reducing the teacher's load.
- The teacher should not correct the errors but should write specific comments that will help the students towards revising and correcting themselves. Errors may be indicated in the margin, leaving the finding and correcting of the specific error to the student. If a paper has many errors, only a few should be indicated on a single writing. Encouraging and positive remarks must also be included.
- The teacher can concentrate on one or two aspects of a paper and grade only those chosen areas such as content or organisation.
- One grade may be given for content and one for mechanics so that the students will receive credit for good ideas in spite of mechanical errors.
- The grade may be a single rating for the entire piece (i.e. holistic rating; we will look at this a little later on), or a set of ratings for the different features being considered (analytical).
- The teacher may use writing conferences in which the teacher and the child read the writing together. During the conference, the teacher should concentrate on only one or two areas of improvement to offer positive reinforcement for things done well. Generally conferences should last for only a few minutes.
- Once the class is familiar with the writing process, introduce the children to the process of peer evaluation. Give very clear directions to the children about what to look for, and how to evaluate in a positive way. They may need some language

assistance for this, as they might not know how exactly they can put down their comments. Perhaps a simple checklist, taken from the teacher's own criteria can be used. It can be discussed with the children. They might like to use words like 'wow!' or 'cool!' and this is permissible for the learners.

Peer evaluation allows children to read other children's writings, and be exposed to different styles and approaches. They also develop the skills of critically reviewing each other's writings. But the teacher needs to be alert, as children can also be very judgemental, or competitive. They may be shy about letting their writing be examined by other children, or they may be intimidated by another child who writes much better than they do. The teacher must introduce peer evaluation gradually and as an occasional activity in the early stages.

### Portfolios

Another strategy is to encourage students to have a portfolio of their work. A portfolio is a collection of work done by a learner over a period of time. Individual learners can select the work they want to display in the portfolio which may be from day-to-day work or fortnightly/monthly/term tests. In this way the learners are initiated into taking responsibility for their learning and actively taking part in organizing their learning. In the initial years the teacher should help each learner to reflect on her learning achievement, organize her portfolio and set new learning goals. A systematically kept portfolio provides information to the learner, teacher and parents about the learning progress made by the learner. The teachers should motivate the learners to review their portfolio periodically, say once a week/fortnight which is a kind of self-assessment by the learners. What goes into the portfolio will largely depend on the learning objectives you set for each class. A portfolio can include:

- Handwriting samples
- Spelling samples
- Sentences/paragraphs demonstrating vocabulary/grammar skills
- Different kinds of writing samples (letter, report, essay, story, etc.)
- Unit tests
- Learning goals
- Self assessment report
- Peer assessment report
- Teacher observations
- Parent observations

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## 5.4 SOME METHODS OF ASSESSING WRITING

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Writing can be evaluated in a variety of ways. Among the techniques most widely used are the **holistic method**, the **analytic method**, and the **single focus method**. Each method has its own advantages.

**Holistic evaluation:** This method is based on the premise that writing is an integrated process therefore its parts can be evaluated in relation to the whole. This method evaluates writing comprehensively by gauging the overall quality or general impression that a piece of writing makes on a reader. Many teachers find that the holistic method

**Writing Skill**

allows them to evaluate a piece of writing without getting lost in the particulars of spelling, usage and mechanics.

One of the benefits of the holistic technique is its efficiency. By allowing teachers to evaluate the thoughts expressed in a piece of writing without getting lost in particulars, this method saves time. Writing samples can be read quickly and ranked on a three point or five point scale. While this method does not evaluate individual language needs, it is a good method for assessing the overall language demands of the class as a whole.

A set of holistic scoring criteria arranged on a five point scale is given below. The writing descriptions are generic and therefore applicable to any kind of writing. Teachers can however modify it to suit a specific type of writing or adapt it to the needs of their students.

**A HOLISTIC EVALUATION GUIDE**

**SCORE WRITING DESCRIPTION**

4	WRITING IS CONSISTENT AND COHERENT INCLUDES A CLEAR SENSE OF ORDER ELABORATES ON A MAIN IDEA USES ORIGINAL AND SPECIFIC DETAILS PROVIDES A CLEAR CONCLUSION USES VOCABULARY APPROPRIATELY AND EFFECTIVELY
3	WRITING IS CONSISTENT WITH STIMULUS USES ELABORATION THOUGH SOME GAPS APPEAR INCLUDES SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OR DETAILS USES VARIED VOCABULARY
2	WRITES BARE ESSENTIALS WITH LITTLE OR NO DETAILS WRITING RAMBLES AND GOES OFF TOPIC FREQUENTLY WRITING CONTAINS GAPS THAT CONFUSE READERS USES ADEQUATE BUT SOMETIMES INCORRECT VOCABULARY
1	RESTATES WRITING PROMPT WRITING IS CONFUSING OR LACKS COHERENCE LISTS OBJECTS IN PICTURE USES VOCABULARY POORLY
0	USES ILLEGIBLE HANDWRITING DOES NOT RESPOND TO REQUIRED WRITING TASK DOES NOT COMPLETE ASSIGNMENT

(Source: *World of language. Grade 4. TEST TEACHER MANUAL.* Silver Burdett and Gin Inc. 1990)

On the basis of the above evaluation, the teacher could write a summary indicating the strengths of the writing, as well as the areas requiring improvement.

**Analytic evaluation:** This method involves the isolation of specific traits or aspects of writing, such as organisation, word choice, usage, and mechanics. The teacher then evaluates the writing sample several times – once for each trait on a scale ranging from low to high. The analytic method helps the teacher to pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. However, since it is very time consuming, teachers would perhaps need to modify it to suit the requirements and constraints of a large class.



## Writing Skill

note correctness or suggestions for improvement, so that the child's ideas are respected and the writing is not mutilated with red marks. One effective way of arriving at such decisions is for a group of teachers to mark some scripts together and discuss the options available. Without this consensus there can be a wide variation in practice of assessment, and this will turn out to be detrimental to the aims of good pedagogy.

Some possibilities that can be explored by colleagues:

- a) Replacing part of the students' work with the correct form. Reformulating the sentence to make it simpler/clearer.
- b) Indicating an error by underlining and allowing the students to self-correct.
- c) Indicating an error and identifying the error with a symbol, eg. 'sp' for a spelling mistake. If the teachers are going to use a marking code then it is important that the children are familiar with it. It could be displayed on the wall.
- d) Indicating that there is a certain kind of error in a line, by writing in the margin, but leaving the students to locate the errors themselves.
- e) Exercises in proofreading, and other self-correction procedures which would equip children to correct some of their own, or other children's work.

Once a school has arrived at a marking policy it is important that it is shared with the students and parents. They need to know that evaluation is not just confined to pieces of writing corrected by the teacher, but includes all of the following:

- 1) Some whole class feedback, where the teacher responds to the class as a whole, and based on this the children correct or revise their work. This is generally oral, but some correct items can be put up on the board,
- 2) Peer correction, based on a set of criteria which are displayed on the board. It is important that these are within the grasp of the children and at a level where they have meaning for the children.
- 3) Feedback through discussions of either individual or group work through conferences, with the purpose of enabling children to redraft or revise their writings through self-correction.
- 4) Variation in the teacher's correction. The teacher may be correcting the writing with a particular focus in mind. The teacher would decide each time what would be the most important thing she would be looking at – for example, it could be the use of the correct tense or using a form of writing suited to the purpose. This would be corrected in particular, and other aspects of the writing would be secondary for that specific time.
- 5) Indicators for self-correction through revising, such as the underlining of an error, which has to be corrected, or a note in the margin which suggests a better way to express something.

There are two aspects of correction that need to be looked into. These are:

- a) Grading
- b) Conferencing
- a) **Grading:** The school needs to work out a suitable grading scheme. They would need to consider the following:

- correct grammar
- length
- originality of ideas
- spelling
- punctuation
- neat handwriting
- a good range of vocabulary
- complex and well-structured sentences
- good organisation
- keeping to the main idea

A similar list would need to be worked out for creative writing, looking at the writing style, expression, clear main ideas, attention to detail, range of vocabulary and complexity of sentences. The school could either work on a three point scale –e.g. good, average, needs improvement; or on a five point scale, and marks could be awarded accordingly. It would be important to let each child know their strengths and weaknesses.

As discussed earlier, not every piece of writing is corrected. Children select three or four pieces, as required, which are given to the teacher for correction. This process of selecting the best pieces of writing encourages the children to be critical of their own writing and helps develop their skills of self-evaluation.

- b) **Conferencing:** The writing conference is a face-to-face interaction between the teacher and the student. As children work on their writing in the class, the teacher sits beside one child at a time, or a small group of children (depending upon the size of the class). The teacher discusses the organisation of ideas, extends the child's thinking about the topic and assists with language or any other support. Conferencing encourages children to think about writing as a process that can be organised and improved. It gives them an opportunity to talk about their writing and to reflect on the process. It also enables children to look at their areas of weaknesses, which they can improve on their own. It helps the teacher to listen, to learn about the child's language needs and diagnose the language demands of the whole class, so that formal support and relevant formal grammar practice can be given.

### Check Your Progress 3

Design a suitable marking code which you could use for correcting writing errors in a class of elementary school children.

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## 5.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have tried to look at evaluation as a process directed towards the improvement of a child's writing. We have also looked at the various aspects of this process, i.e. teacher correction or feedback at the individual as well as at the whole class level through grading or conferencing. We examined ways of encouraging children to improve their own work through self-correction strategies and procedures for revising and redrafting. The advantages of peer correction and peer conferences were looked at particularly in the context of a large class.

We also looked at inherent strategies for marking as well as different methods of evaluation based on the teacher's purpose. We recognize that all these evaluation methods would be most effective when both teachers and children understand the criteria and procedures for marking, revising and proofreading or editing. It is therefore vital that a school has a clear marking policy and that this is shared with and understood by teachers, children as well as parents. Lastly, but perhaps most importantly we understand that teachers need to be actively involved in changing and modifying methodologies to suit their classroom needs. They need to constantly reflect and review their classroom experiences and use these to develop their own workable methods of process-based evaluation. Evaluation has far reaching effects on a child's development and future academic achievement. The foundation of fair and standard practices in primary school will ensure that the child will grow up with faith in himself/herself and in society.

## 5.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## 5.8 ANSWERS

### Check your progress 1

An example of a **criteria sheet** on a three point scale is given below:

CRITERIA	GOOD	AVERAGE	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
Accuracy	Writes grammatically correct sentences, correct spelling and punctuation, legible handwriting	There are some grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors but doesn't distort communication. Handwriting is fairly legible.	Many errors, which interfere with the meaning.



Appropriateness	Use of language entirely suitable to purpose, layout suitable.	Use of language is broadly suitable though there are some inconsistencies. Layout generally appropriate.	Language is unsuitable, layout unsuitable.
Range	Expresses clearly using selective vocabulary and figurative speech with logical flow of ideas.	Vocabulary adequate but some words are used inappropriately, writing contains some gaps.	Limited vocabulary, lacks coherence.
Complexity	Uses specific and original examples, shows ability to use complex sentences.	Very few details, writing is often very sketchy and off the topic.	No details, goes off the main idea.

### Check Your Progress 2

A criteria sheet for assessing a paragraph with special focus on the main idea is given below:

#### SCORE CRITERIA

- 4
- there is a clear topic sentence.
  - each of the other sentences expands on or clarifies the main idea.
  - uses specific and clear details relevant to the topic.
  - the student addresses the main idea with understanding by showing a logical progression and using suitable connectors.
  - there is a definite and logical conclusion which may include a summing up of the main points.
- 3
- there is a clear topic sentence
  - each of the other sentences expands on the main idea, however there are some irrelevant details.
  - uses details to expand on or support the main idea.
  - there is a logical progression, however there are some gaps.
  - there is a conclusion.
- 2
- there is a topic sentence, but it does not clearly address the topic.
  - some sentences wander off into inappropriate subjects.
  - there is a minimal amount of description or detail.
  - there are a number of gaps, the transitions between actions or ideas are not clearly expressed, therefore the writing does not progress logically.
  - there is no conclusion.
- 1
- the student rephrases or directly repeats the verbal stimulus.
  - the sentences are confusing, they address the topic in a disorganised and disconnected way.
  - details are irrelevant
  - there is no logical progression.
  - there is no conclusion.

**Writing Skill**

- 0 · the student's handwriting is so poor that it is impossible to determine if the topic was addressed.
- the writing is completely off the topic.
- the paper is blank or has some meaningless scribbles.

**Check Your Progress 3**

WG	WG wrong grammar. (I go to school yesterday.)
ww	ww wrong word. (He are go to school)
T	T wrong tense (She is played today)
^	something is missing
SP	wrong spelling
WO	WO wrong word order (He school came to)
P	wrong punctuation
//	new paragraph needed
D	delete
?	I don't understand what you are trying to say
0	Needs clearer expression
()	This part needs to be reworded.