

Beyond



Diagnosing the L2 Writer's Essay: A Strategies-Based Approach

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Deep vs Surface Features

I suspect students can learn the surface features of academic style better if they have first made good progress with the underlying intellectual practices. When students are really succeeding in doing a meaty academic task, then the surface stylistic features are more likely to be integral and organic rather than merely an empty game or mimicry.

(Elbow, 1991. p. 150)

The Four “Maladies”

1. *graphophobia* (writer’s block)
2. *extreme myopia* (inability to focus)
3. *hypocognition* (lack of critical thinking)
4. *alexia* (unwillingness to read one’s own writing)

#1 Graphophobia (*Writer's Block*)

Symptom: the LACK of writing

Causes:

- Performance fear
- “Translation” problems
- Lack of knowledge
- Lack of communicative goal
- Not sure where to start

Treatments for graphophobia

- LOTS of writing games/freewriting/pre-writing
- Use models to write “Chunks”
- S-relevant topics
- Explain “translation” problems
- Talk with S individually
- Ask Qs

#2: Extreme Myopia (*inability to focus*)

Symptoms:

- Paper confusing & tiring to read
- Lack of central, unifying idea/theme
- Topic too broad
- Too many undeveloped ideas
- Key ideas not related
- Purpose unclear

Treatment for myopia: FOCUS!

- Have Ss ASK & ANSWER Questions re. topic
??? What, Who, When, Where, What kind. . .
Why & How???
- Have Ss identify key ideas & make “map”

More activities for download from our website!

Dialogue Writing: A hot-blooded argument!

For 8-10 minutes, create 2 characters who disagree very strongly about global warming. Both characters are VERY certain that he/she is right! Please do NOT make them kill each other or in any way create an absurd scene, but they may take extreme positions. Make your dialogue as realistic as possible. You will switch roles after 4 minutes.

Post-Dialogue Questions

1. What is the most important idea you were trying to get across to your partner?
2. How did you (or can you) support that idea?
3. What is the best order for presenting your argument?

#3: Hypocognition (*lack of critical thinking*)

Symptoms:

- many words but says nothing
- repeats what you just said
- writing that has ideas but no development
- unanalyzed quotations or – worse – plagiarism
- fails to be “text responsible”; enter into argumentation (Leki & Carson, 1997)

Treatments for hypocognition

- Feedback: asking questions
- Peer and self review
- Modeling critical thinking
- Look at what's possible

Writing Critically

OBSERVATION



GENERALIZATION



ANALYSIS

DESCRIPTION



INTERPRETATION



RESPONSE

EVENT/QUOTE

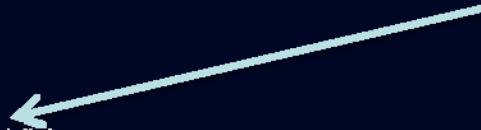


EXPLANATION



REFLECTION

WHAT DOES IT MEAN? WHY IS IT INTERESTING?



Adapted from Elbow & Belanoff, 1995, p.140 and Peterson, 1996, p. 49

It really works!

2nd draft: [Dally] decides to suicide because he feels that life is without meaning if Johnny is not alive. He chooses to suicide by police because he thinks he should die as a hero.

3rd draft: [Dally] decides to commit suicide because he feels that life is without meaning if Johnny is not alive. The fact that he chooses to commit suicide by police because he thinks that he should die **in a heroic situation. In fact, this idea is a reflection from the way that Johnny deals with Dally because Johnny considers Dally as a hero.**

Lower-level example

(first draft excerpts) “I like desert when the sun come up the horizon. ... I like hiking while the May was coming. ... I feel I was a winner when I climbed the top of mountain. ... I like to realize the histories and customs about the countries. I can get a lot of knowledge from the travel.” *(My advice: Why do you like traveling? Separate experiences of nature from learning customs and history.)*

(final draft: new paragraph) “In this way I like a lot of experiences from nature. **Actually, not only the nature changed my life, but culture changed me a lot.** I get a lot of knowledge from the culture. Last year, I went to south of China ...”

#4: Alexia (*unwillingness to re-read*)

Symptoms:

- Avoidance of editing
- Failure to utilize peer or teacher feedback
- Failure to accept responsibility for writing

Treatments for alexia

- Self review
- Preparation for peer review
- Peer review
- Response to peer review
- Grammar editing
- Post process self-analysis

Treatment for alexia

- Self review
 - Why did you choose this topic?
 - Were you satisfied with your choice?
 - What did you like most? Least? Want to change?
 - Analyze for language
 - Over use of TO BE
 - Other language concerns

Treatment for alexia

- Preparation for peer review
 - Are you satisfied with intro? Thesis?
 - Are you satisfied with your examples or development?
 - What might confuse your peer or other reader?
 - Where do you most want feedback?

Treatment for alexia

- Peer review (NOT grammar editing!)
 - What is your first response to this paper?
 - Do you understand the author's arguments?
 - What would be interesting to expand?
 - What seems irrelevant, if anything?
 - Comment on the overall structure of the paper
 - Address your peer's concerns

Treatment for alexia

- Response to peer review
 - Summarize your peer's responses to your paper
 - What feedback do you find most useful?
 - What areas will you change ?
 - You may accept or reject feedback, but please explain if you reject your peer's ideas

Treatment for alexia

- Grammar editing
 - Line by line
 - Nouns first (number, form, etc)
 - Pronouns
 - Verbs
 - Other structures
 - Encourage a coding system

Treatment for alexia

- Post-process self-analysis
 - What did you learn through the process of writing this essay?
 - What was most rewarding for you?
 - What was most difficult?
 - What lessons can you use in writing your next essay?

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Download this Powerpoint, all the handouts, a list of references, and more from:

www.unc.edu/~nacaplan/tesol2009

A paper based on an earlier version of this workshop has been published as **“Beyond ‘Help!’ – Diagnosing the L2 Writer’s Essay: A Strategies-Based Approach”** in C.M. Pearson, K. Losey, & N.A. Caplan (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 2007 MITESOL Conference*. Available from www.mitesol.org