

## An Approach to Teaching CET-4 Writing

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**Abstract:** English writing is gaining great attention and emphasis in Zhongkai University of Agriculture and Technology syllabus, and having an important role to play in learning and communicating. However, of the five items of CET-4 (listening, reading, vocabulary, cloze and writing), writing remains the most difficult. Some new methods and activities are needed to maximize the efficiency of traditional methods and keep students interested in this course. This paper provides a step-by-step description of an integrated approach and activities in a writing course for non-English major students, which combines reading with writing and makes teaching writing become an integrated and interesting process.

**Key words:** college English writing    integrated approach

### 1. Introduction

As compared with other universities and colleges, the pass rate of College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) in Zhongkai University of Agriculture and Technology is much lower. However, the average score of CET-4 is about the same as other colleges. A lot of the students in Zhongkai Agrotechnical College (ZAC) scored between 50 and 59 in CET-4 in the past two years. From the following table of test score, we can see the average score of writing is very low, only about 7. The total score for writing is 15, but the students made a little more than 40% of that.

ZAC CET-4 test results

Area Grade	Listening	Reading	Vocabulary	Cloze	Composition
Grade 2001	11.23	18.89	8.38	6.21	7.08
Grade 2002	11.15	21.65	9.08	5.94	7.27
Pass Score	12	24	9	6	9
Total	20	20	15	10	15

From the analysis of the test data, we can see that teaching students how to write is probably the most neglected aspect of English teaching in the university. If teachers spend some part of teaching time training students writing skills, especially in the first two semesters, they can hopefully predict that there will be a great improvement in the students' writing ability; consequently, the scores of CET-4 will be increased significantly.

The problem is that in Zhongkai University of Agriculture and Technology, there are no English classes specializing in teaching writing. We must design activities both in and out of the classroom, which will motivate students for writing, provide many opportunities to write, and provide correction and feedback to keep the process progressing. In the previous years, most teachers in the university only asked students to write articles in the third or even fourth semester, the students didn't have enough writing practice. Thus, the students couldn't possibly present their ideas in correct and coherent sentences as CET-4 requires, so both the students' scores and the pass rate in writing were low.

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But how can teachers improve teaching methods? Teachers must clearly understand their teaching job is not so much to offer explanations of language points or examples, but rather to create conditions in the classroom that will enable students to learn by practicing. Teachers should try their best to create student-centered classes in which teachers no longer dominate all work in the classroom but utilize the opportunity to engage students in activities, which will provide for practice in relationship to the current learning tasks. Ultimately, one learns how to write by writing and rewriting. It's a process-oriented skill, and teaching it is also a process.

Here, the author will discuss different stages of writing skills and recommend some techniques to improve students' writing at each level.

## **2. The Early Stage**

There is a great need for a starting-point in writing training. Most of the first-year students often find it very difficult to write something in English. If they are asked to write a composition, they would have no choice but to write something according to their Chinese thinking. The compositions would be full of mistakes in vocabulary, organization, mechanics, and even grammar. Although Chinese students are familiar with grammar rules, they have difficulty in applying their knowledge to the writing process.

So the starting point for writing is of great importance. Teachers must start training their writing skill in the first semester.

In the early stage, teachers should get students to interact with words, get them to "adopt" words that they like and they want to use, get them to do things with words so that they become properly acquainted with them. Vocabulary is essential to starting writing. Free-writing techniques can give students a broad experience for accumulating vocabulary. Here are some techniques:

(1) The teacher should write a word or phrase concerning a topic or text on the blackboard.

(2) Ask students to put down on paper every idea or every word that comes into their minds without stopping to decide if it is good or bad and without caring how closely related it is to the particular word or topic. This is called brain-storming.

(3) Ask some students to give all the words they have written.

(4) Ask students to write several sentences according to these words.

Since there is no separate composition class for students, teachers should try every means to integrate their teaching of writing with reading.

Usually only a few superior students will be able to do this. The teacher should put a few of the sentences on the blackboard, to guide the students in analyzing the sentences, making changes as necessary. As this kind of experience is repeated, the other students will learn how to analyze and evaluate their own sentences, which is the primary goal of first stage writing. This exercise will serve as a motivational introduction to text. They will automatically compare them with what they have written. As a result, students will more naturally internalize the material in the text. When you ask them to make comments on these study habits, which they prefer to apply to their practice, and why they should be much better prepared to participate.

The exercise described requires students to recall related words, a process called free association. It is a very efficient way for students to review vocabulary and for students to introduce a lesson. Most important of all, it can help students start writing easily and enjoyably.

## **3. The Second Stage Writing**

There is quite a lot of “Writing Practice” in College English Intensive Reading. However, sometimes these exercises are not very closely related to what they have learnt from the texts. Often students are not interested in doing them. Here are some techniques which can be used as a variety to classroom activities, in order to stimulate students’ interest in writing as in reading.

(1) Imaginative writing before reading

Before handing out the reading material, the teacher should write down the title, or tell students the first part of the story.

In the former case, ask students to write down anything related the title, or in the letter, continue the story according to their prediction and imaginations.

Putting students in pairs or small groups, ask them to exchange their stories orally or in written form. Later, ask some students to read their stories in the class.

Then hand out the material (College English Fast Reading books are suitable for this exercise) and ask students to read it and compare with what they have written.

(2) Active reading before writing

Ask students to read the text or some reading material carefully.

Let them find the main idea of the passage or topic sentences of each paragraph.

Then ask them to write down what impressed them most and why, what they agree or disagree with and try to explain why or any new ideas they have come across while reading.

Put students in pairs and ask them to exchange their ideas or written work and discuss them.

Finally, after they exchange their different opinions or viewpoints. Students should write down their partners’ opinions. Ask students to be careful with verb form, especially the third person singular in present tense, a frequent mistake in their writing.

#### **4. The Third Stage**

In the first two stages, the techniques mentioned provide students with opportunities to practice their writing in class under the teacher’s guidance and help. Now at this more advanced stage, Teachers should train them to write longer and more complex sentences with some transitional devices. Teachers should develop students’ ability to write efficiently, directly to the point, which is a significant characteristic of English writing. In order to achieve this goal, the author strongly recommends that teachers should keep journals or even diaries in English. There are many advantages for keeping journals. First of all, everyone can keep journals, and journals give students great freedom to express their thoughts and feeling. Students can express honestly their personal opinions and write in their own natural voices. Second, journals can help students see writing personally significant, thus helping them remove emotional barriers to learning. Third, journals are very useful tools for both students and teachers. They can help students prepare for class discussion, study for examination, understand reading assignments and write formal composition. By keeping journals, students can easily find and explore topics, easily clarify, modify and extend those topics, try out different writing styles, sharpen their powers of observation, practice fluency, and finally, students may become more aware of themselves as a writer.

#### **5. Conclusion**

There are many other ways to improve students’ writing skills in addition to those mentioned. However,

whatever we do, we should keep one thing in mind: we can't teach all of the learners to write good English sentences and paragraphs in a short progression, from simple short sentences to lengthy composition.

The techniques mentioned in this paper such as free-writing, imaginative writing, etc., can help us arouse the students' interest in writing and reading and help students become familiar with useful expressions in the text more easily. Students' writing can thus be improved when they compare what they read with what they wrote. These techniques will also help students in developing a most important skill-being a careful reader, that is to say, learning to analyze their reading material from a writer's standpoint.

Reading and writing are definitely integrated skills. To assume the writer's viewpoint while reading and to assume the reader's viewpoint while writing, will result in improvement on the level of both reading and writing. In fact, there is an English saying "To become a good writer, you must be a careful reader".

Teachers' goals should be to help students get rid of their frustration and fear of failure at the beginning of writing and to create an active class. With many opportunities to practise writing in and out the classroom, students will have a change of attitude toward writing, which will result in increased ability. We tend to do what we enjoy, and enjoy what we can do well. As students write more, their confidence and enjoyment will motivate them to write more. As a result, they will no longer fear the CET-4 writing test.

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