

Reading and Practice Needed in CET Writing

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Abstract: The cultivation of writing ability calls for knowledge and command of various writing techniques. This paper deals with two important factors needed in English writing, namely reading and practice. Reading some English materials is aimed at providing the students with rich knowledge through which they can familiarize themselves with the diversified styles of English writing, enlarge their vocabulary and obtain updated information. Practice is also crucial in CET writing. Based on rich knowledge, students can write a smooth composition if they keep on practice. This paper seeks the way that the students can obtain the knowledge and provides some useful suggestions for developing practical CET writing.

Key words: reading; practice; CET writing

1. Introduction

It is known that there are four essential elements in communication: listening, speaking, reading and writing. All the four abilities are very essential to interaction. How to improve CET writing is worthy of study. We know China's Great Wall was built stone after stone, mile after mile. Just like the laborers toiled on the wall, the students labor over their writing. For most college students, it is not a happy thing to write a composition with 120 words in thirty minutes. Many teachers and students view it as a burden. Recently teachers began to see writing as a process rather than just as a finished product, more emphasis was given to knowledge-put in and practice. Therefore composition began to be seen as under construction, needing continual reevaluation at various stages of development and both teachers and students often come to the writing task much differently. As any English teacher in China knows, those who are from the East and those who are from the West will look at language much differently. Chinese with its rich heritage of calligraphy and proverbs, is often "looked at". English, however, is "looked through". In order to change this kind of concept, Chinese students need to improve their reading and practice their writing. By doing this, they will succeed in writing more effective English.

2. Reading

We know reading is an integrated act whose aim is the cultivation of students' comprehensive abilities in writing as well as in listening, speaking, reading and translation. Therefore, students should become acquainted with these techniques by analyzing them in reading and learning how to apply them to their writing.

2.1 To obtain background information

Reading English materials, for the students, is to obtain various information meanwhile they are familiar with the cultural background related to English speaking countries. The cultural background information will suggest the psychological feature of a nation, mode of thinking, concept of value, interests and religious belief. If the

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students get the social-cultural meaning of a reading material, they will have a thorough understanding of the passage and it will be of great help in their writing. As the famous British philosopher Francis Bacon once said: Reading makes a full man. A language is based on its certain culture. The more you know about the culture, the better you will understand the language you are learning and the people who speak the language.

2.2 To be familiar with the English grammar and sentence pattern

Generally speaking, students have an intermediate level of English language when coming into colleges and universities. Although they have learnt English for six years since middle school and have quite a good command of grammar and a certain large amount of vocabulary, they are still anxious about how to improve their language competence in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Actually it is effective to improve one's writing by improving reading. It is proved that writing is learned from reading. Reading and writing will go hand in hand and can not be separated from each other. The key to a good writing is to use the correct grammar to convey ideas and feelings as precisely and elegantly as possible. Reading will teach our students this process step by step. A good sentence pattern will always give the reader a deep impression when we catch the pattern of the sentence. Now study the following paragraph of Book III of College English Textbook "Now picture yourself—as vividly as possible—the way you want to be. Remember to picture your desired goals as if you had attained them. Go over all the details of this picture. See them clearly and sharply. Impress them strongly on your memory. The resulting memory trace will supposedly start affecting your everyday life. They will help lead you to the attainment of your goals." In this paragraph, the writer has used many imperative sentences which lead the reader to follow the instruction to act the daydreaming. In the first sentence, the part of speech "picture" is transformed into verb and the structure of "as...as" is used. All this has impressed the readers deeply. So correct grammar and good sentence patterns can ensure a piece of good product.

2.3 To familiarize the students with the basic organization of the writing and some rhetoric devices

In reading, we can find how the writers develop the main idea, adopt what kinds of way to prove the main statement, whether the main idea is developed by listing, exemplification, explanation, question and answer, cause and effect, etc. In reading, students will be familiar with modes of writing: description, narration, exposition and argumentation. Most writing involves a combination of these modes. In CET, most college writings are expository because college papers usually explain texts, statistics, observations etc. In reading, students will also note the unity (presenting only one topic or one part of a topic in each paragraph), coherence (each sentence in a paragraph leads naturally to the next sentence in explaining the central ideas), variety, length and so on to make a composition more effective and attractive. Unity means oneness, a combination of sentences centered round a single central idea. In a well-organized unified paragraph, there is one central idea which is expressed in the topic sentence or sentences of the paragraph, and other sentences are related clearly to it. In reading, students can also sense the rhetorical device the writer has applied. Some writers will use simile, metaphor, personification, pun, euphemism, irony, repetition, parallelism, climax and rhetoric question to construct the writing. Constant stress on them attracts students' attention and appreciation of rhetorical devices which can lead the students to stepping gradually into a level in which they can freely apply various figures of speech to their writing. In fact the rhetorical devices in English are as colorful as in Chinese. Only if you are indulged in them, will you be able to grasp the essence. When you want to use it, it will come naturally and make your expression witty and ingenious.

3. Practice

It goes without saying that learning a language means putting the language to use. Learning English, like

learning a sport, consists of two parts: knowledge and practice. Although textbooks and English classes primarily address knowledge of English through grammar and vocabulary, unfortunately our teachers can not provide sufficient practice through English classes. In CET writing, what is also needed is practice. The problem is how to provide this practice in sufficient quantity, given the abundance of students and paucity of the teachers.

3.1 To put the responsibility to the students in the practice of writing

In the class the students can be organized to create a relaxed and cooperative classroom atmosphere so that they can build the sense of responsibility and try their target language and exchange their writing for appreciation and correction. As a result, the students can take each other into accounts as much as possible and learn to share language and ideas. The teacher can put the ball in the students' court. The writing task is the responsibility of the students, not of the teacher. The students can be required to repair the poorly organized writing with poor word choices. To accomplish the above task of assigning responsibility to the students often involves a change in expectation. The students must begin to see writing as a communicative task whereby the student communicates something to someone. The teacher's role is to intercede in this process only where absolutely necessary. This shift in roles will often not be warmly received. The student perceives this as a strategy of the teacher to reduce his or her workload. The student at this point can be reminded that he will have writing tasks throughout his lifetime. The student should realize that a piece of writing a student produced is his creation and he is fully responsible for it.

3.2 To develop the independence of the students in their practice of writing

Their dependence on the teachers can be reduced. To develop the independence of students in writing, teachers can begin by giving them an assortment of writing task. Diary writing can be given to develop freedom of expression and focus on meaning. Mode writing assignment can be given to focus on organization and development. Rewriting of assignment can be used to develop accuracy. Of course, this divided or functional approach to writing has its limitation. It should be remembered, however, that even the real world puts different demands on writers and therefore assignment focusing on different aspects is not as artificial as some critics might claim.

3.3 To practice some writing techniques learned in reading

The most useful class is one where the students, not the teachers, do the greater part of work. When students write a composition, they can use rhetorical devices obtained in reading (one of the writing techniques), no matter whether they are lexical or syntactic devices. Meanwhile they should pay attention to the unity and coherence of the written passage. As we know, unity is not usually an isolated sentence, but a combination of sentences which are linked together by ties. In other words, a unity of written passage consists of sentences which are linked by function and discourse patterns and markers. If we want to give a contrast statement in our writing, we will use the word "however". If we are sure to give some examples, we can use "for example" or "such as". The students can be demanded to write the "riji", a daily diary, and the "zhouji", the weekly diary. In this practice, when teachers receive their students' paper, the task is quite clear. The teacher, as a master and judge, evaluates the composition by looking for any points of deviation no matter whether they are grammatical, lexical, or to the point.

3.4 Correction needed in practice

A useful method to use in different kinds of writing is a different system of correction. First of all, students should be made aware that there are different methods of correction. And with each method there is a different purpose. Secondly, the teacher should explain that one type of writing may need responses to content alone, while others may need detailed comments on grammatical constructions and word choice. For essays going through multiple revisions, each stage will involve a different kind of correction. The teacher can tell the students to imagine constructing a large building. One designer may be discussing the color of the paint to be used on the third floor, while another makes the

decision that there will not even be a third floor. In the same way, students are at times concerned about the grammatical details of a paragraph, when the main concern should decide if the paragraph should even be included or edited out. Finally, at any level the amount of guidance given by the teacher can vary. For students of lower levels, the teacher may need to provide more direct and specific feedback. More open-ended, non-directive comments should be given to students of higher levels. We should also balance the fluency with accuracy.

4. Conclusion

In short, one learns to write through reading. Just like at the beginning of the paper mentioned, Great Wall was built stone after stone, mile after mile. Writing is also the same case. Rome was not built in a day. Our students need to read more, write more and practice more. Those suggestions mentioned above, as far as I am concerned, are workable in CET writing.

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