GCSE (9–1)
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Lesson Element

Effective Writing Skills

Instructions and answers for teachers

These instructions should accompany the OCR resource 'Effective Writing Skills' activity which supports OCR GCSE English Language.

The Activity:

This resource comprises of 3 activities: a starter activity, a development activity and a plenary.

The task supports students in preparing for extended writing tasks by looking at how to create cohesion throughout a text and how to develop a text from a clear opening to an effective and powerful conclusion

This activity offers an opportunity for English skills development.

Associated materials:

'Effective Writing Skills' Lesson Element learner activity sheet.

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Teacher Guide: Introduction to the Task

This task is designed to support teachers in delivering the writing aspect of the GCSE English Language course as assessed by:

AO5:

- communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences.
- organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.

AO6:

- use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

The task develops students' understanding of how to use different phrases and references throughout their writing to avoid their work becoming repetitive and formulaic. Students will gain an understanding of how to use connectives, how to organise paragraphs and how to create a link between the opening and the ending of a text – all of which will help them to make their writing more cogent and structured.

The following activities can be used to support students when writing more open, creative writing tasks, and can be adapted to suit a range of topics. The example here is 'Write about a person who has left a lasting impression on you'. The activities can also be adapted to support the teaching of various functional writing styles and purposes such as articles, letters, reports and advice writing.

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Task Instructions: Starter Activity

To introduce different ways of referring to someone (other than using their name repeatedly), play a celebrity guessing game with the class.

In teams, students have to guess the celebrity being described from the clues given by the teacher. The quicker they can guess the celebrity, the more points they earn for their team (eg a correct guess after 1 clue earns 10 points; after 2 clues 8 points etc.). However, there are risks in guessing before they are sure – if a team get it wrong, they get no points.

When a team wants to give an answer, they need to write it on a piece of paper and hand it to the teacher, who then continues to give the rest of the clues before revealing the answer.
Once the game is over, discuss with students how these phrases helped them to guess the celebrity figures. If they are still unsure, ask them to come up with 5 clues, that would help someone guess their identity, or the identity of one of their favourite celebrities.

Teacher Information to Support Preparation

Choose celebrities that you know your class are interested in, to help them prepare for their own piece of writing. Here are some examples of clues for the celebrity guessing game:

- 'A laid back personality' (10 points)
- 'A Jamaican born star' (8 points)
- 'An internationally known sports person' (6 points)
- 'The fastest man in the world' (4 points)

Answer = Usain Bolt

- 'He is known by a pseudonym' (10 points)
- 'He was born in 1972, in Missouri, USA' (8 points)
- 'He has had many personal issues, which he uses as inspiration in his music' (6 points)
- 'He starred in the semi-autobiographical film '8 mile'' (4 points)

Answer = Eminem (Marshall Mathers)

- 'He died in 2011' (10 points)
- 'He was a board member of the Walt Disney corporation' (8 points)
- 'Most people in this room have probably owned something designed by his company' (6 points)
- 'It was estimated that he was worth over \$8 billion at the time of his death' (4 points)

Answer = Steve Jobs

Task Instructions: Development Activity

Introduce the writing task: 'Write about a person who has left a lasting impression on you.' Read through the example answer and ask students to discuss in pairs what is wrong with this piece of writing.

Share ideas as a class, students should offer ideas such as:

- it is very repetitive
- it is quite disjointed and doesn't seem to 'flow' from one idea to the next
- it is not always clear what/who is being written about
- it is boring
- it ends abruptly.

Give students 10 minutes to make improvements to the piece of writing.

Using student responses, model changes that could be made to the text (use of connectives; order of the paragraphs; adding a clearer conclusion; using other ways of referring to the person, other than by their name etc.) To summarise the changes that were made to improve the structure, make a list (as a class) of things writers can do to improve the structure of their writing. Students then use this list of success criteria to help them as they write their own piece of writing about a person who has left a lasting impression on them.

Teacher Information to Support Preparation

An example text, with a number of obvious flaws, is provided for use with students.

Students might point out:

- the opening is not engaging, it is not ideal to start with 'I'
- the repetition of 'J K Rowling' and 'she' makes the text very repetitive and boring
- there is no clear link from one paragraph to the next

- the content of the paragraphs is very disorganised (eg charities are mentioned in a number of places but no link is made between each of these references)
- sentence starters and structures are repetitive
- there is no clear conclusion, the text ends abruptly and seems to end half way through a paragraph
- there is no link back to the question/ task at the end of the text.

Methods for overcoming this could include:

- using references such as 'the Harry Potter author', 'the British writer', 'the wealthy woman', 'philanthropist' etc. instead of repeating 'J K Rowling' and 'she'
- a more engaging opening (a rhetorical question, a series of adjectives to describe her etc.)
- reorganising the content of the paragraphs
- using connectives to link between the paragraphs
- rearranging the paragraphs in to a more sensible order
- adding a clear conclusion that relates back to the task
- making a link between the opening and the conclusion, perhaps by repeating a phrase or sentence
- using simple sentences for effect.

Plenary

After they have written their own example, students use the success criteria list to assess how well their own writing is structured. This could be through labelling their own work to highlight the features that they have used, or by swapping work and labelling examples of each technique in their partner's work. This helps students to set targets for improving the structure of their writing in future, such as remembering to think carefully about the order and content of paragraphs or using various ways of referring to the topic of the task, other than the most obvious.

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