Teaching Notes – Written Accuracy

Introduction

The accuracy of the presentation of a narrative is critical in ensuring that what is written is clearly understood by the reader. This is assessed through AO6.

Technical errors through punctuation, spelling and grammar will always be made when writing under pressure. On a practical level, students need to be made increasingly aware of strategies to avoid common weaknesses in these aspects of writing.

However, focusing on the analysis of discrete technical errors in writing should never become too frequent in lessons.

Why focus on written accuracy?

The role of the examiner in assessing a piece of creative (or transactional) writing is to arrive at a skilled best-fit judgement about the positive features of a text. An examiner does not focus on 'spotting' technical errors. There is **not** a deficit model for assessing writing through a cumulative list of technical errors.

However, there should, be an expectation that students aim to consistently improve the accuracy of their spelling as well as their range of vocabulary as they are not only preparing for an examination but for lifelong learning.

The range of vocabulary and sentence structures used by students in their writing is also assessed within AO6 and part of this unit helps students to become more aware of some of the problems that can occur if sentences are not written with grammatical accuracy.

Practising the avoidance of technical and grammatical errors (and the ability to self-assess through proof-reading) in their writing will not only help develop students' skills in text construction but also to focus on its effect on a reader.

Practice - Key Outcomes

Teachers should prepare students to understand the importance of technical and grammatical accuracy in their writing (as well as the variety of appropriate vocabulary and sentence structures) so that the following **key outcomes** are evident in all or most students' texts by the time of the final assessments:

- an ability to use a variety of sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect
- an ability to use a wide range of vocabulary in an appropriate context
- an awareness of common and complex spelling patterns with strategies to ensure that spelling is accurate in their writing
- an understanding of how to use a range of punctuation accurately
- an understanding of how to use intentionally placed punctuation to create deliberate effects

All the practice in ensuring a range of vocabulary and sentence structures – as well as

technical accuracy - should lead to students being able to draw on previous practice to develop spontaneous texts under the pressure of the final assessment.

Resources – potential activities

Learning Focus 1 – Varying the Way You Start Sentences

Learning Outcomes

- understanding that sentence variety is a characteristic of quality writing
- being able to manage a variety of sentence starts within a narrative
- adopting different sentence starts to affect the tone and mood within a narrative

Resource 1 – Keep the Reader Interested

This resource focuses on varying sentences through using a range of different ways to open them, e.g. focusing on character, on place, using fronted adverbials, direct speech, noun phrases and fronted non-finite verbs.

Teaching suggestions

- Students should have plenty of examples of their own writing where the sentence variety could be improved. Select a previously assessed piece and ask students to consider how they may have changed some of the ways that they have begun sentences.
- Use **Resource 1** and focus on the first section which outlines different ways in which the beginning of sentences can be varied through a text to maintain interest.
- Work through the exercises and discuss responses and ideas where appropriate.
- Clearly, the examples have been arranged formulaically for the benefit of organisation for learning. Further work on varying the beginning of sentences can note that complete variation at all times is not necessary!
- Learning about sentence variety can then move on to the selective deployment of complex and short sentences depending on the intended effect on the reader.

Learning Focus 2 – Range of Vocabulary

Learning Outcomes

- Understanding that the use of a wide range of vocabulary used in an appropriate context enhances the quality of writing

Resource 2 – The Right Word in the Right Place

This resource encourages students to widen the range of their vocabulary use in writing. They are given a definition and then four options from which to choose the correct word.

Teaching suggestions

- Students could be asked to work in pairs to discuss more sophisticated vocabulary that they have recently learned from reading. Ask them to present the words in a sentence

where it makes sense in context.
- Discuss the vocabulary round the class and encourage students to add to their list of new vocabulary.
- Stress the point that just using more sophisticated vocabulary in a piece of writing does not automatically mean that higher marks will be awarded. Vocabulary needs to be used in an appropriate context so that precise meaning is conveyed. For example:
  - *My friend was melancholy when I told him the bad news.*

  Here, the word *melancholy* is used inappropriately – *sad* or *distraught* would have been far better in context.
- Use other examples to develop and underline this point as some students do litter their writing with vocabulary that have been learned discretely.
- Ask students to consider how vocabulary should be used for precise meaning, e.g. whether or not a character you have created would use these words.
- Above all – encourage students to read more widely and to discuss any unfamiliar vocabulary so that it may be confidently used in an appropriate context.

Learning Focus 3 – Standard English

Learning Outcomes

- understanding the main characteristics of what is Standard English
- being able to use Standard English appropriately in an original narrative
- judging when it is appropriate to use non-standard English forms for effect

Resource 3 – Standard or Non-Standard?

This resource explores the difference between standard and non-standard English. The activity asks students to write standard versions of non-standard English.

Teaching suggestions

- Ask the students to discuss the difference between standard and non-standard English. Gain feedback and steer the learning to the point that we can usually identify what is not standard English.
- Look at slang, regional difference and appropriated meanings.
- Use **Resource 3** to support learning about the use of non-standard English in direct speech and to look at the examples of non-standard usage.
- Collect further examples from the students and ensure that they understand how to use non-standard English appropriately!
- Remind students that they do not have to use non-standard English in their creative narratives. They should choose to do so when its use is appropriate.

Learning Focus 4 – Using Punctuation Accurately

Learning Outcomes

- being able to demarcate sentences accurately
- understanding how to use a wide range of punctuation within writing

- being able to deploy punctuation confidently to enhance meaning and sometimes to create particular effects

Resource 4 – Punctuation is the Key

This resource helps students to assess what they do and don't know about using punctuation to help the reader make sense of the text. One exercise asks students to apply given descriptions of punctuation to a text. Another asks them to insert all the punctuation needed into a narrative that has had the punctuation stripped away.

Teaching suggestions

- Discuss the way that the examination assesses students' ability to use punctuation. Stress that it is important to use the simplest punctuation correctly (such as commas) rather than to try and include everything into one piece of writing.
- Use the exercises in **Resource 4** to identify strengths and weaknesses in students' knowledge of using punctuation.
- Create similar exercises with students and/or ask the students to create their own for use with other groups in the class so that the discussion can continue.
- The aim is to have students not thinking about demonstrating their skill with punctuation to impress an examiner. The punctuation that is selected for use in the examination should be there because it helps convey precise meaning.

Learning Focus 5 – Common Slip-ups in Grammar

Learning Outcomes

- understanding that grammatical errors are very easy to make in English
- being able to control sentence constructions so that they are grammatically accurate
- being able to control tense and agreement so that they are grammatically accurate
- ensuring that all the main areas for error are noted – and avoided!

Resource 5 – Something's Not Quite Right …

This resource helps students to understand the many different ways that errors can slip into extended writing when working at speed. These range from using the wrong word, mixing up singular and plural to writing as if speaking (without direct speech).

Teaching suggestions

- Students should be well aware of the main grammatical errors made while constructing extended writing under the pressure of time. Set partners to create a list of the 'Top 5' mistakes they have made (and perhaps still make.)
- Gather feedback and discuss as a larger group. Perhaps ask students to look at their previously assessed writing to see if the errors they have highlighted are in evidence.
- Use **Resource 5** to outline the main examples of grammatical errors made in examinations. Also highlight that some punctuation and spelling errors are incorporated into this resource – though these are covered in other parts of the 'Written Accuracy' unit.
- Assess students' performances and ask them to revisit the list made at the start of the

lesson so that they can personalise this with aspects of grammar learned from the exercises.

Learning Focus 6 – Spelling

Learning Outcomes

- understanding the spelling patterns of simple and common polysyllabic words
- being able to develop strategies to learn the spelling of complex irregular words
- understanding the common spelling errors made in examinations and how to avoid them

Resource 6 – Using the ~~Rite~~ *Right Spelling

This resource helps students to realise that English spelling is a difficult subject to master. It covers some of the wide range of different spellings with similar sounds as well as an exercise where students have to identify misspellings in a piece of high quality narrative.

Teaching suggestions

- Ask students to work in groups to list the most common problems they face in spellings.
- Feedback and discuss why there are problems with particular words and patterns of sounds within words. You could also look at historical shifts such as the b still left in *debt* from the original Latin *debitum* etc. and the spellings that have been adopted from other languages such as *restaurant* and *liason* from French.
- Use **Resource 6** and set students to work through the various exercises. Stop and discuss at planned points in the resource.
- Discuss the final exercise in detail and discuss the different types of error in the text. Also remind the students that this is a high quality piece which is only affected by errors in spelling. This demonstrates that spelling is part of the award of marks in each band. Final marks for AO6 are awarded on a best-fit basis.
- Encourage all students to build up both reminders for words with which they have particular problems in spelling and lists of other common mistakes made by students in examinations.

AO6 - Self-Assessment Grid

- The self-assessment grid helps students to match their current skills against the skills required to be awarded a mark within a particular band.
- With the support of teachers, students will also be able to set realistic targets for the next stage of development.