In the Classroom

Prewriting Tasks for Auditory, Visual, and Kinesthetic Learners

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Although it is a well-known fact that students' preferred learning styles vary, many instructors teach in the way that reflects their own learning style preferences despite the fact that mismatches in teacher-learner styles may result in lower student achievement. In a traditional ESL or EAP writing class, students who prefer to learn by reading and writing may be privileged over those who have a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic style preference. In this article, I describe a variety of prewriting tasks that appeal to diverse learners and complement a process-oriented approach to writing.

Même s'il est bien connu que les styles d'apprentissage préférés des élèves varient, plusieurs enseignants présentent la matière selon leurs propres préférences. De cet écart entre les styles de l'enseignant et des élèves peut découler un rendement inférieur chez ces derniers. Dans un cours traditionnel de rédaction en anglais langue seconde ou anglais à des fins académiques, les élèves qui préfèrent apprendre en lisant ou en écrivant pourraient être avantagés par rapport à ceux qui préfèrent apprendre de façon visuelle, auditive ou kinesthésique. Dans cet article, je décris une variété de tâches de pré-écriture qui plaisent à divers apprenants et qui complètent une approche à la rédaction orientée sur le processus.

Introduction

In 2008, an Iraqi student in my policy-writing class at a small private graduate school in the United States raised her hand and politely asked, "Can we have a visual representation of the policy memo?" I was stumped. Although I had provided explicit and detailed guidelines for this writing assignment, these four pages of prose evidently were not presented in an easily accessible way to this student. I wondered how many other students would have appreciated a visual representation of the policy memo. Thus I began my exploration of students' preferred learning styles and my attempt to diversify my writing pedagogy to accommodate all students' learning preferences.

Learning styles have been defined as "the cognitive, affective, and physiological traits that are relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment" (Keefe, 1979, p. 4)

and "the general approaches students use to learn a new subject or tackle a new problem" (Oxford, Holloway, & Horton-Murillo, 1992, p. 440). Learning styles may broadly cover cognitive, affective, social, or perceptual styles, the last of which I focus on in this article, because they are relatively easy to assess and familiar to most instructors and learners. Perceptual learning styles describe learners' preferences for processing information through visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or tactile channels.

In the 1980s and 1990s, scholarship on learning styles was prominent in TESOL (Oxford et al., 1992; Reid, 1987, 1998). Several scholars concluded that culture is one of the determining factors that affect students' preferred learning styles (Oxford et al.; Stebbins, 1995). In studying cultural differences in learners' preferences, Reid (1987) found that most high intermediate and advanced ESL students enrolled in an intensive English program in the US strongly preferred kinesthetic learning, particularly those from Arabic, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Malay, and Thai backgrounds. In a study of 227 East Asian university students, Goodson (1994) found that most students preferred visual and kinesthetic styles. More specifically, mainland Chinese and Taiwanese students favored visual approaches to learning, Japanese students preferred kinesthetic approaches, and Korean students favored tactile and visual modes. Auditory and visual modes were preferred among 500 Arabic students learning English in Australia (Willing, 1988). Although research on learners' preferences across cultures has not always produced consistent results, several scholars have noted cultural patterns in learning style preferences and perhaps not surprisingly, that ESL/EFL instructors' teaching styles often reflect their own learning styles (Oxford et al.).

The potential for a mismatch between teachers' and learners' preferred styles may be high, particularly in postsecondary educational settings where lectures in the second language still serve as a predominant mode of instruction. Asian international students in particular tended not to do well academically when the primary mode of instruction in their college courses was auditory (Ladd & Ruby, 1999).

Among children of cultural minority groups, a mismatch in teaching and learning styles has been linked to poor academic performance and negative attitudes toward education (Morgan, 2010). Conversely, a match between learning and teaching styles has been correlated with higher student achievement rates (Dunn & Griggs, 1995; Ellis, 1989; Oxford, Ehrman, & Lavine, 1991). As a result, many scholars (Franklin, James, & Watson, 1996) have called for educators to adopt a culturally sensitive inclusive approach to their pedagogy to foster positive learning outcomes among students.

Since the 1990s, less research has been published on learning styles in the field of TESOL. While such publications were beginning to wane in TESOL, the process approach to writing had already gained prominence (Hyland, 2003). This recursive approach, which involves prewriting, drafting, revising,

and editing one's work, may privilege those who prefer to learn via reading and writing, rather than those whose preferred learning style is visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. However, barring a few exceptions (Leki, 1991; Stebbins, 1995), relatively few scholars have focused on the importance and classroom application of a process approach to writing that appeals to students with diverse learning styles.

Without abandoning the principal tenets of the process approach to writing, I argue that instructors should attempt to diversify their writing pedagogy to include all learning style preferences. Just because learners need to *write* does not mean that the prewriting process, which involves activities such as brainstorming, data-collecting, note-taking, outlining, and free writing, could not (or should not) appeal to those with visual, auditory, or kinesthetic preferences. In fact during the prewriting stage of the writing process, instructors have the most flexibility to design creative tasks that appeal to diverse learners, because prewriting, unlike writing, is not limited to a single mode. Integrating diverse activities at this stage may be easier for instructors and may result in better learning outcomes for students.

Diversity of Learning Styles in the Classroom

Visual learners learn best when they see something; auditory learners prefer to process information through oral/aural modes; and kinesthetic learners prefer to learn through activities that require total physical involvement. Table 1 presents a small repertoire of activities and materials that instructors can use to appeal to learners with each perceptual preference.

Table 1

Auditory	*Visual*	*Kinesthetic*
Discussion	Texts	Movement
Debate	Charts	Role-plays
Podcasts	Tables	Drama
Dictations	Graphs	Races and competitions
Jigsaw reading	Mind maps	Handling objects or props
Reading aloud	Graphic Organizers	
Storytelling	Art	
Chain games/chants	Drawings	
Lectures	Pictures	
	Posters	
	Realia	
	Visualizations	

In the following section, I suggest several ways that instructors can use stories, graphic organizers, mind-maps, and other tools creatively in prewriting instruction so that course content is presented in a culturally sensitive, inclusive way that takes into account the diversity of learning styles in the classroom. I implemented these activities with international graduate students enrolled in my credit-bearing English for Academic Purposes writing courses in the US. The learners were pursuing a master's degree in international policy studies or international business, and all had attained a TOEFL score of at least 79 (Internet-based) on admission to their graduate program.

Prewriting Tasks for Auditory Learners

1. Auditory learners respond well to discussions and oral brainstorming, both of which are widely used as prewriting activities in the traditional writing classroom. Instructors can also make use of technological tools such as *Voxopop* and *Audacity*, which can serve as a more permanent archive of students' ideas. Students in my business communication class recorded and posted reflections on http://www.voxopop.com before composing a letter of recommendation for one of their peers. I asked them to respond to a set of questions about their educational and professional background, greatest professional or scholarly achievements, and skill sets. Students uploaded their responses to these questions and listened to one of their peers' recordings, asked follow-up questions, and composed a letter of recommendation for their classmate based on information that they had collected from the oral recording. These tools, which allow students and teachers to make oral recordings, may also have relevance later in the writing process as an alternative to face-to-face conferencing or peer review.
2. Auditory learners love stories, and stories can be useful for teaching students techniques for paraphrasing before assigning them to write a paraphrase. I begin this activity by asking a student to tell the class about a memorable experience or simply an exciting activity that he or she did over the weekend. Then I call on another student to retell the classmate's memorable event. I ask the entire class to identify what was similar and what was different about these stories. Students recognize that the gist of both stories was similar and that no new information was added to the rendition. However, the stories were different in that the chronological sequence of events may have been altered in the second story, a few details may have been omitted, other words may have been used to tell the story, and the rendition was probably told in the third person rather than the first person. I use these insights as a bridge to teach students about the concept of paraphrasing: the goal is to capture the author's main point while rephrasing it in one's own words using another sentence structure.
3. Auditory learners may understand the concept of supporting a claim with evidence more easily if it is first presented as an oral rather than textual

activity. To introduce this activity, I have students take a stance on any controversial issue about which they feel passionate. I tell them that they are to convince their partner of their point of view in two minutes. Then I have them switch roles and listen to their partner's persuasive pitch. Afterward I ask them: Were they convinced? Why or why not? This usually leads to a fruitful discussion of evidence including facts, statistics, expert opinions, and true anecdotes as a way to strengthen one's position. I remind students that these lessons apply to writing; few readers will be convinced based solely on conjecture.

Prewriting Tasks for Visual Learners

1. Mind-mapping is a wonderful way for visual learners to brainstorm ideas and to map cause-effect sequences. *Bubbl.us* allows users to convey the relationship and hierarchy among ideas using color-coded boxes that are appealing to visual learners. Moreover, students can collaborate in creating a mind-map on *Bubbl.us*. I have played the two-minute trailer of *An Inconvenient Truth* and asked students to create a mind-map of the cause-effect sequences (e.g., the problem, the causes leading to the problem, and the consequences resulting from the problem). This prewriting activity helped students outline the cause-effect framework that they were to model in their policy analysis papers.
2. Graphic organizers are helpful for visual learners to categorize, classify, and organize their ideas. I have used a graphic organizer of a tree to teach students how to conceptualize a problem for a policy memo. The roots of the tree are the causes of the problem, the trunk is the problem, and the branches and fruits represent the consequences of the problem. Because students sometimes have difficulty in distinguishing the causes from the consequences, this graphic organizer helps them outline their ideas clearly before writing their policy memo; it can also be used for outlining any cause-effect or problem-solution structure for essay writing.

Prewriting Tasks for Kinesthetic Learners

1. Kinesthetic learners, who love to move around and do things in class, react favorably to the following dynamic activity for learning how to organize and categorize information for an essay. Each student receives a colored card with the name and location of a vacation destination. Then I ask students to stand up and organize themselves into groups based on the information on their cards. Students must develop an organizational scheme or pattern as if they were writing an essay; they are not provided with any more explicit instruction than this. When students are satisfied with how they have organized themselves, I ask them to explain the pattern they chose. Perhaps they have developed categories such as "Vacations to take if you like nature," "Vacations to take on a romantic getaway," "Vacations

to take with young children," "Vacations to take if you want to be physically active," or "Vacations to take to learn about history," among others. Then I ask students to reflect on what they have learned about categorizing and organizing information for an essay. Key points for discussion include the importance (a) that each subpoint connect to the overarching theme (in this case, vacations one can take); (b) that each category (or paragraph) have multiple examples; and (c) that the categorization be logical. In this case, the subpoints are all related to vacations one can take. One could imagine alternate and perhaps illogical ways to organize this information: by alphabetical order or by the color of the card.

2. If students are assigned to write a genre that can be divided into multiple sections such as a research paper that has an abstract, literature review, method, results, and discussion or an essay that has an introduction, body, and conclusion, the following activity can help them learn about the rhetorical purpose of each section. I write the title of each section of the paper on the board (e.g., abstract, literature review, method, results, and discussion). Then I give each student a card that describes a key purpose of one of the sections (e.g., *This synthesizes previous research; This describes the number of participants*). I tell students to match the descriptor on their card to the appropriate section and tape it to the board. Then I lead the class in a discussion of the accuracy if their categorization is correct and move the pieces to the correct section as needed.

Although I designed these activities for my advanced language-learners, they could be adapted for learners at lower proficiency levels with appropriate scaffolding. For example, students at lower proficiency levels might complete a graphic organizer in pairs or listen to a video clip twice: once to comprehend the content and a second time to complete the assigned activity. In my writing courses, these activities helped to foster a more interactive, student-centered classroom environment. Students commented on course evaluations that material was presented in a clear and accessible way for all learners and that the classroom environment was a place where "everyone is comfortable to learn" (Anonymous student).

Conclusion

According to some researchers, what constitutes *good teaching* may be a culturally bound phenomenon (Hofstede, 1986; Xiao, 2006), but if we were to assess the quality of our teaching based on our students' learning, we would aim to diversify our instructional approach to be more inclusive of all learners' preferences. Aside from creating a more engaging classroom environment, such diversification would ensure that no student is disadvantaged based on a mismatch in teachers' and learners' preferences. Instructors might also wish to have students complete a learning-style preferences survey (such as those found in Reid, 1998) at the beginning of each course to create a pro-

file of their students' preferred learning styles. Students can reflect on, write about, and discuss their learning style preferences. They can brainstorm learning strategies that they might use to be successful and explore how their cultural or educational background may influence their preferred learning style(s). Moreover, instructors can solicit students' input as to how classroom activities and materials might accommodate their learning styles and take this into consideration when designing activities that meet the course goals. Perhaps the culturally based notion of *good teaching* no longer needs to be an elusive concept: matching our instruction with our learners' style preferences may be part of the solution.

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