

NAME (family name first): \_\_\_\_\_

DATE (month, date, year): \_\_\_\_\_

**Learning to Write. Workshop. Introduction**

By Micaela Ford for EFL Advanced students (Spain, summer 2019)

Writing is all about **communication**. This is the first idea you need to mull over! It's about communication with yourself and others, so it's about **identity and relationships**.

If you **feel** you are not good at writing, or if you "hate" writing, you need to connect writing to your needs as a human being. If you love writing, why is that so? Why do you write? What do you use writing for -- to sort out your ideas, to learn to think better, to explore the communicative potential of language and express your own world...? Who do you communicate with when you use a written text? What are your purposes and intentions when you decide to write? What tools and resources do you use to present your words? How do you arrange your words depending on the tools you use? Which words do you use depending on the tools and the people involved?

Consider the kind of writing involved in tapping messages: Whatsapp messages are "oral written texts," not "written texts," really. Like texting (sms messaging), they rely heavily on lexical creativity: making the most of the least number of characters by using letters, abbreviations, words, symbols, emoticons indicating mood (tone) and intentions (particularly, underlying intentions!). But if this is the only writing you practice every day and you need to take an exam, you certainly need to think about learning to write other kinds of texts!

Writing tasks in EFL Writing Tests require a different kind of writing to that of oral written texts. It's an **interesting** kind of writing because we use it in academic learning, in many jobs, in certain kinds of relationships, in discussing the world when using empathetic rationality, in introspection... In a nutshell, for understanding the world and ourselves. And it is closely connected to being a **reader** in this precise sense: being someone who reads different kinds of texts, who is aware of the amazing world of human texts! We learn to write as we read.

**Improving** our writing skills is complex but if you have the chance to learn, use it! Focus on the learning process & the aim of communication (with yourself or others) and your path will be more interesting! **Curiosity** will ease our way. It will replace our obsession with being self-destructive and judgmental: the usual reason why we have trouble learning is because we are afraid, our complexes and traumas rule our world. In my own words, it's all a lack of generosity towards learning, exploring, discovering, due to values prevailing in patriarchal societies, so obsessed with destruction and self-destruction...

Being **good at** writing is something we never know, really. Not even for writers! They are often in tension before writing and when they start they can never be certain of the outcome. BUT we can train to learn to write a variety of texts so we can manage in our everyday lives. Our minds are malleable! We can learn to be *resourceful*. This takes practice. This includes *controlling* procrastination, fears, *learning* to think positively, to notice things...\*

Developing **resourcefulness** is what we do when we sit & learn. When you are learning to write, you need to **understand** that you are exploring, learning, practicing: experiencing a full process through time. Metaphorically speaking, **writing as process** is about onion layers or work!

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\*A side note on **Exams**. Put the world of exams, small & destructive, in place: think about writing tests under the light of what I am explaining. When we read instructions, if our mind is just focused on the fear of failing an exam, we are not focusing on "solving the problem" which is responding to the task! We need to train in not creating unsurpassable hurdles or unbearable burdens that make us run the risk of breaking under pressure! A good life is simple: during a writing test, your aim should be to show you are able to write the text you have been requested to write. In this course, you need to practice to focus on that! You have practiced self-destructive approaches way too often! Passing tests comes at the end. Passing is consequence of a learning year. If you **focus then on the task**, in spite of the tension involved in this (tension can be positive), you are more likely to control your fear (even overcome it) and probably do much better than if you stay trapped in the mental world of Exam Culture.

We have *befores* (reading similar texts, gathering info on structure & ideas), *durings* (working on an outline and doing the task), and *afters* (proofreading our work)! After this kind of training, we will be able to do the Before (thinking, outline), the During (exam task) and the After (proofreading) in a Writing Exam respecting the time and word limits. But for now, please, work to develop a positive key attitude: evaluation comes last, exploring and practice (trying!) comes first.

### EXERCISE. Developing Textual Awareness

Writing involves considering what we want to say and who we are addressing and where we are, the kind of relationship we have, the kind of tool we are using to communicate. More technically, we say it involves considering **format** (the physical distribution & presentation of the text), **textual structure** (how we organize & connect the content in the complete piece), **content structure** (how we sequence the content), **register & tone** (how we express & address others depending on levels of formality, intimacy or emotion), **purpose** (what we wish to achieve through communication)...

*Writing Task: Write a cover letter for your CV. Word limit: 175 words (10%). Time limit: 1 h.*

Hiya potential boss!

I was having my morning coffee today while leafing through the paper when I found your ad. So here I am to tell you all about myself, because I know I'm the one you're looking for!

I was born in a little town in Oklahoma... Ha-ha... I'm just teasing! Well, down to business: at school I was a lousy student, so I quit all that crap, never went to university -- in spite of being as clever as hell! I traveled lots and learned about life.

I can manage in all types of situations! Come rain or come shine! ;D I'm great at socializing and at organizing people's work around me -- ha-ha -- so I'd be a great manager! Think about it!!

I'd love to meet you. We could negotiate the salary having a couple of drinks, what'd ya think?

You can reach me at 999999999. Don't ring too early, say after midday -- I'm a late night bird. ;)

Hope to hear from you soon!

Cheerio!

[Signature]

PS: If you need references, my mum can tell you all about me!

### Questions for small group analysis & plenary discussion

1. Is the writer a man or a woman? What did you imagine? Count the votes in your group, please. (If someone just saw a genderless body you can include votes for "person")
2. Do you think the student who wrote this should get a pass mark? Consider these questions:
  - a. Does the job seeker comply with the **task requirements**?
  - b. In terms of **format**, what kind of text is this?
  - c. What's the **content structure**? (outline for the information offered)
  - d. What's the communicative **purpose** of the text? Are the writer's **intentions** clear?
  - e. What's the **tone** & the **register**? Give examples.
  - f. Do you think the writer will **achieve** its purpose? Give reasons.
3. Is this text funny? Why (not)? Explore reasons for your answer.

**Follow-up questions:** What impressions do we get of people's personalities from how they communicate? Would you write this letter in this way? When? Why?

**Letter-writing.** Following the content structure for cover letters, copy the language items the job seeker used and find examples of the formal wording this person should have used instead if the letter was/were a true job application cover letter. Now write your own job application cover letter. It needs to fit a single page and be effective! It is complemented by your CV/resume, so don't make it a rewording of that.