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Abstract

DEVELOPING & IMPROVING EFL WRITING SKILLS

Learning a foreign language is a process that entails the development of four basic skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. According to the Common European Framework, such skills can be grouped into productive and receptive. Reading and Listening are categorized as receptive skills, while speaking and writing are productive skills. Experience and research findings suggest that most learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) find productive skills more difficult to develop than receptive skill, and writing skills the hardest to improve. Learning to write is a complex process that calls for a wide range of cognitive and linguistic strategies to be used, most of which EFL students are not fully aware of.

Difficulties in crafting a text often arise from students' unawareness of how to organize ideas logically in English so as to make the information in the text flow smoothly, and of the linguistic features that cause the discourse to sound foreign. All claims in a written text should be relevant and related to the topic (unity). All sentences must also be arranged in a logical order and connected to each other to create a smooth transition (coherence) throughout the text. The second level of challenge is the use of linguistic features (suitable vocabulary, appropriate collocations and patterns, and correct structures); these are frequent sources of mistakes that make a text sound foreign and often hard to understand. Gass and Selinker (1994) claim that many EFL learners "find themselves without the linguistic resources" to express their ideas.

The purpose of this talk is to help EFL college majors become aware of the relevance of how to organize ideas according to the logical patterns of development in English. Different short texts will be analyzed to identify the strengths and weaknesses in each case. In addition, specific linguistic features that often cause difficulties to native speakers of Spanish will be examined and discussed.