

Creative Writing Endeavours in Class: Drafting Print Advertisements

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Abstract

This paper outlines a small endeavour to help Class XI learners develop Creative Writing skills with the help of authentic language learning materials. Learners' journey to drafting print advertisements with the help of facilitative tasks is documented. The tasks were created with built in scaffolding to help learners overcome their linguistic limitations. The gradual progression of tasks facilitates learners to move ahead with the process of creative drafting of a print advertisement.

Key Words : English language teaching, creative writing, learner centred, authentic material, task planning, in built scaffolding.

Introduction

While learning a second language, the learners learn to communicate with other people: to understand them, to talk to them, read what they have written and write to them. An integral part of participating fully in a new cultural setting is learning how to communicate with each other in writing. However, that is not the only reason to include writing as part of the second- language syllabus. Writing helps develop cognitive growth, organizational abilities, and the power to influence others through persuasion. Writing helps the learners reinforce the grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary that have been transacted in class. Secondly, writing helps learners experiment with language. Not only do the learners become involved with the target language, writing, especially creative writing encourages them to use their imagination. Writing calls for use of thought, planning, organization and use of apt language to get the point across. The relationship between writing and thinking makes writing a valuable part of the language course.

Research indicates that creativity diminishes with age(Claxton et al, Vygotsky, Lehman). Creative Writing helps them remain creative through the use of their imagination and thinking out of the box. Learners who engage with creative expression are able to express their feelings, feel empathy for others and develop confidence in one's abilities.

Drafting print advertisements is a creative endeavour that is included in the ambit of +2 level learners. Advertisements provide the scope to enter a make believe situation by addressing an audience that your imagination deems appropriate for using the product at hand. Writing print advertisements calls for experimenting with language: brevity, experimental sentence structures, a punchline, and weaving a narrative in limited words and images are called for. Such creative endeavours provide learners with a break from the monotonous complexity of the new disciplines they are trying to get to grips with.

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Advertisements fit in well with the process approach to writing, where learners ask themselves not only questions about purpose, but also address processes such as How do I write this? Process approach calls for an exploration of the theme/ topic through writing, revisiting what has been written, consequently moving over to newer ideas.

The given set of tasks was devised with the express purpose of facilitating Class XI learners to become familiar with the process of framing print advertisements. They were taken through a set of tasks to identify features of advertisements, along with factors that shape the final advertisement, and finally frame a print advertisement. The tasks were scaffolded well to help the learners from state- run schools to be able to identify and use appropriate words and structures.

To begin with, the learners were asked to read sample advertisements and reflect on them in view of the key points given. The objectives for this task were

The learners would be able to:

- identify the components of an advertisement .
- analyse advertisements to identify the components present therein.

STEP A

Advertisement - A

Holiday Destination :

Chail (Himachal Pradesh)



Activities

Advertisement - B

Holiday Destination:

Corbett Riverside Resort



Activities

Advertisement - C

Holiday Destination :

Haridwar



Activities

Learners were asked to read the advertisements carefully, and identify the activities being offered in each advertisement. Next, they were asked to identify that in view of the activities, which age group seems to be the target audience. They were asked to notice the choice of words in each advertisement, and the impact these are likely to have on the reader. They were also asked to pay attention to the details such as the choice of the picture, captions that went with it, punch lines used, placement of the logo and contact details.

Learners were able to discern the difference in the choice of activities outlined in each advertisement. They were able to identify the target audience with a little prodding and cuing. They were able to discuss amongst themselves their preferences, in terms of places, activities and advertisements. Next, they were asked to go through the given table on a slide.

STEP B

Here some Key Points for writing that are Noticed by the Readers	
(1) Put your message in the headline:	(4) Use pictures that say something :
Put the special aspect of your destination /Package in the headline.	People like pictures. They are easy to 'read' use interesting pictures that make readers develop an interest in these.
(2) Try to be specific about the target group:	(5) Place your company logo clearly in the advertisement :
It should be clear from the advertisement; who is the advertisement aimed at? Try to be as specific as possible.	your logo will always remind people of what you are trying to sell. Use it on every thing.
(3) Use Positive words :	(6) Put a caption beside each picture:.
You want to give a good impression of your destination, So use positive words such as "peaceful" "advertisement" "unique". Do not use negative words - say what your products is - not what is not.	when people see a picture, they look for a caption or a title. Most people do not read the rest of the advertisement.

Each point was read aloud, discussed, with examples from the given advertisements. Learners were able to develop an understanding of the key aspects that needed to be kept in mind when framing advertisements. They were reminded of the power of positivity, and asked to come up with words and adjectives that were positive. Next, the learners were asked to identify these six components in newer advertisements. They were asked to put ticks or crosses in the columns given.

STEP C

Read the table again. Look at the advertisements given below. Put a tick (•) in the box if the point is present in the advertisement given.

Components	1	2	3	4	5	6
Advertisement A						
Advertisement B						
Advertisement C						

Advertisement A



Advertisement B



Advertisement C



Learners did not require a long time for completing this task. Some of them discussed certain points with their partners. They seemed to appreciate this task. They were asked to look up advertisements of places of their own interest at home, and bring one advertisement which included the maximum number of features discussed.

The next class started with a discussion of the advertisements some learners had brought. The six components covered in the previous class were revised with the help of these advertisements and listed on the board. The tasks for the day were based on these objectives.

Objectives

The learners would be able to:

- work on the different components of advertisements.
- identify *the target population for advertisements*.
- suggest positive words and phrases describing holiday destination and activities,
- write captions for photographs, write an advertisement.
- write an advertisement.

Learners were divided into groups of four. Each group was presented with a set of postcards for different holiday destinations. Samples of two different holiday destinations are given here. They were asked to look at these closely, discuss amongst themselves and identify the place. Next, they were to identify the activity and its target population. They were asked to come up with positive words and phrases for each picture. A variety of expressions were encouraged. They were instructed that it is not mandatory to concur on the choice of words. They could list as many as they wanted. However, they ought to be able to explain their choices in view of the postcards.

STEP D

Sample Postcards:

Magnificent Kerala



Target People

Word\Phrases

Caption



Target People

Word\Phrases

Caption



Target People

Word\Phrases

Caption



Target People

Word\Phrases

Caption

Awesome Manali



Target People

Word\Phrases

Caption



Target People

Word\Phrases

Caption



Target People

Word\Phrases

Caption



Target People

Word\Phrases

Caption

Learners were a part of avid discussions. They were able to identify most places with ease. They came up with a number of creative expressions to describe each place. In the process they put their knowledge of geography to good use. They sought clarity regarding some postcard names of places and their significance. The post cards with adventurous themes were a great success and many of them expressed a desire to visit such places. Writing captions turned out to be quite competitive. They tried to outdo other groups. Hindi movies proved to be an inspiration too -- Masakali Kathakali, Fly with me, Come! Be a bird, Experience the snowflakes, Untouched Beauty..... and so on.

This first task had prepared them for the next step. Each group was asked to come up with a print advertisement for the place allocated to them. They had to devise an advertisement that would motivate others to visit the place. They could draw or use the post cards given to them. It took most groups another 7 to 10 minutes to agree upon a format and finalise their ad. The advertisements were lined up, read out and discussed.

As the last step, each group could either ask one question or give one suggestion to other groups. They had to write the questions/ suggestions on a piece of paper and present it to the concerned group. They were asked to review and finalise their advertisements before the next English class.

Most learners acknowledged that they had enjoyed the process of drafting and reviewing the advertisements. All the final advertisements were displayed for a week in the class.

Discussion

This set of tasks were first in a series of creative writing tasks to facilitate Class XI learners in becoming confident.

STEP A helped the learners in noticing details about print advertisements. It oriented them to vocabulary they needed to use at a later stage. It provided them with different samples of the same theme. It worked as a pre- writing task and prepared them for the identification of the specific components considered significant for the print advertisements.

STEP B crystallised what had been augmented earlier. It provided them with the Must Do's for writing print ads.

STEP C helped them in analysing the advertisements vis- a- vis the components, helping them in identifying the manner in which these are knitted together in the advertisements. These steps are extremely significant for the purpose of teaching. Though most learners may come across advertisements in various newspapers or magazines, yet they may not pay attention to the details that go into their making. The process approach to writing mandates that enough effort needs to go into learner preparation. Not only should they be prepared for the content and its organization, but significant attention needs to be paid to the nuances of its features. Creative Writing endeavours cannot begin with free tasks. The issues of form, content and linguistic readiness need to be catered to.

STEP D comprised a heavily guided task that helped the learners engage with one step at a time. The inherent steps in the task scaffolded the learners to gradually move ahead towards the drafting of the advertisement. Keeping in view the limited functionality of learners in the target language, learners were divided into groups of four so that they would be able to accomplish the tasks collectively. Each group was provided with a different set of postcards so that the variety of induce would lead to the emergence of a variety of advertisements.

The different sets added to the learners' enthusiasm and sense of accomplishment. Guidance inherent in the postcards proved to be quite facilitative for the learners.

Takeaways for Teachers

- Creativity of learners needs to be nurtured. Opportunities for Creative Writing need to be created within class time.
- Readiness to facilitate and scaffold learners' creative endeavours is needed on part of teachers.
- Teachers' eyes need to be trained to recognize authentic material that can be used in class to cue learners.
- Task planning needs to be taken up such that cues are embedded in the process itself. Each preceding step can prepare the learners for the one that follows.
- Tasks need to be such that drafting and re- drafting are a part of the process of writing itself.
- The tasks and themes delineated by the teacher ought to be engaging for learners.

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This activity was conducted by the Author as part of her PhD Coursework in a school.