

Teaching ELL Reading Through Writing

by Hyonsuk Cho

How English Language Learners (ELLs) acquire knowledge and perform in reading and writing can differ from how native English speaking students (NESs) learned similar material. Compared to the NESs, ELLs tend to possess a narrower range of vocabulary and underperform on syntactic knowledge in both reading and writing (Crossley & McNamara, 2009; García, 1991; Hinkel, 2003; Keck, 2006; Lesaux & Siegel, 2003). Writing's potential contribution in learning to read in a second language has gained increasing attention in second language acquisition (Harklau, 2002; Manchón, 2011; Manchón & Roca de Larios, 2011; Williams, 2012). Learning a second language “through” writing is as important as learning how to write in a second language (Harklau, 2002, p. 332).

This research suggests that activities specifically designed for ELLs can be beneficial for them. In this paper, I share two worksheets—the thinksheet and the questionsheet—that can help ELLs learn reading through writing and improve both reading and writing skills. Drawing on the cognitive process theory of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 377), the worksheets serve as a cognitive model while students read and write by helping them achieve both “process goals” (e.g., procedural instructions of writing) and “content goals” (e.g., what to say to an audience).

Thinksheet

To create the thinksheet, I adopted the model originally created for native English speaking students by Brutt-Griffler and Collins (2007) and Collins and Madigan (2009).

The thinksheet covers skills from identifying and organizing ideas to writing. Depending on the students' proficiency or grade level, teachers can decide to provide more detailed guiding questions. Each thinksheet can be modified to reflect a specific target strategy (e.g., author's purpose, summary, narrative, fact/evidence, and vocabulary), the genre of the reading material, and the goal of the class. Writing a summary of the reading material is a good way to learn reading and writing together because it requires a series of integrated skills, such as critical reading, comprehension, paraphrasing, and writing. A thinksheet for summary and reflective writing is given here (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Thinksheet

Step 1: Ideas and details

- For each reasonable chunk of the story (e.g., paragraph, page), ask students to identify the main ideas and details. You can then help them comprehend the passage.
- Ask students to paraphrase the main ideas and details to help their comprehension and summary writing skills. A short workshop to teach paraphrasing before the lessons helps.
- If students have difficulty paraphrasing in their own words, allow them to copy, but assist beginners to gradually develop sophisticated ways to paraphrase and avoid plagiarism.

Step 2: Organization and reflection brainstorming

- Ask students to select the most important three to four ideas from Step 1 to write a summary.
- Introduce different types of graphic organizers so that students can choose a way to logically connect the most important ideas.

- Encourage students to reflect on the selected ideas (e.g., why they choose the ideas and how meaningful the ideas are to them).

Step 3: Extended writing

- Provide a guiding structure of the summary. A brief workshop to teach summarizing before the lesson helps.
- Tell students to use their writing in Steps 1 and 2 and go back to the reading if needed.
- Ask students to reread and revise their writing. Peer review can be helpful.
- When revising, help students focus on not only language but also meaning and organization.

Focus Strategy: Summarize and Reflect

Step 1: Ideas and details

Page 107. What are the most important ideas and details? Discuss with your peers.

Original	Paraphrase
Lou's mother thought games and sports were a waste of time. But Lou loved sports.	

Step 2: Organization and reflection brainstorming

Organization: You have written the most important ideas. Now it is time to plan for writing a summary. Select three to four ideas you think will be the most helpful as you write a summary.

Reflection: You have selected the three to four most important ideas. Now think about why they are important and meaningful to you. Did you learn something from them?

Step 3: Extended writing

Directions: Write your summary and reflection.

Writing Guidelines

- **Introduction:** Write what you are going to write about.
- **Body:** Write what the major ideas are and include examples or details.
- **Conclusion:** Briefly mention the major ideas and write what you learned from the story.

Questionsheet

I created the questionsheet (Figure 2) to provide students time and space for working cooperatively on their questions about vocabulary, grammar, and the story. The questionsheet promotes peer cooperation and interaction as well as learning. Teachers can use it to diagnose students' vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension needs, adding tables for grammar, story, and other categories. When using the questionsheet, it is important to:

- Give students time to write questions about vocabulary, grammar, and the story.
- Group students and let them try to solve each other's questions.
- Help students answer their unsolved questions.

Figure 2. Questionsheet

Directions: Write questions you have while you are reading and discuss them with your classmates.		
Vocabulary		
Page	Question	Answer

The thinksheet and questionsheet are useful tools for learners because they allow students to practice reading through writing, while learning the process of extended writing. The thinksheet and questionsheet provide students with various ways to interact with texts, and are also useful for teachers in systematically guiding students' development of both reading and writing skills. Furthermore, they can serve to assess students' development and achievement as an integrated process.

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