

# Efl writing - errors and solutions

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**Abstract:** *Writing is the most challenging skill in English, so it is unavoidable for most EFL students to make errors in writing. Errors made by students have always been considered as helpful remarks for teachers to direct the foci of their teaching as they need to pay attention to the most serious errors before addressing other ones. Hence, aiming at assisting EFL learners to successfully master writing skills, it is necessary to have a close look into errors for better understanding of their sources so that EFL teachers and learners can avoid those error for better writing.*

**Keywords:** *errors, writing, EFL*

## Introduction

Writing is considered to be a crucial component of language performances. Writing is one of fundamental language skills that holds significant importance in the process of teaching and learning English. English writing is becoming more and more important in countries where English is not the native language both in educational and professional contexts (Leki, 2001:199). EFL learners often find that writing is a difficult task and in no way can avoid making errors. This paper attempts to summarize major types of errors frequently made by EFL students, investigating their sources and then gives some suggestions for both EFL teachers and learners to improve their writing skills.

## Research content

### 2.1. Writing and its importance?

#### 2.1.1. What is Writing?

There have been numerous assumptions and definitions proposed to specify the concept of “writing” in the literature. Writing, which is the arrangement of some linguistic components like spelling, grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation, is an activity to express thoughts, ideas, and feelings in written language. Coulmas (2003) defines writing as a “set of visible or tactile signs used to represent unit of language in a systematic way, with the purpose of recording messages which can be retrieved by everyone who knows the language in question and the rules by virtue of which its units are encoded in the writing system”. Bryne (1979) views writing as “transforming our thoughts into language; a very complex skill that requires both physical and mental activity on the part of writer”. He also notes that writing is the final and perhaps most challenging skill learners have to master. While these definitions give an understanding of the nature of ‘writing’ it

is obvious that writing is actually a sophisticated and demanding process that may be regarded as an obstacle for those who wish to produce precise pieces of written information in a second language.

#### 2.1.2. The importance of ESL writing

In discussing the important role of writing, Suleiman (2000) asserts that “writing is a central element of language, any reading and language arts program must consider the multidimensional nature of writing in instructional practices, assessment procedures, and language development.” (p. 155). Writing shows writer’s ability to express their ideas, knowledge, analyses of what they have read or listened. Good writing is one of the keys to success.

**Communication skills:** Writing also plays one of the major means by which people demonstrate their knowledge, and it provides a powerful mechanism for communication, self-expression, and self-reflection (Graham, 2006). Writing is a means of communication for learners to show their ability to express themselves effectively in a written form. It allows them to produce their well - organized ideas in well - structured sentences.

**Vocabulary and grammar improvement** Most linguists such as Wardhaugh (2006) agree that the language knowledge is the literacy that speakers have of the language or languages and this knowledge explains how we can understand grammatical sentences and distinguish ungrammatical ones. Language knowledge comprised of linguistic knowledge, such as the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and orthography. Through writing practice, the frequent use of vocabulary applied to a specific grammatical patterns expands learners’ linguistic knowledge.

On their selection of vocabulary and grammatical structures to illustrate their ideas, learners get an

opportunity to better their linguistic knowledge to the extent of both language consolidation and expansion.

**Critical thinking** When writing, learners are encouraged to think critically and creatively. Good writing requires information analysis, opinion formation and a coherent and logical expression of thought and ideas.

Integrating critical thinking in writing lays a further cognitive and metacognitive demand on English learners as writing is always regarded as a way to express people's inner thoughts. A person who is writing can impose their own ideas and knowledge on certain social or economical issues, giving comparison, judgement or evaluation.

**Better understanding** Without a good platform of understanding, learners can never produce a good piece of passage. They, therefore, are required to explore as much of the world as possible by seeking information and then writing about what they have read, listened or discussed. These, thereby enhancing their intercultural competence.

**Self-expression and reflection** By writing, learners can express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in their own manner. Writing, therefore, can be viewed as a means of self-expression and self-discovery, giving learners chances of deeper understanding of themselves and their own identities.

Overall, writing in EFL not only helps to develop language skills of learners, it also fosters critical thinking, and encourage self-expression.

## 2.2. Types of EFL writing errors and their causes

### 2.2.1. Grammatical errors

There have been a number of studies into grammatical errors in writing made by EFL students, Seitova (2016) found that the seven most common errors committed by the participants were pluralization, subject-verb agreement, omission or misuse of articles, omission or misuse of prepositions, spelling, gerunds and infinitives.

### 2.2.2. Misuse of vocabulary.

Learners may use incorrect or inappropriate words, leading to semantic errors or lack of clarity in their writing. EFL students may have a limited vocabulary, which can lead to errors in word choice and usage. Lack of awareness: Some errors may occur due to a lack of awareness of specific language rules or conventions. Students may not be familiar with certain idiomatic expressions, collocations, or formal writing styles.

### 2.2.3. Lack of coherrence and cohesion

Lack of coherence and cohesion: EFL learners

may struggle to organize their ideas and connect them logically, leading to a lack of coherence and cohesion in their writing.

### 2.2.4. Cultural and stylistic errors

Learners from different cultural backgrounds may have difficulty understanding and applying the conventions of English writing, resulting in cultural or stylistic errors.

### 2.2.5. Spelling errors

EFL learners may struggle with spelling, especially when it comes to irregular words or words with silent letters.

All these errors can be attributed to the learners' insufficiency of English language knowledge (Kaweera, 2013:13), which may result from the reasons of time and resources of text books they expose to. For this, Richards (1971) explained that developmental errors are the errors occurring when "the learner attempting to build up hypotheses about the English language from his limited experience of it in the classroom or text-book" (p.209). As a result, EFL learners do not have sufficient practice and acquisition of the language.

The EFL's incomplete knowledge of language may result from three types of causes of errors classified by Norrish (1983). They are: carelessness, first language interference, and translation, and lack of practice.

**Carelessness** carelessness is often closely related to lack of motivation. Many teachers will admit that it is not always the student's fault if he loses interest, perhaps the materials and/or style of presentation do not suit him.

**First language interference** Grammatical errors and misuse of vocabulary are brought about by the learners's first language interference. That is the influence of their native language onto the second language acquisition process. These errors, Richards (1971:205), (Ellis, 1997: 28). are the results of the learners' application of their native language components in their written performances of the target language. Learners carry over the existing knowledge of their native language to the performance of the target language. The influence is stronger where there are greater appearances of differences (Odlin, 1989:7). When the linguistic principles of native language are much different from that of target language, the learners find it difficult to comprehend, and they begin to apply the rules and structures of native language in their learning process (Krashen, 1981:65).

**Translation** It is one of the causes of errors.

This happens because a student translates his first language sentence or idiomatic expression in to the target language word by word.

### **2.3. Some suggestions reduce writing errors for EFL learners**

#### *2.3.1. Develop a good foundation in grammar and vocabulary for the students.*

The incorporate targeted grammar and vocabulary exercises will reinforce specific language points that have to master in term of correct usage. Besides, teachers should encourage their students to do as much reading as possible as reading enables learners deep understanding of vocabulary and grammar to the extent of contextual meaning so as to avoid cultural and stylistic errors as well as vocabulary errors.

#### *2.3.2. Provide writing models*

Students should be provided with examples of well-written texts in English, of which they can analyze the model, discuss the structure, organization and language. clear guidelines, together with clear explanation of the writing expectations and criteria should also be given to students. This gives students an illustration of what to be the expected so that they can figure out the crucial points in each writing requirement.

In general, learners having model texts can enhance their subsequent compositions by improving expressions and grammatical accuracy, enriching content, and making structure more coherent and logical. Model texts help students who start writing without a clue, have more supporting information to illustrate their arguments.

#### *2.3.3. Provide constructive feedback*

This is of the utmost importance, a constructive feedback must focus on both students' strengths and areas to improve. Teachers should give a clear, specific, consistent and if possible, personalized feedback to recognize learners' strength and to draw learners' attention to their weaknesses

A good feedback not only increases the learner motivation so that they are more willing to be involved in the learning process but also gives hints to promote their active involvement, which enables learners to notice their teacher's comments, understand them and work in order to fix their errors

At the same time, a comment is considered constructive when it shows the teacher's respect to his/ her students' personalities and learning styles. Students, otherwise may feel embarrassed if they feel being criticized which causes great demotivation. Any feedback, therefore need to be carefully delivered as

to how the teachers approach their students and how they comment on their students' performance.

#### *2.3.4. Use a variety of correction techniques*

Teachers of EFL writing can use symbols when correcting their students writing, so that they can be aware of the kinds of error they should correct themselves. At the same time, teacher should also set up a clear marking criteria and show it to their students (if possible), which will help their students identify what to focus on. Another correction method should be selective marking, which allows the ignorance of several criterion and draws learners' attention to a specific writing objective.

#### *2.3.5. Require regular writing practice*

A persistent practice benefits people the neuroplasticity, memory consolidation, automaticity, confidence and motivation, which can be especially important for language learners, who may feel discouraged by the complexity and difficulty of the language. This habit also gives learners more opportunities of exposure to English language. As a result, regular practice helps learners to maintain progress and achieve their writing objectives and brings them language proficiency.

### **Conclusion**

Writing plays the crucial role in daily life as it helps people to express their ideas, thoughts and feeling. The acquisition of a language or a foreign language is of no other purpose. Writing is an arrangement of linguistic components like grammar, vocabulary, cultural knowledge to produce a meaningful piece of information. Errors in writing is, however, unavoidable to all EFL learners. These errors may result from learners' incomplete linguistic knowledge, their first language influences, or their learning habits which can be reduced by EFL learners' regular reading, and practice with their teachers' proper techniques of correction. Writing, however, is a long process which requires patience and consistency of both teachers and learners.

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