

# Evaluation of Teachers' Methodology of Writing Skill Teaching: A Case Study

Pedro Luis Luchini

(University of Mar del Plata - Mar del Plata Community College)

**Luchini, Pedro. 2002. Evaluation of Teachers' Methodology of Writing Skill Teaching: A Case Study.** *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 10(4), 211-232. The purpose of this paper is to report an evaluation of teachers' methodology in relation to the teaching of writing skills in a private school in Argentina. This study will take the format of an evaluative case study in which the subjects participating in it, will be explored in depth in a particular incident (a writing project) in an attempt to provide a description, explanation and above all, judgement about existing assumptions, which were held before the implementation of this writing project. In this work, data gathered from different methods of classroom-based evaluation will be analysed and interpreted in order to determine how far the implementation of this writing project was effective. Finally, based on these findings, recommendations will be given to shed some light on the teaching and learning of writing skills.

**Key words:** evaluation, case study, writing skills, effectiveness.

## 1. Introduction

For a long time now, ESL teachers in Argentina have expressed unhappiness with the way they have been teaching writing skills. Many of them realise that writing is a problem for their students because, most of the times, when involved in writing tasks with their students, teachers perceive a feeling of frustration and dissatisfaction which reminds them of their own problems with writing when they were young. Indeed, the majority of them find it difficult to help their students, and sometimes, even though there has been thorough

preparation, the activities they try to build into the writing lesson do not always work true to type and, this, in turn, they argue, impinges on their students' achievements. In my context, far from focusing on learners as writers and the processes they go through when they write a text or helping them to see how language and meaning relate to the structure elements of genre, the teaching of writing skills is predominantly product-oriented, that is, a traditional text-based approach in which teachers, who mainly focus on form and on the end product and who treat errors as something that they have a professional obligation to correct and eradicate from their students' outcomes, present their students with authoritative texts for them to reproduce and imitate (Tribble, 1991).

The controversy generated by the adoption of either methodology to teaching writing (product/process), and their subsequent implications for language learning, seems to indicate that there is a potential problem between what is actually happening, on the one hand, and what we would like to happen, on the other. Mismatches or incongruities of this type call for decisions about change that will eventually and hopefully eliminate or reduce the problem posed and provide opportunities for teachers and students alike to achieve their own goals and assess their accomplishments so that they can make decisions that will advance their second language teaching and learning (Rea-Dickins and Germaine, 1992).

The purpose of this paper is to report an evaluation of the teachers' methodology in relation to the teaching of writing skills at a private school in Argentina. To do this, I designed a small-scale research involving the in-depth study of a series of linked cases related to the teaching of writing skills over a defined period of time following the format and orientation of an evaluative case study (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). In this study, I set out to critically analyse the effectiveness of a project on teaching writing skills by focusing mainly on one particular teacher, her students and their perceptions with regard to this specific teaching/learning experience. Here the study is described and the data are analysed and interpreted: these include

sources gathered from different methods of classroom-based evaluation and, finally, I provide recommendations based on the findings obtained in an attempt to ensure more effective teaching and better learning.

## **2. Defining the Problem : A Mismatch**

Since 1999, I have been working at CADS, a private school, as coordinator of the English language department. At this school, students receive four hours of instruction of English a week and, as one of the institutional requirements, learners have to take and pass three term tests which are administered after each academic quarter in order to win promotion to subsequent courses. By the end of May, 2001 and after the first term test had been administered and rated, I held an evaluation meeting with the teachers where we analysed the test results with relation to the students' achievements and the instructional objectives of the courses set prior to the start of instruction with regard to writing skills. In fact, during that meeting, we realised that the students' present level of written language proficiency and the instructional objectives of the courses for that term were not fully compatible. While the course objectives for their courses aimed at enabling students to become trained competent writers in English, learners' written outcomes, however, revealed that students had failed not only to organise their ideas but also to use specific linguistic forms necessary to produce a coherent and cohesive written piece. As in this case, when there is a discrepancy between instructional objectives and learning outcomes, informed decisions are called for that will eradicate or reduce potential problems, and improve chances of attaining instructional objectives. Evaluation at these times allows teachers to fine-tune instructional objectives and students' outcomes so that the possibilities for successful learning are enhanced (Genesee and Upshur, 1996).

Innovation in educational settings is more likely to be successful when perceived as necessary by those in the school, rather than outsiders. It may seem technically simple yet it is socially complex due

to the difficulty of planning and organising a multidimensional process involving many people, all with diverse perceptions and beliefs (Everad and Morris, 1996). For a long time, a typical writing lesson at CADS consisted of thirty or forty minutes each, where teachers gave students a composition title to write about, discussed some points that could be included and, then, students were given the rest of the time to write on their own, a stereotypical product approach (Tsui, 1996). That day at the meeting, it was decided that a need for change in the current methodology for teaching writing was crucial if we meant to produce the cherished match between instructional objectives and learning outcomes. Although some teachers, probably carried away by their old perceptions and beliefs, at first objected to effecting the desired change, at subsequent information meetings and workshops where teachers were told about different views for teaching writing, it was finally decided to replace the old traditional product-based approach to writing for a process/genre-orientation methodology which we thought would fit our context better and, thus, be more beneficial for teachers and students alike.

### **3. A Modified Version to Teaching Writing**

In this section of the paper, I will briefly describe a modified version to teaching writing that combines the process and genre approaches, that is, knowledge about the genre product with the opportunity to plan, draft, revise, and edit work, in order to identify the criteria against which the evaluation of the teachers' methodology for teaching writing skills was carried out (Kay and Dudley-Evans, 1998).

Process and genre approaches to teaching writing contain some elements, which are sometimes regarded as contradictory. In particular, the genre-based approach enables students to make sense of the world around them and participate in it, and to enter a particular discourse community. It also allows students to be more aware of writing as a tool that can be used and manipulated, thus, promoting flexible thinking and informed creativity since "learners need to learn the rules before

they can transcend them” (Kay and Dudley-Evans, 1998, p.310). The genre approach involves the use of model texts or schematic structures on which students are expected to base their works. Modelling, then, entails analysis of texts in terms of purpose, message, structure and grammar and this requires researching and “scaffolding” to accommodate the generic structure of the text that students will produce later (Gee, 1997, p.38). That is, students are presented with an explicit framework or with a scaffold for their writing where the focus is on the generic structure, its grammar and the organisation of the content knowledge into a structure. Moreover, learners under this approach, learn grammar through writing, in that they learn the grammar of writing through understanding how their own writing functions (Gee, 1997). The aim of teaching grammar through writing is not to teach grammar *per se* but as a language resource from which decisions can be made to create meanings. This “genre-based grammar” (Gee, 1997, p.37) operates at three basic levels: word (grammar of morphemes), sentence (clause grammar) and text (layout of texts, generic structure, thematic structure, paragraphing, cohesion, reference and conjunctions) levels (Gee, 1997).

On the other hand, one of the most original criticisms which process approach advocates disapprove of other teaching approaches to writing is the focus on models for imitation. The process approach, however, is associated with freedom, self-expression and creativity. In fact, process writing is not about a sequence of linear and distinct stages or activities through which writing is created, but rather it is a highly complex and a variable process whereby sub-processes are intertwined in brief episodes. Generating ideas, planning, drafting, re-reading and revising are “micro-activities” that take place at all phases of the composing process (Caudery, 1997, p.6). In other words, these micro-activities are recursive in that they occur many times over during the writing process. Besides, the process approach emphasises the importance of writing being truly owned by the student writers, in that they should be able to select the topic they want to write about, not one about which the teacher demands that they should write. Even if

the teacher does make certain demands with regard to the topic or mode of writing, “the student should still decide the precise nature of the text” (Caudery, 1997, p.12). On similar grounds, proponents of process writing sustain that this approach stresses the importance of audience and purpose, and aims to train students to recognise the relevance of these elements in constructing their texts (White and Arndt, 1991). With regard to grammar, process writing teaching, in early drafts, concentrates mainly on content, with concern about form being largely reserved for final drafts upholding the view that, non-expert writers tend to get bogged down in the detail of form at an early stage of their writing, thus, taking no notice of content (Silva, 1990). Although some later studies have suggested that second-language learners tend not to fall into this trap, the importance of not worrying too much about form at the early stages of the writing process is still normally stressed to student w

Even though both approaches are sometimes contradictory in some areas, it would be beneficial to look for ways in which they can complement each other rather than ways in which they are in opposition. One crucial level of complementarity would be the fact that the process approach focuses mainly on the generation of content, whereas the genre approach centres on the choice of form (Caudery, 1997). Another area in which both approaches are not in competition is audience and purpose in writing where, on the one hand, the genre approach focuses on finding an appropriate form for the text and, on the other, the process approach provides a means of deciding what content is necessary, how it should be sequenced, what needs further explanation and what the reader already knows.

Now in view of the potential problem posed in the preceding section, in which a call for change was necessary and crucial to produce a match between the school instructional objectives and learning outcomes, a combination of both the process and genre approaches could provide us with the principles and notions, which will re-appear throughout this paper as issues necessary to identify the criteria against which I will evaluate the teachers’ methodology in relation to the teaching of writing

skills. Since the school instructional objectives require that our students become trained competent users of the target language, able to operate and perform effectively and efficiently in academic discourse settings, it was felt that a modified version to teaching writing, one that conflates both these areas - form and meaning - could be of great value for our particular context.

#### **4. The Case Study**

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of this writing project, I will use the framework of an evaluative case study by centring around one particular teacher and her students and their perceptions regarding the teaching and learning of writing skills. In this study, I will analyse and reflect upon the data gathered from different methods of information collection in relation to the implementation of this writing project and, finally, make decisions about how to proceed in order to promote better teaching and learning experiences.

The case study approach has been a vital feature of qualitative research over the past century (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). Case studies evolve around the collection and presentation of detailed, relatively unstructured information from a range of sources about a particular individual, group, or institution, usually including the accounts of the subjects themselves. The main critique of qualitative case studies, however, focuses on their validity in terms of their subjectivity and lack of precise quantifiable measures that are the trademark of survey research and experimentation. In order to help increase the internal validity of this study, I have undertaken triangulation of the data sources by cross-referencing different perspectives obtained from different sources, that is, analysing data collected over a period of time, from more than one location, and from more than one person (Cohen and Marion, 1994).

In this study I will work with only one teacher and her students because I want to explore them in depth in a particular incident in an attempt to provide a description, explanation and above all, judgement

about existing assumptions, which were held before the start of data collection with regard to the teaching of writing skills.

#### **4.1. The Subjects**

Mirtha and her twenty seven students are the subjects I have chosen to do this case study. Mirtha is currently working at CADS in charge of 9th form (secondary level). Mirtha has been working at this school as a teacher of English for more than twenty years now. Although Mirtha is not a graduate teacher of English, her vast experience in the field and her willingness and commitment for continuous improvement makes of her a competent professional.

#### **4.2. Methods of Information Collection**

The methods for collection information used in this case study consist of the teachers and students' interviews, teachers documents, classroom observations, students' feedback sheets and portfolios.

### **5. Framework for Planning and Designing the Evaluation**

As was pointed out in earlier sections, after the evaluative meeting held at the end of May 2001, we realised that the assessment procedures employed until that time had consisted of giving students classroom tests of writing, making and grading them and, later, reporting their results to students, while instruction proceeded unchanged. It was evident that the results of assessment were not used to improve instruction; rather, they were used only as indicators of students' achievements; therefore, student learning became disconnected from the learning environment in which it occurred.

Classroom-based evaluation is part of a process of continuous monitoring and modifying instruction to improve language learning



which requires teachers to become agents of change in their classrooms, actively using the results of assessment to modify and enhance the learning environment they generate (Genesee and Upshur, 1996). So considering our current situation at school, our next move was to design and plan a framework for carrying out classroom-based evaluation following the next steps (Genesee and Upshur, 1996) (Appendix A)

First, we determined the kind of specific decisions we wanted to make as a result of evaluation, that is, we identified the purpose for carrying it out. Although it was agreed that we needed to bring about a match between instructional objectives and learning outcomes, the change would also involve equipping teachers with the necessary tools to be able to help their students write effectively.

The next step consisted of collecting information pertinent to the decisions already made. Teachers selected a writing task from their lesson plans and based on this, crafted a set of comprehensible materials containing a timetable of activities which students and teachers were expected to do by focusing on the methodology as presented in the process/genre approaches. I also carried out observations on a regular basis in teachers' classes where they were expected to apply the principles of the process/genre approaches as agreed on previous meetings. After the observations, I chose Mirtha, the teacher in charge of 9th form, with whom I held a semi-structured interview. For reasons of confidentiality, Mirtha is the name I have given her to protect her identity. Students in her class, worked in groups and recorded their written works in portfolios and, after they submitted their final drafts and the teacher responded to them with constructive feedback, learners were given a classroom writing test, where they were expected to transfer the skills and knowledge they had previously gained throughout the realisation of the writing project. Once the projects and tests were over, students were given a feedback sheet to complete individually where they put down their opinions regarding the implementation and impact of the writing project on their learning experiences. Also six students from Mirtha's 9th form, who

participated in this writing experience, were interviewed individually for three main reasons; firstly, to corroborate the reliability of the questionnaire against the results obtained in their feedback sheets, secondly, to enlarge and recapture significant information that might not have been contemplated in the questionnaire, and lastly, I needed to match up the teachers and her students' comments to see how much agreement and how much difference there was.

The next step was devoted to interpreting the information gathered in relation to the implementation of the writing project 2001.

## **6. Analysis of the Findings**

### **6.1. Class Observation Report**

The first impression I had when observing Mirtha's 9th form initial class, was that, at first, students found it difficult to work in groups, this might have been because they were more used to and, therefore, felt more comfortable with a teacher-fronted approach. However, as time went by, I could observe that students progressively began to work collaboratively and that led to a considerable increase in students' motivation and willingness to participate in class. Yet in subsequent classes, one of the drawbacks that Mirtha had to deal with as students worked in groups, was that most of the times, they turned to L1 (their mother tongue) to complete the tasks set. On a different occasion, another shortcoming took place when Mirtha, assuming that students would know how to generate ideas on their own, assigned them a task in which students had to brainstorm by themselves. Failure to accomplish the task revealed that students had never been explicitly taught creative strategies, invention or reasoning skills. However, after noticing this, Mirtha immediately stopped the activity and, as a whole class, she showed them with two or three examples how they could use brainstorming to generate their own ideas. Once students learned that technique, then, she proceeded to let them work on their own. While students were on tasks, Mirtha walked around the groups monitoring

students' work prompting or facilitating the knowledge that they needed in order to complete their activities. In her classes, Mirtha incorporated the explicit teaching about language focusing on grammar and how language functions as a resource for making meaning. She tried to show her students how grammar may enable them to make conscious choices in the way they could organise their texts, that is, the formal arrangement of texts, paragraphs, sentences and words (Gee, 1997). This was partly illustrated when she explicitly encouraged her students, after having worked with meaning, to re-read Dickens' biography (the text used as a model at that time,

## **6.2. Teacher's Materials**

In analysing her set of materials (Appendix B), I could see that Mirtha combined several specific aspects or areas pertaining to both the process and genre approaches. For example, she included the analysis and discussion of texts that represented the target genre that she later used as models for her students to organise their own written works. She also emphasised on the complexity and often extended process of composing a text by having students work in groups, engage in pre-writing activities such as generating ideas (brainstorming), anticipating topic, predicting and eliciting information through pictures and/or prompting questions, all this, to help student writers learn some explicit creative strategies before and during the process of creating their own texts. It seems that grammar played an important role in Mirtha's approach to teaching writing since most of the activities she proposed aimed at combining the teaching of explicit grammar items such as tenses and cohesive devices, with the structural elements of genre.

## **6.3. Interview with the Teacher**

All through the interview with Mirtha, we talked about before, during and after the implementation of this writing project. In reporting how

she conducted a writing lesson in the old days, Mirtha added:

We would start off with a brief discussion related to the topic they would then have to write about. After that, I gave them the topic, and I would tell them to write. I did not engage students into any kind of pre-writing tasks. As they began to write, students asked me all sorts of questions related to vocabulary, grammar, ideas, etc. After students finished writing, I would collect their papers, mark and grade them and then give them back to them. Corrections were done in red or green by crossing-out wrong words or illogical ideas, mostly focusing on grammatical mistakes and re-writing the appropriate form next to the students' mistakes. For years, I have been doing this same thing as part of my professional obligation regardless of the extent to which students' had truly internalised the target forms and neglecting their feelings of frustration and lack of confidence to write.

Mirtha's predominantly product-based methodology for teaching writing deprived her students of help, support and encouragement; indeed, the demand that was made of her learners in a writing task seemed to be enormous. However, Mirtha seemed to acknowledge the fact that although she shared those feelings of frustration, anxiety and dissatisfaction with her students, she did not know how to assist them in their learning process as they composed a written text.

In the second part of the interview, Mirtha referred to her perceptions during and after the writing project; she pointed out:

The concept of process/genre approaches to teaching writing changed my perception of what writing was all about. Understanding the process of writing helped us gain self-confidence and bring down the barriers of frustration and dissatisfaction. Students began working collaboratively to create their drafts and I could see that progressively, by learning to identify the different genres and purposes of texts the significant features -, students

were empowered with the strategies necessary to replicate these features in their own productions and this, in turn, allowed them to organise their ideas to produce a unified text and improve their grammar as they learnt to think and plan before writing.

After the interview, Mirtha began to wonder whether the students' as well as teachers' feelings of anxiety and unhappiness about teaching and learning writing skills had to do with the approach to writing. As she progressed through the writing project, she could witness how a genre-based approach enabled her students to be more aware of writing as a tool that can be used and manipulated and to discover how writers organise texts that serve their intended purpose. Alongside this, she also felt that the modified version to teaching writing was particularly suitable for her students since it gave them confidence, and that allowed them to work in a relaxed atmosphere. As many writing researchers point out, a supportive, low-anxiety and friendly environment, in which students feel at ease to take risks, is crucial to get over anxiety and fears. In fact, learners need the support of their peers as well as their teachers as they engage in the composing process of creating a text (Zamel, 1987; White and Arndt, 1991; Hedge, 2000).

#### **6.4. Students' Portfolios and Timed-essay Test Results**

In analysing the students' portfolios, which were the result of group work, against students' individual outcomes measured through timed-essay tests, the results seemed to indicate that many students seemed to have transferred some of the skills they might have acquired throughout the realisation of the project. That, in turn, it might be argued, could have helped them score higher grades if compared to previous writing tests students took before the implementation of the project. In order to pass the course, students are required to take and pass three written term tests, one in May, another in September, and the last one in November. These written tests are based on what was done in class and their format is consistent with the format of those

activities carried out during the course.

The chart below briefly illustrates the results students obtained in their term tests before they engaged in the writing project and after it. These results are shown as total averages in relation to the number of students taking the course.

Table 1. Mean scores before and after the writing project

Date of test	Number of students	Term Tests Mean score
May 2001 (Before writing project)	25	5.56
November 2001 (After writing project)	27	7.01

### 6.5. Interview with students and feedback sheets

Six students from Mirtha's 9th form were interviewed and their findings analysed against their comments on their feedback sheets. Both methods of collecting data provided different but very interesting information. In general terms, all the students liked the idea of the writing project for a variety of reasons. All said that it was fun working in groups except for one who would have liked to work individually. In reference to this, one student said:

·we liked working in groups because we had many ideas and it was fun because we can talk and laugh and at the same time learn a lot·

Most said that it was helpful sharing ideas and working out problems together. Indeed, all of them claimed that the writing project had helped them develop and improve different areas and aspects in their learning process. For instance, some of them pointed out that the writing project had made them become aware of the schematic structure and purpose of the texts of different genres, in particular their

significant features, and thus had empowered them with the skills necessary to reproduce these features in their outcomes. Along these same lines, one student mentioned that the project had helped him internalise past tenses. Another referred to an increase in vocabulary, but most of them said that the writing project had helped them clarify and organise their ideas when writing. The following are some of the testimonies drawn from the interviews with some of the students participating in this experience:

... every time I write now, I understand a bit more and when we finish we can write something complete and organised... ... with this system of writing we can go on improving with our grammar, and the organisation of ideas... (Students from CADS, 9th form)

## **7. Discussion and Recommendations**

Throughout this paper I have witnessed how a teacher of English shifted from considering the teaching and learning of writing as frustrating experiences to come up with solutions as she encountered them. Both her perceptions of writing and her teaching of it definitely changed as she took her students through a modified approach to writing that conflates both the principles of the process and genre approaches. This combination in methodology and practice allowed this teacher to bridge the gap between the instructional objectives she had set for the course she taught and her students' achievements, a goal that in the past, following a product-based orientation to teaching writing, she was unable to accomplish.

Looking back at the results obtained through this writing experience, it may be true to say that as long as teachers are well prepared, they should be able to teach successfully. As Piper (1989, p.20) says "the sensitive, well-informed, well-organised and enthusiastic teacher tends to get good results in a writing class whatever approach she uses" (in Caudery, 1997).

In fact, I should also mention that all the teachers who participated in

this project, including the subject I chose for this particular study, responded positively to effecting this desired change thus contributing to fulfil the aims set for this project. However, we all agreed that if we really mean to ensure a more efficient and effective teaching/learning environment, more in-service training would be needed aiming at equipping teachers with the tools and knowledge they need to successfully guide their students through their composing processes. Indeed, and in reference to the issue of continuing development, Gee (1997, p.39) suggests that what teachers need is “a training programme so that they can acquire the necessary skills to analyse and describe language, teach grammar and have sufficient linguistic knowledge to refer to relevant theories for answers when needed”.

In analysing the data gathered, it could be true to claim that, in this case where in-service teachers were trained during a limited length of time in order to effect a change in their pedagogical skills aiming at improving their teaching practices and their students' outcomes, the transfer of their knowledge and experiences to their classroom settings proved to be effective, at least, during the realisation of this particular project where they were expected to apply the new modified version to teaching writing skills. Now looking back at this, some debatable questions arise such as, for instance, what will happen once the project is over? That is, will these same teachers continue using the modified version to teaching writing skills in their classes even though they are not engaged in a writing project which aims specifically at doing that? At this stage of the study, it may seem that more research would be needed in order to be able to answer these questions.

## **8. Conclusion**

This paper has considered the evaluation of teachers' methodology with regard to the teaching of writing skills in a private school in Argentina. The format and orientation of this evaluation has been that of a case study revolving around the in-depth study of one teacher and her students in relation to the implementation of a writing project



experience.

The motivation for evaluation in this study has been to gain information to bring about a desired planned change. In this way, evaluation and innovation are closely related concepts in that, evaluation forms the basis for a subsequent change or modifications within the curriculum. This study involved information from many people over a period of time, but mainly from teachers, since they have a key role to play in the curriculum renewal and development process considering that they have foremost contributions to make in the evaluation of classrooms. As opposed to just passing an evaluative judgement on the end product of a teaching programme, formative evaluation, as in this case, is designed to provide information that may be used as the basis for future planning and action aiming at strengthening and improving the curriculum (Rea-Dickins and Germaine, 1992).

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Framework for planning and designing an evaluation: School Writing Project 2001

GOALS	ACTIVITY	TIME	INDICATOR	CONSTRAINTS
General Goal:				
Change in teachers methodology for teaching writing skills and analysis of its impact on learners outcomes	Plan, carry out and report an evaluation	May/Dec 2001	Indicators will include the framework, data and report; recommendations will be given	Adapt to change
STAGE ONE				
Targets for improvement	Identify areas for improvement and setting of immediate goals	May 2001	General meeting with teachers: students written tests analysed against desired outcomes. Adoption of a process/genre approach	Objection to the implementation of change
STAGE TWO				
Knowledge of component elements involved in the writing process.	Information seminars and workshops to develop knowledge Personalised meetings with teachers	June/Aug 2001	Teachers design a set of comprehensible materials	Most teachers feel more comfortable and safer with a product-orientation to teaching writing
STAGE THREE				
Implementation of the plan in practice	Teachers put in practice their plans. Class observations followed by feedback sessions	Aug/Oct 2001	Students portfolios Observation records and interview data	Getting students used to working in groups. Teachers fear of being observed.
STAGE FOUR				
Summative assessment	Administration of a timed-essay writing tests	Late Nov 2001	Written tests	Test reliability and validity
STAGE FIVE				
Evaluation of the development of the project	Evaluation meeting with teachers Design of a student feedback sheet	Dec 2001	Full set of data Student feedback sheets	Availability to attend meetings Reliability of questionnaire
STAGE SIX				
Report to school authorities	General meeting with school authorities	Dec 2001	Full set of data	

## Appendix B (Teachers materials)

### Writing Project 2001

WARM UP SESSION: In groups, students brainstorm ideas by looking at a picture related to Dickens.

QUESTIONS: In groups, students read the questions and try to answer them without looking at the text.

- a. How old was Dickens when he died?
- b. How many brothers and sisters did he have?
- c. Was he good at school?
- d. Why did he leave school when he was eleven?
- e. Who was in prison?
- f. What did Charles do in his first job?
- g. What was his next job?
- h. Was he happy at home?
- i. When did he stop writing?

### READ THE TEXT AND CONFIRM YOUR EXPECTATIONS

(Adapted from Liz & Soars 1993)

"Charles Dickens is one of the greatest novelists in the English language. He wrote about the real world of Victorian England and many of his characters were not rich, middle-class ladies and gentlemen, but poor and hungry people. Although he was a famous writer he did not have a very happy life.

His family lived in London. His father was a clerk in an office. It was a good job, but he always spent more money than he earned and he was often in debt. There were eight children in the family, so life was hard. Charles went to school and his teachers thought he was very clever. But suddenly, when he was only eleven, his father went to prison for his debts together with his family. Nevertheless, Charles didn't go to prison. He went to work in a factory, where he washed bottles. He worked ten hours a day and earned six shillings (30p) a week. Every night, after work, he walked four miles back to his room. Charles hated it and never forgot the experience. He used it in many novels, especially *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist*.

When he was sixteen, he started work for a newspaper. He visited law courts and The Houses of Parliament. Soon he was one of the Morning Chronicle's best journalists. In addition, he wrote short stories for magazines. These were funny

descriptions of people that he met. Dickens characters were full of colour and life. Good people were very; very good and bad people were very horrible. His books became popular in many countries and he spent a lot of time abroad, in America, Italy, and Switzerland. Dickens had ten children, however, he didn't have a happy family life. He was successful in his work but not at home, and his wife left him. He never stopped writing and travelling, and he died very suddenly in 1870."

**HIGHLIGHT TENSES:**

- a. Identify and underline the verbs throughout this text and state their tense form.

*e.g.                    lived..... Past simple (live)*  
*was ..... Past tense (to be)*

- b. Which tense form is most recurrently used throughout this text?  
 .....
- c. Why do you think this is so? ....

**TEXT ORGANISATION**

- a. How many paragraphs can you identify in this text?
- b. What kind of information can you find in each paragraph?
- c. Complete this box :

Paragraph #	Information in each paragraph

**CONNECTORS**

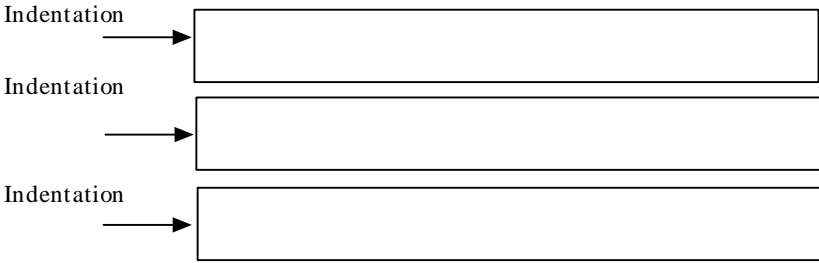
- a. Read the text to identify connectors or linking words.
- b. Transfer them onto this box and state their purpose, for example:  
*addition, contrast, concession, consequence, sequence, etc.*

CONNECTOR	PURPOSE
e.g.: howevercontrast	contrast

**BRAINSTORMING:** In groups students choose one famous character

and generate ideas related to this person. Then, groups report their findings to the whole class.

**DRAFTING:** students organise their ideas following the schematic structure of biographies as presented earlier. Students should consider indentation as well.



**DRAFTING AND FEEDBACK:** students in groups write their first draft and submit it to their teacher to make comments and suggestions for improvement

**Pedro Luchini**

Language Department  
Mar del Plata Community College (MDPCC)  
University of Mar del Plata  
(7600) Mar del Plata, Argentina  
Phone: 54-223-479-9611  
Email: [luchini@copetel.com.ar](mailto:luchini@copetel.com.ar)

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