

Second Edition

Reading and Writing Module 1

Writing Journals and Book Reviews

Teacher's Guide



The Curriculum Project

Extensive Reading and Writing

The aim of this module is to encourage learners to write weekly journals (diaries) and read and review books. This way, you can get learners to do regular free writing and extensive reading.

You can organise a system where learners write journal entries and review books each week. You collect them, read them, comment and give them back. You will find that if learners get into the habit of reading and writing each week, their English comprehension and use will improve over time.

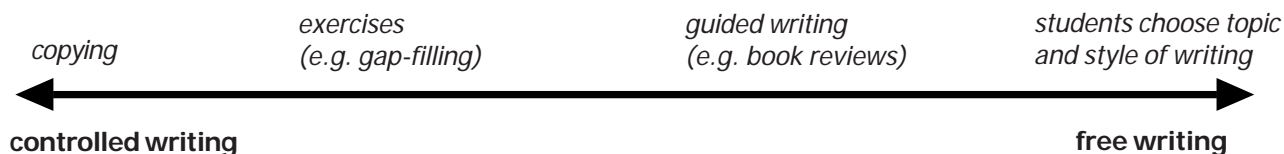
Writing Journals

What is *extensive writing*?

Extensive writing is doing a large amount of *free writing* on a range of topics and in a range of styles. *Free writing* is different from *controlled writing*. With *controlled writing*, learners have to try to be correct, and focus on not making mistakes. The teacher provides the grammar structures and topics that the learner must use. Many classroom writing activities are controlled writing.

In *free writing* learners focus less on accuracy (correctness) and more on fluency (communicating information and ideas without worrying about accuracy). It is important not to correct the learners too much in free writing.

Learners need practice in both free and controlled writing techniques.



What is *journal writing*?

Journal writing is one way learners can get free writing practice on a range of topics. Learners have an exercise book - not the same book they use for classwork - and every week, they write a little about a topic of their choice. Most learners write about things they did, thought or felt that week. Other learners write their opinions of an event or situation, or tell a story from their past.

Some teachers like their learners to write for a few minutes in each class, while other teachers prefer to make journal writing part of learners' homework, to do in their own time.

The teacher collects the class journals once a week, reads the week's entry, and writes a comment. Many teachers believe you should never correct journals for grammar and spelling, but some teachers prefer to correct a little. More information on this topic is on pages 21-22.

Advantages of journal writing:

1. Learners can write by themselves, outside the classroom.
2. Learners practise using the language they know in a natural context.
3. Learners get opportunities to think about what they are doing and learning.
4. Learners get to write about their lives - they can use it as an opportunity to tell you things about themselves.
5. Learners can express their ideas, opinions and feelings.

Writing Book Reviews

The aim of this section is to encourage learners to read extensively, for pleasure. It will work best if you have a library, with books in it that are interesting for the learners.

You can organise a system where learners read a book - or part of a book - every week, and then write a short review of the the book. If you like, you can make a chart where you record learners' reading progress throughout the year.

What are *extensive* and *intensive* reading?

Extensive reading is reading a large amount with the aim of getting an overall understanding of the material. Learners don't need to understand the exact meaning of every word or sentence. It is more important that they get the *gist* (main points) of the text. Extensive reading should not involve detailed exercises. Extensive reading works best if the texts are enjoyable and interesting to the learner, and easy to understand.

Intensive reading is reading to get detailed information. Most classroom reading exercises are intensive reading. If learners have to answer comprehension questions, summarise a paragraph, or do vocabulary or grammar exercises with a text, they must read it carefully and accurately. Most intensive reading texts are short: a paragraph, article or short story.

A balanced English course has both *extensive* and *intensive* reading.

Advantages of extensive reading:

- 1. Learners can do it by themselves, outside the classroom. It may be the only way learners can access English after the class is finished, or after they graduate from school.*
- 2. Learners get exposure to language being used naturally.*
- 3. Learners get exposure to new information and ideas.*
- 4. It can be fun.*
- 5. It involves little or no extra work for the teacher!*

How can I encourage learners to read extensively?

Extensive reading is supposed to be enjoyable. Therefore, there must be reading materials that are interesting, and easy enough for learners to understand. At lower levels - elementary and pre-intermediate - the main options are graded readers. If you have a library, try to ensure it keeps level-appropriate readers, and make sure learners know where they can find them!

What is Extensive Reading and Writing?

The aim of this section is to introduce learners to the concepts of extensive reading and writing, and ensure they understand why they are important. Use learners' first language as much as you like; the important thing is that they understand the ideas, not the English words.

- a. Give each learner, or each pair, a dictionary if you can. If you do not have dictionaries, write the following definition (taken from the Cambridge Learner's Dictionary) on the board. Translate it into learners' first language if necessary, and check they understand it.

extensive *adj* large in amount or size • *an extensive art collection* • *the hurricane caused extensive damage*

- b. Learners use the definition to try to figure out what 'extensive' means in the context of reading and writing. If you like, put them in pairs or groups to discuss ideas. Then get some learners to tell the class their ideas. Do other learners agree?

Write the following definitions on the board:

Extensive reading *is reading a wide range of texts without worrying about details.*

Extensive writing *is writing a lot without worrying about accuracy.*

Translate them if necessary, and have the learners copy them into their books.

- c. Learners discuss this in pairs or groups for a few minutes. Then elicit ideas from them and write them in a table on the board. If they miss any, add them to the table. The following table shows the main benefits of extensive reading and writing, but there may be others too.

extensive reading	extensive writing
* You can see words and structures being used naturally, which helps you to use them properly	* You can practise using naturally lots of vocabulary and grammar that you have learnt
* You can learn lots of new words and structures	* You can express your ideas and opinions
* You can read about things that interest you	* You can write about things that interest you
* You can find out lots of new information	* Your handwriting improves
* Your reading speed improves	* Your writing/typing speed improves
* You can do it outside class, in many places (in bed, on the bus, in the library...)	* You can do it outside class, in many places

1. What is a journal?

- a. Ask if learners know what a journal/diary is.

Answer:

A book in which you write regularly about what has happened to you, and/or your personal thoughts and feelings.

Ask them the questions about their journals, if they have them.

(Check they understand that 'keep a journal' in this context means 'regularly write in a journal'. If you have a journal but never touch it, you do not keep a journal!)

If not many learners have ever kept a journal, ask a few hypothetical (imaginary) questions such as: *Why don't you keep a journal? Would you like to keep a journal? If you kept a journal, what language would you use? What would you write about?, etc.*

- b. Learners look at the questions and decide what answers they would give. Then they each interview three other learners, and complete the chart. (Of course, if the answer to the first question is 'No, I haven't', there is no need to ask the second question.) They should try to use the correct modal verb: *do* if the interviewee writes a journal now (present); *did* if they wrote one before but don't now (past); and *would* if they have never written one (imaginary situation). But it doesn't matter if they make some mistakes. Get a few learners to tell the class about their findings, e.g.

Aung Mon has never kept a journal, but if he kept a journal he would write in Burmese. He would write every day about...

2. Looking at journal entries

- a. Learners read the journal entry.
In pairs or groups, they answer the questions.

Possible answers:

- 1) *English class, feelings about learning and speaking, the teacher, pronunciation.*
- 2) *Yes or No, because...*
- 3) *Probably a nurse, doctor, medic or other worker at a hospital or clinic. We know he/she writes quite good English, wants to improve his/her English, is quite shy about speaking English, and thinks his/her pronunciation is very bad.*
- 4) *There are a lot of grammar and spelling mistakes.
They are not very important because the meaning is very clear and easy to understand.*

- b. In groups, learners read the journal entries and complete the chart.

Possible answers:

	What is it about?	What do you know about the writer?
1	<i>work, duties, health programme</i>	<i>works in a health programme</i>
	<i>studying</i>	<i>is studying</i>
	<i>needs a teacher</i>	<i>wants to improve her/his English</i>
2	<i>grandmother was sick</i>	<i>cares about her/his grandmother and is worried about her health</i>
	<i>grandmother went to hospital</i>	
	<i>grandmother got better</i>	
3	<i>Shwe Oo's youth and education</i>	<i>he's 46, feels 30</i>
	<i>his work and interests</i>	<i>born in Basein</i>
	<i>his plans for the future</i>	<i>moved from place to place</i>
		<i>good at maths and science</i>
		<i>wanted to work for Karen people in Karen State</i>
		<i>came to Karen State in 1975</i>
		<i>didn't practise English much - only medical terms</i>
	<i>interested in disease education</i>	
4	<i>toddy trees and their uses</i>	<i>lived with grandparents</i>
	<i>childhood memories</i>	<i>had many toddy trees</i>
5	<i>studying about Cambodian history and problems people faced</i>	<i>student interested in Cambodia</i>

- c. In groups, learners discuss which journal entries are interesting or not interesting. They must think of reasons.

Get one member of each group to report back to the class.

Example answers:

We think Saw Shwe Oo's entry is interesting because he moved so many times when he was young, then he moved again as an adult to help his people.

5 is interesting because the writer is very good at describing his environment and we get lots of new information about toddy trees

- d.** Learners read journal entries 6 and 7.
In groups, learners discuss which journal entries are interesting or not interesting.
Try to elicit these points:
- *they only talk about facts*
 - *they don't have any opinions or feelings*
 - *they don't give any details*
- Some learners might like entry 6, as it is tidy and well organised. You can make the point that people are not interested in reading this style of writing every week!

- e.** Learners look at these parts of journal entries 5 and 7.
Discuss how they are similar, and how they are different.

Possible answers:

Similar: both about what they did in class

*Different: 5 gives opinions and details about what s/he learned
7 only lists what they studied*

Make the point that 5 sounds like someone who is really interested in what they study in class. Probably this person spends a lot of time thinking about what the teacher and the learners discuss in class.

3. Writing a journal entry

- a. Elicit a class list of journal topics.
(You can write about anything in a journal, so the list could get very big - stop when the board is full.)
- b. **Fast Writing**
The objective of this activity is to get learners writing as much as they can, as quickly as they can. They should not worry about grammar or spelling for this activity!
- 1) Learners spend exactly five minutes writing as much as they can about the topic:
What do you like to do in your free time?
 - 2) Stop them after exactly five minutes. Learners count their words. Who wrote the most?
 - 3) Learners exchange their writing, and read their partner's writing.
They look at the mistakes, and see whether the mistakes make it difficult to understand.
Ask a few learners to summarise what their partner wrote, e.g.
Mi Mi likes dancing, because she likes the exercise. She also likes reading.
They should NOT read their partner's writing out loud!
- c. 1) Learners spend exactly three minutes writing as much as they can about the topic:
What's your favourite place?
- 2) Stop them after exactly three minutes. Learners count their words. Who wrote the most?
- d. 1) Learners spend exactly two minutes writing as much as they can about the topic:
What problems do you have at the moment?
- 2) Stop them after exactly two minutes. Learners count their words. Who wrote the most?
- e. 1) Learners spend exactly one minute writing as much as they can about the topic:
What did you learn in your last English class?
- 2) Stop them after exactly one minute. Learners count their words. Who wrote the most?
- f. Learners read each statement. Clarify anything they don't understand.
In groups, learners discuss each statement. Do they agree with them?
Get one member of each group to report back to the class.

g. Who and What?

In this activity, learners write journal entries and put them on the wall. The class then walks around reading the journal entries, and indentifying

- *who wrote it*
- *what the topic is*

What did you do last Saturday?

1. On page 23 of the Teacher’s Guide, there is a worksheet with journal topics on it.

Copy and cut these up, and give one topic to each student. Give each learner a number, and a piece of scrap paper. Learners write about the topic for ten minutes, and write their number on the paper.

They should not write their name or the topic on the paper!

After ten minutes, collect all the entries, and put them on the classroom wall.

14
I studied most of the morning. I spent 3 hours doing my science homework. It was mostly about different kinds of plants. Then I read a book for half an hour. It was interesting. I lay in my hammock and read the newspaper.

2. Learners work in groups of two to five, depending on the size of the class.

Each group has to guess who wrote each entry, and what the topic is.

Give them 10 minutes, and see how many they guess correctly.

14 - Mu Mu - My weekend
3 - Sai Sai - My favourite place
19 - Ma Gyi - dreams
12 - ? - my parents
7 - Ko Naing - ?

h. In groups, learners discuss these questions.

After they have discussed them, write the ideas on the wall.

Do most groups agree, or do they have different ideas?

Then explain your ideas to learners.

- *How often do you want them to write in their journals?*
- *How much do you want them to write?*
- *Do you want them to decide their own topics?*

Possibilities for Journal Writing

1. How often should learners write journals?

Many teachers like their learners to write them once a week for homework.

Other teachers like their learners to write for five or ten minutes at the beginning or end of each class.

If you have time, we recommend that learners hand in their journals once a week, and you can read them and write comments, but this depends how much time you have for reading and commenting. Some teachers might prefer to do this less frequently.

2. How much should learners write in each journal entry?

This depends on the level of learners. Learners with very little English are probably not able to write more than a few sentences at first. However, you want to encourage learners to push themselves - if high level learners are only writing a couple of sentences, they should be encouraged to write more.

3. What should learners write about? Should I give them a topic?

There are many advantages of giving the learners topics to write about. This encourages them to be more thoughtful, and not repeat the same information each week.

However, sometimes learners want to write about topics of their choice, and find this to be more meaningful. If you choose to allow learners to do this, make sure they don’t just list their daily routines!

On pages 21/22 there is a discussion about whether to correct or not correct learners’ journals.

e. Questionnaire

Learners copy the questionnaire.

They write the answers to the questions - clarify anything they don't understand.

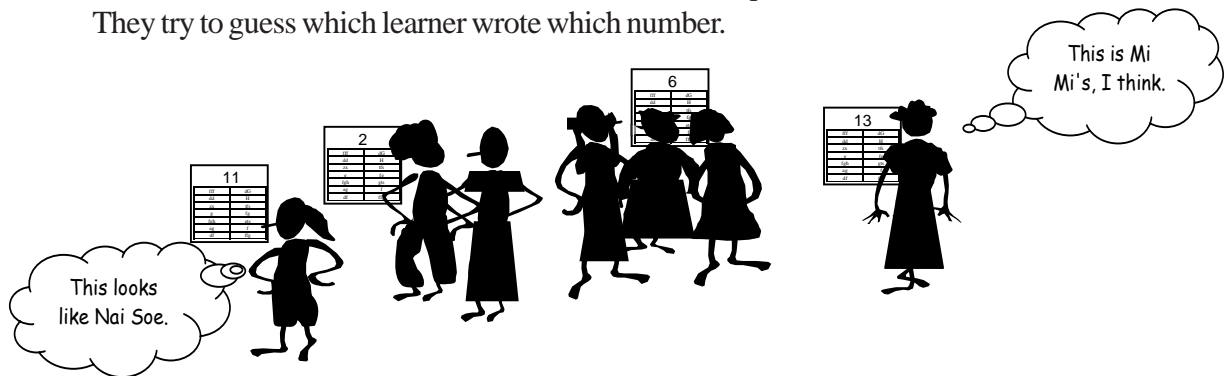
Give each learner a number.

They write the number on the questionnaire - NOT their names!

Stick learners' questionnaires on the wall.

Learners walk around the room and read each other's questionnaires.

They try to guess which learner wrote which number.



f. Why do you read?

This exercise will be much easier if learners do it in their own language.

Learners work in groups of four or five.

Each group writes a list of reasons people read.

Groups read out their lists - write each reason on the board.

Some possible reasons:

- to get information
- to find out about a topic
- for school
- for fun
- to know about an event
- to know what is happening in the world
- to pass an exam
- to relax

g. Interview

1. Give students some time to think of questions.
Learners ask you the questions.
Answer the questions; try to give as much information as you can.
Encourage learners to think of some more questions about reading.
Write these questions on the board.

2. In pairs, learners ask each other the questions.

5. Choosing a Book

a. Types of book

1. Learners work in groups of four or five.
Each group writes a list of things they can read.
Groups read out their lists - write each idea on the board.
Which group has the biggest list?

2. Learners classify these into *fiction* and *non-fiction*.

Some types of book (there are others):

fiction	non-fiction
love story/romance	biography/autobiography
action/adventure story	textbook
horror/ghost story	dictionary
poetry	encyclopaedia
science fiction	atlas
historical novel	travel story
war story	etc...
spy/detective story/mystery	
fairy tale/fantasy	
comedy	
etc...	

b. What do you like reading?

Learners rank these types of books in order of interest.
They write their rankings on the chart.
Draw the chart on the board, and get two or three learners to tell the class their rankings, and write them on the board.

c. Match the books

1. Learners identify the titles of the books on pages 12-13.

Answers:

Mr Bean, Nelson Mandela, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Gladiator, Skyjack, Mike's Lucky Day, Manchester United, Revolutionary Poet, Kidnapped, K's First Case, Lifelines, Crow Girl, The Hat Trick, Coma, Prozen Pizza, The University Murders, The Adventures of King Arthur.

2. Learners classify the books into types, from their list above. If this is too difficult, write the types of book from the list below on the board (not in order!), and they have to match them with the titles.

Possible answers:

Mr Bean - <i>comedy</i>	Nelson Mandela - <i>biography</i>
The Adventures of Tom Sawyer - <i>adventure or historical</i>	
Gladiator - <i>action/adventure or historical</i>	Skyjack - <i>action/adventure</i>
Mike's Lucky Day - <i>romance</i>	
Manchester United - <i>general non-fiction/sport</i>	
Revolutionary Poet - <i>biography</i>	Kidnapped - <i>action/adventure</i>
K's First Case - <i>detective story/mystery</i>	Lifelines - <i>horror</i>
Crow Girl - <i>fantasy/fairy tale</i>	
The Hat Trick - <i>comedy</i>	Coma - <i>action/adventure or romance</i>
Frozen Pizza - <i>comedy</i>	
The University Murders - <i>detective story/mystery</i>	
The Adventures of King Arthur - <i>fantasy/fairy tale or historical</i>	

3. Look at the covers and the descriptions.

Clarify anything learners don't understand.

In groups, learners match the descriptions with five of the books.

Answers:

1. *Skyjack*
2. *Mike's Lucky Day*
3. *Revolutionary Poet*
4. *K's first Case*
5. *Manchester United*

4. Learners look at the seventeen books, and decide which they would like to read.

They tell their group which books they are interested in, and why.

Ask a few learners to explain their choices to the class.

Extra Idea

Get some books from the library. Learners decide what category these books are in.

OR:

Tell learners to find one example of a mystery, one biography, one horror, etc.

OR:

Tell one student to find a comedy, another to find an adventure story, a third to find a mystery, etc.

6. Reading a Book

The aim of the section is to encourage learners to read faster.

Many learners think that you have to understand exactly every word of a book. This is not useful. With *extensive reading*, the important thing is to understand the main ideas. Slow readers often find reading very boring. If learners pause to look at dictionaries a lot, or spend a long time on each word or sentence, they aren't going to enjoy the story.

Part of this section is about guessing words from context. This is a very useful skill - if learners are practised at this, they will be able to read faster.

The rest of the section is an exercise to help learners realise that with easy texts, fast reading gives the same understanding as slow reading.

a. How do you read?

Learners look at the texts, and identify the one that needs attention to detail.

Explain that the first text doesn't need a lot of attention - you can easily get the main ideas (enquiries about Mu Mu's family, information about a new sister).

With the second text, there is a lot of important information that you need to know exactly.

Discuss *reading for gist* and *reading for detail*.

b. Guessing from context

1. Give learners 40 seconds to read the text.

Ask them how much they understand. 20%? 50%? 80%? 100%?

Elicit (ask the learners) the main idea of this story:

The narrator (a child) is afraid of chickens. One chicken attacked the child, so he or she wants her grandfather to kill it soon.

2. In groups, learners decide what the 'words' mean (there is more than one possibility for some of them).

Possible answers: hytgzp - house ckwalse - brother, sister or cousin
kowsge - big, bed, main (any adjective that can describe a room)
fjovip - breakfast, school qidmfpt - collect, pick up, get
gyamish - large, sharp (any adjective that can describe a beak)
puxpexw - shouts, clucks, screams msssmpt - attack, hurt, bite, scratch
uopppo - tree, ladder niniborz - kill

(None of these words are real - don't look for them in a dictionary!)

It should be easy for learners to guess some possible meanings

c. Is each word important?

Discuss whether it is important to understand the exact meanings of these words.

Possible answer: *No, because it is easy to understand the main points of the text. The general meaning is all you need to be able to follow the story.*

d. Reading fast

1. Give learners exactly 40 seconds to read the text.
2. Learners cover the text so they can't see it, and answer the questions.

Answers:

1. *No, he doesn't*
2. *No, he doesn't*
3. *He wants to be a gardener*
4. *Grammar exercises*
5. *No, he wasn't*

e. Reading slowly

1. Give learners exactly 3 minutes to read the text.
2. Learners cover the text so they can't see it, and answer the questions.

Answers:

1. *He was sleeping*
2. *No, she wasn't*
3. *No, he didn't*
4. *No, he isn't*
5. *Because the teacher said everyone didn't have pencils.*

f. Which was easier?

Discuss the two exercises - slow and fast reading.
How many questions did learners get right for each exercise?
Was the fast reading easy or difficult?

7. Looking at Book Reviews

a. Useful words and phrases

Using their dictionaries if necessary, learners match the words and definitions.

Answers:

title - *the name of the book*

author - *the writer of the book*

main characters - *the main people in the story*

setting - *where and when the story happens*

plot - *what happens in the story*

reader's opinion - *what you think about the book*

message/meaning of the book - *the main point of the book*

b. Identify the parts

Have any learners read 'The Wells of Pandi Warra'?

Look at the book review.

In pairs, learners identify the *title, author, main character, setting, plot, reader's opinion* and *message/meaning of the book*.

Answers:

title - *The Wells of Pandi Warra*

author(s) - *John Milne and Stephen Andrews*

main characters - *Motta*

setting - *a small village in the middle of the African desert*

plot - *When refugees arrive in the village, Motta helps them. But unfortunately, there are problems with the village water supply. The book tells the story of how Motta solves these problems.*

reader's opinion - *liked the book because it was exciting*

message/meaning of the book - *People must try to understand each other, and learn about other people's situations. That way everyone can work together to solve problems.*

Read the information in the box. Clarify anything the learners don't understand.

d. 'My Life Story'

Get learners to imagine their autobiography.

They decide who is the *author*, *main character*, *setting*, and *plot* of their autobiography, and write it in the chart.

Answers:

author	main characters	setting	plot
(learner's name)	(the learner, and important people in her/his life)	(when the learner was born, until now; all the places the learner has lived)	(all the important events in the learner's life)

Elicit suggestions for the message/meaning of learners' life stories, e.g.

I had a difficult childhood, but I studied really hard and now I'm at a good school. This shows that hard work and education can improve your life.

e. Texts around the room

There are four book reviews on pages 24-27 of the Teacher's Guide.

Copy them, and put them up on the walls of the classroom.

Learners work in groups of two to five to complete the chart.

Which group completes it fastest, with the most correct answers?

Answers:

title	author	main characters	setting	plot	meaning/message	opinion
<i>Nelson Mandela</i>	<i>Colleen Degnan-Veness</i>	<i>Nelson Mandela</i>	<i>South Africa</i>	<i>The life of Nelson Mandela - his childhood, education and fight against apartheid</i>	<i>If you love your people you can change a situation</i>	<i>good book; easy to understand</i>
<i>Life Lines</i>	<i>Peter Viney</i>	<i>Rachel, Mervyn Astra</i>	<i>a town called Chatford</i>	<i>Rachel gets information that people in Chatford are going to die. She goes there to check this information.</i>	<i>Be careful, or bad things can happen</i>	<i>didn't like it; frightening</i>
<i>K's First Case</i>	<i>L.G. Alexander</i>	<i>Katrina Kirby, Sir Michael Gray, his wife, and others</i>	<i>doesn't say</i>	<i>Someone killed Sir Michael Gray. Katrina Kirby finds the killer.</i>	<i>You need to ask clever questions and think hard</i>	<i>liked the pictures; easy to understand; many new words</i>
<i>Island of Blue Dolphins</i>	<i>Scott O'Dell</i>	<i>Karana</i>	<i>an island</i>	<i>Karana is left alone on an island for 18 years. She learns to survive.</i>	<i>Don't give up hope and learn new things.</i>	<i>Liked Karana, as she is intelligent and interesting</i>

f. A book review by a learner

In groups, learners read and discuss this book review. They should not try to understand every word, just the main ideas.

Do they think it is a good review?

Discuss this with the class.

Elicit or explain these points:

- *this review has all the necessary information, except the title of the book, and the writer's opinion of the book.*
- *it has lots of useful information about the main character*
- *it clearly explains the message of the book.*
- *it has many small spelling, grammar and vocabulary mistakes, but they don't matter much as it is clear and easy to understand.*

8. Writing a Book Review

a. Short story review

1. Learners quickly read this story.

2. In pairs, learners write the information about this story.

Example answers:

Title: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

Author: *Mark Twain*

Main characters: *Tom and Joe (perhaps Aunt Polly)*

Setting: *A Saturday in summer, outdoors*

Plot: *Tom has to paint the fence on Saturday but he doesn't want to. His friends laugh at him. But he makes them believe that painting the fence is fun. So they do all the work for him and also give him many exciting things. After that they all go and play.*

Your opinion: *I liked/didn't like the story because...*

Message/meaning of the story: *If you use your brain, you can succeed*

3. For homework or in class, learners write reviews of this story.

When you collect the reviews, give them out for learners to mark each other's work.

You can decide whether to mark them yourself as well.

Don't correct for grammar and spelling unless you can't understand the meaning.

b. Step by step

In groups, learners decide on the steps you need to write a book review.

Elicit groups' ideas, and write them on the board.

Possible answers:

1. *Choose a book*

2. *Read the book*

3. *Identify important information: title, author, main characters, setting, plot, and the message/meaning of the book*

4. *Decide on your opinion of the book*

5. *Write a review*

c. Write a book review

Learners choose books, and write reviews of them.

If you are making this a regular part of the programme, get them to record their reading on a chart on the wall, e.g.

Name	June 16	June 23	June 30
Naw Paw	<i>The Locked Room</i>	<i>Rainforests</i>	<i>Amazon Rally</i>
Ko Tin	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	<i>Walkabout</i>	<i>Walkabout</i>
Mi Mi	<i>Wyatt's Hurricane</i>	<i>Love Story</i>	<i>The Promise</i>
Sai Min	<i>The Wells of Pandi Warra</i>	<i>Oliver Twist</i>	<i>Nelson Mandela</i>

Should you correct writing in learners' journals?

Many teachers think you should never correct learners' journals. This is because you want learners to focus on communicating as many ideas as possible, and not worrying about spelling and grammar. If learners are concerned with spelling and grammar, they won't be confident to write as many ideas. Also, it will take the teacher a long time to correct all learners' journals every week. However many teachers prefer correcting, and many learners like to be corrected.

Here is a table summarising the advantages and disadvantages of correcting journals.

advantages	disadvantages
<i>* Learners can see when they make mistakes, so they may become more accurate</i> <i>* Many learners like their writing to be corrected</i>	<i>* It takes a long time to mark them</i> <i>* Learners may worry too much about accuracy so they don't try new language or ideas</i> <i>* Learners may lose confidence if they see they have made lots of mistakes</i>

Some teachers decide to only correct very important mistakes - mistakes where you can't understand what the learner is writing about.

How can a teacher respond to learners' journals?

Write a comment at the end of each learner's journal, responding personally to the learner.

Some examples:

- I hope your grandmother gets better soon!
- My home village was very near that place. I agree, it is beautiful there. Did you ever climb the big tree by the river?
- I am afraid of dogs too. My brother was bitten by a dog when he was 3.
- Don't worry about your pronunciation! If you practice, it will get better.
- Your aunt sounds like a very nice person. You are lucky.
- Good luck with the football game next week!
- Be careful, your girlfriend might get angry with you if you do that!
- You sound very busy! Don't work too hard, you need to relax also.

Reflections on Journal Writing

This is the experience of Alice, a teacher from Singapore.

I first started journal writing during class, but this did not work out very well. The students were under pressure to write anything at all and I got a lot of "I got up at 5am and carried water and chopped wood and fed the pig", etc.

The next year I changed the system. The students wrote their journal at home, and handed them in during writing class once a week. In the beginning it used to take me a lot of effort to get the students to do them. It started out not unlike last year's list of things they did. Then the camp and school had to move, and the students started writing about how they felt and thought about this.

From the start I have been actively encouraging the students to write more about what they thought and felt than just about their daily routine. Some of them really opened up and a lot of personal issues were shared with me in those journals - their life stories and the problems they faced with friends and family and teachers.

I had told my students from the beginning that journal writing was not formal writing. I also said that I was not going to correct their grammar mistakes and that they did not need to worry about the correctness of their writing. Initially, I just wrote some simple comments in response to a few students' entries. After some time I realised that the students really enjoyed reading my comments, so I wrote something in everyone's book. Sometimes, it's like a dialogue between me and the student, where they actually address me in their journal and I respond to it. Other times, I just react to what they write with teasing or advice or encouragement.

As for correction, my own rule is that I make some simple corrections. For example, certain spelling mistakes e.g.

- if they keep spelling the same word wrong throughout the entry
- if they get the word wrong entirely, eg 'evening' for 'afternoon'
- a word that I know they use frequently but always the wrong form, eg unity for united.

In other words, I correct the mistakes that are "worth" correcting. Something that they might remember the next time. I never correct tenses or sentence structure.

On the whole, I think most of my students enjoy journals for the communication it allows between them and me. Even my weakest writing student can turn out OK diary entries. I think journals serve another important function. That is I get to know the students better. A weak student doesn't necessarily mean an unintelligent one.

Each teacher's experience is individual, but some general ideas that come out of Yuina's project can be summarised as follows:

- ◆ In the beginning learners are likely to write a lot of 'what I did today' stuff.
- ◆ Learners should not be pressured to produce a perfectly correct entry.
- ◆ Referring to an event that has strong personal relevance for the learners will trigger more 'real' writing, or writing about what is going on in their minds, rather than just describing daily routines.
- ◆ More 'real' journal writing will help develop trust between the learners and the teacher and vice versa – the more the learners trust the teacher, the more open their writing will be.
- ◆ It is useful to only make a minimum of corrections in the learners' journals.
- ◆ Journal writing will definitely help them develop their thinking, organise their ideas, and express their opinions. Eventually, in the long run, journal writing is bound to bring an improvement in the learners' performance in a range of subjects through practising reflective, analytical thinking.

Journal Topics

What I did last Saturday	My parents	My free time
My home village	My education	When I was ten years old
My favourite animal	What I learned in English class	A dream I had
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What I did last Saturday	My parents	My free time
My home village	My education	When I was ten years old
My favourite animal	What I learned in English class	A dream I had

Texts around the room

Text 1

Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela is a book about Nelson Mandela. It is a very good book, and it is easy to understand. Nelson Mandela is a great leader for all people who can help all people in the world. It is written by Colleen Degnan-Veness.

The book starts with a short history of South Africa. South Africa had the apartheid system where black people do not have equal rights with white people. Then it talks about Nelson Mandela's childhood from 1918, and early education. He goes to university to study law and politics. He gets involved in black liberation movements, to stop white people oppressing black people. In 1956 he is arrested. He spends many years in jail but in 1990 he is free and in 1994 he becomes the first black President of South Africa. The end of the book says 'This is possible because one man loved his country and his people.'

Texts around the room

Text 2

Life Lines

I read Life Lines by Peter Viney. It is a horror story. It is 23 pages long. It is about a woman called Rachel. She works for a fortune telling company. Her boss is called Mervyn Astra. She doesn't like her boss and she doesn't believe in fortune telling. People send money to the company, and their hand picture goes into a computer and the computer tells the fortune. She gets some information that many people from Chatford are going to die. Chatford is a town near a nuclear power plant.

Rachel has a fight with Mervyn and leaves her job. She becomes a reporter for a newspaper. She goes to Chatford to see if her information is correct. I think the book wants people to be careful.

I didn't like this book because it was a little frightening.

Texts around the room

Text 3

K's first Case

Katrina Kirby is a detective. Most people call her 'K'. This is her first job as a detective. A rich man, Sir Michael Grey, is murdered in his home. Katrina interviews his wife, his wife's brother, his friend, his secretary and his housekeeper. All of them dislike Sir Michael Grey. One of them killed him. Which one? K looks at all the clues, and asks many questions. In the end, she solves the case and the police arrest the murderer. I think the message of the story is you need to ask clever questions and think hard to find the solution. I liked the pictures in this book, they are colourful and the book is easier to understand. But I don't understand a lot of the English words so I need to use my dictionary. The book is by L.G. Alexander.

Texts around the room

Text 4

Island of the Blue Dolphins

This is the story of Karana, a young girl who lives in the Pacific Ocean. Many hunters visit Karana's island to trade with the islanders. One day, the hunters fight Karana's people, and kill her father. All the islanders flee to another country, but Karana is left alone with only her 6 year old brother. She must learn how to survive on the island, how to build houses, hunt animals, catch fish, fight the wild dogs, and hide from the hunters when they return. Karana stays on the island for eighteen years. Karana never gives up hope, and she learns new things all the time. I liked this book because I like Karana, she is an intellegent and interesting person. The Book was written by Scott O'Dell.