

Ten reasons why ... it's good to write

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1. Writing is a real life activity.

Whether it is in social, work or study situations, we write to get things done: to form and maintain social relationships (email, chat groups, text messaging) and for business purposes (emails, reports and more formal correspondence). Academic writing may also be important for foreign students wishing to study in Anglophone countries.

2. Writing can be practised at all levels.

A beginner student of mine wrote a short paragraph on her 50th birthday saying how contented she was with her life, and volunteered to share it with the class. This led to great satisfaction for both student and teacher, and confirmed Perl's suggestion (1979), that the greater the degree of involvement of a student in what they are writing, the more successful the writing is likely to be. This can be highly motivational and, if a writing habit is established, a positive spiral may be started. This is what Stanovich (1986) described as the Matthew Effect, where 'The rich get richer and the poor get poorer'.

3. Writing can help generate ideas.

As students see their ideas emerge visually on the page, this in turn stimulates more ideas. This can be a useful way to produce and organise content for more challenging writing tasks such as reports, argumentative writing, and expository essays.

4. Writing can give a voice to shy students.

Here 'voice' does not refer to the Americocentric concept of 'personal voice', although this may become an important by-product of frequent student writing. More simply, it refers to writing as a medium through which less confident students can communicate with their teacher. The accepted wisdom is that spoken interaction, with all its accompanying paralinguistic clues, is more communicative. However, it is also true that in a large group some students are nervous about having to claim the conversational floor. A project such as a dialogue journal, where the student corresponds with her teacher (giving for example her reflections on the learning process, on lesson content, on her background study), can yield valuable insights and results in a meaningful dialogue which might not have been possible in face to face interaction.

5. Writing can be confidence building.

Writing can be less threatening for anxious students as it gives them time to think about their meaning and purpose. This planning time can be equally important in speaking activities, where, if students are allowed time to script and rehearse what they want to say, they may build up confidence until they feel ready to move on to real-time

processing. Writing things down also gives students a permanent record of their language and is something for the teacher to focus on (Howarth 2001).

6. Writing can be both collaborative and solitary.

Some writing—diaries or poetry—is for the writer's personal pleasure. However, a good deal of writing is interactive, whether between reader and writer as the text is processed (such as in peer review) or on the wider stage of the culture or discourse community in which the writing is found (for example, in academic writing).

7. Writing raises awareness of how genres work.

Picking up the previous point of the wider culture, if students are exposed to discourses from a variety of social and cultural contexts, they gradually acquire an awareness of genre. By exploring and noticing the typical features of different types of writing (letters of application, for example), they become familiar with linguistic and social conventions. This will hopefully lead to a more intuitive understanding of what is appropriate for their audience and purpose as they progress.

8. Writing is permanent and is still considered more prestigious in many cultures.

The ability to write appropriately gives students access to many domains and fields where this skill is highly valued.

9. Writing results in a tangible product—the finished text.

This can be enormously satisfying for students. By keeping their writing in paper or electronic form, it also allows them to chart their language progress. My 14-year old son has a file with his writing from primary school essays to the film scripts he experiments with today..

And last, but definitely *not* least ...

10. Writing is fun.

It allows creative students to create, writing stories, poems and plays. It allows learners to interact and form relationships with people from all over the world.

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