ACTIVITY FOUR: USING A PROOFREADING CHECKLIST

As teachers, we put many demands on our students when it comes to finalizing papers and proofreading. We assume that they are both able to identify and fix their own mistakes. However, many language learners struggle to identify lower-order concerns such as spelling and subject-verb agreement. Lower-order concerns are addressed in later drafts of writing and include issues related to spelling, punctuation, grammar, and citations. Higher-order concerns are issues that we examine early in the drafting process and affect an essay's overall structure and design. These include issues related to thesis and content development, organization, and structure. Learners struggle to identify both higher and lower-order concerns, but lower-order concerns are particularly difficult, to recognize and edit. It is not because learners do not have the knowledge, but, at the end of the writing process they are like all writers— tiredly scanning their paper without taking time to pick up on the hidden mistakes. We can help our students recognize these small errors before they submit their final versions while giving them the tools to catch such mistakes in the future.

In this week's Teacher's Corner, we share a simple activity that students lead and conduct in the final days before submitting an essay.

LEVEL

Advanced

LANGUAGE FOCUS

Writing

GOALS

During this activity, students will be able to:

- Recognize what common errors are included on a proofreading checklist.
- Work individually and in pairs using the checklist as a guide to finalize their essays.

- Copy of Proofreading Checklist (see Appendix A)

- Essays/writing tasks

- Paper/pencils

- Prepare enough copies of the Proofreading Checklist for each student

- Remind students to bring copies of their essays/writing to class

1. Begin class by putting students into pairs. Give each student a number and students with the same numbers are partners. If there are 30 students in your class, give each student a number from 1 to 15, so that you have two of each number.

2. Once in pairs, give them a copy of the Proofreading Checklist.

3. Tell them to review and define each item on the list.

4. Bring the class back together as a large group. Review the list as a group, asking students to share an example of each item on the list.

5. Once the list has been explained and reviewed, tell students to trade essays. On the checklist, tell students to write their name next to *reviewer* on the checklist and write the name of the writer next to *writer* on the list.

6. Recommend that students read the paper fully, one sentence at a time, and then go through the checklist. This ensures that they don't speed through the essay and skip small, easily-missed errors. Give students time to review their partner's papers.

   a. As they review their partners' papers, have students correct one of each type of error that is given on the checklist. From then on, ask students to simply circle each error as they occur.

Once students finish, have them return the essays and checklists to their partners. Give all students in the class time to review the mistakes in their own paper and ask questions of their reviewers.

7. Students then begin to make corrections referring to their own checklists and ask their partners and the teacher for help and advice.

8. Remind students that they will submit their final version with the corrected draft and the checklist. Explain that this helps you assess how well the learner used the Proofreading Checklist.

VARIATIONS

An alternative to this activity is to give the learners the Proofreading Checklist to use outside of class. If the activity is given for students to check their own work, suggest they do one of the following to aid in careful reading:

- Read the paper one sentence at a time.
- Read the paper slowly out loud so that listening and reading skills are working together to identify mistakes.
- Read the paper from the end to the beginning one sentence at a time. By starting with the last sentence, students can't rush through reading and will not skip glaring errors.

An additional variation includes assigning students to items on the checklists according to their abilities. Then students are put in groups with each group including an expert for each item on the checklist. The expert is responsible for checking that one item on each paper presented in their small group.

EXTENSIONS

Extend this activity by asking students to develop the Proofreading Checklist as a group. Rather than give students a preset checklist, they can identify common errors and create a list that they will use to do the activity outlined above.

Proofreading Checklist
These are recommended guidelines, but you can adapt any of them to fit your own assignment guidelines.

1. _____ All subjects agree with their verbs.

2. _____ All words are spelled correctly.

3. _____ All words are used correctly, e.g. *to* vs. *too*.

4. _____ All sentences begin with a capital letter.

5. _____ All proper nouns are capitalized.

6. _____ All sentences end with a period, and all questions end with a question mark.

7. _____ All compound sentences are connected using a coordinating conjunction.

8. _____ All complex sentences are connected using the appropriate coordinating/subordinating conjunction.

9. _____ All quotations are written within quotation marks: " "

10. _____ All quotation marks are above the text, not below, such as "example"

11. _____ The font is the same throughout the whole text. It does not change size or style.

12. _____ The essay is double-spaced or meets the spacing guidelines you have required.

13. _____ The margins are the correct size.

14. _____ Each paragraph is indented at its beginning.

15. _____ The writer's last name is in the top right or left corner of each page.

16. _____ The paper has page numbers at the top or bottom of each page.

17. _____ The title is centered at the top of the page.

18. _____ All outside sources that are paraphrased and summarized are cited in the text according to assignment guidelines.

19. _____ All outside sources that are quoted are cited and formatted in the text according to assignment guidelines.