



The Five Steps for Foreign Born Students in Writing Reports

Curriculum Unit 81.04.09
by Italo Mongillo

OBJECTIVES

I have chosen to write a unit which will help foreign-born students to develop their skills in writing reports. I feel that the foreign-born students are at a disadvantage because they are not made aware of resources available to them and how to put them together. They must be exposed to all the available materials before they can begin their assignment. Those students born in the United States are exposed to these skills during grammar school and in junior high school and also in high school.

After a great deal of reading and studying, I have devised a unit which has five basic steps to report writing. It must be understood that students should not attempt writing a report unless they know how to use the library and its available materials such as, a card catalog, an encyclopedia, an atlas, an almanac, and the Reader's Guide. A separate unit should be taught on this before a report writing unit. Once the child can utilize these research materials, then my unit can be taught.

The first step or objective is *to chose a topic* . A child is usually given several general subjects to write about. The child must learn how to narrow down these subjects and choose a related topic.

The second step or objective is *to research your topic* or gather information about your topic. At this step the student must be able to use the reference materials available and also to gather information by writing away for information and setting up personal interviews where possible.

The third step is *to take notes on what you've researched* . This may be the most difficult task for foreign-born and may require a little more attention. The students at this step must be aware of how to write direct quotations and keep bibliographic information.

The fourth step or objective is *to outline your notes* . This will be the student's writing plan. It will help the students to organize what they want to write about in a logical order.

The final step or objective is *to write the report* . Once the outlining is completed, this should be simple to do. At this step two other things must be covered: how to write a bibliography to list sources and how to proofread your report.

If the teacher follows the five basic steps, the students will have a successful experience writing their first

report and won't moan and groan every time a report writing assignment is assigned.

PURPOSE

Writing a report is like going on an exciting trip. Start by *planning* where you are going. After you get started, make *notes* along the way about what you have seen and done. Finally at the end of the trip, *tell* your friends about what you have done. But how do you get from the *beginning* of your report . . . to the *end* of your report? My unit will explain this in five simple steps.

The unit I have developed can be used with seventh and eighth grade foreign-born students. The instructions will be clear and straightforward since the students are foreign-born. It will last approximately four to five weeks. Each child should be provided with two folders. One folder will be for all the activities done as practice exercises in this unit. The other folder will be for keeping all the steps the child has completed in the actual writing of the report.

The students will be introduced to each step. First they will be given exercises to practice the objective of the step. Then they will be required to complete that step for their actual report. At the end of the unit they will have had practice at each step and an actual product for their report at that step.

The classroom should also look inviting. A bulletin board should be decorated and displays should be set up in the classroom. A display of all types of research materials could be placed in one corner of the room. A bulletin board with a blank outline on it could be displayed. On the side all the parts of the outline could be scrambled up. In the students free time they could try to unscramble the outline. Many other motivating boards and displays could be arranged.

THE FIRST STEP: CHOOSING A TOPIC

My unit begins with how to choose a topic. When given a report to write, the teacher may suggest several general subjects to write about. But students will have to narrow down the subjects and choose a related topic. This will keep them from writing about subjects that are too broad and too complicated.

If the teacher suggests *travel* , as a general subject, the students can narrow this down to writing about a trip they have taken or that someone else has taken.

Many practice activities can be done to help the students narrow down a topic. The teacher can give the students a list of words and have them choose which are general subjects and which are related topics. For example:

An opening lesson could be to have the students *underline* the general subjects and *circle* the related topics in the following list:

exercise automobiles pansies
flowers Ford cars jogging

Another activity could be to set up the following chart:

Topics	General Subjects
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bicycling Travel Hobbies Professions

Erie Canal

Doctor Jonas Salk

guitar playing

gardening

The student is to look at the general subjects listed. Then look at the related topics at the left. Each subject can be narrowed down by listing related topics beneath it. Two of the topics can relate to more than one subject. After the student has done this, he continues to narrow down each general subject has done this, he continues to narrow down each general subject by listing one more related topic.

Many More of these activities should be given as practice exercises. Once they have had enough practice on narrowing down topics then the teacher can set up a real situation as follows: Ted must write a report about a country in South America. He has chosen a main topic. It is Brazil. Now Ted is thinking of some subtopics that relate to his main topic. He must decide what subtopics to write about in his report. Your task is to help Ted narrow down his topic. Ted has listed the following:

lumber Indians northeast manganese
ranchers Amazon tobacco miners oil
centralsouthern sugar cane coffee tin
cacao diamonds rubber government workers

Each of the words listed relates to one of the following subtopics. You must write each word from the list under the subtopic you think it best relates to. Some words may be written under more than one subtopic.

Natural Resources Crops People Regions

____ cacao ____ ____
____ ____ ____ ____
____ ____ ____ ____
____ ____ ____ ____
____ ____ ____ ____

The students should work on this activity independently. After they have completed the list, it should be reviewed in class. Do not do this activity until they have had enough practice exercises.

When this activity has been completed the teacher should give the class the topics for the report they are going to write. They must now choose their own main topic and list some subtopics they would like to cover in their report and play the same game again, but this time "for real".

Approximately three days should be spent on this first objective. Don't make it boring. Keep it quick and to the point.

THE SECOND STEP: RESEARCHING THE TOPIC

The second step of my unit is to research the topic and gather information. A full week should be spent on this step.

The teacher should provide several activities that deal with using a card catalog. For example:

Each student chooses a special topic of interest. They check the card catalog to see how many books are available in the school library on the chosen topic and lists them alphabetically.

Or, in the Teacher's Guide to your basal reader, there will probably be lists of book titles for further reading. Have some students take the list to the library. They are to check the card catalog to see which of the titles are available. They can check out one of the books for the class.

Or, when a student enjoys a book by a particular author, suggest that the student check the Author Index in the card catalog to see what other books may be available by that author.

The teacher can provide these and more practice activities to make the students familiar with using the card catalog. The teacher should also remind the children that reference books are a good source of finding information, and those should also be checked. The teacher shouldn't find it necessary to review all the reference materials since a unit on reference materials should be taught previous to this unit.

When students have had enough practice on this, go back to Ted and his project on Brazil and do the following sample lesson:

Ted found these catalog cards under the subject heading "Brazil". Which books have information for his report?

(figure available in print form)

Answer these questions using the catalog cards Ted found.

1. Which book was written most recently?
2. Which book is a fiction about Brazil?
3. Which book has maps of Brazil?
4. Which book title names the continent in which Brazil is located?
5. Which book title names a river in Brazil?
6. Will Ted find information about living in Brazil in 1977 in any of these books? Why or why not?

Once you have completed these activities, provide the students with enough library time to research their

paper.

At this step the teacher should also inform the students that it would be a good idea to write away for information for their report. The librarian should provide the student with a directory that lists the names and addresses of places that will send the students information on almost any subject.

If necessary one class period should be spent going over the correct form of a business letter and actually writing a business letter to get information on a topic. Students love to receive things in the mail, and this would certainly make their project more motivating.

Where possible students should be encouraged to try and set up personal interviews with someone who knows a lot about the topic or a good way to get information for their report. If the teacher would like the class to do this than prepare the class for it. The teacher together with the class should set up a list of five to ten good rules to follow to have a good personal interview. For example: make an appointment to see the person, always be on time for an appointment, prepare questions in advance, dress appropriately, and thank the person for his or her time and information.

THE THIRD STEP: TAKING NOTES

The next step of my unit is to take notes on what the students have researched. As I mentioned earlier this step may be the most difficult for foreign-born to take. The teacher must emphasize the following four points when taking notes:

1. Write notes in you *own words* .
2. Write only the *main ideas* and *important details* .
3. Notes need not be written as complete sentences.
4. Write down each of your sources of information.

To help the foreign-born with this step, it would be wise to provide many practice activities in finding the main idea and important details and also in paraphrasing.

Some sample practice activities would be:

Provide the students with a list of sentences. Have them underline two words that tell about the main idea.

Or, have the students read a short selection and choose the best title from those provided.

Or, you can obtain some telegram blanks from Western Union or ditto up your own imitations ones. Use them for practice condensing information in the simplest form. Telegrams may be written or typed in appropriate style. You can also use old telegrams as samples. Western Union will provide you with them.

Be creative and ingenious in your own way. Provide as many activities as you possibly can for this objective. After you have completed this then go back to Ted and his Brazil report. Give the students an excerpt from

the encyclopedia about Brazil. Ditto it off so that each child could have one. Have them take notes on this piece of information. When the class has completed taking notes on this same excerpt, have the class share their notes so that they can get a good idea of where they went wrong. Usually when taking notes, students tend to be too wordy. They must do at least one example together to use as few words as possible and yet be accurate.

In this step, students must also be made aware of direct quotations. A direct quotation is when you copy phrases or sentences directly from a book. It always begins and ends with quotation marks. Some practice activities should be given to reinforce this concept. Then give the students an article Ted would find on Brazil with notes taken on it. Have them underline any direct quotation they see in the notes and punctuate it correctly.

Now that all of this is taught and reviewed have the students take notes on the information they found on their topic.

THE FOURTH STEP: OUTLINING

The fourth step in writing a report is outlining. An outline is a writing plan. It helps you organize what you want to write about in a logical order. Many practice activities can be done to teach outlining. Start out by practicing assembling an outline. The teacher can give the child a selection to read and an envelope containing a cut-up outline of the selection. The students task is to assemble the outline correctly. This method is easier than copying the pieces of an outline because the students can arrange and rearrange them until they look right. This is an excellent activity to teach outlining skills before the students are asked to make an outline of their own. The students can exchange with their classmates so that they have enough practice with it.

Then the parts of an outline should be introduced. Every outline has a title. The main topics are written next to Roman numerals. Subtopics are ideas or information about the main topic. They are written next to capital letters below the main topics. Details that tell about the subtopics are written next to numbers below the subtopics. The students should see a sample of the set up of a blank outline so they can get a picture of what it looks like. For example:

TITLE

- I. MAIN TOPIC
 - A. SUBTOPIC
 - 1. DETAIL
 - 2. DETAIL
 - B. SUBTOPIC
- II. MAIN TOPIC

Once the students have seen the form than a variety of practice activities on outlining can be done varying from giving the students an outline of a reading selection with some major headings and other items provided where they must fill in the rest to reading a selection and outlining it from scratch.

Spend as much time as necessary on this section. You may need a week or more depending on how well your students grasp it. Once they have this under their belt, have the class outline the notes Ted took on Brazil in the last step. They must decide what Ted will write and the order Ted will write the information in. When all the students have made their outline collect them and see if they have the idea. If not, more practice activities are needed. If so then return the outlines and have the class come up with an agreed upon outline on the board. An example of what the beginning of what Ted's outline could look like is:

The Amazon Region of Brazil

I. Introduction

A. Facts about Amazon Region

1. Location
2. importance
3. population

B.

When this lesson is completed and understood, have them outline their own notes. Again, take as much time as needed. It is important that this is done accurately because this will be the basis for writing the report.

THE FIFTH STEP: WRITING THE REPORT

The last step is to actually write your report. If all the other steps have been completed correctly than this will be the easiest step. I would teach this lesson by using Ted's outline.

Ted must begin by writing the introduction to his report. The introduction tells the reader what the report will be about. Start an introduction for the students and have them complete it using your outline and notes to help.

Then use Ted's outline to write the report. To make this lesson easier, it would be a good idea to provide each student with the agreed upon outline from the last step so that everyone is working with the same material.

The students should now be instructed to write a paragraph for each main topic listed after a Roman numeral. The subtopics and important details should be used to write a complete paragraph about each main idea. The teacher should check the students' work to make sure that it is done correctly.

Once all the students have written a sample of Ted's report have them share it with the class. Depending on the students in your class they can each read their own or if they are shy the teacher could read them without mentioning which report belongs to whom. I feel that it is essential that the students are exposed to their classmates style of writing. This will expand their horizon and make their reports more alive.

In this last step the students must be taught two other lessons. One lesson is how to list your sources and the second lesson is in proofreading.

When you list your sources you are writing a bibliography. A bibliography lists the books, magazines, newspapers, and other sources that gave the writer the information. A bibliography is usually the last page of a report.

A bibliography is written in a certain way. A sample should be distributed to each student to show them how to set up a bibliography for books, magazines, newspaper, encyclopedia, and personal interview sources. The sample could be set up as follows:

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Book

Asimov, Isaac. *Space Dictionary* .
Scholastic Book Services, 1969.

Personal Interview

Sherman, Jane. Oakwood Junior High School,
Dayton, Ohio. Interview, 3 March 1977.

Magazine Article

Hunter, Maureen. "Facts About the Moon."
News Citizen , March 1977, pp.6-8.

Encyclopedia

World Book Encyclopedia, 1977 edition,
"Government of Canada."

Newspaper

"Amazing Amazon Region." *New York Times* ,
12 January 1969, sec. 4, p. 11.

Some activities that could be done to reinforce types of sources are:

Make flash cards of different bibliographies and have the class decide which source it is a bibliography for.

Or, give the class a list of sources and have them write it in the correct form for that source.

Or, list all the sources in correct form and have them arrange them on a page.

Once this is done then have the students use the lesson from the catalog cards and the notes from Ted's report and write a bibliography for Ted's report.

Lastly, we have proofreading. A report should always be proofread before handing in. When you proofread, read your report carefully to see if there are any mistakes. The most important mistakes to look for are the following:

- spelling mistakes
- missing capital letters
- missing punctuation marks
- incomplete sentences
- paragraphs that don't make sense

The best type of practice activity to do for this is to give the students sample paragraphs with errors in them and have them rewrite them without any errors. To make this more exciting you can divide the class into two teams or groups and make a group project out of it. The first team or group to come up with all the errors corrected wins.

Now the students are ready to work on the last step of their reports. Have them use the outlines and notes to write their reports. Then have them make a bibliography page and lastly have them proofread their report before handing it in to the teacher.

In conclusion, this unit using the five steps choosing a topic, researching the topic, taking notes on the research, outlining the notes and writing the report is an excellent beginning to report writing for the foreign-born. After this unit is taught then the students could eventually get into writing lengthier reports and term papers. I have researched this unit thoroughly and made it as simple as possible to follow. I hope it is a success in your classroom.

SAMPLE CLASSROOM LESSONS

A Lesson on Using Quotation Marks—Quotation Quandry

Purpose : After completing this activity, the student should be able to use quotation marks correctly.

Preparation Directions :

1. On strips of tagboard, write twenty-four sentences needing quotation marks that have been omitted.

(figure available in print form)

2. On the back of each strip write the sentence correctly.

(figure available in print form)

3. On twelve small tagboard squares make quotation marks.

(figure available in print form)

4. Two or three players may play this game.

Player Directions :

1. Each player draws a sentence strip and four quotation mark cards.
2. On the count of three, the players place the quotation marks where they are needed.
3. Each player checks himself by turning the sentence strip over and reading the correct sentence.
4. The first person to place the quotation marks correctly wins and keeps the sentence strip.
5. Continue playing until all the strips have been used.
6. The player with the most strips wins.

*You can vary this activity to make it a classroom activity however you choose to.

A Lesson on Outlining Outlining Dilemma

Purpose : After completing this activity, the student should be able to outline correctly.

Preparation Directions:

1. A ditto should be prepared as follows:

Main Topics

maintains courteous attitude

obeys school rules

keeps his locker in neat condition

does his assignments promptly

looks on going to school as a privilege

Subtopics

plans higher education

stacks books neatly

is considerate of lockermate

in the halls

toward his peers

toward the teachers

in the auditorium

hangs wraps in place

reads text

does written work

on the school grounds

seeks further knowledge

reviews work for testing

in the gym

in the classrooms

Details

in college

by extra reading in class

by research in the library

in professional school

in trade school

is unselfish

old friends

avoids clutter

new classmates

helpful in class

respectful in class

Procedure:

1. Introduce the activity by reviewing outlining forms.
2. Pass out the ditto prepared to each student.
3. Instruct the students that the five main topics should be arranged in outline form under the title "Characteristics of a Good Student."
4. Then assort the subtopics and details under the main topics in correct outline form.
5. When the class has completed this assignment they can share their results.

A Lesson on Card Catalogs Classroom Catalog

Purpose : After completing this activity, the students will have their own classroom card catalog.

Preparation Directions :

1. Each student is to bring in the book they will be giving to the classroom library.
2. Each student is to be given an index card.
3. A chart should be displayed demonstrating the different kinds of entries in the library card catalog.
4. A set of drawers which will contain the card catalog and a shelf which will hold the books should be set up in a corner of the classroom. It should be nicely decorated and inviting.

Procedure :

1. Introduce the activity by reviewing the chart demonstrating the different kinds of entries in the card catalog.
2. Explain to the students that they will be making author cards for their books.
3. Demonstrate on the board how they will set up their author card using the book the teacher will be contributing as an example.
4. Distribute the index cards and have the students make up an author card for their book.
5. The teacher should check every one's card to make sure it is set up correctly.
6. The entire class should be involved in arranging their cards in the card catalog drawers.
7. Once the cards are arranged, then the books should be arranged on the shelves.
8. When all this is completed, the teacher should demonstrate how to find a book in the classroom catalog.

Teacher Bibliography

Anderson, Paul S. *Language Skills in Elementary Education* , 2nd ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1972. An excellent reference book for all language art skills.

Burrows, Alvina, Doris C. Jackson, and Dorothy O. Saunders. *They All Want to Write* . 3rd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1964. Shows that students given the opportunity will write.

Flesch, Rudolph and A. H. Lass. *A New Guide to Better Writing* . New York: Harper and Row, 1947. Will help

students write more clearly and correctly.

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Rudolph, Evelyn. *Language Drills* . Pennsylvania: Hayes School Publishing Co., Inc. 1968. An excellent ditto book.

Spache, Evelyn B. *Reading Activities for Child Involvement* . Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon, Inc. 1976. Gives 472 activities as follow-up ideas to skills taught.

Student Bibliography

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Treanor, John H. *A First Thesaurus* . Massachusetts: Educator's Publishing Service, 1963. A simplified but not complete thesaurus.

Yates, Elizabeth. *Someday You'll Write* . New York: Dutton, 1962. Helps to see that all children can write.

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