

**Third Year Turkish
Lessons 10 and 11**

The Writing Skill and Composition

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The Writing Skill

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Introduction

In addition to the intrinsic value the writing skill occupies in language teaching and learning, it is viewed as the most important and the most sophisticated compared with other skills: listening, speaking and reading.... So, writing is a basic skill in language leaning, since the learner has to make considerable effort and practise many writing activities to reach an acceptable level of writing. In other words, an increased level of effectiveness in writing can be acquired through a thorough understanding about the nature of the skill itself. In this lesson ,we will deal with the writing skill in general, including the different definitions, the components of writing, as well as the different stages the students go through to develop it. It also deals with the writing skill and the other skills speaking and reading comparatively.

1.1.1-What is Writing ?

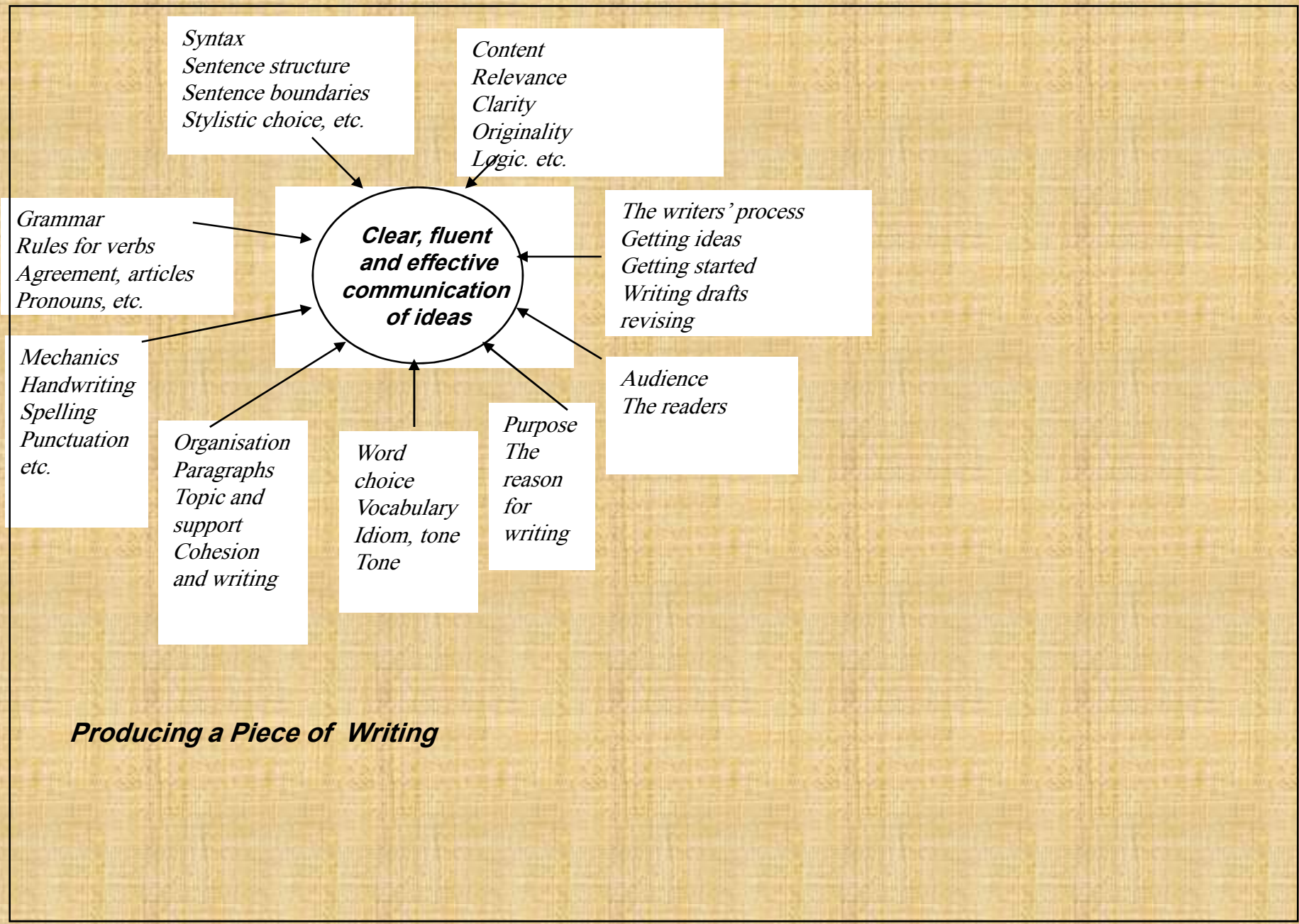
Writing, in general means words in symbols (for example, Hieroglyphics) written down as a mean of communication Apart from a piece of written language designed to be read, writing also refers to the activity through which such a piece of written language is produced. However, it is far from being a matter of transcribing language into symbols. So, writing is not as simple as it seems to be. "But writing is clearly much than the production of graphic symbols, just as speech is more than the production of sounds". Byrne (1979:1). This means that the graphic symbols have to be arranged in certain ways and conventions to form words, and the latter are arranged to form sentences. We produce a sequence of sentences arranged in a particular order and linked together in certain manners.

The research of White and Arndt (1991) into writing is based on the assumption that requires a high level of abstraction and actually demands conscious work in that “it is a skill that must be learnt by doing it”. (Turk and Kirman (1989:28). It is not inborn, one has to go through much practice to write well.

According to Vygotsky (1962:98), Written speech is a separate language function differing from speech in both structure and language mode of functioning. Even its minimal development requires a high level of abstraction and it actually demands conscious work

Lado (1983:248) views writing in a foreign language in terms of the ability of manipulating structures, vocabulary and their conventional representations. He put it as follows: “We mean by writing in a foreign language the ability to use structures, the lexical items, and their conventional representation in ordinary matter of fact writing”. Similarly, Widdowson (1981:26) relates the act of writing to the activity of producing correct sentences and “transmitting them through the visual medium as marks on paper”.

So, the idea we draw from the previous definitions is that writing is the activity of being able to communicate with the language through graphic representations of ideas, respecting the correction of the different structures and vocabulary items in order to share ideas to convince and persuade, to arouse feelings clearly concisely and understandably. It is a very complex skill that requires both physical and mental activity on the part of the writer. According to Walters (1983 : 17), “Writing is the last and perhaps the most difficult skill students learn if they ever do”.



Producing a Piece of Writing

As can be seen from the diagram above, Raimes categorizes the components of writing as content, the writer's process, audience, purpose, word choice, organization, mechanics, grammar and syntax. In order to communicate their ideas clearly, fluently and effectively, the students need to think about knowledge, abilities and the interests of their audience; i.e, the people they are writing for, the teacher in our case, as well as the purpose for which they writing.

In addition, students need to learn the styles and formats for a variety of writing purposes by choosing the appropriate lexical and grammatical terms relevant to those purposes.

The students also need to be trained to act as an audience for other students, writers and to comment on the appropriateness and originality of what the writer produces as well as the form in which s/he presents it (handwriting in case it is under a form of script, spelling and punctuation). So, there is no doubt that writing is a complex activity which deserves continuous research.

The processes of writing are so closely interwoven that finding the end of the thinking thread becomes difficult and the mastery of certain abilities and mechanical skills is quite difficult. Heaton (1994:138) suggests the following aspects:

Grammatical skills: the ability to write correct sentences.

Stylistic skills: the ability to manipulate sentences and use language effectively.

Mechanical skills: the ability to use correctly these conventions peculiar to the written language, for example punctuation, spelling.

Judgement skills: the ability to write in an appropriate manner for a particular purpose with a particular audience in mind, together with an ability to select, organize and order relevant information.

We understand that writing is a particularly difficult skill and presents a challenging task for native and non-native speakers alike . It is not easy for students to produce / create their products , and this is mainly due to the multiplicity of skills involved in the production of a piece of writing.

1.1.3 -Stages of Development of the Writing Skill

In order to develop an ability in writing, students move systematically and thoroughly through the different stages of the writing skill. There are five stages: copying, reproduction, a production with major adaptations, guided writing and finally composition.

- Copying

Some foreign language teachers see that copying is an unworthy activity since the students already know the script. However, we believe it is quite an important skill.

The fact of repeating to himself / herself what the student is copying, thus deepening the impression in his/her mind of the sounds the symbols represent makes copying a worthwhile activity. In addition to this, copying is an activity that enables the learners to differentiate between the conventional graphic forms to represent the different sounds they have already heard; i.e, the different spellings of the sound.

Here, we would like to point that the students should not be asked to write a word they have not heard or uttered (spoken). In other words, a correspondence between the letters and the sounds should be existing before the students write.

At the stage of copying (character shaping), our students of English do not have major difficulties in manipulating the shapes of English letters (alphabet) because they have already gone through that in French courses, where the roman script is used. However, we have noticed that letters such as “a” and “o”, “b” and “h” are often misshaped.

- Reproduction

The stage which follows copying is that of reproduction. During the second, or reproduction stage, the student will attempt to write, without originality, what he has learned orally and read in his textbook. This he will be able to do all the more successfully if he has been trained in habits of accuracy during the copying stage.

The activity that is mostly used to develop this stage is dictation, where the student develops two major skills: listening and writing in the sense that s/he has to distinguish between the sounds aurally and writes the corresponding symbols accurately.

- Reproduction with Minor Adaptations

Recombination consists of the reproduction of a model presented by the teacher with minor adaptations. Rivers (1968 : 248) said that: ... at this stage, writing practice may take a number of forms. Students will write out structure drills of various kinds : making substitutions of words and phrases, transforming sentences, expanding them to include further information within the limits of learned phrases, contracting them by substituting pronouns for nouns or simple words for groups of words.

So, at this stage, the students first carry out some drills that take different forms such as :

- Transformation: for example, complete the second sentence so that it means the same as the first given or rewrite the sentences in the passive form.*
- Expansion: for example, complete the following classes with a word expressing 'reason' or 'purpose'.*
- Substitution: for example, supply the appropriate relative pronoun (that, which, who ...) in the following sentences.*

Once enough practice has been performed in this step (transforming, expanding, substituting), the learners get introduced to the ultimate activity in this stage, that of recombination.

The composition

In this stage of the writing process, the composition, the students select his/her vocabulary and structure to express their ideas as Rivers (op.cit :252) puts it: “The final stage of composition involves individual selection of vocabulary and structure for the expression of personal meaning”.

Composition writing largely depends on a sufficient training in the preceding four stages; that is, copying, reproduction, reproductions with minor adaptations, and guided writing. In this stage, the student cannot write correctly, concisely and meaningfully unless s/he shows a complete control of the structure, the vocabulary s/he employs to express his/her ideas, in addition to the conventions of writing, including mainly spelling and punctuation. It is worth noting that within this stage, the student develops the writing skill gradually until s/he reaches an acceptable piece of writing.

1.2. Writing and the Other Skills

1.2.1- Writing and Speaking

Both writing and speaking are clearly productive activities in that they create language outcomes just as listening and reading are both passive activities. However, speaking and writing are two different skills.

Vygotsky (1962:98) notes that “written speech is a separate linguistic function, differing from oral speech in both structure and mode of functioning”. Learning to write is different from learning to speak in that “writing abilities are not naturally acquired; they must be culturally (rather than biologically) transmitted in every assisting environments” Grabe and Kaplan (1996 : 6).

This means that writing causes problems for students to learn it, i.e; they have to make a lot of efforts and go through much practice to develop the different skills of composing. In fact, in creating a written text of any length (a paragraph or an essay in our case), the student is normally expected to choose and manipulate language forms that are more concise than those used in spoken contexts, but at the same time, "Written Expression" is more often complex in its syntax and more varied and richer in vocabulary. The differences between writing and speaking can be summed up in:

Writing is a learned behaviour; talking is a natural, even irrepressible behaviour.
Writing is an artificial process, talking is not.
Writing is a technological device – not the wheel but early enough to qualify as primary technology; talking is organic, natural earlier.
Most writing is slower than most talking.
Writing is stark, barren, even naked as a medium; talking is rich, luxuriant, inherently redundant.
Talking leans on the environment, writing must provide its own context.
With writing, the audience is usually absent; with talking the listener is usually present.
Writing usually results in a visible graphic product; talking usually does not.
Perhaps because there is a product involved, writing tends to be a more responsible and committed act than talking.
It can be even said that throughout history, an aura, an ambience, a mystique has usually encircled the written word; the spoken word has for the most part proved ephemeral and treated mundanely.
Because writing is often our representation of the world made visible, embodying both process and product, writing is more readily a form and source of learning than talking.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION