APPROACHES TO WRITING AND THINKING

E.M. Kolomeitseva, M.N. Makeyeva

Department Foreign Languages, TSTU

Represented by a Member of Editorial Board Professor V.I. Konovalov

Abstract: Major problems of teaching thinking while writing different papers are discussed. It is pointed out that writing papers is a vital part of the educational process because it requires of students intensive study of a limited topic. Therefore it is essential for students to learn the standardized process of writing reports and essays.

Some guidelines and basic strategies of preparing for BULATS Writing Test are given. It is stressed that to create a focused and interesting report, it's necessary to plan carefully. Some tips for using illustrations of details are given. The conclusion is drawn that by maintaining these three attitudes – objectivity, neutrality, and strictness in observation – the writer will be able to make a credible and acceptable report.

Writing papers is a vital part of the educational process because it requires of students intensive study of a limited topic. Therefore it is essential for students to learn the standardized process of writing reports and essays. Though standardized, the process is complicated enough to require considerable time and effort to learn, that's why it is necessary to teach students some basic approaches to this kind of work so that they could cope with the assignments of BULATS (Business Language Testing Service) tests, which include the Standard Test, the Computer Test, the BULATS Speaking Test, and The BULATS Writing Test. The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) was established in Europe by the leading language testing organizations in Europe to implement common standards of language assessment throughout Europe.

Business Language Testing Service (BULATS) has been developed and is managed by four members of ALTE: The University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate (English), Alliance Françoise (French), Goethe-Institute (German) and Universadad de Salamanca (Spanish).

BULATS tests are based on the internationally recognized five-level framework developed by ALTE. The ALTE framework enables the level of language qualifications to be compared across 15 languages. This means that BULATS users can be confident that candidates' scores across the whole range of BULATS tests are comparable and consistent, whatever the language. BULATS is relevant, practical and flexible because it focuses on the kinds of language needed in the workplace – vocabulary, texts and practical tasks cover areas such as job descriptions, phone messages, business correspondence, customer service and presentations.

According to the academic programs of Tambov State Technical University the foreign languages department prepares teaching materials and runs a few training management courses, Business English classes of different levels, applying BULATS tests as final examinations.

BULATS tests meet the language testing needs of companies and organizations, which need a practical and reliable method of testing the foreign language skills of their employees, job applicants and trainees, in a way relevant to their work.

The BULATS Writing test focuses on a single skill and requires both trained examiners and examinees. That's why it is essential to dwell on preliminary peculiarities of writing and thinking.

It's impossible to produce clear writing unless you have first done some clear thinking, and thinking can't be hurried. It follows that the most important step one can take is to leave oneself enough time to think. To write is to make choices. Practice makes the decisions easier to come by, but no matter how fluent you become, with each piece of writing you will still have to choose. In university, it's always sound strategy to ask yourself two basic questions: "What's the purpose of this piece of writing?" and "What's the reader like?"

Depending on the assignment, your purpose in writing may be the following:

- to show your knowledge of a topic or text;
- to show that you understand certain terms or theories;
- to show that you can do independent research;
- to show that you can apply a specific theory to new material;
- to show that you can think critically or creatively.

An assignment designed to see if you have read and understood specific material calls for a different approach from one that's meant to test your critical thinking. In the first case, your approach will tend to be expository, with the emphasis on presenting facts. In the second case, you will probably want to structure your essay around a particular argument – an assertion that other people can debate. Your aim in this kind of argumentative or persuasive essay is to bring your reader around to your point of view.

Thinking about the reader does not mean playing to the teacher. To convince a particular person that your own views are sound, you have to consider his or her way of thinking. If you don't know who will be reading your paper– your professor, your tutorial leader, or anybody – just imagine someone intelligent, knowledgeable, and interested, skeptical enough to question your ideas but flexible enough to adopt them if your evidence is convincing.

Before you start writing, you will also need to think about the length of your assignment in relation to the time you have available to spend on it. In BULATS tests both the topic and the length are prescribed. Candidates are assessed independently by two trained assessors. They are assessed on:

- how accurately and appropriately they use the language (the grammar and vocabulary);
- how well they organize their ideas;
- how effectively the piece of writing achieves its purpose.

There are two parts in the BULATS Writing Test:

Part 1: Short Message/Letter (50-60 words) 15 minutes

The candidate writes a short message or letter following given guidelines.

Focus: Candidates' ability to write a short letter, covering all relevant points, using an appropriate style and tone. Essays and reports require a formal tone.

Part 2: Report (180-200 words) 30 minutes

The candidate writes a short report following brief instructions. For this part, candidates choose a task from two alternatives.

Focus: Candidates's ability to write and structure a longer piece of writing, using appropriate style and tone for the intended reader.

In our business courses students have to write the kind of formal report used in the business world. Business managers with many demands on their time want to know the central idea of a report as quickly as possible. They also want to trust in its accuracy. When writing a business report, it's helpful to follow three basic principles:

1   Put the most important information up front, unless you have a particular task to do otherwise. In fact, in most cases it's a good idea to put the essence of what you want to say in your first page-just in case that is all a busy reader happens to read.

2   Be concise. A report should say as much as possible in as little space as possible.

3   Be objective. Readers must be confident that the information you are providing is free of personal biases. Logical analysis will make your work believable. A business report must be as free as possible of biases and subjective opinions. To achieve that it's necessary to identify your assumptions, avoid unsubstantiated judgments and subjective language.

To create a focused and interesting report, it's necessary to plan carefully. As in any other kind of writing, the time you spend organizing your thoughts and devising your strategies is well worth the effort.

Before writing four aspects should be taken into consideration: reason, reader, restriction and research. Broadly speaking, every report has one of two basic purposes: either to provide information, or to recommend some course of action. Many informational reports such as progress, production, or monthly sales reports are used regularly to pass along facts as they accumulate; unless they focus exceptional rather than routine matters. On the other hand, reports that are written to fill specific needs – to help someone make a decision, or to suggest a solution to a particular problem-usually receive close attention from both writer and reader. Examples would be suggestions for a new product line, a feasibility study on a proposed plant location, or recommendations for reversing a sales decline. This is the kind of challenging report students will be asked to write for most courses. It provides the most opportunity for students as writers to show their ability to make inferences and judgments – both marks of managerial competence.

Determining the reason for such a report means establishing both its purpose and its expected outcome. If an important decision rests on your report, you will have to consider exactly what information is needed to make that decision, and precisely how you will support any recommendations.

Identifying your reader will enable you to organize and present your material in such a way that it's likely to be well received. The following details should be considered:

1   What type of person is the reader?

Often the reaction will depend less on the nature of the reader's job than on his or her personality. A cautious, conservative person might favor a carefully understated position, whereas a bold, creative type might prefer a more daring approach.

2   What is the relationship?

If you are writing for someone in a position far up the line from you, your tone and approach will probably be more formal than they would be for an associate.

3   Has the reader asked for the report?

If you are writing in response to a request, you may not need to fill in much detail about the purpose, but if the report is unsolicited you should take care to place it in a context.

4   What is the reader's field of interest or responsibility?

Usually top management will want an overview, whereas a specialist will require all the particulars. In the business world the report might be going to several different kinds of readers – to a plant supervisor as well as to top management. If so, the complete analysis should be given to the supervisor, and an executive summary should be sent to top management.

5   How is the reader likely to respond to the report?

If you can anticipate probable objections or concerns and answer them in the report itself, your work will be that much more convincing. Your suggestions will be more persuasive if you can point out their advantages for the reader. The benefit could be significant giving the reader a competitive edge in the marketplace or saving the business itself from impending financial collapse. Even if the benefit is a more general one, such as improving the reader's ability to anticipate future problems, you should point it out.

The practical restrictions on your writing should be considered from the outset. The report should be limited to manageable proportions and restricted by time (a specific year or years), by geography (a certain region or market) and the reader's time restrictions.

Research decisions will be easier if the topic is worked out in precise terms and research needs are considered in relation to the first three R's: Reason, Reader, and Restrictions. Research means obtaining essential data by questioning people on the job, researching company documents, relevant government documents, valid statistical information. Research information is only as valuable as it is accurate.

The next step is to decide on the most effective way of organizing the information gathered. The order will depend on both the nature of the report and the anticipated response of the reader to any recommendations made. There are two basic approaches:

1   The direct deductive approach

This is the most common order nowadays. The most important information comes before the supporting material: purpose, recommendations, method, and findings. Major consulting firms and others who routinely use the direct approach have discovered that it appeals to most readers.

2   The indirect inductive approach

This approach may be a good choice if you think that your reader's initial response to your conclusions or recommendations will be unfavorable. Instead of emphasizing your conclusions right away, you lead into them gradually, showing in a careful, step-by-step way how you reached them. If your logic and research are sound, the reader should find your conclusions inevitable. Here is the basic order: purpose, method, findings and recommendations (conclusions).

Often a long formal report will follow this order, but in effect change the format to a direct one by beginning with a summary that condenses the recommendations or conclusions: summary of recommendations, purpose, method, findings and details of recommendations.

Many organizations insist on an added Executive Summary on a separate page at the front of any report- even if the order is direct (giving recommendations at the beginning. It's good practice in business, since this is often the only part of the report that a busy executive will read. The Executive Summary is a stand-alone piece, aimed at

the reader who wants a general overview of the important points. The reports itself repeats the summary in more detail.

Organizing the details

The principle of "important things first' also applies to the arrangement of points within each section. In the Recommendations section especially, it's a good idea to put your most important point at the beginning and give the rest in descending order of importance.

The Findings section, usually the most detailed part of a report, may require a different approach, especially if it's long. If there is a lot of material to cover, you should try to let your purpose determine the way you arrange it. To present a benefits plan, you could divide or classify the information according to the different types of employee or the different parts of the plan. To describe a process, you could present the stages in chronological order. To discuss various markets for a product, you could follow a spatial order, arranging your findings according to geographical regions.

Whichever way you choose to order your details, you should be systematic and consistent. Tables, charts and other illustrations are common and useful in reports, especially those that analyze a quantity of data. Such visual aids can help the reader grasp quickly what would take many words to explain. When using one of these visual aids, you must decide on the importance of the information it contains. If the information is supplementary, it should be placed in an appendix. If it's essential, the illustration should be positioned next to the relevant discussion in the text.

Nowadays, most people are accustomed to seeing and interpreting visual representations of ideas. From international traffic symbols to "dangerous substance" signs to business logos, visual symbols and illustrations are becoming part of our everyday life. This increased reliance on the visual may result in part from the influence of television. It also reflects the multicultural nature of our society and the increasing need to communicate quickly with a variety of language groups. Whatever the diverse reasons, graphics have impact. The pictorial representation of information or a concept can indeed be worth a thousand words: it allows us to see the point.

Whichever method is used, these tips should be remembered:

1   Information in an illustration should expand on or complement information in the text- not simply duplicate it.

2   Simple illustrations are better than cluttered ones. The easier it is for the reader to grasp the information quickly and accurately, the better the visual aid.

3   Each illustration should be given an explanatory title, unless it flows immediately from the preceding text – in which case a title is optional. The title reflects the point of the illustration, not just the topic.

4   Each part of the illustration should be labeled clearly. If there is no room within the illustration, a legend or key to the illustration should be created at the side, identifying each part.

5   Visual aids come in many forms. The most common in scientific and business writing are tables and charts (including graphs), which can pull together quantitative data; for qualitative information, a matrix may be the most useful choice.

Here are some guidelines for when and how to use each of these.

A table is useful when the reader needs to know many precise figures: for example, the exact prices of certain items for each year in a five-year period. It is the sensible choice for data too detailed to be worked into a simple chart. If a table is placed right after the section of the text that describes it, the title can be omitted. When in doubt about the amount of detail to include, it's helpful to remember that too much data

can make a table difficult to understand. It may be better to create two tables than to clutter a single one with an overdose of information.

Charts come in three basic kinds, each suited to a particular purpose. They can dramatize information more effectively than tables and are easier for the reader to grasp.

The line chart or **graph** shows change over a period of time; it's often used to point out trends or fluctuations in trends, as in a sales report. In devising a graph, you should use a scale that will distribute the data points over the total space. You should put quantities on the vertical axis and time values on the horizontal axis. The dimensions of the graph should be shaped so as to give an accurate visual impression of the extent of change.

The bar chart is used to compare elements at a fixed point in time: for example, the comparative profits made by each department in a company. The bars can be horizontal or vertical, depending on the range of data. Bars can also be segmented to show different parts of the whole. As with a line chart, the scale for a bar chart should allow the data to spread out over the available space, not cram everything into one corner. The bars will be easier to distinguish at a glance, if the space between the bars differs from their width – it should be either greater or smaller.

The pie chart is used to emphasize proportions- to draw attention to the relative size of the parts that make up a whole. For example, it can provide a quick visual comparison of individual department sales as a proportion of total sales. Visual separation by color or shading can emphasize any particular piece of the pie.

A matrix is another way of helping the reader to make comparisons, and is particularly useful for presenting an array of qualitative rather than quantitative information. A matrix can be used to highlight the different features of various alternatives, enabling the reader to make a choice.

There are two dangers in giving illustrations:

Firstly, computer graphics programs make it possible to produce all kinds of fancy diagrams and enhancements of basic charts. They can add visual impact and drama to your written material. But they do make it tempting to add so much detail that you obscure the basic data. The designs you are creating shouldn't be too elaborate for the purpose. Visuals are meant not to dazzle but to make it easier for the reader to understand.

Secondly, any illustration, whether done by hand or by computer, can distort information. For instance, the slope of a graph line can be made to look steep or shallow, even with the same data; trend lines can begin at a time that omits unfavorable periods. Although line and bar charts are the most susceptible to distortion, the shapes and proportions of other diagrams can also give a false picture. The writer should be careful to present as accurate a picture as possible, so that your illustrations add to the credibility of the words.

Thus, writing a business report requires a number of techniques and the development of meticulous approach to work and research. This approach has three indispensable characteristics that should be applied in writing: *objectivity*, *neutrality* and *observation*.

Objectivity means that the writer mustn't permit his feelings, opinions, expectations, and preconceived notions to influence the results of the research. Judgments and interpretations must be kept separate and clearly labeled as such.

Neutrality requires the writer to maintain an open mind until the work is complete. Open-mindedness is essential to the credibility of any paper.

Observation means that the writer doesn't take anything for granted in regard to the topic. Information presented in the paper is derived from factual data, which is used

either to develop or to support a thesis or argument. Conclusions are valid if they are backed up by data.

By maintaining these three attitudes: objectivity, neutrality, and strictness in observation- the writer will be able to make a credible and acceptable report.

Подходы к обучению обдуманному письму

Е.М. Коломейцева, М.Н. Макеева

Кафедра иностранных языков, ТГТУ

Ключевые слова и фразы: визуальное представление идей; деловой доклад; написание докладов и эссе; нейтральность и наблюдение; основные цели письма; письменный экзамен BULATS; цель письма.

Аннотация: Рассматриваются важные проблемы обучения мышлению в процессе выполнения письменных работ. В частности указывается, что обучение письму – это важная часть учебного процесса, поскольку требует от студента внимательного изучения определенной темы. Именно поэтому важно познакомить студентов с основами процесса написания докладов и эссе.

Даются некоторые основные направления и стратегии подготовки к письменному экзамену BULATS. Подчеркивается, что для написания четкого и интересного сообщения необходимо предварительное планирование. Даются некоторые подсказки по использованию иллюстраций отдельных моментов. Делается заключение, что при соблюдении трех главных подходов – объективности, нейтральности и точности наблюдений, – автору удастся написать хорошее и понятное сообщение.

Behandlungen zur Ausbildung im bedachten Schreiben

Zusammenfassung: Im Artikel werden die wichtigen Probleme der Ausbildung im Denken während der Erfüllung der schriftlichen Arbeiten betrachtet. Es wird hingewiesen, daß die Ausbildung im Schreiben ein wichtiger Teil des ganzen Lehrprozesses ist. Darum ist es sehr wichtig, die Studenten mit den Grundlagen des Prozesses des Vorträge- und Esseschreiben bekanntzumachen.

Es werden einige Hauptrichtungen und Strategien der Vorbereitung zur schriftlichen BULATS- Prüfung angegeben. Es wird unterstrichen, daß man für das Schreiben des deutlichen und interessanten Berichtes die Vorplanung braucht. Es werden einige Vorsagen für die Benutzung der detaillierten Illustrationen angegeben. Es wird die Volgerung gezogen, daß der Autor mit Hilfe der Beachtung der drei Hauptbehandlungen – der Objektivität, der Neutralität und der Genauigkeit der Beobachtungen – ein guter und verständlicher Bericht schreibt.

Approches vers l'apprentissage de l'écriture réfléchie

Résumé: Sont examinés d'importants problèmes de l'apprentissage de la pensée au cours des travaux écrits. En particulier, on indique que c'est une partie importante du processus de l'enseignement puisqu'il exige de l'étudiant d'analyser attentivement un sujet défini. C'est pourquoi il est important de faire connaître aux étudiants les bases du processus de l'écriture des rapports et des essais.

Sont présentées quelques orientations et stratégies de la préparation aux examens de BULATS. Est souligné que pour écrire un communiqué net et intéressant il faut le planifier d'avance. Sont données quelques remarques pour l'emploi des illustrations. En conclusion on parle de trois approches – objectivité, neutralité, précision – qui permettent à l'auteur d'écrire un bon communiqué.