



Know your ISE syllabus (Information Booklet)

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1. How is the skill of speaking different to writing?

Speaking and writing are quite different beasts

When we speak we use pauses, we vary the volume, use different intonation patterns, make use of hand and body gestures.

Speech develops, often subconsciously, from observing and copying parents, peers and teachers.

Writing expertise develops over time, usually consciously. It is an expertise that many people never fully master.

A lot of our speech is unplanned. We often build in thinking time with 'errs' and 'ums', 'I mean', 'what I mean is', etc. In other words, we use tactics to delay and buy thinking time.

Writing on the other hand can be edited and rewritten many times, therefore, hesitation and thinking space words are not necessary. In the **Trinity portfolio tasks** students have the opportunity to review their work and rewrite it before submitting it for assessment.

Spoken language tends to be simpler with linking words, 'but, and' whereas written language typically uses more complex forms

Grammar is more flexible in speech than in writing. In speech we do not always observe the rule of being 'grammatically correct'

whereas in writing, every sentence must have a subject and a verb and the expectation is that it should be as grammatically correct as possible in an academic or public environment.

Because body language is not available in writing, communicating meaning through writing means being clear and precise. In writing sometimes a punctuation mark can help us out for emphasis. It can serve the purpose of pointing a finger, or some other gesture to emphasise.

Unlike speech, writing is generally standardised with minor differences in words, vocab and spelling between British and American English. Either forms are acceptable in Trinity exams but they must be used consistently, one or the other.

When we speak, we generally know who we are interacting with. In writing our audience could be anyone though, in writing tasks, the audience is always defined in the task question. We have only one attempt to make ourselves clear when writing so we should **avoid vagueness and ambiguity**.

With writing we have the opportunity to get things right first time or at least before a piece of writing goes to the audience. We can look up words, use spellchecks; writing can be edited and redrafted.

Before simply handing out advice to your students it is important **to get 'buy-in'** from them. If they accept your advice and values of good practice, they are more likely to apply them to their own work and achieve better results.

Here are some suggested areas you can explore with them. Where possible get their agreement and cooperation from the start.

2. Raising Awareness

1. To make clear the differences between spoken and written language to your students, here is a fun exercise which can be done in Spanish if you like.

1/ discuss a subject with a friend. Record this conversation

2/ after this, write a short summary of, say, 100 words on the same

topic

3/ compare the recording and written summary and identify the differences.

Once you have made your students aware of the basic differences between spoken and written language, ask them to review some previous writing.

1/ does it sound more like speech than writing?

2/ can you spot any words which should not be there?

3/ can you spot any sentences which are not grammatically correct?

4/ is there repetition of the same language?

5/ are linking words very informal and could be improved with forms more appropriate for writing?

Focus your students' attention in particular on:

1/ the formality of the language they have used in their written work

2/ take a look at punctuation and make corrections

2/ talk to them about the importance of proof reading as a means of avoiding the problems we have looked at above.

3. Plagiarism in the Portfolio tasks.

The Etiquette of handing in your own work.

Test out these ideas with your students and discuss as a group:

1/ I can simply take somebody's original ideas and words and use them as mine without reference

2/ I need to include a reference to ideas that are commonly known or accepted

3/ I can take my friends' work and adapt it and present it as mine

4/ it is easy to copy and paste from the internet into my answers and I don't need to say where I got the words from

5/ it's ok to ask my brother or another family member to read through my portfolio or homework exercises and let them correct my work for me because their English is better. If necessary I will pay them for doing it

6/ talk about the distinction between 'searching' and 'researching' using the internet or other reference sources.

4. Approaches to reading.

- Ask students about what types of reading they do in Spanish
- Write different categories of written material on board. *i.e. magazines, novels, train and bus timetables, newspapers, blogs, websites, advertising etc.*
- Have students think about and describe how they go about reading each kind of material. You may want to prompt them by asking the following questions:

- Do you read every word in the TV listing for the day or week?
- Do you understand every word you read when reading a novel?
- What kind of clues to meaning can the presentation and layout of the material give?
- How much time do you spend reading the newspaper? Do you read every single word?
- What kind of assumptions do you make when you read the first few lines, or a headline? (e.g. Top Tennis Player in trouble again....)
- How much time do you spend reading the various types of materials?

Based on students' answers to such questions, ask them to identify the type of skills they are using in the various reading situations.

Have students discuss their opinions about the various skills required for the listed materials.

Present various "real world" materials (i.e. magazines, books, scientific materials, computer manuals etc.) and ask students to identify the necessary skills required.

Present your students with these scenarios - There is often not a single correct answer, because it will vary according to your reading purpose.

- The TV guide for Friday evening
- An English grammar book
- An article in *National Geographic* magazine about Mexico
- A celebrity sportsman's homepage on the web
- The weather report in your local newspaper
- A novel
- A poem
- A bus timetable
- A fax at the office
- An advertising email - so called "spam"
- An email or letter from a good friend
- A recipe

Types of reading.

Your students do not need to know the names of the types of reading but it is useful if you, the tutor, do:

- Skimming - reading rapidly for the **main points – the gist**
- Scanning - reading rapidly to find **a specific piece of information or focus**
- Extensive - reading a longer text, often for pleasure with emphasis on **overall meaning**
- Intensive reading - reading a short text for **detailed information and accuracy**

Active reading techniques

It is a waste of time, particularly in an exam, to read without any specific purpose. The exam or task question in this case gives you the purpose:

1. Underlining and highlighting

What you think are the most important parts of what you are reading. Of course, only highlight your own copy of texts or photocopies, not borrowed books!

Visual learners, find it helpful to use different colours to highlight different aspects of a text

2. Note key words

Note down the main headings as you read. Use one or two keywords for each point. If you can't write on the text, make notes on a piece of paper

3. Questions

Before you start reading something like an article, a comprehension text, prepare for your reading by noting down questions you want the material to answer. These questions are usually set in the question you are going to answer. While you're reading, note down questions which the author raises and any definite statements the author makes.

4. Summarising

Pause after you've read a section of text. Then: try and put into your own words what you have just read.

Skim through the text and check how accurate your summary is. Fill in any points you have missed.

5. Signposting

What sequencing and other clues does the writer give the reader to help with the argument and direction of the text?

e.g. 'firstly, etc, then....'. 'Now we are going to ...'. 'as I said before....', 'finally, in conclusion....' and so on.

6. Words, phrases and vocabulary

Don't spend lots of time looking up words and expressions you could possibly guess from the meaning of the text. If it is a class or group exercise, consult your group members and share what you already know with what they already know.

Together, you will discover that most of the text is understood.

In an exam, remember you don't have to understand every single word and that many words can be understood by the context they appear in. Look at the sentences before and after the 'doubtful' phrases and vocabulary and see if you can work out the meaning.

If your students adopt some sort of strategy such as that suggested above, reading will be more effective and speedier than reading with no particular purpose in mind.

5. Planning your time for completing your portfolio tasks.

The temptation is to leave most of the PF tasks until a short time before the exam.

1/ why is this obviously a bad idea?

2/ ask your students at what time of the day do they feel **most effective and productive**? What does this tell them about getting homework and PF work done?

3/ where can you work best and in what sort of atmosphere: the cafe, in your bedroom, with or without music lots of short breaks or working through until you are finished? Everyone has their own effective style but you have to be honest with yourself.

4/ how often do you feel like stopping what you are doing and doing something completely different, so that you continue to be effective.

Focus, refocus. Focus ...etc.

5/ do your students plan a schedule of work and are they prepared to adapt it if it is not working?

6/ how can talking to friends about your tasks help but what should you remember about about plagiarism?

7/ do your students make a clear division between work time and relaxing time? Do they make use of an electronic calendar - Keep a diary of progress?

6. Brainstorming and Planning answers.

These two facets can make a huge difference to the quality of the answer for the PF and in the controlled written exam.

Check with your students how they feel about these statements:

1/ there is no point planning an answer. It is better to start writing and see where it goes.

2/ planning takes up valuable writing time. After all, it is the final piece of work that will be assessed, not the plan

3/ I have no idea how to plan so I avoid doing it.

Help with brainstorming

1/ brainstorming is just emptying your head of things you know about a subject and putting them down on paper. It also helps you identify perhaps what you don't know.

2/ go for quantity of ideas. Don't worry at the moment about specific detail and accuracy.

3/ try to get a variety of ideas, background information, arguments for and against, data, etc

4/ once you have all these ideas in front of you, it is easier to construct your answer

5/ use some kind of graphic organiser like a mind map to group your ideas and information. There are other organisers to help you.

6/ delete any information you don't want to use or which does not usefully demonstrate the level of language required for your exam.

7/ link ideas which are related.

8/ look at the word count of the question and decide how many paragraphs are needed.

9/ work roughly on these amounts: 80% for the main part of your answer, 10% for your introduction and 10% for your conclusion or summing up.

10/ develop each idea you want to include in simple language, bullet points if you wish.

Start to write:

1/ your introduction should include a **topic sentence** which ideally shows the scope of your composition.

2/ refer to the question several times during your writing to make sure you answer the question and include any sub points in the question.

3/ where appropriate include counter arguments to the points you make, or examples - whatever the task involves

4/ make your conclusions or summarise briefly the ideas you presented above.

7. Paragraphing

Ask your students how they define or decide where a paragraph begins and ends:

1/ I start a new paragraph when it looks a bit long

2/ when I start a new reason, idea, argument, present a new piece of information

3/ I have no real strategy, I just guess when it is time to start a new one.

Tips

1/ each paragraph has a **topic sentence** which is the writer's 'promise' of what is to appear in the paragraph. Ask yourself: **does this paragraph deliver my promise?**

2/ what **linking language** can I add to my ideas within a paragraph to make it logical and coherent to the reader?

3/ **coherence** is achieved often through 'referents' which reference something or someone mentioned before. Pronouns and determiners can help here.

4/ a good paragraph develops an idea logically and may contain a general idea followed by some examples, or short anecdote.

Quick check on your paragraphs

1/ too long? It contains more than one idea. Separate paragraphs for different ideas may be the solution.

2/ too short? Have I explored the theme of my topic sentence in enough detail to make the point clear to the reader? Can I combine it with another idea or related idea to make my point more clearly and interestingly?

3/ do my ideas link together? If not, can I use some linking devices to show the relationship between ideas?

4/ does my summary paragraph relate to the **topic sentence** of the paragraph and the overall subject of the composition? **Does it answer all the questions set in the task?**

5/ your conclusion should relate to or refer back to your introduction without repeating what you said in the introduction. Remember your introduction introduces your theme(s) and sets them out clearly for analysis, whereas your conclusion summarises and answers the questions.

8. Register or levels of formality

The degree of formality of your writing will be determined by the **audience** you are writing for. For example, an email to a close friend will sound very different from a letter of complaint or enquiry to someone in the local Authority. In the **Portfolio Tasks** and **the Controlled Written Exam** the task question will always **define the audience** for your writing.

At higher levels of ISE where, for example, data is presented and requires

interpretation by the writer, a greater level of formality is appropriate.

For example, 'this table shows that....' And not 'You can see from the table that....'

Contractions are generally not used. 'It is...' Not 'It's.....'

Slang words should be avoided. Often the Latinate verb is preferable to a verb+ preposition.

What exercises could you give your students to make them aware of and eliminate over-informal language in a formal context?

9. What makes a good sentence?

Find out what your students' opinion is about 'a good sentence'

- 1/ Is it as long as I can make it?
- 2/ long enough to do the job?
- 3/ ideally around 20 words
- 4/ no less than 10 words?

Sentences of course are as long as they need to be. Strictly speaking, a sentence contains at least **a subject and a verb** which we call **a clause**.

In English what are the basic 'rules' regarding:

- 1/ word order - verb, object, subject
- 2/ position of adjectives
- 3/ position of prepositions.
- 4/ position of adverbs

How would you explain the following to your students:

- 1/ a compound sentence
- 2/ a complex sentence

What effect do the following have on the reader?

- 1/ using too many short sentences
- 2/ sentences which are over long
- 3/ unrelated sentences joined perhaps with a comma or semi colon

10. How to write better paragraphs.

The advantage of following the pattern of planning, organising thoughts and linking where appropriate and managing time in an exam is

COHERENCE.

Coherence is the logical development of an argument and remaining

consistent throughout your paragraph.

Good practice is for students to read each other's work and ask themselves the following:

- 1/ Can I follow your arguments?
- 2/ can I identify a step by step development of your argument?
- 3/ does your **topic sentence** at the beginning of the paragraph deliver in what it promises?
- 4/ have you actually answered the question set by the task and also answered any sub points?
- 5/ does each paragraph contain only one main idea?
- 6/ are the sentences overlong?
- 7/ are there too many relative clauses?
- 8/ are there places where sentences can be split, ended and new sentences started to make the meaning clearer?
- 9/ is the grammar too complicated?
- 10/ does the argument develop or is it repeated throughout the paragraph?

What **linking words** do your students know and actively use to make their writing flow more smoothly?

Here are a few examples. What others can you usefully teach?

In no particular order:

- in conclusion, to begin with, to sum up, consequently, in addition, apart from, besides whereas, although, until, when.....

11. Cause and Effect

Many tasks require students to look at cause and effect. Many students focus on the 'what' and 'where' but ignore the 'how' and 'why'.

Conjunctions are frequently used to express the cause and effect relationship.

- because, as a result of, owing to due to....

Another way of expressing **cause and effect** is through verb phrases:

- X leads to Y, A results in B, Xs are the cause of Y, Y gives rise to Z, A produces B

Conditionals are useful to **predict and express wishes or regrets** for the future and past.

1/ **Zero conditional**: if world poverty continues, the future is very dark indeed

2/ **first conditional:** if logging continues in the rain forest, floods will result

3/ **second conditional:** if students spent more time practising writing, they would do better in their exams

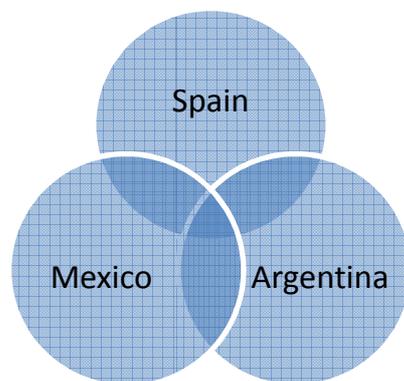
4/ **third conditional:** if I had worn a crash helmet, the accident wouldn't have been so devastating.

12. Comparing and Contrasting

Comparing and contrasting is a common feature of analysing a problem or situation.

Using a VENN diagram can help to organise ideas.

Where the circles overlap, we can write the similarity of two ideas or situations. The rest of the circles can be used for the contrasting ideas.



What other graphical devices can you use to organise thoughts and language?

Compare and contrast - the grammar

The language and grammar of compare and contrast includes **comparative** (-er) to the adjective or 'more'.

Superlatives are expressed by adding -est + the and 'the most+ adjective'.

Using '**intensifiers**' the comparison can be strengthened or weakened.

- ' is considerably, significantly, without doubt cheaper than'

- ' is slightly, barely, scarcely noticeable'.

Can your students **compare and contrast confidently**, using a variety of forms and **intensifiers** to keep their writing lively and interesting ?

13. Proofreading

The key to eliminating errors in the portfolio and the controlled written exam is the ability to proofread effectively.

Students frequently 'run out of time' or think the time is better spent writing more of their answer. You need to **get their 'buy-in'** about **proofreading** so that your values become their values.

Ask them:

- 1/ do you always leave time to proofread in exams? Why/not?
- 2/ how much time do you spend doing it?
- 3/ with your portfolio, when do you proofread?

What advice would you offer for each of these points?

The benefits of proofreading include some of the points we have already looked at:

- 1/ are my sentences difficult to understand - too long - or are there too many very short sentences?
- 2/ is my writing **coherent**? Is there a clear connection between sentences in each paragraph which makes my argument easy to follow? Have I used appropriate **linking words** to make my paragraphs flow.
- 3/ looking at my work, the handwriting, the **paragraphing**, the **layout** etc, what impression will the marker have? Have I taken care or I don't care about what I am submitting for my portfolio/ controlled written exam?
- 4/ are there any careless spelling mistakes (typos) I could easily fix?
- 5/ are there any obvious punctuation mistakes I can fix easily? Have I used capitals, commas, full stops, semi colons correctly?
- 6/ have I used one paragraph for each new idea or have I allowed several ideas to creep into the same paragraph?
- 7/ have I checked the basic grammar of my sentences? Does each one have a **subject and verb** at the very least? Do the sentences make sense or is there something missing to complete an idea?
- 8/ is there a lot of **repetition in my arguments**? Have I presented the same information more than once?
- 9/ have I checked the question again and **answered all parts of it**? Have I addressed the **audience** correctly that is stated in the task?
- 10/ given the task and the audience for my writing, have I used the correct level of **formality/informality (register)**?
- 11/ have I finished my work so close to the deadline there is no time to reflect and correct? For the portfolio, have I left myself a good **48 hours** before returning to my work to check it? If 48 hours is not possible, then

have at least allowed a break between finishing and proofreading so that I can look at my work with more distance and **critical thinking**?

12/ does my introduction give an overview/the scope of the whole composition? Does the introduction **capture the reader's interest**?

Does the reader know from the introduction which direction your writing is going?

13/ do my paragraphs present the **main points of my composition**?

Is my thought **consistent and coherent**? Have I presented the right **quantity and quality of information** to make my point and answer the question?

14/ does my **conclusion** refer back to the main ideas of the composition or the question set? Is it a conclusion or just a repetition of what I have already said above? Does it **answer all the questions set**?

Some top tips to help proofreading

1/ print it out. It is easier to read on paper than on a computer screen

2/ use coloured pens to indicate different types of mistakes and where you find a mistake, look carefully around because there could be another mistake nearby.

3/ does it help to read out loud all or parts of your work. Can you hear your mistakes more easily than spotting them on paper?

4/ can you get a friend and help each other proofread your work.

N.B. This is different to getting your friend to write it for you!

5/ leave yourself time to proofread more than once. You will not spot all the mistakes first time.

6/ what 'weaknesses' do you know you have from other work that has been corrected before? Are you sure you are not repeating your mistakes?

7/ try to think of **proofreading as a valuable activity** to help you get a better result. Don't see it as a waste of time where you could be writing more and more.

8/ don't throw away work which had been previously corrected. Use that to guide you with this new piece of work and give yourself credit for making progress. Keep your previous work in a separate folder as a personal record of your writing 'journey'.

What other tips can you add?

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