

Teaching Concept of Brevity Using Interactive Whiteboard in an ESL Classroom

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Abstract

This paper is about teaching the shortening of long and elaborate passages through precis writing and summary writing, to senior secondary students using an Interactive White Board. Learning the shortening of passages is one of the most important advanced writing skills to learn in the present era. In an era, which is marked by technological advancements in almost all fields, including education. Technology in education has played a major role in making teaching-learning accessible, interesting and easy to understand. It has become convenient for teachers to explain a concept using multiple examples which enhances learning and retention. Today one is surrounded by knowledge and information, in such conditions senior secondary-level students must know what to look for and what to let go. They must know the skills of searching, skimming, scanning and processing this information using their cognition, saving it and using it when needed. All these skills become easier to teach and learn in a large classroom when it is facilitated with ICT tools (Information and Communication Tools). In this, the author has shown the utility of an Interactive whiteboard (IWB) to teach precis and summary writing. The teachers of ESL (English as a Second Language) find it difficult to teach the nuances of these skills, where the students have to compress a long passage into shorter forms. The above are practical skills for work-related situations, where the students need to communicate useful information and leave behind not-so-useful ones. The paper presents a collaborative classroom activity using Interactive Whiteboard (IWB) accompanied by traditional materials to teach the beauty of brevity.

Keywords: *Precis Writing, Summary Writing, Interactive White Board, ESL Classroom, Traditional materials*

Introduction

Concept of Brevity

For students of senior secondary schools, it is important to know the beauty of brevity. They must know more is not always beautiful. They should know how to make a long article, a passage or a paragraph into a shorter one including all the important information. It's one of the most important skills they need to know before entering into their work field, after completing school.

This paper discusses two such skills having minor differences.

In today's world knowledge is exploding in all quarters every minute. In fact, we are living in an information age, where students need to sieve useful information from the rest of the lot. These skills are also important for them to become dexterous on their job front, in the academic rise and adaptable in a social set-up. It helps students to select important information and leave behind

repeated, unimportant or not-so-important ones from a paragraph or a passage and compress them into a concise form. It is done for an audience who is not present at the time of sharing that particular information or he is only interested to know the main points of that piece of information. Usually, during precis writing and summarization, the original piece of information is shortened to one-third, including the main points.

There is a close connection between reading and writing skills. Unlike oral-aural skills they need print medium and communication is done with the help of these printed signals, these texts are processed in our cognitive domain and then decoded. The skills of condensing come within the purview of reading and writing skills and it needs high levels of cognitive skills. These are essential skills in academic writing. Here, the students are expected to extract the key points from a given text and rewrite them in a smaller number of words than the original text.

Precis Writing

A precis is a miniature of a long article, a passage or a paragraph with only important points included in it and leaving not-so-important ones. The words, phrases and sentences are directly copied from the passage without much change. It is generally one-third of the original passage.

Summary Writing or Summarisation

While summary writing is a small version of a passage having descriptions of all the main points of a passage, its length depends upon the length of the text. In summary, writing or copying the original words, phrases and sentences of the passage is discouraged. Paraphrasing is a most useful technique in summary writing.

Why teaching ‘Essence of Passage’ is important for senior secondary students?

Capturing and restating is one of the most important skills in an academic field. This

skill is needed at every step of their education, from high school to university level. The next stoppage of the students studying at the secondary stage level is into adult life. After choosing a career-oriented course they have to enter into the world of work, where this skill becomes extremely essential for a successful career. So, it is of utmost importance to teach them from the secondary school level and through persistent practice master them at the senior secondary level.

Teaching Precis Writing and Summary Writing through Technology

Today humans are surrounded by technology, be it running a home or an institution, education or fashion, industry or a factory, jobs or merchandising, hospitals and cinema halls, supermarkets or street vendors, in solitude or in gathering, everywhere technology is seen moving along with us. It is part and parcel of our lives now. And the most amazing part of technology is – it compels us to move along at its pace.

It's an admissible fact that technology has eased our lives. It has greatly contributed to almost all fields including education. Children cannot think of studying without having a computer or smartphone. In this paper, the precis writing skills and summarizing skills will be taught using an interactive whiteboard.

The interactive whiteboard is a low-cost, easy-to-handle educational technology, useful in teaching summarizing skills. It's a digital whiteboard where the students can be kept engaged with the content and each other at the same time. It's a useful feature-rich and real-time digital board for a large class.

It is proven that students excel better when they stay engaged. And IWB is one of them, here;

- Students can be kept engaged and participating for longer as they are provided interactive media such as animations and embedded audio/video along with the targeted teaching content.
- Teachers-students and students-students work in collaboration.

- Enhance classroom communication using all the skills of the English language, i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Tools used for shortening the passage/paragraph

In an ELT (English Language Teaching) classroom, a tool may be defined as a mean/mechanism of accomplishing a task or purpose. In order to compress a passage, the following effective tools can be used.

1. Identifying the Topic/Main Idea and Supporting Details
2. Re-expressing the Information in Fewer Words

The overall structure of a passage/paragraph

Every passage/paragraph has a main idea and the following facts/evidence/details that support the main idea of the passage or paragraph. These are;

1. Topic: Subject (who and what is it about?)
2. Main Idea (what about the topic being discussed?)
3. First supporting details (primary supporting details)
4. Second supporting details (secondary supporting details, elaborates on primary details)
5. Extra facts, evidence and details

Capturing Content Points

The students have to find out those content

points that capture the essence of the passage, taking all the relevant points and leaving the irrelevant ones behind.

Materials provided and preparations done before the commencement of the class activity.

- Interactive Whiteboard (IWB)
- A Personal Computer of the teacher
- One Projector
- They will be supplied with a class dictionary or they can ask the teacher the meanings of certain words.
- They are given blank paper to note down points, a pencil and an eraser.
- Also, worksheets having different sub-headings will be distributed to each student for writing the relevant points.
- A few copies of a revised version of the grammar book should be made available in the classroom.
- The class will be divided into groups of three.

I. Classroom Activities for Writing Precis

1. Classroom Activities for Identifying the Topic/Main Idea and Supporting Details

Step 1

The students will be provided with a worksheet, one for each student. They will be told to write their names on their worksheets for later assessment of their work. The sample worksheet is given below.

Overall Structure of a Passage/Paragraph Name of the Student:

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Topic				
Main Idea				
Primary Supporting Details				
Secondary Supporting Details				

Step II

In this step, the students will be shown a paragraph or a passage on the IWB. The

selected passage will be appropriate to their proficiency level and grade level. The class will read the passage silently, they will be

given time to read it. They can ask a couple of questions to their teachers or to their fellow students but not much, as it will disrupt the teaching of the target skill. When the reading is done, they will be asked certain questions and their answers will help in condensing the main points. The order of these questions will be;

Question No. 1: Find out the topic of this passage.

Probable answer: The students will come up with many options. The teacher will underline those on the interactive whiteboard. The students will also write options in the boxes of their worksheets. After underlining the options, the teacher will again ask which option seems to be the closest one, seeing the content of the passage. After a little bit of brainstorming in small groups, the students will come to know what the passage is all about. The students will highlight it in their worksheets. After the completion of Step I, the teacher will erase the underlines on the IWB.

Step III

Question No. 2: What is the main idea of the passage?

Probable answer: By this time students have a fair idea of the topic being discussed in the passage. They will come up with answers or point to the lines which discuss/talk about the topic. She will start underlining those lines. The students will be allowed to discuss in groups of three. They will select 3 or 4 options and will write in the boxes. Out of the many options, the students will be able to tell the main idea contained in the passage. They are instructed to highlight the correct option in their individual worksheets. After the completion of Step III, the teacher will erase the underlines on the IWB.

Step IV

Question No. 3: What are the primary supporting facts/evidence/details you see in the passage?

Probable answer: Here, the students may mix up primary and secondary details. But the teacher will underline all those lines on the IWB pointed out by the students. The students will also write down them in their worksheets. Then the teacher will again

give them time to discuss in their groups. They will brainstorm once again and on the basis of the main idea of the topic already known, they will come up with the answer. All through this activity the teacher's role would be of a facilitator only. The primary supporting details will be kept and the secondary supporting details will be erased from the IWB. The students too will erase the secondary supporting details from their worksheets and keep only the primary supporting details.

Then the teacher will ask the students to copy the exact words, phrases or sentences and take into notice only the important details of the passage. They are expected to flow in the direction of the author's ideas.

Step V

Question No. 4: What are the secondary supporting facts/evidence/details you see in the passage?

Probable answer: This step is going to be easier for the students as everything has been sorted out —the topic, the main idea of the text, and the primary supporting details. They will easily point out the secondary supporting details given in the text. She will underline them and ask them to note them down in their worksheets. Later on, she will erase those underlines to move on to another set of group activities.

Throughout, the teacher will discourage students to add facts from their side and twist the information. No subjectivity is incorporated here. They are encouraged to condense the passage into one-third of the original passage approximately.

II Classroom Activities for Writing Summary

2. Classroom Activities for Identifying the Topic/Main Idea and Supporting Details

Step I

The students will be provided with a worksheet, one for each student. They will be told to write their names on their worksheets for later assessment of their work. The sample worksheet is given below.

Overall Structure of a Passage/Paragraph Name of the Student:

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Topic				
Main Idea				
Primary Supporting Details				
Secondary Supporting Details				

Step II

In this step, the students will be shown a paragraph or a passage on the IWB. The selected passage will be appropriate according to their proficiency level and grade level. Here, the class will read the passage silently, allowed to ask a couple of questions to their teachers or to their fellow students for clarification. When the reading is done, they will be asked certain questions and the teacher will gradually drive them towards summarizing the paragraph/passage. The order of these questions will be;

Question No. 1: Find out the topic of this passage.

Probable answer: The students will come up with many options. The teacher will underline those on the interactive whiteboard. The students will write those options in the space provided in their worksheets. Then she will again ask which option seems to be the most appropriate one, based on the content of the passage. After a little bit of brainstorming in small groups, the students will come to know what the passage is all about. After the completion of Step I, the teacher will erase the underlines on the IWB.

Step III

Question No. 2: What is the main idea of the passage?

Probable answer: The students know the topic being discussed in the passage. They will start pointing towards the lines which discuss or talk about the topic. She will start underlining those lines and ask the students to write them in their worksheets. The students are asked to choose one option out

of many. They will discuss in groups of three once again and will be able to tell the main idea contained in the passage. They will be instructed to highlight it in their individual worksheets. After the completion of Step III, the teacher will erase the underlines on the IWB.

Step IV

Question No. 3: What are the primary supporting facts/evidence/details you see in the passage?

Probable answer: Here, the students would not be able to separate the primary and secondary details in the beginning. But the teacher will underline all their responses on the IWB. The students will also write down in their worksheets. They will be allowed to brainstorm once again and on the basis of the main idea of the topic, they will be able to tell distinguish primary and secondary information. During this activity the teacher's role would be of a facilitator only. After this the primary supporting details will be kept and the secondary supporting details will be erased from the IWB. The students too will erase the secondary supporting details from their worksheets.

The teacher will encourage them not to copy the exact words, phrases or sentences from the passage but to paraphrase them in simple language.

Step V

Question No. 4: What are the secondary supporting facts/evidence/details you see in the passage?

Probable answer: Compared to the previous

steps, the final step is easier for the students. They will easily point out the secondary supporting details given in the passage. Based on their responses she will underline their answers on the IWB and ask them to write down in their worksheets.

The teacher will encourage the students to use simple language and discourage them to use the language of the passage. She will instruct them to keep the secondary details as well, as in summarization the length of the summary depends upon the length of the original passage.

3. Classroom Activities for Re-expressing the information in fewer words

Techniques of Summarizing

To make a text concise, techniques are required, where all the supporting facts, evidence and details are present become one-third of the original text without getting repeated. For this, the content points have to be condensed and rephrased. Below are some techniques to be used during the group activity in an ESL classroom.

Technique 1: Substitution with a collective noun

Group Activity: The selected passage/paragraph will be displayed on the IWB once again. The teacher will ask the class to find out groups of words that can be replaced by a collective noun. They will work in groups to find them. The teacher will underline the lines or groups of words pointed out by the students. The teacher will ask them to take the help of a dictionary or google the suitable collective noun for those words. She will help the students replace the words wherever possible. Before moving on to the next technique the underlines will be erased.

Technique 2: Substitution with suitable synonyms (one word only)

Group Activity: The selected passage/paragraph will be displayed on the IWB once again. The teacher will ask the class to find out word/s that can be replaced by suitable synonyms. She will underline the word/s

pointed out by the students, and encouraged to take the help of a dictionary or google the suitable synonyms for that word/s. She will help the students replace the words wherever possible. Before moving on to the next technique the underlined word/s. Before moving on to the next activity she will erase the underlines on IWB.

Technique 3: Re-expression by changing word form

Group Activity: The selected passage/paragraph will be displayed on the IWB once again. The teacher will ask the class to find out sentences that can be re-expressed by changing the word forms. They will work in groups to find such word forms. The teacher will underline those sentences pointed out by the students. The teacher will ask them to discuss in groups, take the help of English language applications or google them. Once found the teacher will help them re-express those word forms wherever possible. Before moving on to the next technique the underlined sentences will be erased.

Technique 4: Re-expression by re-structuring sentences

Group Activity: The selected passage/paragraph will be displayed on the IWB once again. The teacher will ask the class to find out sentences that can be re-expressed by re-structuring them. They will work in groups to locate such sentences. The teacher will underline those sentences pointed out by the students. The teacher will ask them to discuss in groups, take the help of English language applications or google them. Once found, the teacher will help them re-structure those sentences wherever possible. Before moving on to the next technique the underlined sentences will be erased.

Teaching Precis Writing and Summarising without using IWB

Not every school is equipped with ICT tools, so in that condition, the above skill can also be taught without using IWB. In such cases, a teacher can use the Xerox copies of a carefully selected text along with the

workable worksheets. Here, the teacher can distribute one copy to a group of three students. The teacher and the students will repeat all the aforementioned steps of Group Activities 1 and all the techniques of Group Activities 2 the same way as done using the IWB.

Conclusion

Precis writing and summarising skills taught with the help of Interactive Whiteboard (IWB) will definitely make the teaching/learning process a lasting experience. It will help the students to master the techniques and to use them wherever it is needed.

Skills learnt through group activities and in collaboration teach not only the target skill but add to the learning of all language skills like listening, speaking, reading, writing and language elements like grammar and vocabulary. Usually, in an ESL classroom, the students are of multi-proficiency levels and with different socioeconomic statuses and personality traits. The teacher can use these individual differences to create a conducive classroom atmosphere where peer-group teaching/learning can be carried out in collaboration. And teaching the importance of brevity like precis writing and summarising skills needs such a classroom environment.

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