

Designing Differentiated Writing Tasks for Different Ability Groups (Secondary)

A school in Kwun Tong with a large intake of academically low achievers has designed differentiated assessment tasks on writing for Secondary 3 students with a wide range of linguistic abilities.

Design of the assessment tasks

The writing task is coherently integrated into the theme 'Travelling in Hong Kong'. Students learning this theme are taught the lexis and language structures in authentic contexts before doing the writing task.

The writing task as an assessment tool can serve a differentiating function and also meet the different needs of the students having a wide range of linguistic abilities. Teachers can employ the following strategies to cater for different ability groups:

- Students of different linguistic abilities are given different contextual clues and support. More able students are given the notes only (Set 1) as contextual clues whereas less able students are given both the notes (Set 1) and the letter (Set 2).
- There are varied contextual clues and support given in different parts of the notes (Set 1) and the letter (Set 2). Therefore, different cognitive and performance demands are made on students while they are making use of the given contextual clues and support.
- The writing task is designed in such a way that students need to provide only factual information at the beginning but they are required to express their feelings and judgment in the later part of their writing.

Special features

- Differentiated contextual clues are used in the assessment tasks to cater for different ability groups. The complexity of the language, organization, length and context in the teaching materials are varied to pitch at students' linguistic level.
- Less able students can develop a sense of achievement while more able students will still find the writing task challenging as they can enrich the content by adding extra ideas in their writing.

Differentiated assessment tasks

Your cousin, Alice, lives in Singapore. She came to Hong Kong last week. It was the first time that she came to Hong Kong. Therefore you took her to different places of attraction in Hong Kong. Now write a letter to your uncle in another country telling him about your visits to those places of attraction. Study the following notes which will help you write the letter to your uncle.

Set 1

	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Location	the Ocean Park in Aberdeen	the Po Lin Monastery on Lantau Island	?
Transport	Bus	Ferry/Bus	?
Highlights of the visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • watched the dolphin show • tried the roller-coaster • went to the Wave Cove and the shark aquarium • saw the world's longest "dancing dragon" in the Middle Kingdom • bought some souvenirs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the big Buddha • the vegetarian lunch • the Hau Wong Temple nearby • souvenirs from the temple.....? 	?
How you and Alice felt after the visits	???		

Set 2

Complete the following letter using the given information about the visits.

Dear Uncle Jim,

How _____ (be) you? Do you still remember Alice? She came to Hong Kong last week. Since it was the first time that she visited Hong Kong, I _____

We went to _____ on Friday. We went there by _____ .
We _____

It was really great fun! We especially loved _____

We also _____ on Saturday. _____

What we enjoyed most was _____ because _____ .

Alice and I _____

Alice told me that she really felt _____ !

Well, I know you've never been to Hong Kong before. Uncle Jim, when will you come to Hong Kong and visit us? Please let me know as soon as possible.

Best wishes,
(signature)