

Enhancing Students' Writing Skills through Assessment FOR Learning (Secondary 4-6)

Introduction

This example illustrates:

- the use of different strategies to promote assessment for learning in the development of writing skills such as:
 - discussion about the success criteria in the evaluation form
 - self and peer review
 - teacher's written feedback
 - analysis of good student work
- how students are guided to develop strategies for planning, monitoring, revising, and evaluating their own work in the process

Previous Learning Experience and Analysis of Students' Needs

- Students have completed a unit of tasks on the theme “charity”, which includes browsing websites and viewing TV commercials related to charitable organisations, searching for information about a charitable organisation that is worth supporting and giving a short presentation to explain its work, mission, vision and appeal for support.
- Based on students' performance in the oral presentations, the teacher identified their strengths and areas for improvement:

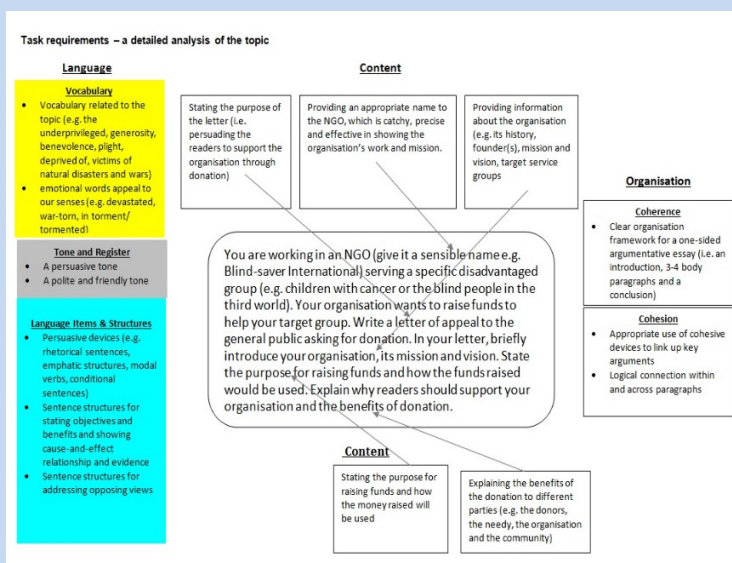
Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being able to give a factual account of the work of charitable organisations and their campaigns • showing an understanding of topical vocabulary such as “disasters”, “earthquakes” and “famines” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adding vivid descriptions to enhance the emotional appeal when presenting the mission and work of the organisation • using appropriate language items and rhetorical strategies to convince people that the organisation is worth supporting

Writing Task

As an end-of-unit task, students are asked to write a donation appeal letter for a charitable organisation, in which they have to consolidate and apply what they have previously learnt, as well as to practise using strategies to enhance the emotional appeal and persuasiveness of their writing.

Learning, Teaching and Assessment Process	Impact on Learning
Pre-writing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are shown some sample letters of appeal from NGOs to the public and guided to study the style, format, organisation and language. • Students identify rhetorical strategies and language items that help involve the readers and appeal to their emotions (e.g. the use of imperatives and personal pronoun “I” and “you”) from the two sample letters. • Students play the role of the founder of a new NGO / charitable organisation. They have to come up with the following information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ the name of the organisation ➢ the vision and mission ➢ the target service group ➢ reasons for serving the target group • Students form groups of four to share their ideas with the other group members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are provided with the opportunity to identify the tone, style, language and rhetorical strategies used in sample letters of appeal, which they can model on in later stages of writing. • Students can transfer what they have learnt in the unit on charity to the formation of a new NGO that matches their personal values, beliefs and aspirations. • Students’ positive values and attitudes such as “care for others”, “love” and “common good” are nurtured through a task that encourages them to think about people who need help in society and the world. • Students’ motivation for writing is raised after the brainstorming and discussion activities as they can develop a sense of ownership through creating a new NGO of their own.

- Students are asked to identify the main points to address in the writing topic and work out the purpose of writing, the writer-reader relationship and the tone.
- Students are guided to discuss the organisation of the writing, as well as the vocabulary and language required to persuade the readers to make donations.



- Explicit teaching of strategies for topic analysis (e.g. underlining key words and parts in the question, breaking down the language elements into vocabulary, tone and sentence structures) enables students to understand the requirements of this writing task and apply the tactics in analysing other writing topics they come across in the future.

First Draft

- Students are guided through the Assessment Form (Annex 1), which lists the success criteria for the writing task.
- Students write the first draft of the letter individually, focusing mainly on content and ideas. They then exchange their work with their peers and assess whether their peers' work can meet the requirements for "Content" and provide feedback.

- Students' understanding of the success criteria for the writing task is enhanced.
- Peer review and feedback help to promote peer and collaborative learning.

Second Draft

- Students rewrite the letter based on the feedback from classmates. They then evaluate their own work with reference to all the criteria in the Assessment Form. Students rate their own performance by ticking the appropriate boxes in pencil.
- Students submit the second draft, together with the Self-Assessment Form to the teacher.

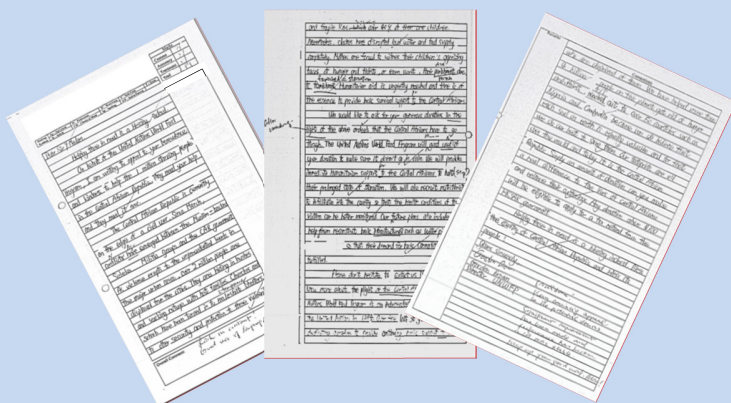
- Students develop the ability of editing and reviewing their own work with reference to the peer feedback and the success criteria.

Post-writing

- The writing assignments, together with the teacher's Assessment Form, are returned to students. A feedback session is held to discuss some areas for improvement in terms of content, language and organisation using students' examples.



- A good student writing sample is discussed with the whole class and students are guided to identify the strengths of the writing.



- Students are asked to compare the ratings given by the teacher (in red) and themselves (in pencil) and read the teacher's written feedback in the Assessment Forms to reflect on their performance.

Please tick ✓		Teacher	Student	Average	Good	Excellent
A. Content						
1.	Starting the purpose of the letter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Giving a suitable name to the NGO	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Introducing the organisation, its mission and vision (e.g. founder(s), history, target beneficiaries, non-profit making nature)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Stating the purpose for raising funds and how the funds raised would be used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Explaining why readers should support your organisation and the benefits of donation (e.g. alleviating the pain of and offering hope to the target beneficiaries, tax exemption)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Including sufficient details and explanations (e.g. suffering and urgent needs of the disadvantaged groups, needs of donation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Language and Style						
1.	Adopting a polite and friendly tone to appeal for donation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Using suitable vocabulary related to the topic (e.g. the underprivileged, be deprived of, generosity, benevolent)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Using appropriate expressions and sentence structures to state objectives and benefits, and show cause and effect	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Using appropriate tenses to present facts and ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Using rhetorical strategies to persuade the readers (e.g. rhetorical questions, imperatives, conditional sentences, tension and other emphatic structures)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Organisation						
1.	Using appropriate layout and format of a letter (i.e. opening and closing remarks, a body to introduce the organisation, the purpose for raising funds, how the funds raised would be used, reasons why readers should support the organisation and the benefits of donation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Adopting a clear focus for each paragraph	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Creating a logical flow of ideas in a paragraph	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Using appropriate cohesive devices to establish connection between ideas and across paragraphs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Teachers' Comments

Satisfactory writing that provides a clear purpose for the donation. You can improve the organisation of the letter by better planning before writing and outlining the focus of each paragraph. To persuade the readers to donate money, you should enhance the emotional appeal of your letter. Keep trying! :)

- Good student work is presented for students' modelling and discussion. The strengths of the work are discussed in detail to enhance students' understanding of the task requirements and success criteria.
- Students are more aware of their own problems in writing when they refer to the teacher's comments, compare their own ratings with the teacher's and engage in the discussion during the feedback session.

- Students complete the last part of the form to identify areas to focus on and plan actions for improvement.

Students' Reflections
Taking into consideration the teacher's feedback and comments, I have identified some areas for further improvement and planned the follow-up actions:

Weaknesses / areas of improvement	Actions to be taken
e.g. I gave too much factual information about the organisation but talked very little about the benefits of donation.	e.g. I can emphasise the benefits of the donations to the donors (e.g. tax remission) and the victims (e.g. speeding up the relief and reconstruction work after the disaster)
My title is not clear.	I need a title that shows the purpose of the letter directly
My opening is not striking enough to catch the attention of reader.	I can describe the plight of the victims more vividly to show how desperate they are so as to arouse sympathy of readers.
My letter is a bit disorganised.	I can reorganise it and put only one focus in each paragraph.

I need to seek advice/assistance from my teacher on the following areas:
How to organise the letter.

- Students revise their own work based on teacher's feedback and the actions they have planned. They submit the revised work together with the previous draft for the teacher's further feedback.

- Students' self-directed learning skills are enhanced through engaging them in active reflection and action planning for making improvement in writing.

- Learner autonomy and independence is promoted through allowing them to select areas / aspects of the writing to focus on in the revision.

2nd Draft

Dear Sir / Madam,

Every little helps ??? unclear A striking opening is needed to appeal to the readers

I am writing on behalf of Disaster-saver to ask for your generous donation to help those whose lives are threatened by the fierce natural disasters. Disaster-saver is an international non-profit making organisation founded in 1978. We have been offering assistance to people suffering from disasters. And now, it's your turn to make a difference sounds like an obligation and a bit abrupt and turn over a new leaf for the victims.

Revised Work

Dear Sir / Madam,

Every donation counts ✓ much clearer title stating the purpose of writing

The Richter 7.0 earthquake in San Jose one week ago caused more than 700 injuries and deaths. People's homes were smashed into debris and the victims are undergoing dark times with the shortage of fresh water, food, medicine and other basic necessities. SD to show a pressing need for funds with a real case Fortunate as we are living in a disaster-free city like Hong Kong, let us not forget the victims suffering in another part of the world. I am writing on behalf of Disaster-saver to ask for your generous donation to help those whose lives are threatened by the fierce natural disasters.

Some of the activities have been tried out in St Mark's School. We thank the school for sharing their experience.

Teacher / Self / Peer Assessment Form

Date:

Task: *You are working in an NGO (give it a sensible name e.g. Blind-saver International) serving a specific disadvantaged group (e.g. children with cancer or the blind people in the third world). Your organisation wants to raise funds to help your target group. Write a letter of appeal to the general public asking for donation. In your letter, briefly introduce your organisation, its mission and vision. State the purpose for raising funds and how the funds raised would be used. Explain why readers should support your organisation and the benefits of donation.*

Text Type: *A letter of appeal for donation*

Please tick: ✓	Unsatis- factory	Below Average	Average	Good	Excellent
A. Content					
1. Stating the purpose of the letter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Giving a sensible name to the NGO	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Introducing the organisation, its mission and vision (e.g. founder(s), history, target beneficiaries, non-profit making nature)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Stating the purpose for raising funds and how the funds raised would be used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Explaining why readers should support your organisation and the benefits of donation (e.g. alleviating the pain of and offering hope to the target beneficiaries, tax exemption)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Including sufficient details and explanations (e.g. sufferings and urgent needs of the disadvantaged groups, modes of donation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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