



Writing Practice Activity

Overview

- General non-academic writing practice for students who use English as an additional language - aimed at an intermediate level.
- Approx. 1 hour for practice writing (topics are provided) + appointment to review.
- Contact ELS if you have any questions about this activity. Email: els@ryerson.ca

Activity Rationale

Writing, like any skill, needs constant practice in order to improve. This activity uses practice topics taken from the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). By regularly engaging in this writing activity, participants will begin **to identify their common errors** (both grammar and usage), **gain confidence**, and start to **find their *written voice***. As well, participants will become more aware of the Writing Process, (**Brainstorming-Organizing-Writing-Proofreading**), and how to use time more efficiently.

Participant Instructions

1. Two steps are involved:
 - Planning and writing a 5-paragraph essay (1 hour). Essays can be written by hand or electronically (no use of dictionaries or spell-grammar checker).
 - Going through the essay with a member of the ELS staff (**approx. 50 minutes**)
2. Select a topic from the TOEFL topic list. The **1-hour** time limit begins now.
 - Brainstorm the general topic + compose a thesis + supporting arguments + make a plan or outline (**approx. 10~15 minutes**). An outline states your thesis + key words for your 3 topic sentences + conclusion (if necessary). An outline should be in point form.
 - Write a 5 paragraph essay, i.e. Introduction + 3 supporting paragraphs + conclusion. Don't get off topic - use your outline to organize your thoughts (**approx.. 40 minutes**)
 - Revise & make corrections (**approx. 5~10 minutes**)
3. Book an appointment for individual help through the ELS online reservation calendar (Skype or on-campus appointment). During your appointment you will read your essay aloud. The ELS staff member will stop you at various points for clarification, correction, stylistic comments, etc. This process allows you to become aware of your common writing errors – over time you will begin to self-identify these errors and then self-correct them.

Writing Topics

Write a 5-paragraph essay (*Introduction + 3 supporting arguments + Conclusion*). Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.

Topics taken from the TOEFL (Test of English as an Additional Language).

1. People attend school for many different reasons (for example, expanded knowledge, societal awareness, and enhanced interpersonal relationships). Why do you think people decide to go to school?
2. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Coaches are the best teachers.
3. It has been said, "Not all learning takes place in the classroom." Compare and contrast knowledge gained from personal experience with knowledge gained from classroom instruction. In your opinion, which source is more important? Why?
4. The government has announced that it wishes to build a military base near your community. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this new influence on your community. Do you support or oppose the military base?
5. How does advertising influence people's behaviour?
6. "When people succeed in life, it is because of hard work. Being lucky has nothing to do with success in life." Do you agree or disagree with the quotation above?
7. Many people visit museums when they travel to new places. Why do you think people visit museums?
8. Some people believe that university students should be required to attend classes. Others believe that going to classes should be optional for students. Which point of view do you agree with?
9. Neighbours are the people who live near us. In your opinion, what are the qualities of a good neighbour?
10. What are some important qualities of a good supervisor (boss)?
11. Should governments spend more money on improving roads and highways, or should governments spend more money on improving public transportation (buses, trains, subways)? Why?
12. It is better for children to grow up in the countryside than in a big city. Do you agree or disagree?
13. In general, people are living longer now. Discuss the causes of this phenomenon.
14. We work or will work in jobs with many different kinds of people. In your opinion, what are some important characteristics of a co-worker (someone you work closely with)?

15. Is it better to enjoy your money when you earn it or is it better to save your money for some time in the future?
16. Do you agree or disagree that progress is always good?
17. Learning about the past has no value for those of us living in the present. Do you agree or disagree?
18. Some people think that human needs for farmland, housing, and industry are more important than saving land for endangered animals. Do you agree or disagree with this point of view? Why or why not?
19. What is a very important skill a person should learn in order to be successful in the world today? Choose one skill.
20. Why do you think some people are attracted to dangerous sports or other dangerous activities?
21. Some people prefer to get up early in the morning and start the day's work. Others prefer to get up later in the day and work until late at night. Which do you prefer?
22. People work because they need money to live. What are some other reasons that people work? Discuss one or more of these reasons.
23. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Face-to-face communication is better than other types of communication, such as letters, E-mail, or telephone calls.
24. Some people like to do only what they already do well. Other people prefer to try new things and take risks. Which do you prefer?
25. Some people believe that success in life comes from taking risks or chances. Others believe that success results from careful planning. What is your opinion?
26. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? One should never judge a person by external appearances.
27. A company is going to give some money either to support the arts or to protect the environment. Which do you think the company should choose?
28. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Businesses should do anything they can to make a profit.
29. Some people are always in a hurry to go places and get things done. Other people prefer to take their time and live life at a slower pace. Which do you prefer?
30. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Games are as important for adults as they are for children.
31. Would you rather be self-employed, work for someone else, or own a business?

32. Should a city try to preserve its old, historic buildings or replace them with modern buildings?
33. If you were an employer, which kind of worker would you prefer to hire: an inexperienced worker at a lower salary or an experienced worker at a higher salary?
34. Some people think that the automobile has improved modern life. Others think that the automobile has caused serious problems. What is your opinion?
35. Which would you choose: a high-paying job with long hours that would give you little time with family and friends or a lower-paying job with shorter hours that would give you more time with family and friends? Explain your choice.
36. Grades (marks) encourage students to learn. Do you agree or disagree?
37. The best way to travel is in a group led by a tour guide. Do you agree or disagree?
38. Boys and girls should attend separate schools. Do you agree or disagree?
39. Technology has made the world a better place to live. Do you agree or disagree?
40. If you could go back to some time and place in the past, when and where would you go? Why?
41. Some people prefer to live in places that have the same weather or climate all year long. Others like to live in areas where the weather changes several times a year. Which do you prefer?
42. People have different ways of escaping the stress and difficulties of modern life. Some read; some exercise; others work in their gardens. What do you think are the best ways of reducing stress?
43. In your opinion, what is the most important characteristic (for example, honesty, intelligence, a sense of humor) that a person can have to be successful in life? When you write your answer, you are not limited to the examples listed in the question.
44. It is generally agreed that society benefits from the work of its members. Compare the contributions of artists to society with the contributions of scientists to society. Which type of contribution do you think is valued more by your society?
45. Some people believe that the best way of learning about life is by listening to the advice of family and friends. Other people believe that the best way of learning about life is through personal experience. Compare the advantages of these two different ways of learning about life. Which do you think is preferable?
46. People learn in different ways. Some people learn by doing things; other people learn by reading about things; others learn by listening to people talk about things. Which of these methods of learning is best for you?

- 47.** Some people enjoy change, and they look forward to new experiences. Others like their lives to stay the same, and they do not change their usual habits. Compare these two approaches to life. Which approach do you prefer?
- 48.** Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? People behave differently when they wear different clothes. Do you agree that different clothes influence the way people behave?
- 49.** Some people trust their first impressions about a person's character because they believe these judgments are generally correct. Other people do not judge a person's character quickly because they believe first impressions are often wrong. Compare these two attitudes. Which attitude do you agree with?
- 50.** Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? People are never satisfied with what they have; they always want something more or something different.
- 51.** Some people say that physical exercise should be a required part of every school day. Other people believe that students should spend the whole school day on academic studies. Which opinion do you agree with?
- 52.** Only people who earn a lot of money are successful. Do you agree or disagree?
- 53.** Some high schools require all students to wear school uniforms. Other high schools permit students to decide what to wear to school. Which of these two school policies do you think is better?
- 54.** Playing a game is fun only when you win. Do you agree or disagree?
- 55.** If you could make one important change in a school that you now attend or have attended in the past, what change would you make?