

PARAMEDIC METHOD -

Facilitator between argumentative reading and writing

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Today academic writing remains a milestone in many higher education programs. If some ten-fifteen years ago many language specialists and particularly English language teachers were mainly concerned with students' poor speaking skills, today writing or academic writing, as we are accustomed to call it at educational institutions, has turned into the major target of many English language curriculum programs, either ESP or General English. Osmond (2013:14) claims that academic writing is formal; the scholar also believes that writing essays and assignments is difficult (2013:1). This is true because, writing is not a detached skill or subject, but is closely connected with reading and even listening. It is also true that academic writing is normally taught within a particular content. That is, students write about materials they are currently studying in an academic course or that the language or composition course itself stimulates the academic process (e.g., minilectures, readings, and discussion on a topic lead into writing assignments) (Shih, 1986:617). Thus, having integrated with reading, listening, and discussion about the core content and about collaborative and independent research growing from the core material (Shih, 1986:618) academic writing goes hand in hand with such notions as referencing, argumentation, citation, etc. Referencing your research correctly is a vital part of academic writing. It is impossible to separate the mechanics of referencing from how we effectively bring our research into our own writing and our own arguments (Osmond, 2013:5). For instance, such

assignments as critical analysis, argumentative essays, persuasive essays, etc. will look much more credible and readable if the author uses arguments to support his/her idea. In its turn, "Argument" ... doesn't mean a specific debate between two or more people around the kitchen table or at the pub! (Osmond, 2013:2); it should be well supported by appropriately selected references, i.e. the sources which are reliable and valid. Often, teachers, or instructors provide their students with those supporting materials among which are: scholarly articles, newspapers, journals, magazines, etc., i.e. authentic reading materials. Thus, here the problem for many academic writing instructors starts!

I believe that many of my colleagues will agree that in our classes we sometimes deal with students of different language competence level. Particularly, those students who come from various majors and gather in a common EFL or ESP class, they all possess different levels of English language knowledge which often may vary from intermediate to advanced. This makes it difficult for the teacher/instructor to select reading materials (in this case, I am talking about content reading which is later used by the students for referencing their pieces of writing). Joiner *et al.* (1989:428) assume that in typical classroom practice texts are generally used at the intermediate level to prepare the students for their first encounter with authentic texts, which are usually reserved for advanced students, if they are used at all... However, when we deal with academic writing class, in order to provide students with a credible source,

we, teachers/instructors, usually try to provide our students with authentic materials. Gilman and Moody (1984:333) have pointed out that authentic texts, by their very nature, are more culturally rich and interesting and that they are also more redundant than most texts prepared for learners. The richness of these texts makes them appealing to students; their redundancy gives the students more clues to comprehension. So, what to do with/for those students whose English is different from Standard English? Do we (teachers/instructors) need to give students simplified/adapted texts only? Or, we can use real/authentic texts, but change our approach in their class presentation. I believe that the latter variant is more appropriate for an interesting and productive academic writing teaching. Thus, in the next part I will describe the ways and techniques how students with an intermediate English language competence level overcome long and complicated authentic texts later used in their essays.

Paramedic method

It is believed that “turning a simple easy-to-read sentences into a complicated one is very tempting” (Osmond, 2013:130); even more tempting is turning complicated academic sentences into the simple ones. Based on my personal observations, out of twenty-two students in writing and information literacy class, nearly fourteen students avoid reading long academic texts giving their preferences to short level-adapted materials that consist of simple grammatical structures and level-appropriate vocabulary. Yet, “all good and interesting materials are rarely level-appropriate”; this makes us search for such methods and techniques that will teach students read complicated texts previously simplifying them. Thus, developed by Richard Lanham, *Paramedic Method* is targeted to facilitate students’ poor understanding of complicated texts and paragraphs, i.e. to improve clarity and readability,

to make texts effective and concise. This method can be easily used by writing instructors at the very early stages of the writing course to teach students how to easily manage with those materials which they find incomprehensible and hard. According to *Paramedic Method*, there are several steps to make confusing syntax comprehensible.

- Circle the prepositions (of, in, about, for, onto, into);
- Draw a box around the "is" verb forms;
- Ask, "Where's the action?";
- Change the "action" into a simple verb;
- Move the doer into the subject (Who's kicking whom);
- Eliminate any unnecessary slow wind-ups;
- Eliminate any redundancies.

To show how this method works in practice, I would like to demonstrate one of the activities I use in Writing and Information Literacy class. At first, students are distributed a short but complex text, and are asked to underline three long sentences that seem to be the most inapprehensible ones. Interestingly, the majority of students select the same sentences which are later put on the board. Let’s see one of those sentences!

The self-conscious personality must be taken into account by the science of psychology not only because personality is so distinctive of the human species, but also because it is so precious, and so important in practical way, to the individual himself and through him to every social group and to society as a whole. (Weber P.L. 1940:305)

Then, I ask students to copy this sentence into their copybooks (papers), so that everyone can work individually, and start instructing them in the following way:

1. Underline prepositions or prepositional phrases in the sentence:

The self-conscious personality must be taken into account by the science of psychology not only because personality is so distinctive of the human species, but also because it is so precious, and so important in practical way, to the individual himself and through him to every social group and to society as a whole.

2. Mark the “to be” verbs:

*The self-conscious personality **must be** taken into account by the science of psychology not only because personality **is** so distinctive of the human species, but also because it **is** so precious, and so important in practical way, to the individual himself and through him to every social group and to society as a whole.*

3. Find nominalizations and make it an action verb:

The self-conscious personality (to personalize self-consciousness) must be taken into account by the science of psychology not only because personality is so distinctive of the human species, but also because it is so precious, and so important in practical way, to the individual himself and through him to every social group and to society as a whole.

4. Find the agent of the action:

*The self-conscious personality must be taken into account by **the science of psychology** not only because personality is so distinctive of the human species, but also because it is so precious, and so important in practical way, to the individual himself and through him to every social group and to society as a whole.*

5. Eliminate (cross out) unnecessary words:

The self-conscious personality must be taken into account by the science of psychology not only because personality is so distinctive of the human species, but also because it is so precious, and so important in practical way, to the individual himself and through him to every social group and to society as a whole.

Note! Students are explained each of the instructional steps. Additionally, to make the analysis more distinctive, students can use different pen/pencil colours or, different figure for each of the steps.

Finally, students are asked to rewrite the sentence, following all the steps they have previously taken.

The results show that normally the majority of students are in a correct track and have two possible versions:

1. *The science of psychology personalizes self-consciousness as a precious and important one for individual himself and for every social group and society.*
2. *The science of psychology takes self-conscious personality as a precious and important one for individual himself and for every social group and society.*

This activity can be repeated during the first two-three classes (within 15-20 minutes) unless the students get a full comprehension on how to work with level-inappropriate materials. Due to my personal experience, I am strongly convinced that such a technique substantially changes students' attitude towards academic reading which has a positive impact on ensuing classes and enriches students' writing skills.

References

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