

A TEACHER'S OPINIONS ON TEACHING ENGLISH COMPOSITION

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The China Post editorial on Jan. 25, stimulated me to write the following article.

The purpose of teaching a foreign language is to train students in their language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Paying too much attention to grammatical subtleties is by no means a way to teach a language. This traditional method not only deprives students of their chance to apply what they have learned, but shatters their interest in studying the language. As a result, they can't speak or write after having learned English at least six years at school, let alone write an English composition.

Owing to the decision to include English composition in the College Entrance Examination, teachers must teach their students how to write. Teachers with limited experience in teaching English composition find it difficult to adjust to this sudden change. They complain that correcting the compositions of large classes is a burden which overtaxes them. Instead of complaining, they should be improving their abilities and teaching methodology. Current methodology in teaching writing emphasizes learning the so-called model compositions by rote. However, memorizing or copying words from others does not help the students express themselves in their own words. Also, it stifles creative thought.

The question for English teachers lies in how to develop the students' ability to write, which is especially important to students who will be facing the challenge of the Joint College Entrance Examination.

Teachers may find the following suggestions helpful.

1. Refresher courses in speaking, reading, and writing should be established by the Ministry of Education. Teachers' attendance should be compulsory.