

Teaching Writing: An Analysis of Writing Activities in Touchstone 1

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Abstract

The teaching of writing is a very complex process, yet it is a core part of English language teaching since writing involves many different kinds of skills and knowledge in order to produce a meaningful text. Teaching writing is not only about teaching the mechanical and communication aspects of writing to learners, but also it is about identifying how these aspects are presented and outlined in books prescribed for the students. The present study is a comprehensive investigation to highlight some basic issues in teaching writing in general, and identify the writing tasks offered in Touchstone 1 (both the Student's Book and Workbook) in specific since Touchstone 1 is used to teach the non-English major undergraduate students of level 1 at King Khalid University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Our study found that this textbook is replete with a lot of word-level and sentence-level writing activities in the forms of vocabulary exercises and grammar points along with some text level writing activities. In addition, these text level activities do not seem to provide the technical know-how, sufficient practices, proper formats and organizations through which students can easily grasp them. This study also discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the writing activities presented in this textbook and later comes up with possible recommendations.

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Keywords: Document analysis, Teaching writing, Touchstone 1, Writing activity

INTRODUCTION

Writing has always been at the heart of language education process since it greatly shapes human interaction through its power and scope of disseminating and influencing ideas, thoughts, and opinions, not only in everyday situations, but also across time and space. "Writing is not just about putting spoken language down on the page or screen but also about composition – construction of texts that can communicate without their author's presence" (Dombey, 2013, p.22). So, the success of teaching writing mostly depends on approaches that can effectively balance the communicative purpose and the technical skills of writing. The present study aims at highlighting some basic issues in teaching writing in general and exploring writing activities in Touchstone1 (both the Student's Book and Workbook) in particular.

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Touchstone (McCarthy, McCarten & Sandiford, 2009) is a four-level, integrated-skills series for young and adult young learners from the beginning through the intermediate level of proficiency. It has a special edition for the Arab World with a view to offering fresh approach to teaching and learning North American English. It covers the basic four language skills as well as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation along with a heavy emphasis on oral skills, significant attention to grammar and vocabulary, and less focus on writing and reading. Touchstone is widely used in many Saudi universities to teach English to the non-English major students in the preparatory year of the undergraduate study. We are interested in Touchstone series since we have been using it as a textbook at King Khalid University for teaching English as a foundation course to the non-English major students at their first two levels of undergraduate study. Touchstone 1 and Touchstone 2 are used at level 1 and level 2 respectively for teaching grammar and writing. Though it is an integrated-skill series, we do not use this series for teaching reading and listening. From our experience of teaching this book for many years, we found that most of the students are still weak in writing skill. Therefore, this study basically deals with Touchstone 1 and intends to analyze and evaluate its writing activities.

Many teachers may come up with the assumption that Touchstone 1 lacks sufficient writing activities. However, a careful look at the activities in both the Student's Book and the Workbook of Touchstone 1 simply disproves that assumption. In fact, it is replete with a lot of word-level writing activities in the form of vocabulary exercises, and it also has enough sentence and text level writing activities. Yet, these text level activities are not presented with proper techniques and practices to train students to produce them efficiently. Moreover, the text level writing activities do not seem context-specific and the progression from sentence level writing to text level writing is not smooth and gradual since it does not necessarily outline the formats and organizations of the text level writing activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What is Writing?

Writing is the act of forming graphic symbols or letters or making marks on a level surface of some kind, but writing is of course, much more than the constructions of graphic symbols which have to be arranged according to certain conventions, to form words, and words have to be arranged to form sentences. And these sentences have to be organized into such a coherent whole as explicit and complete as possible so that we are able to communicate successfully with our readers (Byrne, 1988). Hayes and Flower (1980) consider writing as a three-stage sequence where the writer mainly engages in three kinds of activities, namely planning, creating text and reviewing where the writer moves backward and forward between all three activities in the course of writing a single text.

Writing also involves many other different kinds of skills and knowledge and understanding the ways of orchestrating and bringing these skills and knowledge into harmony to create a satisfying and effective text. Dombey (2013) illustrates that in any piece of writing, a writer must bring together the aims of writing, a sense of what to be communicated, the sense of audience and the knowledge of who might read the text. He further states that a writer besides having the knowledge of grammar, lexis, punctuation and spelling should be ready to review the writing after the first draft to check whether it matches the purpose of writing, and fits the target audience and the standard of technical accuracy. Figure 1 depicts the elements of writing according to Dombey (2013).

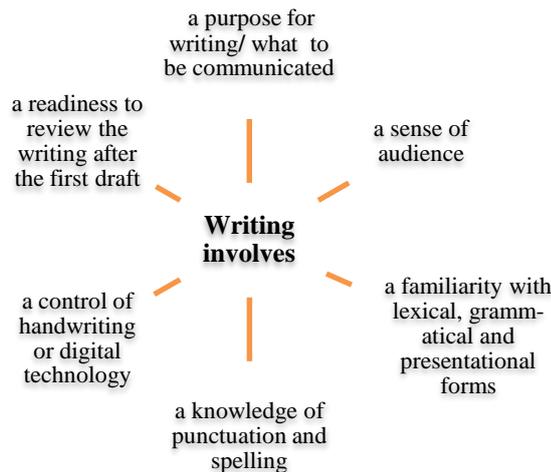


Figure 1. The Elements of Writing (Dombey, 2013)

2.2 Teaching Writing: Past and Present

There have been some significant differences in views and ways regarding teaching writing in the past and at present. A few decades ago, teaching writing solely focused on mastering the technical aspects of writing namely spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other conventions. Grammar instruction, or “how the English language works” (Hillocks, 1987, p. 75), was thought to be indispensable to learning how to write, and therefore, a prime focus in teaching writing. Eventually, this rote approach came under growing skepticism because it failed to engage and inspire students in learning writing skills. It also gave birth to a danger that the teaching of writing could easily be reduced to a mere teaching by correction which virtually ignored the vital part of teaching writing, which is communication (Hicks, 1993; Hillocks, 1986; Kamehameha Schools, 2007). So, it is necessary for teachers to teach both aspects of writing process, the mechanical and communication aspects, so that the process becomes familiar to all learners and fully understood by them as a coherent whole. Since then, there have been various efforts to identify more effective approaches to understand the process a writer goes through when composing materials in order to improve the quality of writing.

Teaching writing to EFL students is a challenging task, particularly when students’ competence level in the English language is not up to the mark. Darayseh (2003) views that teaching writing is not all about simply engaging students in grammar exercises with an aim to producing error-free writing. Instead, writing should be about what students are interested in and what they really want to communicate and how they shape their final writing products to convey the message. Hillock (1987) conducted a comprehensive study by examining at 2,000 studies with a view to identifying the best school instructional method for enhancing writing ability. The study identified that teaching through inquiry was the best instructional method which had the greatest impact on the quality of students’ writing and helped students develop better ideas and produce stronger support and evidence for writing. Hawkins and Razali (2012) have outlined a detailed account of how the emphasis of writing instruction has shifted over the past one hundred years from penmanship to product to process. They stated that writing was all about handwriting and considered as an act of transcribing words onto the page until the 1940s. Around 1950s, the focus of writing then moved to the teaching of mere grammar.

Later, concerns about writing instruction led to a major shift in the focus, which put emphasis on the components of the process of writing in the 1980s and eventually a focus on process instruction emerged in the 2000s. Pritchard and Honeycutt (2006) while presenting a historical overview of the writing process described how the views regarding writing process changed due to the cognitive research occurring in the 1980s. Hayes and Flower (1980) in some of their early studies stated that the writing process was more

complex than the linear model of prewriting, writing and rewriting and required the use and coordination of mental strategies. A study by Tracy, Graham, and Reid (2009) demonstrated that students' use of cognitive strategies for engaging in the processes of writing, such as planning, had a positive effect on their writing performance. Graham and Perin (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of writing intervention research in order to identify effective instructional writing practices for students in grades four through twelve. Their analysis of studies showed that this instructional practice had a positive effect on the quality of students' writing. Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, and Harris (2012) conducted another meta-analysis in order to identify effective instructional practices for students in the elementary grades and found that implementation of a process approach had a positive effect on students within typical elementary classrooms.

There are two quite dominant approaches in the teaching of writing, 1) product-oriented and 2) process-oriented. Hyland (2003) views product-oriented approach to writing as a straightforward action, marks on a page, related words, clauses, and structured sentences and always upholds the idea of accuracy, linearity, and prescriptivism. "Writing development is considered to be the result of [structurally or rhetorically] imitating and manipulating models provided by the teacher" (Hyland, 2003, p.3). On the other hand, process-oriented approach is "a nonlinear, exploratory, and generative process" (ibid) by which writers "discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning" (Zamel, 1983, p.165). This process emphasizes the importance of fluency over accuracy and argues that writing ideas should emerge from learners rather than textbooks. Free-writing technique, for example, is a distinctive writing strategy that "leads quite naturally to a process classroom" (Reid, 1993, p.260).

We also have come across a third type of approach called the genre approach. In terms of writing in a second language, The Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning defines the genre approach as "a framework for language instruction" (2013) which considers writing as a social and cultural practice and encourages students to participate in the world around them, comprehend writing in the context where it occurs, and realize how writers manage content to promote logical organization. It also allows students to become more flexible in their thinking and eventually to realize how authors organize their writings. The genre framework supports students' writing with generalized, systematic guiding principles about how to produce meaningful passages (Kim, 2007). To Paltridge (2004), the genre approach to teaching writing mainly underscores the language and discourse features of particular texts and the context in which the text is used. This approach also emphasizes more on the reader, and on the conventions that a piece of writing needs to follow in order to be successfully accepted by its readership (Munice, 2002). However, Bawarshi (2000) observes that at its best, it helps learners identify and interpret literary texts, while at its worst, it interferes with the learners' creativity.

Writing instruction started changing with the inception of holistic approaches that introduces new practices which not only encourage the rote repetition of spelling, grammar, and other writing conventions but also consider writing as a vehicle for creative expression and critical thought. In the holistic approach, writing is seen as a recurrent and continuing process and a uniquely individual undertaking in which writers enjoy the opportunity to plan, draft, edit, and revise their work (Hillocks, 1987; Kamehameha Schools, 2007; Murray, 1982). This writing process approach advocates many stages to writing and recognizes that these stages are fluid and overlapping. In broader terms, there are three main phases of writing, which are pre-writing, writing, and re-writing. As methods of teaching writing have developed, significant number of studies have so far been conducted to understand the process that a writer goes through when composing material and devise ways how to teach writing most effectively. Unger and Fleischman (2004) in their study also advocated for the process approach where students are engaged in writing tasks, and teachers provide instruction within five stages of the writing process that have emerged from the cognitive models of writing: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. The research outcomes show that students who go through the above steps of writing can produce quality writing than those who follow traditional models of writing.

2.3 Principles of Teaching Writing

Teaching writing requires a combination of both linguistic abilities such as grammar, vocabulary and punctuation along with the abilities of producing and organizing ideas. When a student intends to write,

these abilities are supposed to function together as a coherent whole though teachers sometimes simply focus on discrete points and choose to teach those items (i.e. grammar, vocabulary) separately. While teaching writing, we as teachers, can decide to focus on accuracy or fluency or text or purpose. We also have to redirect our aim so that our students can develop the ability to write in order to communicate. As Byrne (1988) states:

We can and should avoid manipulative procedures which do not encourage the learners to think about what they write and which in any case do not help them to understand how writing language functions. We must also introduce activities which, however simple, demonstrate that writing can be used for the purpose of communication (p.32).

Instead of controlled writing, students should be given ample opportunities just to write as opposed to doing exercises using writing. In such cases, they do not have to be completely accurate in their use of grammar and vocabulary before attempting an authentic writing task such as writing a letter, and story. If we make them do too much controlled writing practice, they will become bored and discouraged and will not have sufficient time to deal with the task of real writing. Byrne (1988) puts forward some guidelines for the teachers about the basic needs of the learners while teaching them writing. He focuses on a wide variety of aspects which include providing students with adequate and relevant writing tasks, considering writing as a means of communication, integrating it with other skills and equipping them with up-to-date techniques and practice formats. This is illustrated in Figure 2.

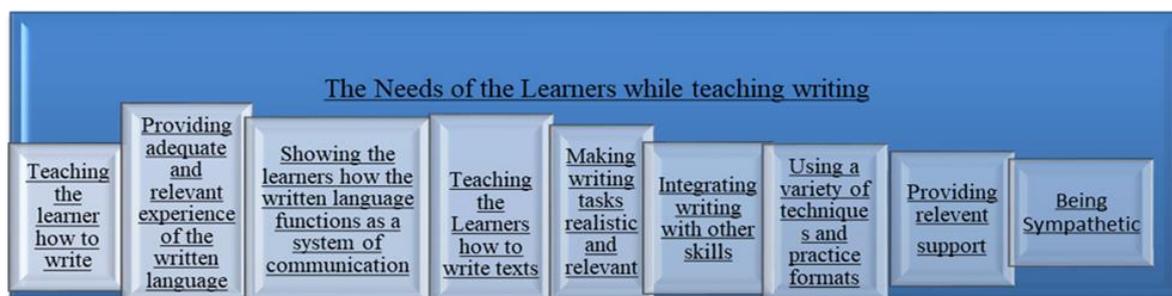


Figure 2. The Needs of the Learners while Teaching Writing (Adapted from Byrne, 1988)

In the teaching of writing, we also need to pay attention to our students' handwriting as well since it always matters especially with beginners. In teaching handwriting, we must remember three fundamental principles involved in all aspects of handwriting.

- Providing a good model is essential.
- Handwriting is a mechanical skill; therefore, practice does make perfect.
- Correction must be done vigilantly to avoid bad habits developing.

Students may develop bad handwriting habits even when they move beyond the early stages of handwriting. One way of improving handwriting at a later stage (i.e. beyond beginner) is the use of a handwriting profile. The profile tells students exactly what is wrong with their handwriting and students with teachers' help or with the help of a friend or parents can put it right.

2.3.1 Teaching Writing in Relation to Speaking and Reading

In a formal EFL learning situation, the teaching and learning of writing skills can never be successful until and unless the writing activities are coordinately practiced with speaking and reading activities. Through the speaking activities, the teacher can explain how these materials can also be used in writing to serve the communicative purpose. In fact, learning to write seems to be a special quality where the constituents of communicative ability can meet and interact to develop the writing skills.

Since writing is primarily a means of communication with a person whom we want to talk to, or of

making a more permanent record of what we want to communicate, we will also view writing in its relation to reading as well. In reading, we can read without writing, but we cannot write without reading since teaching writing to students is a means to more fully engage them as readers. Reading is an essential skill in its own right because it provides access to a large amount of knowledge and information. Pearson (1976) offers a three-cueing system through which effective readers draw upon a range of information sources as they search for meaning in texts. This system involves:

- Semantic cues – relating to knowledge about topics, about cultural or world knowledge, ideas and vocabulary,
- Syntactic cues – relating to knowledge about grammar and the way whole texts are organized and
- Graphophonic cues – relating to knowledge about words and the way they are spelled.

The same system can be used by effective writers as they compose texts. Collectively, the three cues constitute learners' prior knowledge and they heavily rely on this background knowledge when they write. Reading is of course, an exposure to the written word. We essentially read to acquire information or for pleasure. But as we read, we are also absorbing the characteristics of writing. Reading teaches us how to write. Many authors assert the fact that their own writing is influenced by the writing of another author. Similarly our own writing is also influenced by what we read. Our reading helps us build our vocabulary, and make us familiar with structures, ways of organizing ideas and cohesive styles.

2.3.2 *Role of Feedback in Teaching Writing*

Feedback is very central to the teaching and learning of the whole writing process and plays a pivotal role in consolidating students' increasing command over composing skills. Feedback practices take different forms starting from direct, written comments by the teacher often complemented with oral remarks, peer feedback, writing workshops, teacher-student individual conferences to the computer-delivered feedback. For Arab learners, direct feedback often supplemented with oral corrective measures and the individual teacher-student conference can produce astounding results in the teaching of writing. Here, teachers have the chance to work on the mistakes students usually make in their writings and categorize them into different headings like punctuation, capitalization, grammar etc. thus offering corrective feedback to students face-to-face inside the classroom. Teachers can also adopt the individual teacher-student conference strategy to identify the individual student's mistakes. This strategy not only provides that individual to receive the direct feedback but also at the same time, ensures that his weaknesses do not get exposed before his peers. Peer feedback can also work if the teacher can develop an awareness of the nature and function of feedback among students so that teachers and learners can perform their roles effectively in the writing classroom. For this, feedback on writing should be made flexible and sharply linked to the type of text. Furthermore, it is not the sole concern of the teacher rather a joint responsibility of both the teacher and the learners where they can adopt a collaborative approach to the monitoring and processing of feedback (Iglesias, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive in nature and uses the content analysis method through which the activities of textbooks are presented and analyzed by categorizing them into different types. The purpose of this study is to analyze the writing activities of the textbook, the Touchstone 1. For analyzing the writing materials, the authors have gone through Touchstone 1 (both Students' Book and Workbook) in details to find out the writing activities in varied forms such as word level, sentence level and text level writing tasks.

3.1 Instrumentation

For the purpose of the study, we choose to closely look at how and to what extent the writing activities are presented in Touchstone 1 (McCarthy, McCarten & Sandiford, 2009). Touchstone 1 consists of a Student's Book and Workbook, Teacher's Edition and Audio CDs. The Student's Book is the main

book for teaching all the skills. The Workbook is a natural extension of the Student's Book which provides extra follow-up activities. And the Teacher's Edition provides practical step-by-step teaching notes for each page of the Student's Book. There are 12 units in the Student's Book. Each unit has a unit opener page which presents the unit theme and has four two-page lessons (A, B, C, D) presenting grammar, vocabulary, conversation strategies; and listening, reading and writing practice. At the end of each unit, there is a vocabulary notebook page for developing students' vocabulary-building skills. After each three units, there is touchstone check point unit to review the language taught in the previous three units (McCarthy, McCarten & Sandiford, 2009).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

For the discussion, we have divided the writing activities of Touchstone 1 into two broader areas: sentence level (word level also included) and text level though this division very often overlaps. When students begin to learn writing sentences, they are very close to writing texts and we should encourage them to make this systematic jump from sentence level writing activities to text level activities. These books contain some pre-sentence or word level writing activities mainly dealing with spelling and vocabulary which actually contribute to sentence formation. They form the building bricks of writing which after being cemented and supplemented by grammar, ultimately helps communicate our ideas.

4.1 Word Level Writing Activities in Touchstone 1

4.1.1 Spelling

Spelling is a core component of writing and its accurate knowledge enables students to recognize words, distinguish words with similar spellings and write correctly spelled words. We will now look at activities which develop the students' abilities to recognize and produce correctly spelled words. Some of the activities are found in Touchstone 1, others can be used as supplementary activities though the supplementary activities are linked to Touchstone 1 activities in some way. The activities include:

Word Recognition / Find the Word

There are some exercises in both the Student's Book and Workbook of Touchstone 1 where students are asked to unscramble letters to form words. The teacher can prepare more of the same kind on their own. Figure 3 is an example of word recognition activity by unscrambling the letters.

Unscramble the letters. Write the words.	
1. flgero	<u>golfer</u>
2. taleeht	a _____
3. rtweir	w _____
4. maet	t _____
5. ralype	p _____
6. tepo	p _____
7. hwso	s _____
8. rtiats	a _____

Figure 3. Example of the Word Recognition exercise from Touchstone 1 (Workbook), p.18

Word Production Activities

Touchstone 1 is replete with a lot of activities and drills which encourage students to produce words on their own. Among these activities, crossword puzzle can be found in the book.

Find the Missing Letters

In ‘Find the Missing Letters’, students are given words with some missing letters. Then the teacher asks them to fill in the missing letters to make meaningful words. The example is shown in Figure 4. This is a very simple activity for teachers to prepare and many similar tasks can be set using the same words but with different letters omitted. This is a good activity for the warm-up stage of the lesson or as a game. The teacher can simply write the incomplete words on the white board and ask the students to copy and complete them. This can be done in a more sophisticated way. The teacher writes the complete word on the board and lets the students study for a few seconds then rubs it off. The teacher then writes the same word on the board with a letter missing, and asks them to complete the word. These are, however, very useful for improving students’ spelling ability.

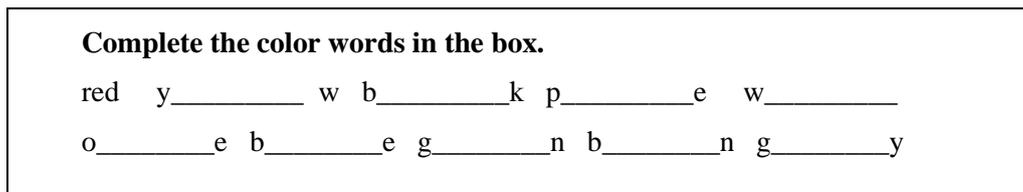


Figure 4. Example of Finding the Missing Letter Exercise from Touchstone 1 (Workbook), p.60

Supplementary Activities

There are some supplementary activities which can be parallel with word level writing activities presented in Touchstone 1. This matching activity (refer Figure 5) is time-consuming and requires much effort from the teacher to prepare. The teacher can write the list of words on the board and ask the students to match the target word (on the left) with the same word from the list (horizontal) using the appropriate number or an X if the word is not there at all. The students should be familiar with most of the words given and certainly with all of the target words.

Words	1	2	3	4
Many	Man	My	Many	Mine
Ruler	Rule out	Ruler	Rubber	Roller
Ten	Teen	Tiny	Ten	Ton
Speak	Peak	Spike	Speak	Spoke
Effort	Afford	Effect	Effort	Affect

Figure 5. Example of Identifying and Matching the Right Word Exercise.

4.1.2 Vocabulary

As part of vocabulary exercises in Touchstone 1, each unit ends with a vocabulary notebook page which contains different activities like Learning Tips, Word Builder, and On Your Own that encourage independent work on the unit topic and offer innovative ways to practice vocabulary outside the classroom. In Touchstone 1, vocabulary activities are manifested through a wide variety of exercises like word sort task, labeling the picture task, linking things with places task, writing names for personal items task and classroom objects task. These activities are also presented with photos and illustrations with an aim to providing contexts and offering practical learning tips while systematically covering vocabulary-building strategies in writing.

Word Sort Task

Word sort task "helps students organize new vocabulary in meaningful ways to help the learning process" and "gives opportunities for students to use the new vocabulary immediately in meaningful, interactions with classmates" (McCarthy, McCarten & Sandiford, 2009, Touchstone 1, Teacher's edition, p.xiii). This task as illustrated in Figure 6 greatly encourages students to take an active role in learning new vocabulary.

Word Sort: Write three things you did at each time below.

last Thursday	last Friday	last week
I went shopping		

Figure 6. Example of Word Sort Exercise from Touchstone1 (Student’s Book), p.100

Learning Tip Task

Learning tip task "introduces a useful technique in every unit for acquiring new vocabulary" and "covers writing whole expressions or collocations; grouping vocabulary in different ways, using charts, mind maps, and pictures; and other techniques" (McCarthy, McCarten & Sandiford, 2009, Touchstone 1, Teacher's edition, p. xvi). Figure 7 shows the example.

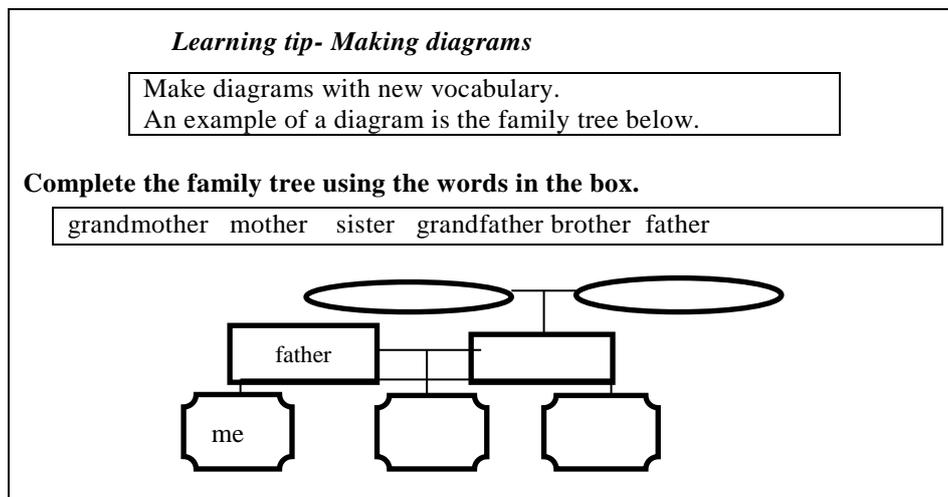


Figure 7. Example of Learning Tip Exercise from Touchstone 1 (Student’s Book), p.30

Use of Visual Materials

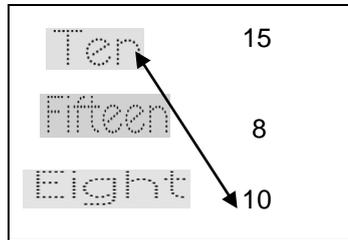
Touchstone 1 contains a lot of writing practices using a wide variety of visual materials for different kinds of writing tasks. These pictorial materials can be exploited from teaching new vocabulary items (e.g. labeling the picture task, linking things with places task, writing names for personal items and classroom objects task) to writing simple sentences by looking at pictures.

Supplementary Activities

The following activities can be added to foster teaching vocabulary items. Byrne (1988) identifies the following word level writing activities useful.

a) Joining up dots to form words

This very basic activity can be useful in the early stages partly to give students practice in forming the letters and mostly to give them the illusion that they are producing the words for themselves. For example,



b) Finding the word that is different

The students are given sets of words and are asked to find and write out the word that is different. They enjoy the problem-solving nature of this activity since this combines reading with writing. For example,

banana	mango	book	apple
cow	cat	phone	dog

c) Making lists

The students can be asked to compile lists of things they would like to eat, countries they would like to visit or animals they would like to see. They can then compare their choices with a friend.

d) Classifying items

The students have to identify and then arrange in categories (the headings will normally have to be provided or at least worked out with the class beforehand) things that they can see in a picture. For example,

Animals	Fruits	Languages	Countries
cat	apple	English	Australia
horse	banana	Spanish	Bangladesh

e) Making words

The students working in pairs or small groups are given one long word to see how many words they can make from it. They can use books or dictionaries to try to find words (and this is a good way of getting them interested in class).

4.2 Sentence Level Writing Activities in Touchstone 1

Sentence level writing activities in Touchstone 1 basically tend to practise grammar points or allow students to express their ideas in writing, thus reinforcing reading and speaking. Sentence level writing activities in Touchstone 1, and some of the examples are listed below:

- Sentence or conversation completion
- Writing sentences using given cues, phrases or expressions
- Writing sentences using pictures
- Unscrambling or putting words in the correct order

e) Guided writing

The example of guided writing exercise adapted from Touchstone 1 (Student's Book), p.83 is shown below.

Write a paragraph about your favorite store for a shopper's guide. Use the model below.	
My favorite store is ...	Help note:
I like it because ...	Linking ideas with <i>because</i> to give reasons
I usually go there ...	Example: My favorite store is Chang's <i>because</i> it
They sell ...	has great clothes.
They also have ...	I like to shop there <i>because</i> it's cheap.
I like to buy ...	

f) Asking and answering questions

The example of skeleton sentence exercise adapted from Touchstone 1 (Student's Book), p.25 is shown below.

Write yes-no questions. Then write true answers. Ask and answer the questions with a partner.	
1. You / shy?	
<u>Are you shy?</u> _____	Yes, I am.
2. this class / easy ?	
_____	_____
3. the teacher / strict?	
_____	_____
4. the students in this class / lazy?	
_____	_____
5. your neighbors / nice?	
_____	_____
6. your friends / outgoing?	
_____	_____

g) Making similar sentences

The example of making similar sentence exercise adapted from Touchstone 1 (Student's Book), p.112 is shown below.

Answer each question. Then think of a similar question to ask. Practice your conversations with a partner.	
1. A. How was your weekend? Did you have a good one?	
B. Answer: _____	
Then ask: _____	
2. A. Did you do anything fun on Wednesday night?	
B. Answer: _____	
Then ask: _____	
3. A. What did you do on Friday?	
B. Answer: _____	
Then ask: _____	

Byrne (1988) states that writing tasks must serve a communicative purpose. If the task is merely reinforcement, we should try to make it communicative; if it focuses on accuracy, we should try to introduce an element of fluency; if the language is not authentic, we should try to make it so; if it is too short, we should make it longer. So far, it has been noted that the majority of the sentence level writing activities in Touchstone 1 are in fact reinforcement of grammar points, vocabulary practices, and speaking activities. It is important to stress that a large amount of the actual teaching of structures and vocabulary should be done orally first, and then followed by writing. Writing in this case is simply a repetition or reproduction in written form of what the students already learn through the teaching of grammar and vocabulary.

4.3 Text Level Writing Activities in Touchstone 1

Touchstone1 is replete with various types of text level writing activities. But these activities are not presented with descriptions outlining teachers' preparation, planning and performance for enabling the students to carry out them. In the Student's Book of Touchstone 1, some samples and models of text level writing activities are given so that students can get oriented with them and reproduce and practise them in the Workbook. Moreover, both in the Workbook and Student's Book, these activities are not adequately provided with guiding principles and strategies how to produce them without merely asking students to write similar types of texts. As a result, students sometimes fail to practise them alone without teachers' help. Table 1 lists all the text level writing activities offered in the Student's Book of Touchstone 1.

Table 1. Text Level Writing Activities in Student Book of Touchstone 1

Unit	Page	Task
1	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completing an application
4	41	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing an email message about a classmate • Using capital letters and periods
5	51	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a message to a Web site about yourself • Link ideas with <i>and</i> and <i>but</i>
6	61	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing an ad for a bulletin board • Using prepositions for time and place: <i>between, though, at, on, for, and from..... to</i>
7	73	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a short article giving advice about exercise • Using imperatives to give advice
8	83	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a recommendation for a shopper's guide • Linking ideas with <i>because</i> to give reasons
9	93	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a paragraph for a Travel Guide Web page for tourists • Using commas in lists
10	105	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a personal journal • Ordering events with <i>before, after, when, and then</i>
11	115	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completing a funny story • Using punctuation to show direct quotations or speech
12	125	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a restaurant review • Using adjectives to describe restaurants

4.4 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Writing Activities in Touchstone 1

Touchstone takes recourse to the Cambridge International Corpus, a database of more than 700 million words to choose the most frequent words and phrases for spoken and written texts. These words and phrases are put into different vocabulary practices in effective ways. In addition, the vocabulary exercises largely constitute the word level writing activities which ensure that students learn the most useful words in writing. Moreover, most of the sentence level writing activities in Touchstone 1 center on or around the grammar points, vocabulary items, and conversation practices. As a result, whatever students learn, with regard to grammar structures, vocabulary or speaking strategies, they have the scope to apply to writing. Touchstone 1 also integrates writing with reading. Before each text level writing, there is a sample reading text which provides students with necessary vocabulary and familiarizes them with structures, ways of organizing ideas and cohesive styles. Furthermore, it also contains a lot of writing activities for homework. In the Student Book, these activities are presented in the vocabulary notebook page in the form of 'On your own' activity. Even the Workbook is replete with a lot of writing activities similar to activities presented in the Student Book which teachers can ask students to complete at home. This will not only help students identify their problematic areas but also save teachers' limited and valuable class time and enhance students' practice time to ensure better results. It also covers the mechanical aspects of writing and thus offers a "systematic syllabus, including 'Help note' panels that give practical advice on areas such as punctuation, linking ideas, and organizing information" (Touchstone 1, Teacher's Edition, p.xv).

Although there are many writing activities in Touchstone 1, a few shortcomings are worth discussing. Firstly, less attention has been given to writing in Touchstone 1 where students are made extensively engaged in grammatical activities, vocabulary learning, and managing conversational strategies rather than in wide-ranging text level writing drills. Secondly, materials are only said to be effective if they clearly state the guidelines through which students can cope with the process of writing in gradual manner and steps though in Touchstone 1, no such guidelines are provided. For text level writing activities, product-oriented approach, not the process-oriented one is followed. Here students are asked to produce similar items using the samples provided in each unit. There is hardly any scope to use and practice students' creativity and thinking through brainstorming, pre-writing, writing, editing, re-writing and hence to produce a finished product.

Thirdly, Touchstone 1 contains a lot of real-world writing tasks such as e-mail messages, letters and short articles, but it does not practically outline proper rules and guidelines for different formats and enough practices on how to produce these activities effectively. For instance, paragraph writing is a basic text level writing task. When students move from sentence level to paragraph writing in this book, they are not informed at all how to write a topic sentence, supporting details, and a concluding statement which are the main constituent parts of a paragraph. Rass (2015) in her article, identified the Arab students' problems in writing well-developed paragraphs, and hence mentioned that "students face many problems in writing good topic as well as concluding sentences, supporting details by adding examples and reasons and using discourse markers appropriately"(p.49). Though the Middle East version of Touchstone 1 is used for the beginners who study English for some time in their life, they barely have the very basics. Even some students face problems with their English handwriting due to less practice in their earlier years of study. Moreover, the nature of Arabic letter formation has a different script from Latin, which requires right-to-left eye movement. But handwriting exercises are not explicitly given in Touchstone 1.

Fourthly, Touchstone 1 makes a move from simple sentence level writing activities to text level writing tasks. Here, we seem to ask our students to make a giant leap from very mechanical and controlled writing activities (e.g. sentence level activities) to less controlled or free writing activities (e.g. text level activities). However, this transition from controlled writing exercises to free writing ones is not of course smooth and not done through gradual progression since the text level writing activities don't provide necessary formats and organizational outlines. Finally, our opinion is that in Touchstone-1, critical thinking is not stressed or encouraged. Besides that, it also lacks enough culturally suitable writing materials for the Arab students. It tries to homogenize the contents which are almost context-free. But they should have been context-specific since Touchstone 1 has a Middle East edition.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

In the teaching of writing, teachers must define students' needs so that they can shape or reshape the writing activities in order to meet the learners' motives and ambition. Moreover, teachers should not merely depend on the activities presented in the prescribed textbook (in this case Touchstone 1); rather they should impart additional internet-based, appropriate writing materials to enhance the process of writing and to make the writing drills more resourceful. Furthermore, since many Arab learners face problems with their handwriting, systematic practice of handwriting is needed to supplement the other practices in the Student's Book and Workbook so that students can have activities on it to improve their unclear or untidy handwriting. Again, for text level writing drills, teachers can explain the specific rules, formats and organization before asking students to produce different items. For the better output, teachers can also prepare and use worksheets for the students containing the manner and steps of writing (i.e. brainstorming, pre-writing, writing, editing, re-writing) if they can manage time. In addition to that, the socio-cultural context has to be considered while choosing materials for teaching writing. In Touchstone 1, most of the text level writing activities are general, not context specific. It is a major responsibility of the teachers to bring the culture of the students in the class by adapting and contextualizing the writing materials so that students feel comfortable and motivated to write and they can exercise their own ideas, knowledge and creativity while writing.

Teaching writing to EFL students involves many vital issues. And teachers' role plays a significant part which greatly contributes to bringing about dynamics in the teaching and learning of writing. Teachers should not blindly follow the text books prescribed by universities for teaching writing; rather they should adapt, edit, add, or contextualize the writing materials if needed, according to the needs, purpose, level and background of the learners. In order to make the teaching of writing more productive, teachers should continuously give feedback to students so that they can identify their shortcomings and take necessary measures accordingly to improve their writing. While using Touchstone 1 for teaching writing, teachers should pay close attention to observe whether the writing activities are resourceful and diverse enough; whether they cover both the technical aspects and communicative purpose of writing, whether the students are well-equipped and well-informed enough to move from one level of writing activities to the other (e.g. from word level to sentence level, from sentence level to text level) and whether the students are confident and trained enough to produce a new item independently in a given time. To wrap up, it can be said that Touchstone 1 has sufficient word level and sentence level writing activities demonstrated through the forms of vocabulary and grammar structures. It has also outlined many real-world text level writing tasks without much illustrations and explanations. Therefore, teachers need to adapt these text level writing materials in order to make them more comprehensible and functional to the students.

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