SETTING UP WRITING TASKS

This command used to be a nightmare for me and my generation in the English courses: Describe a place you know well. Am I supposed to write a paragraph or an article for a travel guide? Do my readers have some knowledge about the place I am writing about? Who are my readers anyway? How do I start such a writing I know nothing about? How about a cliché like “Today I would like to write about Datca which is my favorite town in Turkey.”?

Why do we give writing tasks anyway? We may ask them to write according to certain conventions (e.g. academic writing, personal writing). Then, we should clearly explain the form we are expecting. Another reason can be revising the new structures and vocabulary we have taught. Then, we should clearly add to this topic the language areas we want to focus on. Therefore, before asking the students to write on a topic, the following questions should be answered:

To whom: Audience
What: Context
How: Style
Why: Purpose

Still, answering these questions would not be enough for students to start writing. The reason is, efficient writers do not start writing something without collecting data, doing research, evaluating other similar texts, etc. We need to have some information about the topic we are writing about. If we are planning to do an in-class activity which should be completed in a limited time, we need to activate background information of the students. This can be done by having pre-task discussions about the topic and brainstorming the context and the language to be used. Also having a pre-prepared reading for the writing activity is very useful.

Classroom activities need to be set up in ways that reflect the writing process in efficient writers. Therefore, we need to provide information about the audience and try to make every piece of writing fulfill some kind of communicative purpose. Only then the end products of our students can be connected, contextualized, and appropriate pieces of communication.

Written by Oya Ozagac September, 2004
Copyright © 2006 Bogazici University SFL