

REQUIREMENTS FOR EXERCISES TO DEVELOP WRITING SKILLS IN DISTANCE LEARNING PROCESS

The article deals with requirements to each component of exercises used to develop writing skills in English under distance learning conditions. The main emphasis is on the analysis of exercises concerning the relevance of their usage in e-learning.

Key words: writing skills, distant learning, requirements for exercises.

One of the innovations in organizing professional education in our country nowadays is introduction of distance learning. It opens new possibilities in education due to the usage of IT especially to those who live in regions where there are no resources to get professional education. In this paper we will understand under the term of “distance learning” the academic environment which can be characterized by the student’s remoteness from the teacher in space and time.

One of the main principles of distance learning is the installation of interactive communication between a student and a teacher using IT without providing their face-to-face meeting and learning a certain amount of material independently.

The main problem in developing distance learning is creating new technologies in the process of education which will correspond to the environment of telecommunication. We should have a new model of education based on the following issues: in the center of educational process is a student, the essence of the educational process is the ability to learn independently, the basis of educational activity is cooperation [4].

All mentioned above focuses the necessity to change the methodology of teaching and its means to achieve the goals of educational process under new conditions. There is a thought that it is enough to transfer educational materials from

traditional printed form into electronic and use them in distance learning process, it is not so.

To be successful in this field we must analyze deeply the objectives of educational process, and requirements for its technologies taking into account the peculiarities of distance learning. But unfortunately we do not have enough researches in this area. We decided to start with developing writing skills because the main issues of distance learning can be mostly appropriate in learning written communication.

There are several organizational forms in the system of distance learning nowadays. To teach written communication in our environment we have chosen the form which is connected with the usage of e-mail and the Internet, via which the tasks are sent immediately to students.

Having analyzed the psychological, linguistic, methodological literature, existing coursebooks for teaching written communication [6,7,8], as well as the peculiarities of the process of distance learning [1,3,4,5] we have formulated the requirements for exercises which can be used for developing writing skills in e-learning in non-linguistic Universities for the first and second year of study students.

Let's consider the requirements for each component of the exercise for learning written communication in distance learning process. As it is known, any exercise, regardless of the level of its complexity, includes three obligatory components: 1) the task; 2) its performance; 3) controlling of the accomplishment of the task.

First of all, let's examine the *requirements for the task*, formulated in the exercise. The practical purpose of study at University is to educate students for professional communication in foreign language within the situations defined by the Curriculum 2005, so that the knowledge of foreign language obtained at University will become a base for further professional development. Therefore, the process of communication in a foreign language should be very close to the process of communicating in real life, only in this case it is possible to transfer the skills from academic environment into real life. Therefore, in accordance with the requirements of the Curriculum 2005, and with the methodological principle of intercourse the

exercise should model a particular segment of the real process of communication. Since communication is born out of the needs, the task to the exercise in written communication should clearly indicate what for students have something to write. So, one of the main requirements to the tasks in exercises for learning written communication is *motivation*.

Regarding the fact that real communicative situation involves an element of novelty, it is necessary that the task in exercise should also have a certain *novelty*.

For exercises in learning written communication a very important requirement is *presence of addressee*, who must be either a native or a representative of other nationality and does not know the native language of a partner that causes the necessity to use the foreign language in written communication. The presence of addressee helps the writer to choose the appropriate register, make the text clear and interesting for his/her readers.

Example 1 .

A short while ago you spent two months in Britain on an English language course. Write a letter to your English friend and to your course tutor, Dr. Smith, inquiring about the local employment situation in the area you were staying in – especially in the kind of work you want to do and requesting information about work permits. You are interested in: summer jobs, especially the salary, working hours and how to get a work permit.

To help the students to perform the task, we offer them the use of *Hints* of various kinds as "tools" to perform tasks, the presence of which is very important under the condition of remoteness of a teacher in distance learning. Here's an example of Hint, which we offer for doing exercise in Example 1.

a) First write to your English friend using the following hint:

HINT

INTRODUCTION

THE BODY OF THE LETTER:

Paragraph 1 *Informal opening: I'd like to know.../ I want to know.../ Can you let me know, etc.*

Paragraph 2 *Introduction of the first requests: Can you also find out.../ I also want to know..., etc.*

Paragraph 3 *Informal ending: Please let me know if.../ Send me the details of/about.../ Tell me soon, etc.*

CONCLUSION

b) Now write a letter to your course tutor, use the following hint:

HINT

INTRODUCTION

THE BODY OF THE LETTER:

Paragraph 1 *Formal opening: I am writing to inquire about.../Could you possibly send.../ Would it be possible for you to tell..., etc.*

Paragraph 2 *Introduction of the first requests: Could you also please send me.../ I would also like some information on..., etc.*

Paragraph 3 *Formal ending: I look forward to receiving.../ I would appreciate it if you could inform me as soon as possible, etc.*

CONCLUSION

In this task, in our opinion, all essential features of real process of communication are present: a communicative intention – to learn about the situation with employment; a motive – the desire to get a job; a novelty - writing a letter-request for information will acquaint students with the standards of an informal letter (if the student writes to an English friend) and the formal (if he writes to the Tutor of the courses), with speech patterns, which are used when writing letters of this genre.

Another important requirement for exercises in written communication is ***consideration of age-related interests of students.***

Example 2.

A youth magazine which is printed in English has asked its readers to give their opinions on a problem of protecting the environment. They promised a prize for information with original ideas in this area. Write a short letter telling about the ways of solving this problem in your district or other regions.

This task simulates the actual process of communication. The communicative intention of participants of the competition is to discover new ideas in solving this problem, the motive is to get the prize for the information on the original solution to this problem, the novelty is that each of the participants of this task will offer his/her vision of this problem and will tell about the ways of its solution in the region he/she lives.

Let's consider the second essential component of the exercise which is *performance of the task*. When considering this component we will pay attention to the *degree of controlling* of students' actions.

Totally controlled speech actions which consist of imitation of the speech unit, at the stage of learning written communication at Universities should not have place because students already possess basic knowledge on this issue.

Exercises with *partially controlled actions* take place at almost all stages of learning written communication.

Example 3.

The nearest branch of the British Council has recently advertised one-month cultural exchanges: A month in England, a life time memories! Spend a month in England and you will remember it for the rest of your life...The idea is that someone from Britain comes and lives in your house for a month while you go and live in theirs! All fares will be paid by the British Council! You have decided to take part in this cultural exchange, but they need your personal information. Write your CV as quick as possible. Before doing it, read the following hint:

HINT

A general CV for a student your age might look like this. There are generally 5 main headings: personal details (name, address, telephone, date of birth, marital status); educational qualifications (school, form); work experience (summer jobs if any); interests/skills/organizations (e.g. swimming, theatre/Word Processing skills, fluent English/Environmental Protection Club, etc.); references (give name, address and telephone number of three or four people who are willing to write a reference).

While performing this task, students have before them not speech patterns, but orientational content blocks (headings of paragraphs), which are included in CV and should be filled in.

After doing exercises with a partially controlled actions, students do exercises with *a minimum level of control*, where a student freely combines speech patterns and lexical units he/she already knows. The degree of controllability must correspond to the stage of formation of skills and competencies, i.e. on every next stage the weakening of students' actions management is required. Consider the task with minimal control:

Example 4.

You are a member of an activity club at university. At the meeting it was decided that next summer the group would arrange a cycling trip. You know from your English friend's (Emily/Arthur's) letter, that :...Besides, we went cycling with a group last summer. It was an unforgettable trip. We came back healthy, brown and more experienced...You want to write a letter and ask them how many students there were in the group, what the weather was like, what equipment they took with them, if they took much food and about safety precautions.

Consider another important issue to the task: the *presence/absence of supports*. There are so called natural supports and supports, created for educational purposes. They can be non-verbal (items, pictures, digital data), or verbal.

The use of verbal content supports slightly reduces the degree of controllability of students' actions. When using such types of supports students become more independent; having only the content supports, students should use the appropriate speech material, which they learnt while doing exercises with the speech supports, in which a set of appropriate speech patterns was given. Specially created verbal supports should *gradually be eliminated*, because they are not inherent in the real process of communication.

The last element of the exercise is *control*. After performance of the task a student must check how the text created by him/her helps achieve the goal of communicative task of the exercise, check out the overall accuracy. To help students

perform the function of self-control, which is very important in distance learning, it is advisable to refer to the hints. To check the correctness of an informal thank-you letter we propose, for example, the following hint:

HINT

Check if you have in your informal thank-you letter

INTRODUCTION: *your own address, date, informal greeting*

THE BODY OF THE LETTER:

Paragraph 1 Informal opening

Paragraph 2 Expressing gratitude

Paragraph 3 Informal ending

CONCLUSION: *Complementary close, your first name in normal handwriting.*

Thus, the exercises that can be used in the process of distance learning for developing written communication skills must meet the following **requirements:** high motivation, novelty, the presence of addressee, consideration of age-related interests, the usage of expanded sets of supports, obligatory presence of keys to self-control.

Литвин С.В.

Вимоги до вправ для розвитку вмінь писемного спілкування у процесі дистанційного навчання

У статті розглядаються вимоги до кожного компоненту вправ, які використовуються для розвитку вмінь англомовної писемної комунікації за умов дистанційного навчання. Основна увага приділяється аналізу вправ стосовно доцільності їх використання у процесі дистанційного навчання.

Ключові слова: вміння писемного спілкування, дистанційна освіта, вимоги до вправ.

Литвин С.В.

Требования к упражнениям для развития умений англоязычной письменной коммуникации в условиях дистанционного обучения. Основное

внимание уделяется анализу упражнений относительно целесообразности их использования в процессе дистанционного обучения.

Ключевые слова: умения письменной коммуникации, дистанционное обучение, требования к упражнениям.

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