

REPORT-WRITING BASED ON A QUESTIONNAIRE: A GUIDED APPROACH

Gwynneth Drabble

Editor's Note

This article is part of a longer article on the teaching of report-writing. We hope to publish other sections of the article in future numbers of 'The English Teacher'. It should be pointed out that the author teaches at a secondary school in Singapore. The activity she describes might therefore be more suitable for a Form 4 or a Form 5 class in Malaysia.

A common assignment is to ask the students to write a report on some aspect of the school, for example, the conditions of the school tuckshop. It seemed reasonable to me to give the students the opportunity to express their own views through a questionnaire as part of the lesson (see Appendix A below). First I explained the week's assignment would be to write a report on the conditions in the school tuckshop for the Principal, and then I asked each student to complete the questionnaire on their own. This gave the students the opportunity each to decide on their own views.

Then I asked the students to form groups of between three and six according to convenience (most grouped into fours, and the class followed its preferred groupings). They had to compare their answers, and try to decide upon recommendations. The aim of this was to get the students to communicate, and to amplify, through discussion, the basic facts given in the questionnaire.

There was then a class discussion. First I elicited the answers by a show of hands, asked for reasons where differences arose, and then elicited the various recommendations from the groups. By the end of this stage each student had a definite view of each point, and a list of possible recommendations. I encouraged them to make notes of whichever recommendation appealed to them.

I next handed out the worksheet (see Appendix B) and discussed the various linguistic points in turn, in the order given. Finally, I asked the

students to write the reports in groups of three, each member concentrating on a different section of the questionnaire. On completion they were to check each other's work for grammatical and spelling mistakes before handing in the work for correction. It was stressed that each member of a group was equally responsible for any mistakes made. As part of the marking, I stated the total number of mistakes at the end (as part of my policy towards any written composition or summary work) and encouraged the students to fill in a graph as a visual record of their progress.

The completed reports can be rewritten for display on the notice board.

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

What do you think of the conditions in the school tuckshop?

Instructions: Please complete this questionnaire on your own by putting a circle round the letter which shows the best answer. Do NOT fill in the recommendations yet.

Section One

1. Recess is:
 - A. too long
 - B. just the right length
 - C. too short

Recommendations: _____

2. Are ALL the pupils able to buy all the food they need?
 - A. Yes
 - B. Most can, but some of the younger pupils are pushed out of the queues by bullies.
 - C. No-one can, because the queues are too long.

Recommendations: _____

Section Two

1. Are the tables and benches in good condition?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Most of them are in good condition, but some are in need of repair.
 - D. Most are in need of repair.

Recommendations: _____

2. Are there enough tables and benches?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. There are too many, so the canteen is overcrowded. Some are not used.

Recommendations: _____

3. Are the tables and benches arranged in the best possible way?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No

Recommendations: _____

Section Three

1. What do you think about the number of food-stalls?
 - A. There are too many.
 - B. There are not enough.
 - C. There are just the right number.

Recommendations: _____

2. Is there enough *variety* (note the spelling!) of food?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. There is too much -- I can never decide what to choose, and often end up eating too much.

Recommendations: _____

3. What do think about the price of the food?
 - A. It is too expensive.
 - B. It is generally very reasonably priced, although there are one or two exceptions.
 - C. It varies a great deal. Some stalls are very cheap, but others are too expensive.
 - D. It is all very good value for money, compared to the price of the same food at other schools.

Recommendations: _____

4. Is the food hygienically prepared?
 - A. Yes, always.
 - B. No, never.
 - C. It usually is, though not always.

Recommendations: _____

APPENDIX B

Worksheet

Assignment

You are part of a special student group who have been assigned to study the conditions in the school tuckshop. Write a report to the Principal to describe these conditions and suggest what improvements, if any, could be made.

1. *Format*

You should use the normal format for a report: *just* put a title and write. Suggest an appropriate title: _____

You are going to write this report in groups of three: each person will write about a different section in the questionnaire. To separate the three parts you should use 'sub-titles' (side-headings). Suggest what sub-titles you could use for the parts:

Section One : _____

Section Two : _____

Section Three : _____

2. In the assignment you are to make *recommendations* to the Principal. List some of the expressions you could use, which are polite enough for writing to the Principal.

(i) _____

(ii) _____

(iii) _____

Why should you NOT use an expression like 'you must ?'

Imagine the benches are broken. What would you write to the Principal?

3. You will have to use pronouns to avoid repeating the same groups of words. Which pronouns could you use instead of writing:

(i) the food _____

(ii) the furniture _____

(iii) the benches _____

(iv) the drinks stall _____

(v) the kacang putih man _____

(vi) the hawkers _____

4. You will also have to use connectors. What connectors could you use to:

(i) add on another recommendations? _____

(ii) give your reason for making the recommendations? _____

(iii) go on to another point: for instance, question two after question one? _____

5. Write the report in groups of three: each person should write about a different section of the questionnaire. When you have finished writing, check each other's work carefully to make sure that there are no mistakes. Hand in the three sections of the report together.

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