

## The Use of Substitution Tables in Controlled and Guided Composition Writing

**Jalina bt Abdullah**

When the pupil is given the task of writing a composition, and that too in a foreign language like English, he is in fact burdened with more than one task. He not only has to think of what to say but how to say what he wants to say in a way relevant to the situation in which the language is used. "How to say what he wants to say" involves a good stock of vocabulary, a sound knowledge of grammar and an ability to link his ideas in a logical order. For a learner of English as a Second Language, this is indeed a big task especially as we do not want to nurture a negative attitude towards the writing of compositions. I remember how we moaned and groaned over the idea of having to produce, without any teacher guidance, a lengthy essay. When it was all done it was like having scaled Mt. Everest but when we got back our books many of us felt the reverse — a death plunge to the foothills. We do not want history to repeat itself and to find our students completely demotivated by an abundance of red marks and low scores.

Our role as a teacher is to guide our students. As an English teacher you will agree with me that writing compositions is a much dreaded activity in the classroom. We have to show pupils that writing a composition can be done with little difficulty and that success is within the reach of every pupil. A teacher can help pupils achieve success and a sense of accomplishment by embarking on a course of guided writing by first using linked substitution tables and then progressing, in stages, to a completely free writing stage.

A completely controlled approach is a good start especially with pupils who have no control over their English language structures, transforms, functional words, idioms etc. It also permits sufficient time for the learners to develop skills within these areas. The substitution table is indeed an efficient teaching tool. Several substitution tables linked together by sentences arranged in a logical order and in paragraphs offer the pupil the chance to write many alternative compositions based on the same topic. In such completely controlled linked substitution tables, there is a complete avoidance of error. At the same time the pupils are being exposed to grammatically correct sentences which, hopefully, will serve as models for later writing.

Once the pupils have been given sufficient practice at this stage of controlled writing, the teacher may embark on the almost controlled linked substitution table exercises progressing gradually to the substantially guided linked substitution tables and those that give little or some guidance. In these three types of substitution tables, a more advanced selection of alternatives is required of pupils who have either to make lexical, grammatical or stylistic choices. This entails the students to think in order to make an acceptable choice of the language alternatives offered. Such exercises cannot be branded as "mechanical and dull".

One other aspect of training provided by such exercises is the practice in a correct style or register such as required in a narrative, descriptive or argumentative piece of writing or in letters or in technical writing.

Below are examples of the 4 types of controlled and guided linked substitution tables mentioned earlier.

Composition 1 – Completely controlled linked substitution tables

Composition 2 – Almost controlled linked substitution tables

Composition 3 – Substantially guided linked substitution tables

Composition 4 – Some guidance and a little guidance linked substitution tables.

1. Completely Controlled Linked Substitution Type

To The Market

Language Items: Simple Present Tense, Adjectives of quantity and quality, Indefinite Numbers and quantities

Teaching Aid: Use a picture of a market scene as a stimulus

Every	Sunday Saturday Monday	I	walk cycle take a bus	to the market. It is
not far from near 1 mile from	my house. I see	all kinds of many a lot of	people on the way. Sometimes	
I meet my	good friends teachers neighbours	at the market. I usually	say hello to greet smile at	them.
They come to buy	fish fruit vegetables	and	eggs. cakes. flowers.	They also bring along an
empty basket to	carry take	home what they buy. Some of them buy	a lot of only a few a large number of	
things. The market is a	busy noisy crowded	place in the morning, but in the evening		
it is	quiet. peaceful. deserted.			

2. Almost Controlled Linked Substitution Type

A Malaysian Fruit

Language Items: Adjectives of quality, the Passive

Teaching Aids: Pictures of 3 types of Malaysian fruit – durians, mangosteens and rambutans

The	durian mangosteen rambutan	is a	small medium size large	fruit with a	hairy thorny smooth
skin. It is	green or yellow red or yellow dark purple	in colour. When it ripens, it			
falls is plucked	from the tree which is	not very high. very high.	This fruit has		
a strong no	smell. When it is opened, you can see	several seeds only one seed			
inside.	Each The	seed is covered with a layer of	firm white soft creamy soft, snow-white	flesh.	
During the	durian rambutan mangosteen	season, many fruit stalls are set up beside the			
road. The fruit is neatly	durian rambutan mangosteen	tied up in bundles piled up in small heaps	to attract buyers.		
Most Malaysians like the	durian rambutan mangosteen	because of its taste.			

3. Substantially Controlled Linked Substitution Type

A Dialogue

Language Items: Negative questions with prepositions,  
Relative "that" and "which"

Choose for A: A suitable price, in Malaysian dollars, for the article you are writing about.

B: A price 20% less than (A) for the same article.

C: A final price 10% less than (A) for the same article.

A	Is Isn't	this the	guitar shirt pen frock	that you	wanted to buy? asked for? were telling me about? have tried on? have chosen?
---	-------------	----------	---------------------------------	----------	--

B	Not	exactly. quite.	I wanted something	like the same as exactly like	Ahmad's.
	No. I don't think so.				the one
					I you
					my

showed you this morning. have in the shop window.	
father friend's sister	has. bought.

A	Which Which one What	was that? do you mean? is it like?
---	----------------------------	--

B	It's the one	with	twelve strings. red and black stripes. a gold ribbon. a batik print.
		which has	frills at the bottom. Elvis's picture on it.

A	Oh!	that's	rather expensive. very expensive. not for sale.
	that has been sold.		

B	How much is it? What a pity! I like that very much. Don't you have another one like that?
---	---

A	(A) .....	
	Sorry,	It's my son's. Not right now. Maybe, by Saturday, the new stock will have arrived.

B	(A)? It's too much. Can't you give it for (B)? .....	(B)? .....
	All right, then. I'll come by on Saturday to check...	
	It's all right.	Do you mind if I Maybe you'll let me
		have a closer look at it?

A	Very well,	I'll let you You may	have it for the final price of (C) .....
	Please do that. Don't worry, I'll remember to keep one aside for you.		
	By all means. Certainly. Yes, why not?		

B	I'll take it. Thank you very much. Goodybye.
---	--

4. Some Guidance and a Little Guidance Linked Substitution Type

A Cleaning Up Project

in My \_\_\_\_\_

Language Item: Sentence Connectors

Read over the exercise below carefully. Notice each blank space is marked with a ?. This indicates that a word is needed and you are to provide the word. Where there are no ?'s in the frames, just choose the appropriate word/words given. Notice the Title is incomplete too. Supply an appropriate word at the end.

The 

place housing area kampong
----------------------------------

 where I live in is in need of a big

clean up. First, the 

roads paths
----------------

 must be attended to. They are

strewn scattered
---------------------

 with all kinds of rubbish which has to be 

?
---

.

Secondly, the drains require 

sweeping ? improving
----------------------------

 as 

they are the water in them
----------------------------------

?
---

.

Thirdly, the children's playground which is 

overgrown strewn ? whenever it rains
---

with 

grass stones
-----------------

 has to be looked into. The swings and slides need a new

coat of 

? red yellow
--------------------

 paint to make them look 

prettier. more attractive. ?
------------------------------------

Many children 

love ? like
-------------------

 playing there in the evenings. Finally, those

residents who keep fowls in their back-yards should be 

requested told ?
------------------------

 to

keep the chicken coops clean in order to cut down the 

?
---

. Hopefully, when

all these improvements are done, my 

?
---

 will be a 

cleaner good ?
----------------------

 place to live in.