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Faculty of Letters and Languages  
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## **Strengthening Students' Composition Skills Through Freewriting**

A Case Study: Third year LMD Students of English at Mohamed Khider  
University of Biskra

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master  
Degree in English: Sciences of Language

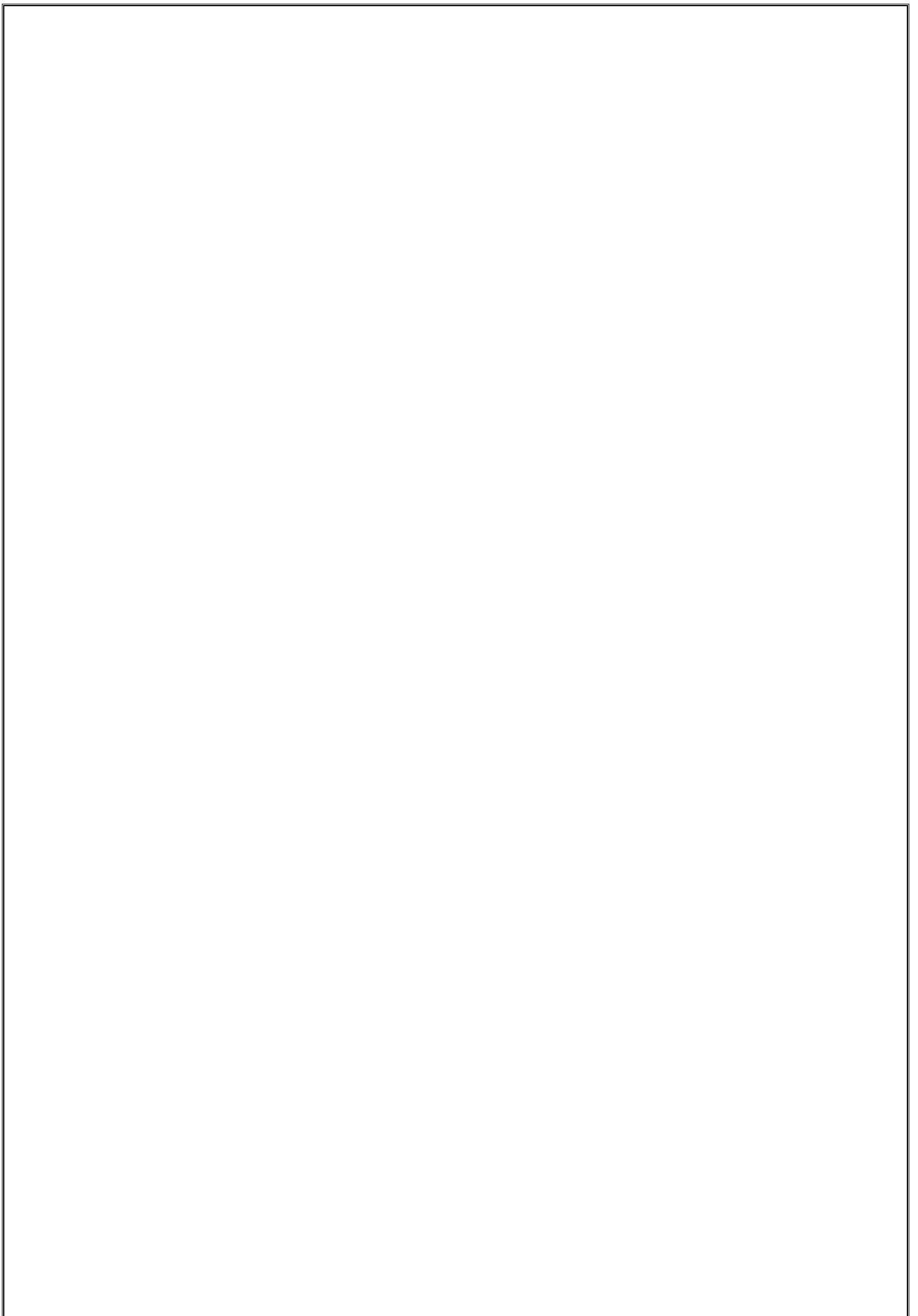
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# *Dedication*

*TO THE ONE THAT NEVER LET ME DOWN ,*

*My MOTHER*

*To the kind loving man ,*

*My late father*

*To the honest loving man ,*

*My dear husband*

*To the brave sweet girl*

*My sister*

*To the funny boy*

*my brother*

*to my family : aunts and uncles*

*to my loving parents*

*my mother –in –law*

*my father-in-law*

*to those who sincerely dedicated their lives, time, and patience , my teachers*

*To the best people I have ever met*

*my friends*

*Group six (2010)*

*To all of you those who wish me good*

*To you*

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## Abstract

This study investigates the difficulties that EFL learners encounter because of the writing process. Though, the aim of the writing process is to guide EFL learner's writings and to help them to write in an accurate way, EFL learners often feel bound by its many steps and rules and eventually they develop a negative attitudes towards the act of writing itself. For this reason, it is hypothesized in this study that using a strategy such as *freewriting* may help EFL learners to overcome their writing obstacles. Freewriting and given to its tolerant and flexible nature could aid learners not only to write but also to overcome their self-criticism, their anxiety, and their writers' block. In order to investigate the truthfulness of the hypothesis, an experiment was conducted with Third year LMD students and the questionnaire was submitted to teachers of written expression course. Both students and teachers are from Mohamed Khider Biskra University. The analysis of the questionnaire revealed that teachers in fact have negative attitudes towards freewriting; whereas, the Quasi experiment revealed that no significant difference was detected in EFL learners' writings after conducting the experiment. Based on the results concluded from this study, some recommendations are given for the sake of enhancing EFL students' writing compositions such as reading, paying attention to topic selection, and practicing freewriting.

## LIST OF ABBRIVATIONS AND ACRONYMES

*df* : Degree of Freedom

**EFL** : English as a Foreign Language

**FL** : Foreign Language

**LMD** : License Master Doctorate

**N** : Number of the Sample

*%* : Percentage

**Q** : Question

**SD** : Standard Deviation

**SE** : Standard Error

**TL** : Target Language

**N** : Number of the Sample

**X** : Mean

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# GENERAL INTRODUCTION

FreeWriting

## General Introduction

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“I’ve almost never seen a freewriting that I couldn’t understand—even if it’s full of “ungrammatical” language and unexpected changes of direction and topic. But I’ve seen lots of writing that was carefully composed and revised that was too incoherent to understand.”

Peter Elbow

## Introduction

Learning a language requires the mastery of the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, in particular, learners who intend to follow a higher education, or have chosen a given language to be their own major. For instance, EFL learners fall into a great pressure having to develop their four skills in parallel in the minimum period of time. For EFL students in Biskra University, writing is the most needed skill. First of all, because they are often asked to write compositions ranging from short paragraphs to long essays as well as various assignments they have to submit. Written Expression, linguistics, Didactics, Language Acquisition, and Psycho-pedagogy are classes which require written compositions. Second, most of tests and evaluations are through writing. However, the difficulty they face in writing raises two questions: Why is it difficult for EFL learners to write? And how can they learn to write? Writing is by far one of the most difficult skills to be mastered, not only does it require the adequate use of vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and punctuation, but also the terrifying fact of having to write something out of nothing and how making it also readable.

Teachers, in their pursue to tackle this problem, have tried several methods and techniques as well as different strategies such as teaching them how to generate ideas, how to organize and develop these ideas, and eventually how to revise and edit their final production. Yet, neither the teachers nor the students were satisfied with the outcomes. The reason lies behind the emphasis on writing in respect to its academic conventions such as grammar, punctuation, spelling, and organization. Unlike those strategies, *freewriting* stands in the contrary. Freewriting is all about freeing the learner's minds from any obstacles that may hinder the flow of his/her ideas. Such strategy gives them a space where they become less worried about correctness and teachers' red pen.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Writing is basically an essential skill in examining the learners' performance and measuring their writing proficiency. Yet, most of EFL learners find it a stressful, challenging and demanding task because of the already mentioned requirements. Consequently, teachers have tried several strategies in order to improve their learners' writing proficiency. However, these strategies often remain partially ineffective for their great emphasis on grammar, spelling, punctuation, and organization rather than making learners write. In contrary, if EFL learners were given a chance to free write instead of being imposed on their written production might be improved .

## **Research Questions**

This research is aiming to address the following questions:

- 1- Why is writing difficult for EFL learners of Biskra university?
- 2- How often do teachers use freewriting in their classrooms?
- 3- To what extent will freewriting enhance EFL learners' composition skills?

## **Research Hypothesis**

The fact that EFL learners' face challenges when it comes to writing skill that leads us to hypothesize that learners' writing proficiency will be improved through introducing the freewriting strategy more often in written expression course.

## **Significance of the Study**

Why is this research important? A question that would be easy to answer if we know the significance of freewriting. It is, as we propose, a fundamental step towards enhancing EFL learners' writing skill for it gives them the opportunity to free their minds from the traditional

constrains that writing impose . It may help them to overcome their emotional barriers (writer's Block) towards writing and that will serve their writing to reach an apt level. The findings of this research hopefully will highlight some of the difficulties facing EFL learners in writing it will also show to what extent freewriting could be a solution to their challenges in writing. Furthermore; some recommendation will be given for both teachers and students for the practical use of freewriting during the course.

### **Aims of the Study**

By conducting this research two main objectives will be attained:

- 1- Highlighting the difficulty that EFL learners' encounter with writing conventions.
- 2- Showing the significance of freewriting on enhancing EFL learners 'composition skills.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **1. The choice of the Method**

Understanding the nature of the study is what normally determines the choice of the method. Consequently, and giving to the nature of the study , the significance of the issue we are investigating, the following method, population, sample, and data gathering tools were chosen :

**Method:** The nature of the research we are conducting is a quantitative quasi experimental . For providing accurate results ; We used a qualitative research tool which is teachers' questionnaire.

**Population:** Third year LMD students at Biskra University were chosen to be the population for this research .There are two reasons behind this choice: First, third year LMD students have mastered to some extent English language that will help them to answer the proposed questions. Second, they are aware of the significance of this study and how it may be beneficial for them.

**Sample:** Seven participants from two groups participated in the experiment that has been conducted at Mohammed Khider, Biskra University.

### **Data Gathering Tools:**

In order to investigate the validity of the hypothesis, we have used a questionnaire which was submitted to teachers of Written Expression course in order to understand teachers' attitudes towards freewriting, In addition to the questionnaire, we have conducted a quasi experiment with Third year LMD students.

### **Limitations of the Study:**

This study encountered several obstacles. First, lack of references about freewriting technique. Second, the experiment was conducted in a limited time which is six sessions. A session for a pre-test, a session for the treatment, and a session for the posttest. In addition to this, the sample was relatively small, out of 372 third year LMD learners, only seven volunteers participated. Third, lack of commitment among certain volunteers. Fourth, the questionnaire was distributed to ten teachers, yet only six copies were received.

### **Structure of the Dissertation**

This study consists of three chapters. The first chapter gives a brief overview on writing. Among other aspects of writing, it presents its history, its definition, and its process. The second chapter tries to spot the light on freewriting as a technique and as a practice. It discusses its nature, presents its definition, its types, and its techniques. The last chapter consists of the field work which presents and discusses the analysis of the questionnaire as well as the Quasi experiment. This study is concluded with recommendations and general conclusion.

## **Introduction**

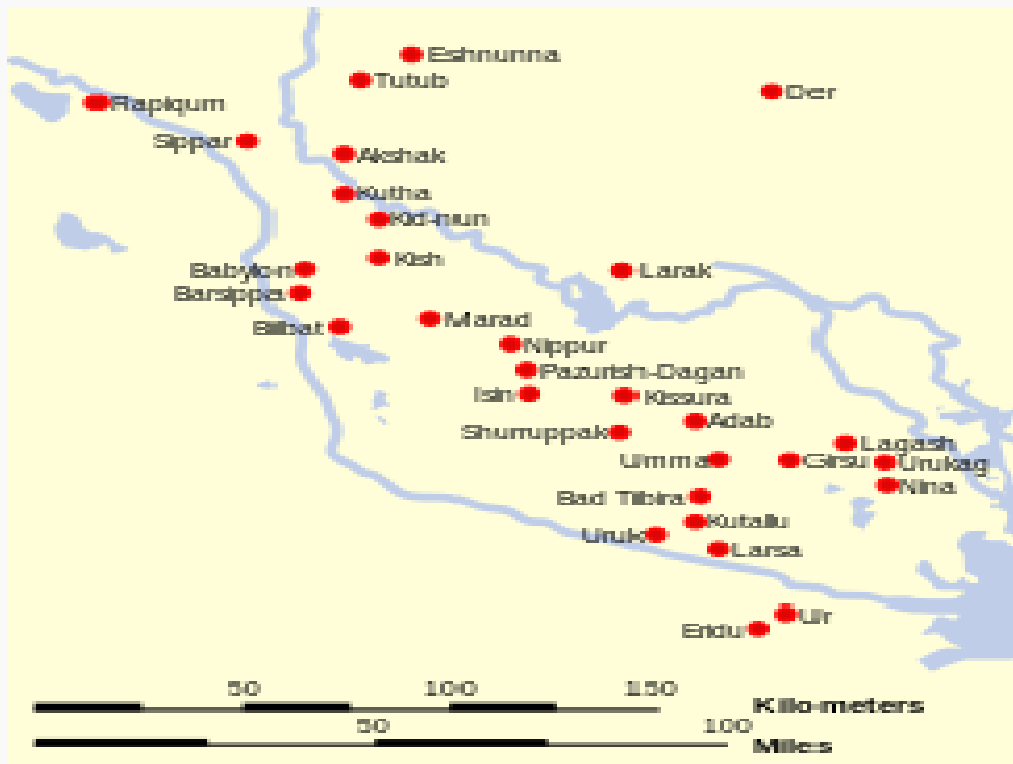
Writing is a multi-dimensional skill. It demands a complete mastery of the language aspects in terms of grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and organization; these dimensions are the reason why writing is difficult. Hence, English as foreign language students often fail in fulfilling the demands of this language. Writing with efficiency seems to be an immense burden which they cannot wait to get it off their shoulders and this by avoiding writing from the first place. This chapter gives a glimpse about the history of writing. It also discusses the most obvious aspects of writing such as definition, process as well as the difference between the other forms of writing and academic writing. Moreover, the chapter presents the various approaches for teaching writing and ends with the factors affecting writing.

### **1. A Brief History of Writing**

Since the dawn of civilization, human beings felt the need of recording their achievements, their beliefs as well as their history. Though they were primitive human beings, they could notice that the spoken utterances could disappear by the death of one of their members. Consequently, They sought for something stronger, much more effective and resistant when facing death or nature and hence, the invention of writing appeared. Naturally, the writing they used was not as sophisticated as nowadays writing, nor it had a complicated system. They mainly used figures, objects and some sort of symbols to denote things and grave incidents that were too important or holistic to be ignored. It is a common truth that writing was first invented in at least two places: Mesopotamia specifically the ancient Sumer around 3200 BCE and Mesoamerica around 600 BCE. It is also debatable whether writing has developed after that independently in Egypt around 3200 BCE and in



China around 1200 BCE (wikipedia).



**Figure 1:** Sumer, an ancient civilization of southern Mesopotamia, is believed to be the place where written language was first invented around 3200 BCE .[http:// en. Wikipedia.org/wiki/file](http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/file)

## 2. The Definition of Writing

Writing has several definitions; which differ in meaning depending on their context.

According to Farlex (2006) dictionary writing is:

1. Letters of the Alphabet (Foreign) a group of letters or symbols written or marked on a surface as a means of communicating ideas, by making each symbol stand for an idea, concept, or thing, by using each symbol to represent a set of sounds grouped into syllables (**syllabic writing**), or by regarding each symbol as corresponding roughly or exactly to each of the sounds in the language (**alphabetic writing**).

Writing is also seen as an embodiment of the vocal sound of speech. It is defined by River (1968, p.242) as “the act of putting what has been spoken in conventional graphic form “. The linguistic nature of previous definition however contrasts with the view of White and Arndt (1991) who see writing

"writing is far from being a simple matter of transcribing language into written symbols: it is a thinking process in its own right. It demands conscious intellectual effort which usually has to be sustained over a considerable effort of time".

The complexity of writing allows for multiple views. For instance, Richard, N. in his article untitled *what is writing* presented several definitions that were yielded by other writers: according to Bambara “writing has been for a long time my major tool for self-instruction and self-development” cited in Richard. The perspective of self-instruction and self development was also shared by Fitzgerald " the reason one writes is not the fact of being wants to say something .He writes because he has something to say ' cited in (Savage &Mayer, 2007 , p. 02). Writing is the embodiment of sounds into written form it is also a way of self-expression, self improvement. It demands intellectual thinking and efforts that needs to be sustained in order to obtain great results.

### **3. Writing Skill**

Writing is considered to be a productive skill. It allows learners to judge their progress in learning their foreign language. In writing, learners are not only required to master vocabulary and grammar, but also to write accurately and proficiently. This accuracy and proficiency manifest through a hard work and sustained efforts along with the mastery of the other aspects of language; for example, grammar, punctuation, spelling, layout, and capitalization. The deficiency in one of these aspects can result in misunderstanding or

different interpretations from readers, in this case, teachers.

When it comes to writing, learners and teachers are aware that this particular skill entails other sub-skills. Heaton (1975) sees writing as a very complex skill that is sometimes hard to be taught. He claimed that in order to write, one has to possess sub-skills that will ensure him a coherent and cohesive written production. He grouped these skills into five general components:

- **Language use:** the ability to construct well-formed sentences;
- **Mechanical skills:** the ability to use correctly those conventions that are peculiar to written language -e.g. punctuation, spelling;
- **Treatment of content:** the ability to think creatively and develop thoughts, excluding all irrelevant information ;
- **Stylistic skills:** the ability to manipulate sentences, paragraphs, and use language effectively.

**Judgment skills:** the ability to write in an appropriate manner for a particular purpose with a particular audience in mind, together with the ability to select, order, organize all the relevant information.

When referring to those sub-skills, Heaton, (1975, p.135) stresses the importance of the Mechanical skills. He argues that writing conventions such as punctuation and spelling should be tackled in the primary stages. However; EFL learners' situation is more complicated since those learners are not natives and they only begin learning English language in middle schools and in some cases in the primary schools. Punctuation and spelling alike are definitely regarded as challenges for all learners in all stages. Heaton surprisingly refutes teacher's intensive feedback concerning these two aspects saying that it hinders learners' writing.

In writing, a writer should generally know his/her audience. Principally, it is the same for EFL learners; when knowing their audience allow them to choose the rightful tools for their writing assignments such as the register of words, the type of format, the degree of formality and other choices which are based on judgments or as Heaton named them Judgment skills. Heaton (1975, p.135) advocates that judgment skills are essential in writing for both natives and EFL learners alike. He states that “The use of correct registers becomes-an important skill at advanced levels of writing. Failure to use the correct register frequently results incongruities and embarrassment.” the issue of choosing the right register might be an effortless matter for native speakers, yet for EFL learners having to differentiate between the various kinds of register such as colloquialisms, slang, jargon, Standard English, business English and so forth, demands tremendous efforts and a real exposure to the English language.

Heaton also stresses these two sub-skills: the mechanical skills and judgmental skills as the guide for the remaining ones. Having the judgmental skills will certainly assist in manipulating language style and possessing the mechanical skills will aid in the treatment of context. Above all, without the language uses all these skills are useless simply because knowing the basic structure of the English language sentence is the first step in any learning that should take place.

Those already presented sub-skills mentioned by Heaton may help teachers as well as EFL learners and advanced learners in general to examine their fragile areas in their learning and hopefully to find some answers their inquiries.

#### **4. Academic Writing**

Academic writing differs in many ways from other writings. It is definitely difficult and it demands more efforts and more proficiency. In academic setting such as universities,

in order to write there are conventions that must be followed: The degree of formality, the wide range of terminology that differs from one discipline to another, the format of different types of writing, and above all spelling mistakes and incorrect punctuation are not tolerated. Moreover, academic writing is characterized by its precision, accuracy and objectivity. It is precise because students are supposed to write exact facts and to be precise with any data they use such as figures, statistics and dates. It is accurate because students are required to use exact words and expressions. Finally, it is objective because students are supposed to be less personal in order to be more convincing.

The question is: How can EFL students manage to master all these requirements? And could they do so? Academic writing follows a process; consequently, EFL students have to follow this process in order to meet the requirements of writing in academic settings.

#### **4.1 Writing Process**

Writing similar to any other sciences has a process. This latter consists of a number of stages that guide students from the start, i.e., the moment they begin their writings until they complete their first draft. It is practical, effective and helpful. In supporting this process, Williams (2003.p.101) says that” these stages are hypothesized as universal which means that, at least to some degree, all writers are to engage assumingly in these stages “.Moreover, Fairbaird & Winch (1996) believe that the first step for writing is to think about the theme of writing, then to plan this writing afterwards, to start writing the first draft and finally to revise the draft (p. 31). Writing process involves several stages and these latter are: pre-writing, planning, outlining, drafting, revising and editing

##### **4.1.1 Pre-Writing**

In this stage EFL students are required to think about their topic then to brainstorm and to gather all the information they already know about the topic. As start, it is convening to write notes, sub-headings and graphics as well. Richards & Renandya (2002) explain how

this technique helps students in their compositions. They asserted that “pre-writing is an activity in the classroom that encourages students to write .It stimulates thoughts for getting started. In fact, it moves students away from having to face blank page towards generating tentative ideas and gathering information for writing” (p.316) .Pre-writing could be seen as a flash back learners use it to create a bridge between their background knowledge and their current knowledge regarding a particular topic for the sake of retrieving information and using them. Herring (2011), in a very detailed presentation, mentioned several steps that are included within the pre-writing stage; students have to follow for organized and effective writing.

- **Narrowing the topic:** students have to narrow their topics and to decide from which angle they are going to tackle them.
- **Determining the audience:** students have to determine who are their readers? What do they want to know about their topic? How do they feel about this topic? And what are they expecting from them? For example, standard written English, correct grammar and spelling, and accurate information presented in a logical sequence.
- **Determining the purpose:** students have to determine their purpose of writing, i.e., is it persuasive, expressive or informative. these types are widely used .
- **Determining the tone:** students have to determine the tone through which their audience will be addressed, for instance, serious, humorous, intimate or detached.
- **Determining the point -of –view:** students have to determine their perspective from which they write their topics (e.g.) First person:” I, we“, Second person” you”, and third Person” he, she, they” .

- **Determine the tense:** students have to determine the tense of their topics, is it happening now, in the future or it happened already.

**Exploring the topic:** students have to explore their topics, to search them, to discuss them, and to make all the necessary brainstorming, outlining, and freewriting for the sake of gathering sufficient information about their topics.

#### **4.1.2 Planning**

Students have to review, to organize and to evaluate their ideas and their information before starting the writing process. Making a plan is the turning point from pre-writing stage to drafting stage. In this stage, EFL students have to determine how their written production will look like starting from the introduction, the body, and the conclusion.

In the introduction, a thesis statement should be clearly stated. A thesis is the central idea of the topic; it reflects the writer's attitude and position towards a given issue without being obvious. Predicates are occasionally given to demonstrate the scope of the written essay (Herring, 2011 p.14).

In the body of an essay, a topic sentence is required along with supporting details .First, primary support; which is the main idea that illustrates the major points. Second, secondary support, which functions as another illustration of the primary support .It is more informative, more detailed and more specific. When writing the body paragraphs, EFL learners should pay great attention to the order of their ideas. There are three types of order: The chronological (time), the space, and the emphatic (order of importance). (Herring,2011 p. 17)

The conclusion is the sum up of the main ideas of the other paragraphs.

#### **4.1.3 Outlining**

When the planning phase is completed, outlining is to be the next step in this process .A good outline will be similar to the following.



• **Figure 2 : Outline .[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline of writing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_writing)**

In the outline a thesis is always placed at the beginning when in fact it could be stated in the middle and occasionally at the end of the introductory paragraph. A thesis statement should be supported with a main idea and this latter is also supported with other main details. Details function as illustration to the writer’s point of view.

**4.1.4 Drafting**

*Better writing right now* is a book written by Galko in which he sees drafting as a way of starching the outline into paragraphs (2001,p.50). In this phase, learners will definitely write more than one draft which is called a rough draft. The more they write drafts, the more their final written productions will be good. Drafting is the stage where learners are allowed to be mistaken. But even in the drafting process, there are certain guide lines to be followed such as organizing the information in paragraphs, drawing readers’ attention in the introduction, being coherent by using transition words, and finally writing a strong



closing.

When writing a draft, there will be usually ideas to be added and others to be removed. The ones that are not suitable or irrelevant to the subject being discussed should be saved and not erased immediately. These ideas according to Galko (2001, p. 55) ought to be saved in a folder called “**slush file**”. This file will help learners to overcome their writer’s block or to find new ideas for new topics.

#### **4.1.5 Revising**

Having finished the final draft, it is wise to let some time pass between the drafting stage and the revising stage. This time allows learners to examine adequately their final written production and to observe what is missing. Consequently, learners are ought to start writing early so they can have the time for an appropriate revision. According to Grenville (2001) revising one’s writing allows readers not to misunderstand the content, it allows the writer, in this case learners, either to cut or add to his/her final draft the necessary adjustments. On the same hand, Galko, D (2001, p.73) advocates that in order to revise a final draft, learners should focus on three aspects: the content, the structure, and the mechanics. The first refers to “what the paper says”, the second refers to the organization of the paper, and the third refers to how the paper was written in terms of spelling, grammar, punctuation and usage Galko (2001, p.75) also presented a content revision checklist which is a set of questions that aid learners when revising their writings. These questions are:

- Does the introduction clearly explain what the paper is about?
- Does it prepare the reader for what comes next?
- Is the thesis statement clear?
- Does each paragraph relate to thesis statement?

- Do the paragraphs support the thesis statement? Is the support specific? Is it convincing?
- Does the conclusion logically end the paper?
- Overall, does the paper meet the goals of the assignment?

Does it meet personal goals?

Revising is a process of making the rightful adjustments to the final draft in order to make it more elaborated, more convincing, and more accurate.

#### **4.1.6 Editing**

Learners often cannot make the difference between editing and revising, which are used interchangeably when in fact they are not. In the following table several points are displayed for distinguish between these two writing steps (Wikipedia , 2012)

.

FreeWriting

<p><b>REVISING</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deals with the paper as a whole</b>, considering strengths and weaknesses, arguments, focus and organization, support, and voice, as well as mechanical issues.</li> <li>• <b>Is dialogue-based</b>. The purpose of revision is to ask questions, expanding ideas and challenging arguments which require discussion between the writer and the reader.</li> <li>• <b>Is non-hierarchical</b>. Offering questions and making observations allow the writer and reader to hold separate and valid opinions. The purpose of discussion is to expand and clarify ideas rather than "correct" them.</li> <li>• <b>Focuses on the writer</b> in the process of writing and increasing the writer's understanding of the paper's strengths and weaknesses.</li> <li>• <b>Clarifies and focuses the writer's arguments</b> by defining terms, making concessions and counter-arguments, and using evidence. This may involve moving or removing entire paragraphs, extending or narrowing ideas, rewriting vague or confusing text, and adding to existing paragraphs</li> </ul>
<p><b>EDITING</b></p>	<p><b>Is on a sentence level</b>, addressing problems with spelling, grammar, punctuation, or word choice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Is one-sided</b>. The editor writes comments and corrections on the paper and returns the paper to the writer.</li> <li>• <b>Is hierarchical</b>. An editor looks for "mistakes" and "fixes" them. An editor places value on writing (such as a grade).</li> </ul> <p>Focuses on the paper as a product</p>

**Table 1: The Difference between Editing and Revising**

• **5 .Writing Approaches**

Because writing is essential and vital for any academic setting, finding a way to teach it as well as to understand how it can be taught has always been a major concern for academic researchers. For this reason, several approaches appeared in order to answer the question: what is the best way for teaching writing? An approach is defined as” the sum of beliefs, assumptions, and principles underlying the teaching and learning of the writing skill” Wiki .Of course, each of these approaches are efficient; however, none of it is the full answer. Writing is more complex and each of these approaches has succeeded in giving a part of the answer .These approaches are: the product approach, the process approach and

the genre approach.

### **5.1 The Product Approach**

In the product approach, copying is seen as an efficient start for better writing. In other words, EFL learners are supposed to replicate or imitate a given text. The more EFL learners replicate their given texts, the more they will learn the language structure and build their knowledge too. Nunan (1999) argues that writing skill is nothing but knowing the structure of the target language. He named this approach as the “bottom-up processing” as it focuses on the detached elements of the target language. Whereas White (1987, p.265) considers the aim of the product approach is “to go beyond the sentence level manipulation to the production of paragraphs and subsequently of multiple compositions “. The product approach views writing as a simple linear model of writing process. According to White (1988) this could be manifested through this figure.

Study the model → manipulate elements → produce a parallel texts

**Figure .3 Model Based Approach (White 1988, p .5)**

This approach focuses on what the learners have produced at the end of the process of writing, not on how they come to finish it. The product approach has been proved to be successful for evaluators to grade their learners for it only focuses on form through evaluating their imitated texts in terms of grammar use and sentence structure.

### **5.2 The Process Approach**

Unlike the product approach, the process approach focuses on how learners write from the first place. It tackles the different stages that learners have to go through in order to produce an acceptable piece of writing. Brown (1994, p.322) states that, “the product is after all, the ultimate goal; it is the reason that we go through the process of pre-

writing, drafting, revising and editing.” the process approach after all aims to enable learners understand that writing is more than grammar and arranging words in correct sequence. O’Brien (2004) explains how this approach encourages “students not to deem

<b>The Process Approach</b>	<b>The Product Approach</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Emphasis on the learning process</li> <li>- Focus on student’s experience</li> <li>- Regard for form and structure</li> <li>- Priority on student interaction</li> <li>- Concern for immediate tasks, activities brainstorming and genre analysis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasis on finished products</li> <li>- Focus on objectives outcomes</li> <li>- Regard for global meaning</li> <li>- Priority on formal course design</li> <li>- concern for long-term objectives</li> <li>- classroom writing, error analysis, and stylistic focus are features of a product writing approach.</li> </ul>

writing as grammar exercises, but as a discovery of meaning and ideas” this approach is very helpful for EFL learners precisely as it teach them how to write step by step. This following table shows the differences between the product approach and the process approach:

**Table 2: The Process Approach Vs the Product Approach**

(Adapted from New fields, 1999; cited in Selman, 2006.p .17)

### 5.3 The Genre Approach

If the process approach aims is to present the different stages that learners have to go through in order to produce their final written production. The genre approach is on the other hand aims to enable them to produce and differentiate between the various texts that might come cross them. The genre approach teaches EFL learners how to write according to the purpose and audience intended. In other words, writing an academic essay is obviously different from writing a job letter application. Writing to a sport magazine is

also different from writing to a business magazine and so forth. The genre approach then is a way to teach learners to determine the purpose and the audience from an early stage of writing and that is through presenting samples from the first place. Hence, learners through these samples will learn to imitate and then to produce similar copies. This approach has been called by Silva (1990) *English for academic purposes approach* (p.16-17). Partridge (2004, p.01) defined it as "teaching particular genres that students need control of in order to succeed in particular settings". This approach enables learners to write for functional purposes and how to be specific.

Some proponents consider this approach suitable for advanced learners and especially EFL learners who need to make the difference between genres and the various existing styles.

All the mentioned approaches have been successful in particular era of time; for each time had a specific demands and perspective towards writing. Yet, there are other approaches that have not been mentioned and others are yet to be invented.

## **6. Writing skill Versus Writing Process**

Writing as a skill denotes the ability to express thoughts and feelings and to communicate ideas with others using writing symbols as a medium. As such, Klein (1985, p.35) describes writing as being able of using pen and a paper for writing and expressing one's ideas. Writers have to poses writing mechanisms so they can be proficient writers and so learners too. When talking about writing as a skill, several cognitive abilities are to be involved. First, the ability to master the writing symbols which is not an easy mission if those symbols were Chinese. Second , the ability to use these writing symbols correctly in order to produce meaningful messages. Third, the ability to read these messages.

Writing as a process stands for all the stages writers as well as learners have to go

through in order to produce a coherent and cohesive piece of writing. It is through these stages that any piece of writing will be qualified to meet certain standards. These standards are created to make the distinction between what is worth reading and what is not. What is academic and what is not. These stages are: pre-writing, planning, outlining, drafting, revising, and editing.

## **7. Factors Affecting Writing**

Learning a different language that is not the mother tongue can be affected by several factors on several levels. On the level of writing, the linguistic, cultural and educational factors are reasons for why the students cannot fully enhance their writing skill. However, these factors are a natural outcome resulted from the differences between the mother tongue and the target language whatever these languages are.

### **7.1 Linguistic Factors**

Foreign language students often fail to develop their writing skill due to the interference between their mother tongue and the target language. This interference occurs on two levels. The first one is on word and sentence level; in this case students are beginners still confused using the sentence structure of their mother tongue to the one of the foreign language. Discourse and text level, in which students neglect the norms of the foreign language due to their lack of knowledge. To illustrate, Sparks, Granschow, and Javorsky (2000, p. 251) argue that any language has its own rules of lexical, grammar and phonology and it is highly important for the students to understand these rules and to memorize them, but much more important is to make the distinction between their mother tongue and the foreign language being learned.

### **7.2 Cultural Factors**

The relation between language and its culture is inseparable. Ogbu (1982, p. 290) states that “cultural differences have implication for human behavior” It is exactly why

foreign language learners apply their own cultural heritage when writing into another language; for they cannot separate themselves from who they are , and who they became when using a different language than their own . Cultural interference is common in EFL writings. Whether it was religious, cultural, or linguistic, these cultural mistakes when written are all due to the lack of the communicative competence that allows EFL learners to distinguish between them and others. Unlike intermediate students, advanced students have to a certain degree learned the FL cultural system which permits them to be culturally aware of the cultural differences when using the FL.

### **7.3 Educational Factors**

When teaching a foreign language in another host community, there are certain measures that need to be taken into consideration. One of it is creating an educational system that fits this language in order to be fully understood by the EFL students. However; creating this educational system proved to be difficult because of the hidden reasons involved .This language has its own culture, and hence, teaching a foreign culture demands a critical awareness of the differences between the two cultures: the host and the foreign culture. In this situation the educational system is not only designed to fit students, but also to maintain certain balance between what the host culture believes in and what the country policy required.

In order to understand how the educational system is designed according to a non-educational reasons. To illustrate, a quick look at the Arabic English text books reveals the ambiguity, there is no mention for Israel or the Holocaust. If this evidence has its own political reasons, certainly there are historical, cultural and religious reasons that shape the nature and the content of the educational system in way that best fits the cultural host community and assumingly EFL students too.

It might be difficult to create an educational system that is a native-like system. This



system will permit EFL learners to approach a foreign language similar to a native learner. However, if the educational system is bounded by certain governmental policies, it should not produce EFL learners who are able of reciting rules instead of being communicatively competent. Weir (1982, p.92) wrote “there are differences in previous educational backgrounds “ talking about EFL learners who encounter difficulties because of the way they were taught and the way they were perceiving the world of the foreign language surrounding them.

If the educational system is beyond reaching, teachers might play a great role in bridging the gap between what the educational system and the actual foreign culture both present.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter is devoted to writing as a skill and as a process. It highlights the main issues learners encounter when writing, and tries to discuss possible solutions for writing difficulties through introducing writing approaches and the factors affecting it. Writing is indeed a complex cognitive process that entails several mechanisms. This complexity made it difficult both for learning it and teaching it as well. However, practicing writing could be the solution for EFL students who wish to develop their writing skill and freewriting could be another way to overcome writing difficulties. The second chapter will be devoted to this strategy.

## **Introduction**

The common convention is that academic writing follows a process. The aim of this process is to guide EFL learners while they write until they submit their final drafts and ensure that these drafts fit the conventions of the academic settings i.e., their writing should be cohesive, coherent, precise, and concise. But, what if this process hinders EFL learners from writing at the first place? Anxiety is what most of EFL learners feel because of all the writing constraints they have to follow, and writing for some of them is regarded as a dull task that needs to be done. Teachers, to overcome this critical situation encourage EFL learners to use writing strategies such as mapping, clustering, and brainstorming. However, little attention is devoted to freewriting.

Unlike the previously mentioned strategies, this strategy aids students to generate ideas; writing aspects like grammar, spelling mistakes, punctuation and layout are to be in the second position. Freewriting could be a simple, tolerant practice that might help EFL students to have different insights towards writing. This chapter gives an overview on freewriting. It describes the nature of this strategy and then defining it. Moreover, it introduces the types of freewriting and then the different techniques involved in it. Furthermore, it shows some of the difficulties that EFL learners encounter when they free write. This chapter also highlights the importance of teaching freewriting as a practice in academic settings. It spots the light on the assessment of this practice and its relationship with creative writing.

## 1. The Nature of Freewriting

When EFL learners experience what is called writer's block they suddenly become unable of writing. Writer's block often occurs due to psychological issues. According to Wikipedia (2012) these issues could be "apathy, self-criticism, resentment, anxiety about deadlines and fear of failure "At least four of these psychological issues EFL learners experience. Learners show apathy when they lack interest about the subject they were asked to write about or they also may feel unable to write because of their negative self-criticism as well as vocabulary shortage.

Moreover, anxiety about deadlines can make EFL learners disregard writing rules, and occasionally they refuse to write. A part from writer's block, a linguistic block is another issue EFL learners encounter .It refers to the lack of vocabulary. In such cases, freewriting might be a solution. In an article by Marian Book Works (2009) describes freewriting as a simple forgiving practice that liberates the writer's voice [whether it was a writer or a student] within an individual and helps him to overcome the writer's block. Freewriting is a tolerant strategy that encourages learners first to write and then to edit. It is all "about loosening and limbering the thought process, not about a product or a performance for a student or a writer" Wikipedia. As such, the more EFL learners feel comfortable with writing, the more their writings become mature.

Mistakenly, one might think that freewriting does not need editing. In fact, any piece of writing must be edited. For instance, Elbow (1973, p.07) wrote "editing, itself , is not the problem. Editing is usually necessary if we want to end up with something satisfactory. The problem is when editing goes at the same time with producing". In other words, if writing and editing took place at the same time, writing will be more stressful. Elbow describes this as an "*obsession* "that hinders the natural flow of ideas and eventually makes

learners frustrated and their writings “*dead*”.

## 2. Freewriting Definition

Freewriting could be defined as a simple, flexible and tolerant practice that helps EFL learners to generate more ideas and ease the process of their writing through overlooking writing conventions temporary. It is defined by Wikipedia as:

“a prewriting technique in which a person writes continuously for a set period of time without regard to spelling, grammar, or topic. It produces raw, often unusable material, but helps writers overcome blocks of apathy and self-criticism. It is used mainly by prose writers and writing teachers”

Consequently, teachers find it challenging to assess freewriting drafts due to the unusual content which is often neither coherent nor cohesive. Similarly, Richard H (2010) describes freewriting as *a messy* perplexing activity. In contrast with the two previously mentioned authors, Franz , (2014 ) describes freewriting as “ a release from the prison of rules”. In other words, it is a release from grammar, spelling, and other writing conventions. Friedlander (2010) presents a more elaborated definition for freewriting as “A simple structured practice that is flexible and forgiven .It can be used as a base of writing practice, or spontaneously whenever you want to go deeper into a subject.” Friedlander definition presents four characteristics of freewriting .First, it is simple for it only needs the learner’s or writer’s involvement .Second, it is structured because it has its own techniques. Third, it is flexible because it disregards the conventional rules of writing .Fourth; it is forgiven because both learners and writers are allowed to commit mistakes and errors.

To sum up, freewriting aims at helping EFL learners to overcome their self-criticism and writer’s block. Moreover, it helps them to generate more ideas and to be more familiar

with writing. It is also tolerant and flexible; two features may urge EFL learners to write with more confidence.

### 3. Types of Freewriting

Freewriting technique has two types: The open- freewriting and the focus freewriting. In an open freewriting students are left to choose the topics they wish to write about ; teachers play no role in guiding them .The main objective is to encourage students to write. Students are better performers when choosing their topics on their own. Unlike open- freewriting, in a focus freewriting a topic is given by the teacher .Students are supposed to write accordingly.

### 4. Freewriting Techniques

Freewriting is about loosening and liberating thoughts .However, there are techniques that have to be followed which make freewriting a tolerant practice. Being an expert teacher of writing, Elbow (1973) wrote the following guidelines for teachers and students alike.

- **Set a time limit:** Timing is the first step before starting the freewriting. It is agreed upon that ten to fifteen minutes will be sufficient for students; whereas, forty-five minutes is for those students who are more familiar with writing.
- **Write nonstop:** the essential key in freewriting is writing quickly .learners are ought not to stop writing even if they could not think about any other thoughts they may write such expression ‘I don’t know what to write, I don’t know what to write ‘Eventually other ideas will emerge . Learners have to keep on moving their hands, It may look unusual; however, that is the way freewriting works.
- **No correction:** Learners are ought to disregard any writing conventions such as grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

- **Editing:** When learners finish their freewriting, they have to read what they wrote .First, learners have to mark the main thoughts that emerged during the freewriting phase. These thoughts can be developed to be paragraphs. Second, after underlining these main thoughts, learners can precede their correction.

At the beginning these techniques were used by writers in order to overcome their writer's block .However, Elbow (1973, p.03) advocates the importance of teaching freewriting techniques for learners who cannot resist their *obsession* of correcting themselves while they write. If learners practice freewriting more often, they may reduce their self-criticism and therefore, they become more able of generating ideas which means writing.

## 5. Freewriting Challenges

Learners when free write may encounter several difficulties .These difficulties are not because of the freewriting itself; in fact they are resulted from the way learners used to write. Each learner has a particular character when he/she writes; this character plays a great role either in easing the process of writing or hindering it. Dickson (2001) , wrote an article in which he presents five types of learners, each learner showed certain symptoms and when observing them teachers can provide the right feedback for their learners. These types are as follows :

- **The eloquent writer:** this learner is unable of concentrating for long duration .He/she repeatedly pauses every once and a while. He is always looking around and writes briefly.

**Solution:** In this case, a teacher is ought to provide him/her with encouragement by making the learner understand that he is not asked to write a perfect work.

- **The always- has – to- be-correct writer:** this learner seeks perfection in his work .He /she often uses eraser, liquid paper and deletes unsatisfied passages he/she already wrote.

**Solution:** A reminder that correctness is not one of the characteristic of freewriting. Asking him/her not to interfere in the stream of his consciousness and that is by written whatever comes to his mind.

- **The keyboard tapper:** This learner often uses dictionaries and electronic devices attempting to find the most accurate word.

**Solution:** A reminder that correctness is not one of the characteristic of freewriting.

- **The talker:** Since freewriting activity demands silence .this learner often talks when the whole class is silent.

- **Solution:** A teacher may ask him/her to write down his thoughts that are verbally expressed. In other words, he/she writes the things that were previously spoken.

- **The copier:** This learner often has a text or a copy that is similar to the task the teacher has asked for. He /she feels more secure when referring to it every once and awhile.

**Solution:** This learner showed lack of confidence in his/her style .He/she may also experience a linguistic block (lack of vocabulary) .A teacher in this case is ought to talk with him/her, by explaining that freewriting is an individual activity that demands a personal touch .

EFL learners may face challenges when freewriting mainly because they spend their whole educational life worrying about mistakes and errors .They are basically reinforced to avoid these deficiencies .Consequently, freewriting may seem an unusual practice to EFL learners.

## 6. Freewriting Prompts

One of the common complaints that EFL learners make is not finding anything to write about. Teachers in such case have to provide their learners with writing prompts. These prompts function as a stimulus, they provoke learners to write. Dickson (2001, p.04-05) listed a number of prompts that he used during his freewriting classes.

- **Quotation:** quotation can be an effective stimulus for learners. Teachers have to provide their learners with provocative, interesting quotations which learners can easily understand and relate to.
- **Short story:** Teachers may also read short stories for five to ten minutes or use listening activities to make learners relate to the story and then asking them to imagine the end of the story or to write something similar.
- **Music:** Instead of the daily routine where teachers talk most of the time and give instructions, playing music can be a good way for learners to start writing.
- **Memory:** There is a saying that says “Most people love to talk about themselves”. As such, teachers can use memories and life experiences to provoke learners to write. This is by asking them to write about their childhood, their parents, their old classmates or friends, and about their dreams they wish to fulfill. Memory flash backs, are great stimuli for students too.
- **Odd predicament:** This odd predicament can provoke learners to write. It is unusual situation that learners imagine themselves in. For example, what if you woke up and you find yourself in the woods, what would you do? If you knew that today is to be your last day, how will you react? These odd predicaments often work as stimuli because they open a totally unexpected dimension and feed learners’ imagination.



- **Pictures:** It is said “A picture is worth a thousand words” by contrast; the thousand words are what teachers seeking from their learners through a picture. Teachers may use web sites to fetch for moving and vivid pictures; the ones that tell a story through which learners can relate to. Pictures often work as good writing prompts.
- **Video segment:** Teachers can also use short viral videos and scenes from famous movies as a prompt. Teachers have to ensure that most of learners have seen the video segment.

Teachers may use different writing prompts, the ones that are suitable to their classrooms ‘atmosphere as well as their learners too. However, teachers also have to understand that learners are not alike. Consequently, their reaction will differ even if they were presented to the same writing prompt, and therefore; their freewriting too. As a result; teachers are advised not to judge learners’ freewriting. Freewriting is an expressive and individualistic practice .In other words, no one can express himself similar to another person .Similarly, learners’ freewriting compositions are an individual work, an individual self expression that cannot be judged by another person .

## 7. Freewriting Assessment

Most of EFL learners feel disappointed when receiving their papers with a red pen correction all over. Psychologically, this disappointment which is caused by a pen makes learners dislike the act of writing. In contrast to the traditional methods of assessing writing, freewriting assessment depends on two ways: Sharing and feedback. *Freewriting, prompts and feedback* is an article written by Dickson (2001) in which he presents the previously mentioned methods of assessing. These two methods are tolerant and encouraging learners to write more since freewriting techniques stress less self correction.

### 7.1 Sharing

After EFL learners have completed their freewriting compositions, teachers may ask

them to share their freewriting with a friend, a classmate, or with the whole classroom. Occasionally, the act of sharing can be between the learner and the teacher. By doing so, learners will benefit from the feedback given by others. However, teachers have to understand the diversity in learners' characters. For example, shy learners are highly to show disapproval; they may seek a feedback from a close friend or a teacher. What is noticeable is that the feedback of sharing is mainly for "fostering friendship, communication and writing skills altogether" *ibid*, (2001.p 06). If learners are more comfortable with sharing their thoughts with their classmates, their tendency to write more often within a group will highly increase, and hence does the act of writing itself.

## 7.2 Feedback

Since no correction is involved in the first step of freewriting, Dickson (2001) suggests that teachers can give feedback through four techniques:

- **Empathy:** Teachers try to find similar life experiences that relates to the learner's writing.
- **Sharing:** Teachers try to relate to the story being told through given their own stories.
- **Elicitation:** Teachers try to know more about a given detail by asking the learner to give more elaboration.
- **Encouragement:** Teachers praise a learner for his/her piece of writing or his courage of sharing his/her thoughts with the classroom.

Having read their freewriting compositions, learners will be asked to edit their drafts. Editing can be with three to five learners, it can be peer editing or teacher - learner editing. Assessing freewriting is first through assessing the content. Basically, its main focus is what learners have to say about a given topic and then the way they said it.

It is worth to mention that freewriting compositions tend to be personal, messy and lack

cohesion which make their assessment a challenging task (Dickson 2010). However; teachers may assess learner's freewriting compositions by fetching for the most common mistakes learners had committed.

## **8. Creative writing and Freewriting**

Creative writing differs from the other types of writings such as academic writing in two levels: style and content. In style, creative writing is characterized with its metaphorical language, it has a personal tone and it is often imaginary. In content, it is the source of all fiction works such as stories, novels, scripts, plays and other various types of literature. It is defined as follows.

“any writing that goes outside the bounds of normal professional, journalistic, academic, or technical forms of literature, typically identified by an emphasis on narrative craft, character development, and the use of literary tropes or with various traditions of poetry and poetics” Wikipedia (2012).

In other words, creative writing tends to be subjective, uses metaphoric language; it is elusive, indirect and demands a great and peculiar skill of imagination. Creative writing is also seen as:

“a process of inventing or rather presenting your own thoughts in an appealing way. The writer thinks critically and reshapes something known into something that is different and original. Each piece of writing has a purpose and is targeted at an audience. It is organized cohesively with a clear beginning, middle, and an end. Attention is paid to choice an apt vocabulary, figurative use of language and style” (p.02)

Creative writing is a *process* of shaping thoughts and ideas in a creative and appealing

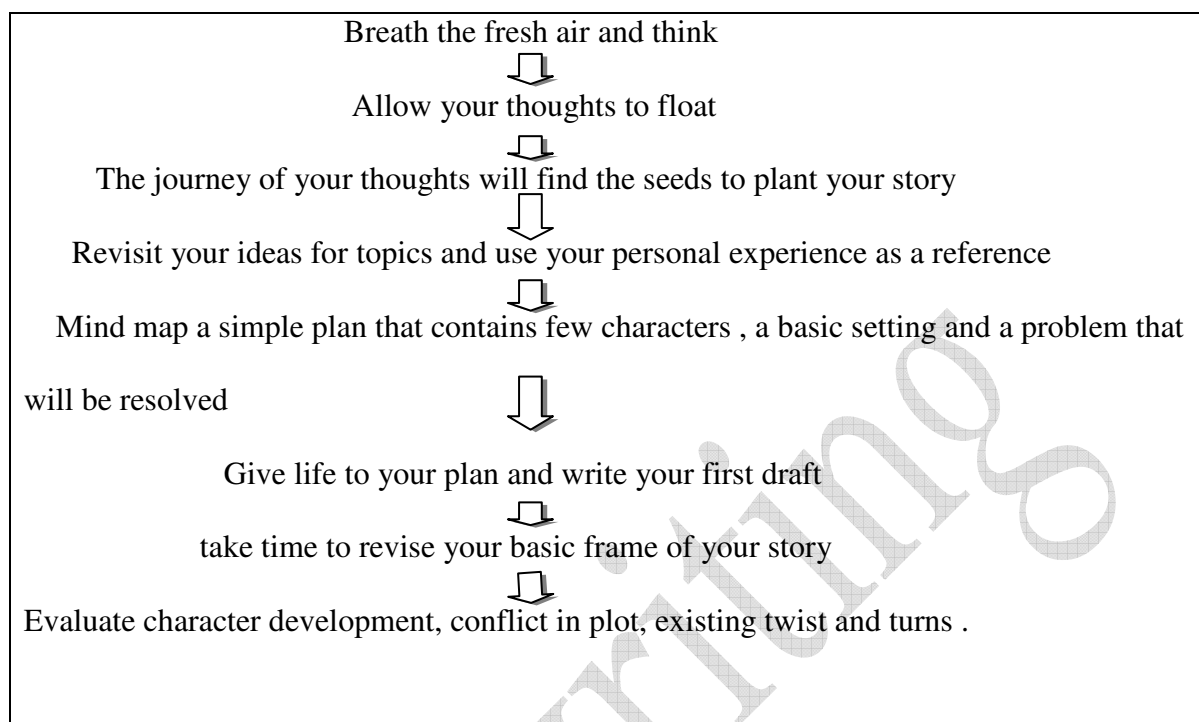
way through a peculiar style of writing that differs from one writer to another . However, it is worth mentioning that before any creative work there was a first step that took place which writers cannot overlook; this step is freewriting.

Creative writing and freewriting are closely related since most of fiction works were merely thoughts, ideas, or foggy images in the writer's mind, but this writer took the effort to write them down and then with time and continuous revising and editing , these thoughts became a story a play, a novel ,or a book. Freewriting is a spontaneous, subjective, and a great method for loosening thoughts, it is exactly what writers need and practice during their first attempt to write a fiction work. Friedlander (2010, p.02) illustrates this by saying that “freewriting is a practice that helps to liberate your writer's voice and connects you to the vibrant stream of creativity that lies just under the surface of your ordinary thinking” Writers practice this technique to draw initial characters, events, and expressions .

On the same wave length, Hammond (1991, p. 32) points out that freewriting is “an effortless and quick way to creativity, discovery, curiosity, and questioning “. They also (writers) use this technique to free themselves from the writer's block which is an unfortunate psychological state writers often experience. Writer's block occurs due to psychological issues such as stress, self-criticism, or boredom. Expert writers advise novice writers to free write, since it is an efficient way to overcome this block .Writers may also experience a linguistic block (lack of vocabulary) if they were not familiar with the field of a given topic .It is worth mention that EFL learners may also experience a linguistic block.

EFL learners similar to writers can also practice creative writing through freewriting in workshops, writing dialogues and plays for oral classes or through completing short stories .It can be also through writing poems and songs. In order to obtain effective outcomes,

teachers may provide their learners with a plan of creative writing process. To illustrate this plan might be similar to the following figure.



**Figure 4: Creative Writing Plan (Adopted from Advanced introduction to creative writing (p.09))**

## **9. Academic Writing and Freewriting**

Writing is a broad field and academic writing is only one genre of several others. It is characterized with its formality, precision, and order along with other conventions. The requirements of this genre of writing make most of EFL learners feel unable of fulfilling these needs and hence unable of writing. In order to ease the process of writing, teachers may use freewriting as a technique where mistakes are seen as a part of their learning process. However, the forgiveness that freewriting is offering for EFL learners is questionable: is freewriting a part or apart from academic writing? To illustrate, Elbow (2010, p.09) wrote.

“Freewriting is an easy reliable way to learn unplanned speaking onto the paper, even

when the topic is thorny .what is important is how it teaches us to use unplanned speaking as a disciplined practice for part of the writing process, not a way to produce a final draft .That is, if we want all those benefits of unplanned speech, we need to be willing to make a mess—indeed to write a garbage. So we need to recognize that unplanned speaking onto the page is only a part of the writing process. We have to learn in revising in order to get rid of the mess without getting rid of the virtues tangled up in it .”

The interpretation of Elbows’ words is that even freewriting that is spontaneous in its nature share the same writing principles with academic writing which are“ editing and revising “ .The difference lies in the process itself, if academic writing is about gathering ideas in a logical sequence and then writing them down with firm conventions ,freewriting is about letting these ideas flow in their natural order , and then again making all the required adjustments .

Practicing freewriting in academic settings could be regarded as inconvenient practice or step backwards for both teachers and learners. However, understanding that freewriting is an “ unusual ” step in the writing process , a different perspective towards writing along with embracing its techniques could solve several writing issues EFL learners encounter such as anxiety and writer’s block .

## Conclusion

This chapter is devoted to freewriting as a practice and a technique . It discusses the efficiency of using this technique as a strategy to enhance learners' composition skill. Freewriting could be a solution to learner's challenges with writing constrains. Its nature along with its flexible techniques makes it an easy tolerant practice for both teachers and learners .Teacher through using it might succeed in achieving their aim of helping their learners in their writing ; whereas , learner might succeed in overcoming their writer's block and their self -criticism . It is worth mentioning that assessing freewriting compositions is not an easy task. Teachers may encounter several difficulties; however, these difficulties should not prevent them from using it. Freewriting fosters learners' creativity, critical thinking, and self awareness.

Freewriting

# Freewriting



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **FIELD OF STUDY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter aims at analyzing the findings that were collected through the field Quasi experiment that took place for the sake of understanding EFL students' writing difficulties. Through conducting this study, the researcher aims at proving the efficiency of freewriting strategy as a technique for helping EFL students with their writing challenges and hence proving the truthfulness of the research hypothesis. It also aims at understanding teachers' attitudes towards freewriting. In order to obtain valid results and conduct a reliable research, the researcher finds it best to use two data gathering tools: A questionnaire and a Quasi experiment.

#### **1.2 Teachers' Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was intended for third year LMD teachers of written expression course; however, and due to some research limitations, only ten copies were distributed for teachers of all levels of written expression course. Yet, only six copies were received. The aim of the questionnaire is to understand teachers' attitudes towards freewriting.

##### **1.2.1 Description of the questionnaire**

The questionnaire is designed for teachers of written expression course at the department of English language, Biskra University, during the academic year of 2014-2015. Teachers' questionnaire aims to investigate teachers' attitudes towards freewriting. This questionnaire consists of two types of questions: closed –ended questions and open-ended questions. In the closed –ended questions, teachers are asked to tick the right answer

from a set of options or to answer with “yes” or “no”. Whereas, open –ended questions require teachers to write a justification for any choice they make. The whole questionnaire consists of ten questions; six of them are open-ended question, whereas the rest is closed questions. This questionnaire is divided into three sections.

**Section One:** This section deals with the writing process. It aims to find out which stage of the writing process EFL students finds it difficult. Moreover, it discusses teachers’ assessment and EFL students’ motivation. This section contains four questions.

**Section Two:** This section is devoted to freewriting. It aims to understand teachers’ attitudes toward freewriting. This section consists of six questions.

**Section Three:** This section is left for any further suggestions from teachers.

### 1.2.2 The analysis of the questionnaire

Understanding teachers’ attitudes towards freewriting is first through analyzing the following data.

#### **Part One: Questionnaire analysis**

#### **Q1: How many years have you been teaching written expression at the university?**

This question is devoted to show the teaching experience of written expression course teachers. The numbers given by teachers was ranging from 2 to 10 years. The number four years is repeated twice; whereas, the other numbers were individualistic. The highest number is 10 years of experience, where the lowest number is two years of experience. It can be concluded that teachers of written expression course have to some degree sufficient expertise. This latter could be considered as helping factor for EFL students .

#### **Q2: Are students motivated to write?**

It is surprising that all the six teachers agreed upon one answer which is: students are not motivated to write. Their justification was ordered in these following points.

- The difficulty of the writing process students have to follow.
- Writing is a boring task in students' perspective.
- Students' laziness.

For the first justification, four teachers agreed that the writing process is one of the reasons students are not motivated. One teacher suggested that boredom could be the reason behind lack of interest for writing among students. Another teacher justified with students' laziness which prevent them from doing their best.

**Q3: In your opinion, which stage in the writing process is difficult for students?**

Options	Pre-writing	Drafting	Revising	Editing
Responses	05	01	/	/
Percentage	% 83	% 17	/	/

**Table 3: Teacher' responses about writing stages**

According to teachers' responses, the pre-writing stage is the most difficult for students to undergo. To justify their answers, teachers assert that students face difficulties in arranging the sequence of ideas about a given topic. It could be also due to the lack of writing mechanism along with relating and generating ideas. As it is demonstrated in the table above, both revising and editing were not chose as difficult stages for students. It could be because teachers chose what is apparent and obvious as an answer.

**Q4: How often do you assess your students' written productions?**

Options	Weekly	Monthly	Each Term
Responses	06	/	/
Percentage	%100	/	/

**Table 4 : Teacher’s assessment of the written productions**

Given to the responses in the table, all the six teachers asserted that they assess their students’ written production every week, which is in fact could be effective for their students and help them to enhance their writing level .

**Part Two: Freewriting**

**Q1: Are you familiar with freewriting ?**

Options	Yes	No
Responses	05	01
Percentage	% 83	% 17

**Table 5 : Teacher’s familiarity with freewriting**

As it is shown in the table above, five out of six teachers are familiar with freewriting .There is only one teacher who is not familiar with it. However, it is worth mentioning that the way they perceive freewriting differs from one teacher to another. Some teachers see freewriting as a writer’s way to overcome his writer’s block. Another teacher understands freewriting as a technique to free oneself from writing rules. It is also seen by another teacher as a technique with limited efficiency, in other words, it can suit some students not all of them.

**Q2: As a teacher, how often do you free write?**

Options	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Responses	/	03	03	/
Percentage	/	% 50	% 50	/

**Table 6: Teachers’ Frequency of Freewriting**

As it is presented in the table, teachers’ responses are equal where three teachers choose sometimes as their degree of freewriting frequency; whereas, the other three

teachers choose rarely as their frequency of freewriting .Yet, It is not surprising that teachers do not free write perhaps due to their extensive teaching programm or their tendency to write according to a strict academic conventions.

**Q3: Do you use freewriting as a technique in your written expression courses?**

Options	Yes	No
Responses	02	04
Percentage	% 33	% 67

**Table 7 : Freewriting in Written Expression Course**

From the responses in the table, four teachers tend not to use freewriting as a technique in their written expression courses. In contrast, only two teachers their answers were positive. These responses reveal that freewriting technique is almost neglected in teachers' classrooms. Deficiency in style, grammar, and punctuation are teachers' justifications for not using freewriting in their written expression courses. In contrast with the previous teachers' view, two teachers consider using freewriting as a good way to urge students overcome their writer's block and generate more ideas.

**Q4: Is freewriting necessarily related to creative writing?**

Options	Yes	No
Responses	04	02
Percentage	% 67	% 33

**Table 8: Freewriting in Relation to Creative Writing**

The teachers' responses reveal that four teachers agree that freewriting is related to creative writing; whereas, two teachers disagree with this claim. The question that must be asked, if those four teachers do believe that freewriting has a strong relation with creative writing, why dont they use it in their classrooms?

**Q5: Have you ever written or tried to write a/an?**

Options	Short story	Play	Novel	Book	Handouts
Responses	01	/	/	/	05
Percentage	% 17	/	/	/	% 83

**Table 9: Teachers' experience in creative writing**

The table shows that out of six teachers only one teacher practice a creative writing. The remaining teachers tend to write their handouts or their lectures, in other words, their major focus is on academic writing.

**Q6: Peter Elbow advocates freewriting as a strategy to free students from writing constrains such as grammar, spelling, and punctuation. These constrains embed them from writing . To what extent do you agree?**

This question is an open-ended question in which teachers were asked to write their own opinion regarding Peter's Elbow claim. Surprisingly, five out of six teachers do agree with the writer's claim that freewriting could be a good strategy for encouraging students to write. However, the researcher asks again the same question: if freewriting helps students to write and frees them from writing constrains why, then, teachers did not use it as a technique in their classrooms? The answer for this question could be one of two: either their answers were arbitrary written with no reflection upon the statement or teachers are more concerned with a correct, standard, and academic writing which make them overlook the benefits of freewriting technique.

**Part Three:** This part was added for any suggestion that will help in ameliorating this questionnaire. Only one suggestion was received. The suggestion was about students 'hand writing.

### 1.2.3 Discussion of Teachers' questionnaire Results

Having analyzed teachers' responses in the questionnaire that aims at understanding teachers' attitudes towards freewriting. The researcher concluded some interesting conclusions. First, as far as the first part of the questionnaire which is about writing and the process of writing. Teachers' answers revealed that most of them have a reliable expertise having teaching writing for several years. Teachers also believe that EFL students lack motivation for writing due to its complex and demanding process specially in the pre-writing stage in which students are not able to put their ideas correctly in the paper. Moreover, the responses showed that all the six teachers assess their students' written compositions each week which make it a great way of giving feedback.

On the other hand, teachers' responses in the second part of the questionnaire which is about teachers' attitudes towards freewriting revealed that some teachers' responses were confusing. As a start, teachers answered that they are familiar with freewriting; however, they either "sometimes" or "rarely" free write and this is due to their academic expertise which imposes and encourages academic writing. It is not known whether they meant using freewriting for writing personal thoughts or as a practice for overcoming writer's block.

Moreover, four teachers asserted that they do not use freewriting in their classes because it embeds their students from acquiring a correct grammar, a correct punctuation or other writing conventions; Whereas, two teachers admitted of using freewriting in their written expression courses. However, the researcher asked this question: if freewriting embeds students from acquiring correct grammar, correct punctuation, or other writing conventions why are students still committing all these mistakes though no freewriting is involved and thought they are following a writing process? Furthermore, Four out of six

teachers believe that freewriting has a strong relation to creative writing, and then again the researcher asks another question: if freewriting has a relation to creative writing, why is it not taught in their classes? Least but not last, one of five teachers did actually write a short story, whereas the other teachers focus on writing handouts and lectures, i.e., academic writing. For the final question teachers were asked to comment on Elbow's words in which he argues that the best way to free students from the writing constraints is through using freewriting. Surprisingly, five out of six teachers believe that rewriting helps students to overcome writing constraints and with it writer's block, and here again the researcher asks another question: six teachers agreed that pre-writing is the most difficult stage for students to write. Why, then, teachers do not use freewriting as a technique to unleash their students' minds?

It is not surprising that teachers have revealed on negative perspectives towards freewriting without examining the technique in the real field. Their assumptions were based on difficulties they could encounter if they used freewriting as a technique, for instance, the difficulty of assessing freewriting and the arbitrariness of ideas that characterized freewriting compositions. However, these assumptions could be answered with these words of Elbow (2010, p. 09) "we need to be willing to make a mess—indeed to write a garbage. So we need to recognize that unplanned speaking onto the page is only a part of the writing process. We have to learn in revising in order to get rid of the mess without getting rid of the virtues tangled up in it."

### **1.3 Description of the Quasi experiment**

The Quasi experiment was conducted with third year LMD students of Mohamed Khider Biskra University, promotion of 2015. They were ten students. Five students from the group three, whereas the other five were from group ten. The female gender was the dominant with five girls and two boys. However, it is worth mentioning that they were



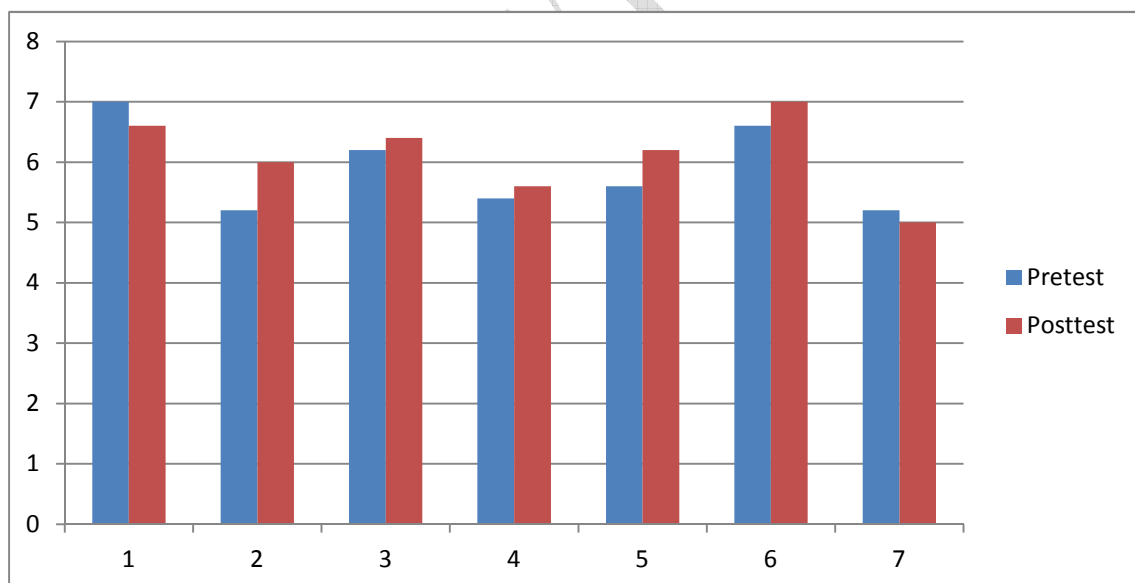
randomly selected by their teacher. The Quasi experiment was held in six sessions, three sessions for each group. The first session was devoted to the pretest in which freewriting was introduced to third year EFL students. During this session, students became familiar with the nature, the types, and the techniques of freewriting. At the end of the session, students had to free write for ten minutes as a pre-test . The second session was devoted to the treatment in which students also had to be reminded with the freewriting basics, and then free wrote for twenty minutes: ten minutes for open freewriting, and another ten minutes for a focus freewriting. The last session was devoted to the post-test in which students had also to write for ten minutes the same topics that were written in the previous pretest. Each session was fully conducted in an hour and a half. As a part of freewriting assessment, each student was asked to read and to share his/her freewriting composition. It is essential to mention that out of ten participants only seven were truly committed to the experiment.

### **1.3.1. The Analysis of the Quasi Experiment**

In order to obtain relevant data, 14 of freewriting compositions were scored according to five elements: structure, spelling , grammar, punctuation , and organization of ideas . The following data are obtained from the pretest and posttest scores which were scored out of ten. As a start, the following table demonstrates the number of participants, their first initial names, their scores in both tests: The pretest and the posttest.

N	Students' name	Pre-test	Posttest
1	O. M	7	6,6
2	N. H	5,2	6
3	B. F	6,2	6,4
4	S. O	5,4	5,6
5	H.H	5,6	6,2
6	A.D	6,6	7
7	S. K	5,2	5
<b>Sum of scores <math>\sum X</math></b>		41,2	42,80
<b>Mean of scores (X)</b>		5,88	6,11

**Table 10: The Pretest and Posttest Students' Scores**



**Graph1: The Pretest and Posttest Students' Scores**

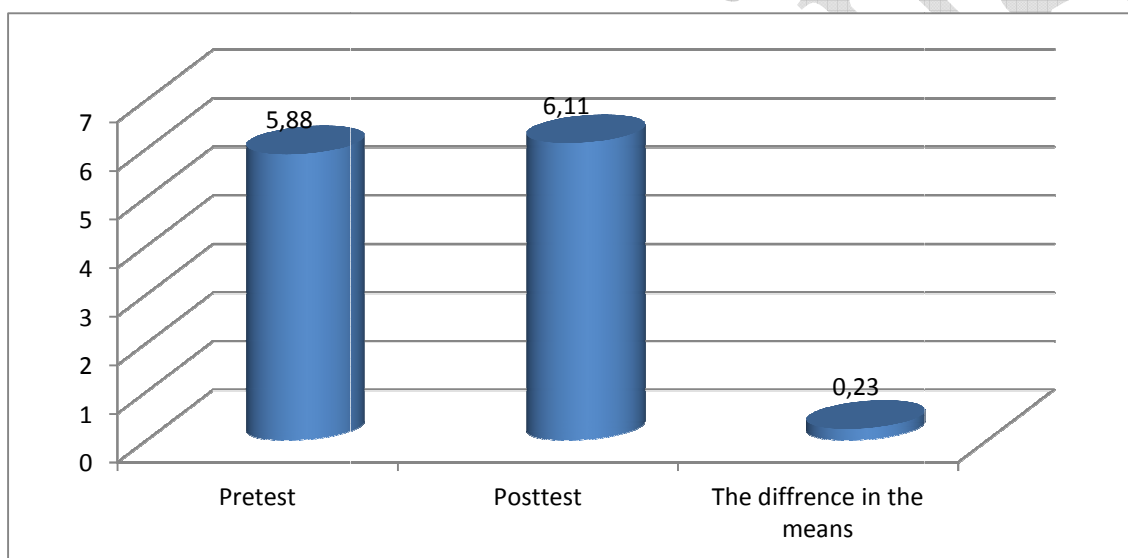
The first interpretation of the table 09 and the graph 01 shows a slight difference between the scores of the pretest and the scores of the post test. In the pretest, the sum of scores was 41.20 whereas; on the posttest the sum of scores was 42.80. This difference

reflects on the means of both tests. The mean of the pretest is 5.88, and the mean of the posttest is 6.11.

Pretest	Posttest	The difference in the means
5,88	6,11	0,23

**Table 11: The Pretest –Posttest: Means of Scores**

Table 11 represents the overall statistics of the pretest-posttest study. These statistics are also displayed in the following graph.



**Graph 2: The Final Pretest –Posttest Means compared**

Referring to the from the statistics displayed on the table 11 and the graph 02, the freewriting technique proved to be effective as a strategy for enhancing students' writing. In spite of the slight difference in the mean is estimated by 0.23, it is still a difference that could be enhanced if the experiment was conducted at a sufficient time.

The following table shows the frequency of score values in the pretest and the posttest

Pretest		Posttest	
Scores "Xpre"	Frequency "F"	Scores "Xpre"	Frequency "F"
5,2	2	5	1
5,4	1	5,6	1
5,6	1	6	1
6,2	1	6,2	1
6,6	1	6,4	1
7	1	6,6	1
		7	1
Sum of "F"	7	Sum of "F"	7

**Table 12. The Final Pretest-Posttest: Frequency Distribution of Scores**

Table 12 presents the frequency of scores of both the pretest and the posttest. Based on these scores, the researcher could draw some interpretations and conclude some results.

First, the researcher concluded that in the pretest

- The scores are ranging from 5.2 to 7, with the frequency of the score 5.2.
- The lowest score is 5.2 whereas the highest score is 7.
- There is no score that is less than 5.2.

Concerning the Posttest scores, the researcher observed the following points:

- The lowest score is 5 whereas the highest score is 7.
- There is no frequency of a particular score.

There is no score that is less than 5.

In both pretest and posttest 07 is the highest score.

The following tables represent the scores' frequency, the Mean, and the Standard Deviation both of the pretest and the posttest procedures of the Quasi-experiment .

Pretest			
Score "Xpre"	Frequency "F"	Frequency scores "Fx"	Square of frequency Fx2
5,2	2	10,4	108,16
5,4	1	5,4	29,16
5,6	1	5,6	31,36
6,2	1	6,2	38,44
6,6	1	6,6	43,56
7	1	7	49
Sum of "F"	N= 7	$\sum FX=41,2$	$\sum FX2=299,68$

**Table 13: Frequency of Scores, the Mean, and the Standard Deviation of the Pretest**

Posttest			
Score "Xpre"	Frequency "F"	Frequency scores "Fx"	Square of frequency Fx2
5	1	5	25
5,6	1	5,6	31,36
6	1	6	36
6,2	1	6,2	38,44
6,4	1	6,4	40,96
6,6	1	6,6	43,56
7	1	7	49
Sum of "F"	N= 7	$\sum FX=42,8$	$\sum FX2=264,62$

**Table 14: Frequency of Scores, the Mean, and the Standard Deviation of the Posttest**

For better illustration, the following table is a comparison between the pretest and posttest Mean and Standard Deviation.

Descriptive statistics	Pretest	Posttest	The difference
Means	5,88	6.11	0,23
Standard Deviation	6,15	5.69	0,46

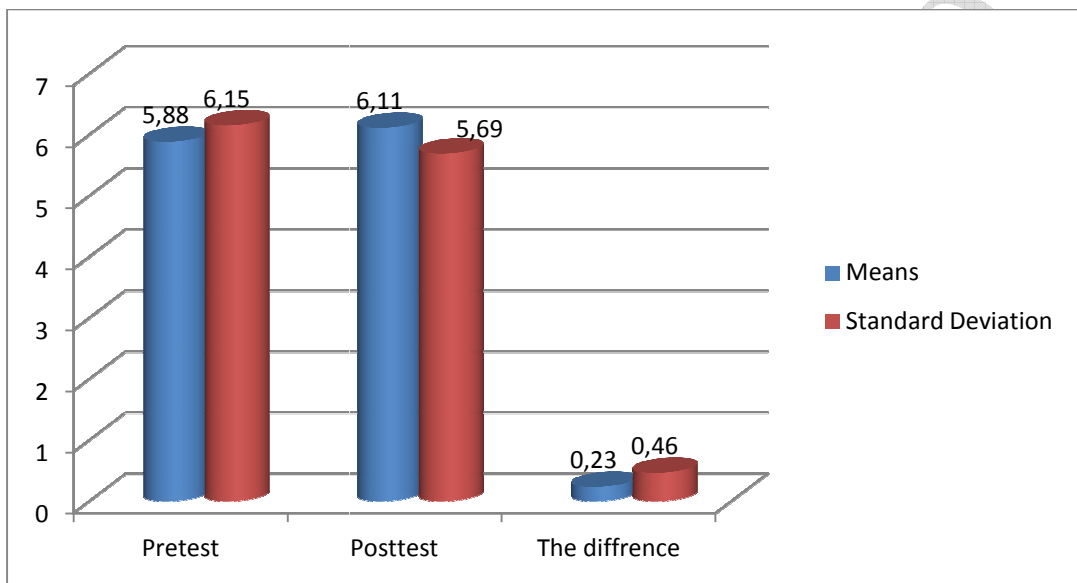
**Table 15: Comparison of the Pretest and Posttest' Mean and Standard Deviation**

The statistics displayed in the tables above: 13, 14, and 15 reveal that the scores of the participants have slightly improved, though the Mean and the Standard Deviation show no

remarkable improvement. Yet, it is worth mentioning that any insignificant difference is still regarded as a difference.

**The Standard Deviation : 0.17**

The following graph represents the difference between the Pretest and Posttest Mean and Standard Deviation.



**Graph3: The difference Between the Pretest and Posttest Mean and Standard Deviation**

In order to calculate the difference in the Mean and the Standard Deviation for both tests , this equation was followed .The first equation is for calculating the Mean and the

$$SE = \frac{SD}{\sqrt{N}} = \frac{6.15 - 5.69}{\sqrt{7}} = 0.17$$

second equation is for calculating the Standard Deviation.

$$x = \frac{\sum fx}{n}$$

$$SD = \sqrt{\sum fx^2 - x^2}$$

The following formula is needed for calculating the Standard Error as a requirement for T-Test calculation .

Standard Error of the difference in Means is **0.17**

$$t - \text{test} = \frac{X_{\text{post}} - X_{\text{pre}}}{SE} = \frac{6,11 - 5,88}{0,17} = 1,35$$

T-Test formula

**Degree of Freedom:**

$$df = (n - 1) + (n - 1) = (7 - 1) + (7 - 1) = 12$$

Degree of freedom is 12

**Alpha Decision Level**

In order to examine the degree of error in the statistics, the researcher sets the alpha decision level at  $\alpha < .05$  which mean that only 5 % of chance of error is tolerated.

**Critical Value**

If the alpha decision level is at  $\alpha < .05$ , the correspondent critical value for “t” in Fisher and Yates table of values is 2.17.

**Observed Statistics  $t$  is 1.35**

After obtaining the alpha decision level, the critical value, and the observed statistics  $t$ . The researcher should have the observed statistics greater than the critical value.

$$1.35 < 2.17 = \text{Null Hypothesis}$$

## Conclusion

Having calculated the statistics, the researcher observed that the critical value is higher than the observed statistics which makes the hypothesis null. A null hypothesis means that freewriting technique statistically brought no significant difference to writing. It is worth mentioning that the size of the sample which is 7 volunteers and the time allocated for conducting the experiment which is 6 sessions were relatively insufficient. Consequently, the statistics obtained revealed no great difference. For this reason, statistically freewriting proved to be ineffective. However, the researcher believes that with the proper size sample and sufficient time the difference between the means can be greater and hence will the difference of the observed statistics which means eventually that the hypothesis is actually effective.

Regardless of the statistics obtained after calculating the critical value and the observed statistics, the means of the pretest and posttest were actually different. Though the difference is relatively slight. It could be seen as a way that proves the relative efficiency of this technique.



## **Recommendations**

Over years, language four skills have been a field of investigation more than any other topics. This intensive focus reveals the significance of these skills, one in particular, writing. The more researchers tackle writing matters; the numerous recommendations were given for the sake of enhancing EFL learners writing skill. Yet; all these researches and recommendations seem pointless since EFL learners are still encountering difficulties in writing. If improving the level of writing is a major concern of learners and teachers alike, these are some recommendations that hopefully would help in achieving this ultimate goal.

### **Reading the X FACTORE**

*“ If you don't have time to read, you don't have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that. ”* Stephen King .

Reading is the ultimate resolution for enhancing writing. Teachers ought to explain the significance of reading by providing reading texts or engaging their students in classroom reading. For instance, short stories are an effective way to draw learners' attention. On the other hand, EFL learners have to be aware of the importance of reading if they truly wish improving their writing level .For those learners who are not accustomed to reading it could be a troublesome yet not impossible, jokes, short texts or short stories can be a great start. Occasionally, teachers choose certain topics in advance and ask their learners to read about them by giving them a false impression that these topics could be a part of an examination.

### **Creative Writing**

There are many EFL learners who are engaged in creative writing such as writing short

stories , poems , plays for oral classes , and diaries; away from their academic writings.

Teachers ought to appreciate these writings , for instance ,by discussing the plot, the characters if it is a story or the rhythm if it is a poem. Though students can have an easy access to online websites fetching for help, a teacher's perspective is much more honorable and encouraging . Moreover, encouraging Learners creativity is also through showing interest in their ideas by giving them an opportunity to read their pieces of writing. The key element is showing interest.

### **Topics Selection**

The choice of topics play a great role either in embedding or encouraging learners to write .Teachers are ought to distribute a survey through which they ask their learners about their preferable topics away from outdated topics. Introducing new topics help in shaping their critical thinking as well as widening their perspective towards the academic life.

### **Freewriting Practice**

Freewriting is an unusual technique for encouraging learners to write, a way that is away from writing conventions that often embeds EFL learners from writing and put them under stress. With a simple calculation, if EFL learners were studying two sessions of Written Expression per week and teachers were willing to devote only ten minutes for freewriting in each session , by the end of the academic year, these learners would have been written 38 hour of freewriting. In five years it would be one hundred and ninety hour (190) of freewriting.

All these recommendations of now and then will not be effective without three crucial characteristics: A learner's will to enhance his /her level, a strong commitment to the act of writing and more important a continuous practice, for practice makes perfect.

## General Conclusion

This study was conducted in order to prove the efficiency of freewriting technique as a solution to EFL learners' challenges with writing. The case study was Third year LMD students at Biskra university .In order to examine the truthfulness of the hypothesis, two data gathering tools were used: a questionnaire and a Quasi experiment. The questionnaire was submitted to teachers of Written Expression course of all levels , and the Quasi experiment was held with Third year LMD students . However, after conducting the experiment and distributing the questionnaire the analysis revealed the following results.

First, the analysis of the questionnaire revealed teachers' negative attitudes towards freewriting .Teachers assume that freewriting cannot help students for two reasons. First, because freewriting is in contrast to academic writing where more emphasis is upon writing conventions. Second, the nature of freewriting makes assessment a difficult task. Second, Teachers mostly agreed that writing process requirements are the reason why students dislike writing. Third, Teachers confess that, in their classrooms, freewriting is rarely used as a technique because of students and teachers 'unfamiliarity with it.

Moreover, the analysis of the Quasi experiment proved the hypothesis to be statistically "ineffective ". Which means that the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable is fragile .There are two reasons behind such result: first, the size of sample with is relatively small, seven volunteers. Second, the time allocated for conducting the experiment, six sessions, which is also insufficient. Though, the hypothesis proved to be null where no difference was statistically detected. This fact could be reversed if the field circumstances were different.

# Freewriting

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- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Editing>



- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer>





# Appendix