

A Brainstorming Activity for Creative Writing – “A Coin Has Two Sides”

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Abstract

Producing a composition is hard enough for English learners of all levels. Brainstorming to make up a good outline to get the production started is no less challenging. An old saying goes “Every journey starts with a single step”. Therefore, there emerges a demand for providing learners with some tools to help them overcome the harsh task of giving birth to valuable ideas worth writing about. “A coin has two sides” is expected to give students a chance of cooperating with others in the process of dealing with an argumentative writing, especially right from the first step of brainstorming.

Introduction

Over the years, the role of writing skills in the process of learning languages in general and English in particular has made a great shift. In the past, little importance was attached to students' demand and desire in writing activities, i.e. why they wanted to write, who the addressee was, or even what role the students played in writing. Fortunately, gone were the days when writing was seen as a way of testing whether learners had mastered some certain given grammar and vocabulary. It is a current trend for classrooms to create a climate of communicative learning, in which communicative writing is considered an integral part.

By nature, writing is an individual activity. In other words, in classroom, it is often done by each student separately and silently, which makes it both a real challenge and a boring activity, no matter which stage of writing process. To make it worse, it is a fact that the types of tasks teachers assign to students are not always motivating, relevant or indeed communicative.

Any devoted teacher may sometimes have to ask herself/himself:

1. What are the students interested in writing about?
2. How can I integrate their interest(s) in my writing lesson?

In search for the answers, the author has come up with a number of ideas and created quite a few activities, one of which, named "A coin has two sides", is to be presented in this paper with the aim of enriching the supply of teaching materials available so that teachers of English will have one more choice to make.

Why brainstorming?

Brainstorming is a term popularized by Alex Faickney Osborn in 1953 and can be understood as a creativity technique to gather a list of ideas to find a conclusion for a specific problem. To start a writing procedure, brainstorming is particularly advantageous because of the following reasons. First, it is fast and easy to perform, so once it is accepted, any barriers to creativity fall quickly. Brainstorming is made even more beneficial when it is carried out among a group because you can get "outsider ideas" which you may never think of. Moreover, because the ideas are not criticized or rejected during a brainstorming session, it allows better and better ideas to be generated and gradually an interesting proposal can be refined. Therefore, the solution found is more acceptable to the whole, or most part of the team.

How brainstorming?

Brainstorming may be carried out individually or in groups, the latter of which is most suitable to EFL students learning writing skills. According to Alice, O. and Ann, H. (1982), there are three useful brainstorming techniques, which they called *listing*, *free writing*, and *clustering*. "A coin has two sides" is based on *listing* as the primary technique, which should take place as follows:

1. Write down the general topic at the top of your paper:
2. Then, make a list of the very word or phrase that comes into your mind about the topic. Don't stop the free flow of ideas by judging or editing them before you write them down. Keep the ideas flowing. The harder you think, the more ideas will flow. Of course, try to stay on the general topic. If, however, you write down information that is completely off the subject, don't worry about it – you can cross it out later.

3. Use words, phrases, or sentences. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. Remember, your primary goal is to jot down ideas as quickly as they come to you without worrying about whether an idea is important, interesting, or related to your subject. (Try to focus on the topic, however).

(Alice, O. & Ann, H., 1982)

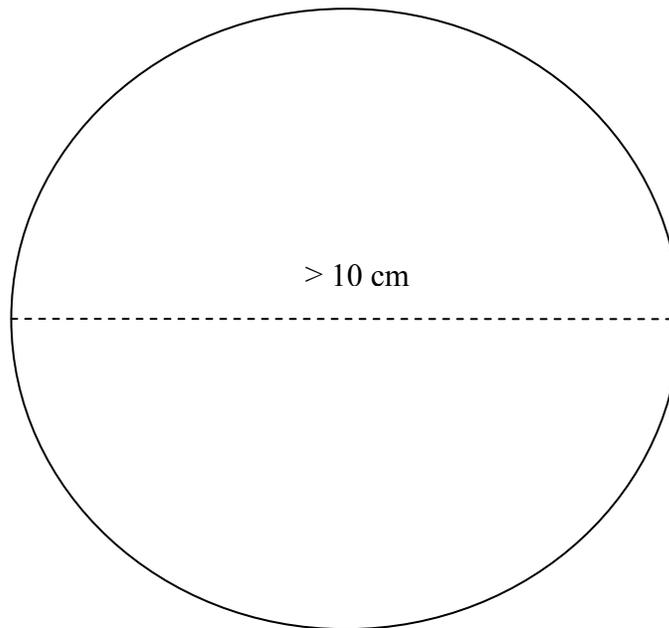
“A coin has two sides”

To begin with, remember that this activity is designed to be applied to brainstorm ideas for an argumentative essay with a balanced view, in which you are expected to present both sides of an argument, or both the “head” and “tail” of the “coin”.

Let us observe how a writing session can adopt this activity into students' brainstorming procedure.

Preparation

The only preparation to make is some kind of draft paper, which may be given students by the teacher according to the number of students present in your class. Make sure that each student has one piece of paper. To make it more interesting, the teacher can prepare round pieces of white/colored paper/carton (which look like coins) large enough to brainstorm some ideas on, with the diameter of ten centimeters for example.

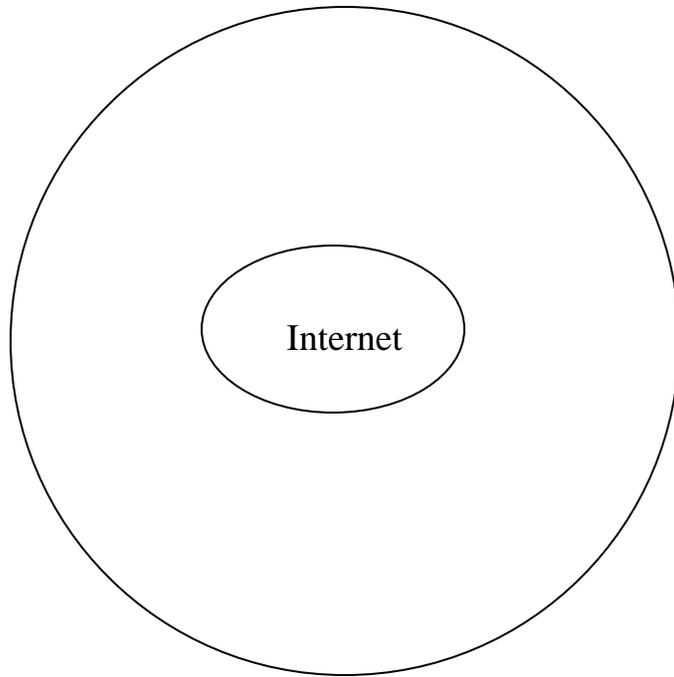


Calling for interests

Give each student one “coin” and ask them to write down one thing they are concerned about in the middle of one side of the coin. This side is then called the “head”, and the other is the “tail”.

The aim of this stage is to know what each student is interested in so that they will be more willing to write about it.

One of the students may write like this:

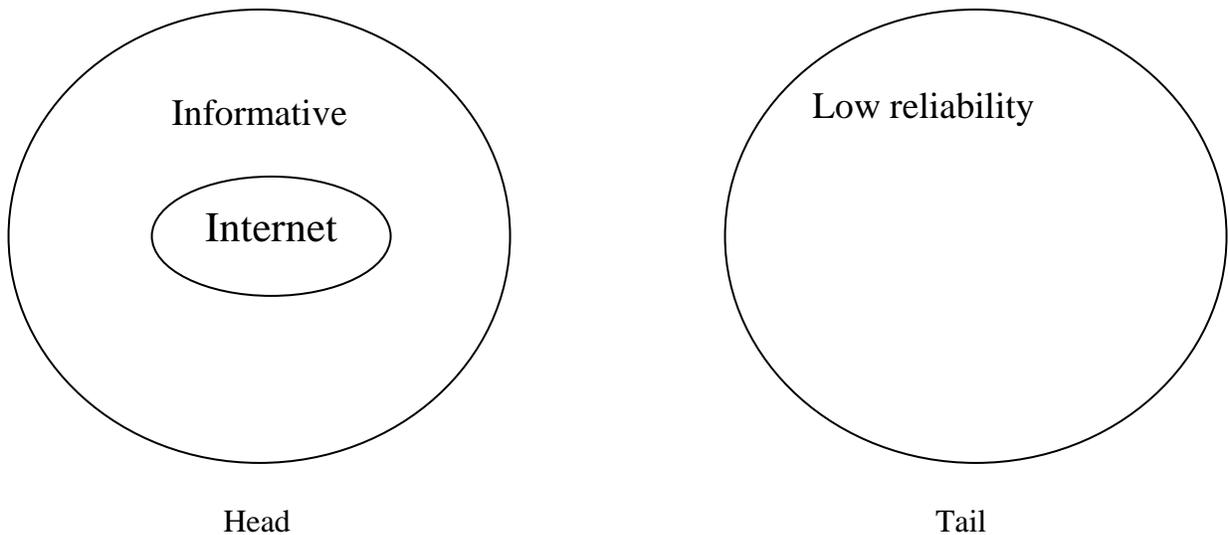


Showing your own opinion

After students have their own interests on their coins, ask them to write down one positive point about that subject on the “head”, then one negative point on the “tail”.

The aim is for students to express their own opinions on the subjects they care about.

Let us continue with the “Internet” coin and this is what student 1 may have:



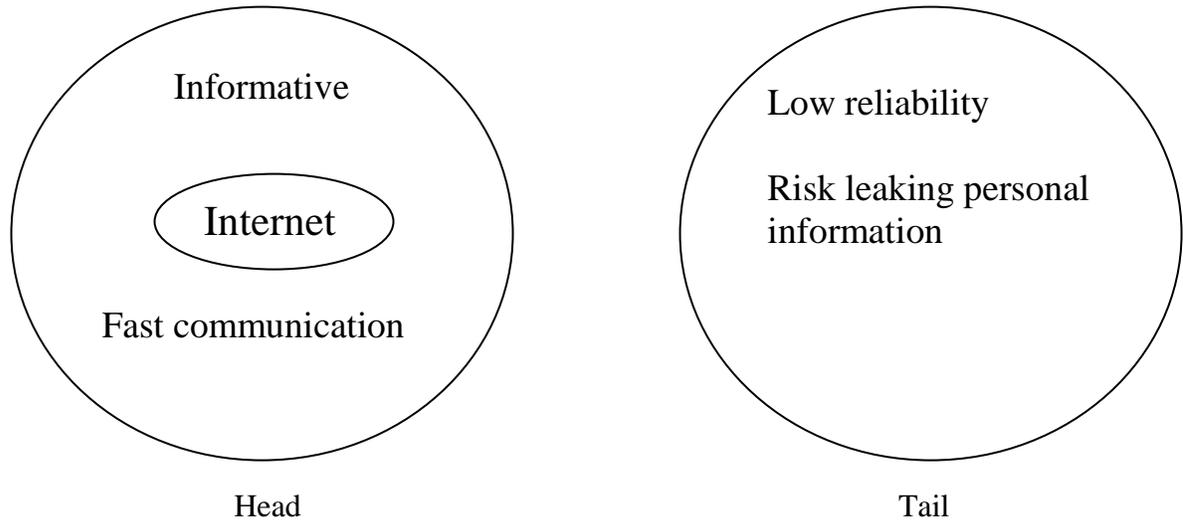
Knowing what others think

Now ask students to exchange their coins with one another. Then see what their friends care for and think of. Afterwards, express their opinion of the subject written on the coin they have got from their friends by doing the same things as the last step: Write one positive

point on the head and one negative point on the tail. Remind the students that their opinions must be different from the ones which have already been given on the coin.

This step gives students the chance to know about and to share their thoughts with each other. In other words, this is where the communication happens, or the communicative approach is achieved. You will see that your students will be as eager to read about their friends' opinions as to write about their own opinions.

The following is how student 2 may continue the job of student 1 shown above:



This stage can be repeated as many times as you want, as long as you are aware that your students have brainstormed enough to have something worth writing about in the later steps of producing a meaningful composition.

Conclusion

The description presented above is how “a coin has two sides” can be performed in a brainstorming process, which, if done well, can get learners started writing more quickly and save them time in the later stages of the writing process.

References

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- Christine, F. & Mario, R.2007. *Creative Writing*. London: Helbling Languages.