

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE EXERCISES TO DEVELOP WRITING SKILLS IN DISTANCE LEARNING PROCESS

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

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

One of the innovations in organizing professional education in our country nowadays is introduction of distance learning. It opens up new possibilities in education due to the usage of IT especially for those who live in the regions where there is lack or no resources in professional issues. In this paper under the term of "distance learning" we mean the academic environment which can be characterized by the student's remoteness from the teacher in space and time.

One of the main principles of distance learning is providing interactive communication between a student and a teacher by means of IT without their face-to-face meeting as well as the student's learning a certain amount of material independently.

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

All mentioned above stresses upon the necessity to change the methodology of teaching and its means to achieve educational goals under new conditions. There is a false viewpoint that it is enough to transfer educational materials from the traditional printed form into an electronic one and use them in distance learning but it is not so. To be successful in this field we must analyze profoundly the objectives of the educational process, the requirements for its technologies, and take into account the peculiarities of distance learning. But, unfortunately, we do not have enough research in this area. We decided to start with developing writing skills because the main issues of distance learning can be mostly appropriate in learning written communication.

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

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

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

First of all, let's examine the *requirements for the task*, formulated in the exercise. The practical purpose of teaching a foreign language to ESP University students is to master professional communication in the target language within the situations defined by the Curriculum (2005), so that the knowledge of a foreign language obtained at University will become the basis for further professional development. That is why the process of communication in a foreign language in class should be very close to the process of communication in real life. Only in this case it is possible to transfer the language and communicative skills from academic environment into real life. Therefore, in accordance with the requirements of the Curriculum, and with the methodological principle of intercourse the exercise should model a particular segment of the real process of communication. Since communication arises out of the needs, the task to the exercise in written communication should clearly indicate what for the students have to write something. So, one of the main requirements to the tasks in exercises for learning written communication is **motivation**.

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

For the exercises in learning written communication a very important requirement is the **presence of addressee**, who may be either a native or a foreigner who does not know the language of his partner and that causes the need to use a foreign language in written communication. The presence of addressee helps the writer to choose the appropriate register, make the text clear and interesting for its reader.

Example 1. A short while ago you spent two months in Britain on an English language course. Write a letter to your English friend and to your course tutor, Dr. Smith, inquiring about the local employment situation in the area you were staying in – especially in the kind of work you want to do and requesting information about work permits. You are interested in: summer jobs, especially the salary, working hours and how to get a work permit.

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

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

HINT

INTRODUCTION

THE BODY OF THE LETTER:

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

HINT

INTRODUCTION

THE BODY OF THE LETTER:

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

Example 2. A youth magazine which is printed in English has asked its readers to give their opinions on a problem of protecting the environment. They promised a prize for the information with original ideas in this area. Write a short letter telling about the ways of solving this problem in your district or some other regions.

This task simulates the real process of communication. The communicative intention of the participants of this competition is to generate new ideas to solve the given problem, the motive is to get a prize for the original solution of this problem, the novelty is that each of the participants may suggest his/her vision of the problem and the ways of its solution in the region s/he lives.

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

Totally controlled speech actions which presuppose imitation of speech units, at the stage of learning written communication in ESP University should not have place because these students have already been trained on this issue. But the exercises with **partially controlled actions** must be done at almost all the stages of mastering written communication.

Example 3. The nearest branch of the British Council has recently advertised one-month cultural exchanges: A month in England, a life time memories! Spend a month in England and you will remember it for the rest of your life... The idea is that someone from Britain comes and lives in your house for a month while you go and live in theirs! All fares will be paid by the British Council! You have decided to take part in this cultural exchange, but they need your personal information. Write your CV as quick as possible. Before doing it, read the following hint:

HINT

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

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

After doing partially controlled exercises students begin doing the exercises with **a minimum level of control**, where they freely combine familiar speech patterns and lexical units. The degree of controllability must correspond to the stage of formation of skills and competencies, i.e. at each next stage the students' actions management should be weakened. Consider the task with minimal control:

Example 4. You are a member of an activity club in University. At the meeting it was decided that next summer the group would arrange a cycling trip. You know from your English friend's (Emily / Arthur's) letter, that: ...Besides, we went cycling with a group last summer. It was an unforgettable trip. We came back healthy, brown and more experienced... You want to write a letter and ask them how many students there were in the group, what the weather was like, what equipment they took with them, if they took much food and about safety precautions.

Consider another important issue to the task: the presence / absence of supports.

There are the so called natural supports and the created for educational purposes supports.

They can be non-verbal (items, pictures, and digital data) or verbal.

The use of verbal content supports slightly reduces the degree of controllability of students' actions. When using such types of supports students become more independent. Having only the content supports, students should use the appropriate speech material which they learnt while doing the exercises with speech supports in which a set

of appropriate speech patterns was given. Specially created verbal supports should *be gradually eliminated*, because they are not inherent in the real process of communication.

The last element of the exercise is **control**. After doing the task a student must check how the text created by him/her helps achieve the goal of the communicative task, and check out the overall accuracy. To help students perform the function of self-control, which is very important in distance learning, it is advisable to refer to the hints. To check the correctness of an informal thank-you letter we propose, for example, the following hint:

HINT

Check if you have in your informal thank-you letter.

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

THE BODY OF THE LETTER:

Paragraph 1. Informal opening.

Paragraph 2. Expressing gratitude.

Paragraph 3. Informal ending.

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

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

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ВИМОГИ ДО ВПРАВ ДЛЯ РОЗВИТКУ ВМІНЬ ПИСЬМНОГО СПІЛКУВАННЯ У ПРОЦЕСІ ДИСТАНЦІЙНОГО НАВЧАННЯ

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

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

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ТРЕБОВАНИЯ К УПРАЖНЕНИЯМ ДЛЯ РАЗВИТИЯ УМЕНИЙ ПИСЬМЕННОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ В УСЛОВИЯХ ДИСТАНЦИОННОГО ОБУЧЕНИЯ

В статье рассматриваются требования к каждому компоненту упражнений, которые используются для развития умений англоязычной письменной коммуникации в условиях дистанционного обучения. Основное внимание уделяется анализу упражнений относительно целесообразности их использования в процессе дистанционного обучения.

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

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