

Outlining as an effective support for teaching writing at advanced level

The organization of the writing task and the sequencing of information at advanced level acquires primary importance. Outlining becomes a helpful mechanism in teaching writing.

Traditionally the use of outlining in writing refers to outlining practice in which a writing topic has to be thought over and discussed in a formal outline before writing begins. However, there exists an alternative approach.

The aim of outlining is to work out the most appropriate logic for assembling information and arguments. In practice some students prepare instructed set of notes which later can be reassembled more carefully and serve as a useful working outline. Other students prefer a carefully-prepared outline which serves as an important preliminary step in writing. Some other students gain most from outlining when they develop a similar outline after writing the first draft. This practice allows them to see weaknesses in the structuring and logic of the material.

Writing an outline is a skill that cannot be explained once and then immediately acquired. If a teacher wants it to become an effective support for teaching writing, it should be included in any larger writing task. The question arises: how to incorporate outlining into it? The so-called semantic maps and other forms of organized brainstorming can provide students with information on the writing topic, key-words and expressions, terminology, etc.

There are also other ways of displaying the structure and content of the material.

The students may experiment with other visual displays, for example, tables, graphs, flow charts and other figures which illustrate the logical organization of the material. Sometimes a tree-branching display may be an effective way to fill in gaps or to consolidate information. A flow chart with several branching options at different points may reflect the complexity of concepts or processes.