

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL  
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A Methodological Proposal to Improve the Descriptive Paragraph  
Writing Skills of Eleventh Grade Students from Colegio  
Ambientalista Isaías Retana Arias in Pérez Zeledón

Proyecto de Graduación para Optar por el Grado de Licenciatura en Lingüística  
Aplicada con Énfasis en Inglés

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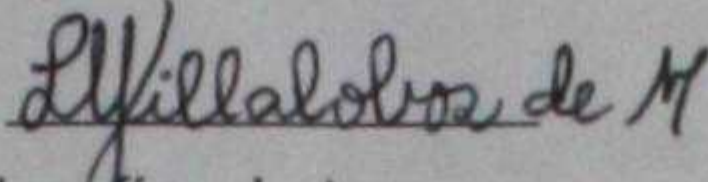
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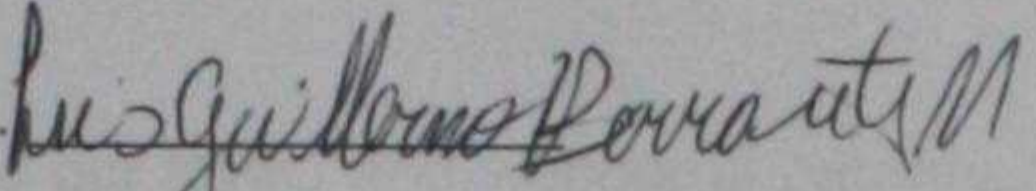
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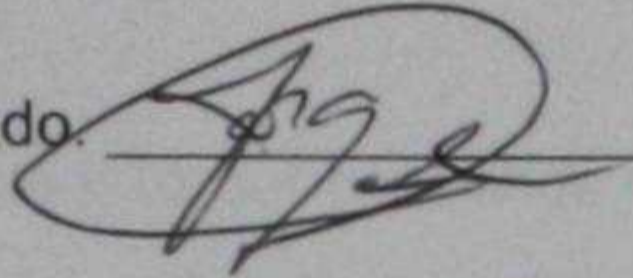


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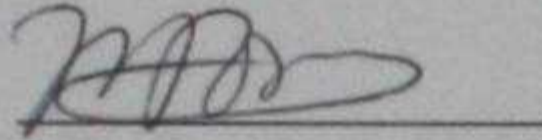
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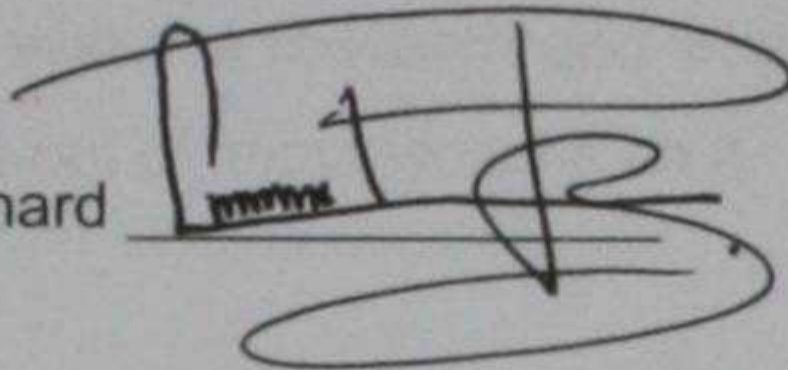
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## Dedications

This research is dedicated to God who gave us the health, patience and strength to work on it during these three years.

This thesis is also dedicated to our lovely and wonderful parents: Nelly, Roger, Gladys and Alfonso. Thanks for all the unconditional love, guidance and support that you have always given us to succeed.

Moreover, we want to dedicate it to our husbands who have always supported us with the tasks we had to carry out to develop this thesis.

I also dedicate this project to my son Ryan who was my inspiration and motivation to continue with this research and who waited for me several times late at night while I was out of home working on it.





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**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION**





## 1.1 Description of the Project

This research was carried out at Colegio Ambientalista Isaías Retana Arias in Pérez Zeledón. This is a public institution and it was built in the year 2000. The project is about the improvement of the descriptive paragraph writing skills of eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista Isaías Retana Arias in Pérez Zeledón through the application of different techniques. It also provides a theoretical and methodological framework to support the teaching of writing in the English classes. The project proposes the implementation of several writing techniques which provide useful information about the adequate paragraph structure and supplies information about activities and exercises used to foster the writing skill.

The first chapter consists of the description of the project, historical background, the problem and its importance. Also, there is information about the principles established by the MEP for the teaching of this skill. In addition, some aspects such as the population and sample, objectives, research question, hypothesis and the limitations of the study are presented. The theoretical framework is included in Chapter II. It includes information about what outstanding theorists have written regarding the writing skill in the teaching of English as a foreign language. All the data are used to support the development of the writing skill. Chapter III includes the approaches to teaching writing and writing techniques. Chapter IV provides a detailed description of the process. It describes the project itself; the type of investigation and the teaching procedures carried out. The data analysis is also included in this chapter. Four different types of instruments were designed to gather information and carry out this project. The instruments applied were a questionnaire for the teacher, another for the students, a pretest and a posttest. Then, the booklet is included in Chapter V, which is the proposal suggested by the researchers as an answer to the results obtained after the development of the investigation. It consists of a set of writing techniques and exercises. It also provides both teachers and students with useful tips on the writing skill and descriptive paragraphs. Finally, a set of conclusions about the



results of the research and several recommendations are stated in Chapter VI. The bibliography and annexes can be found at the end of this project.

In brief, this project provides teachers with information about the teaching of the writing skill and descriptive paragraph patterns which can be useful for further studies.

## **1.2 Historical background**

The teaching of English has been influenced by different theories and methods through the years. One of the methods used in the past is called the audio-lingual method. It required the teacher to use oral drills so that the students could acquire the language structure as a habit. According to Skinner in the book *Teaching ESL Writing*, "it emphasized the teaching of correct oral language through the study of pattern practice, pronunciation and grammatical structure" (22). The author establishes that three major postulates support this method. First, positive reinforcement was vital for success, errors had to be prevented and eliminated. It means that students were taught correct language usage and mistakes were viewed as deviant. Second, language input was seen as a foundation of fluent language. Thus, if students learned by practicing drilling, they were able to use the structures without difficulty. Third, oral language was seen as the pathway to language success and fluency while reading and particularly writing, were seen as a "support" to language skills (Skinner in Reid 22).

The teaching of writing was excluded in the Audiolingual Method since it was considered irrelevant to language competence. As it is stated in the book *Teaching ESL Writing*, "Until the early 70's writing in many ESL classrooms was limited to teaching handwriting skills to the students whose native language differed graphically from English; and to filling in the blanks of grammar and reading comprehension exercises" (Reid 22). In addition, the author stresses that ESL writing was affected by the lack of experience and knowledge of teaching composition among teachers and researchers. He holds that most ESL teachers' experience with the teaching of writing was their participation in freshman composition classes which means that they had little knowledge of theories and practices in the teaching of writing (22).



Writing is a productive skill. It is one of the most difficult skills to learn in the native language and even more so in the process of acquisition of a second language. Indeed, it is more complicated than it seems at first, even for native speakers of the language, since it involves not just an explicit representation of speech, but the development and presentation of thoughts in a structured way. David Nunan reinforces this argument in his book *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*, by stating that "learning to write fluently and expressively is the most difficult of the macroskills for all language users regardless of whether the language in question is a first, second or foreign language" (35). That is why it is important to create a culture in which high school students can practice more writing in order to become more skillful.

Regarding the importance of writing, it can be pointed out that this skill serves as a means of communication. The ability to write well means one has the ability to communicate feelings and ideas, to motivate people, even to solve conflicts. Thus, learners must know how to express in written form their thoughts, ideas, or points of view in the foreign language. Many people are worried about writing correctly in English. But what is the real importance of having good writing skills? First of all, the use of good writing skills makes the paragraph development clear and coherent. Students who write effective essays, paragraphs or sentences provide readers with coherent and clear communication. That is the reason why students must learn how to write well. On the contrary, they might have trouble communicating because their messages may be misunderstood by readers.

Although writing is considered a difficult task, the most important step is to start writing. One outstanding aspect in this case is to provide writers with a purpose to make the message clear, coherent and logical. A good purpose in a piece of writing may catch the reader's attention more easily. Moreover, a well-written text motivates readers to continue reading. Grammar and spelling mistakes might interfere with the message of the paragraph. The use of wrong lexical items can create confusion or distract the reader. Therefore, writers must avoid making such mistakes when writing. Furthermore, it is imperative that students learn the correct paragraph format and how ideas should be organized to help them relate them in a logical, coherent and adequate written form.



There are some other reasons why appropriate writing techniques must be taught. One of those reasons is for occupational or academic purposes. Knowing how to write in English might be useful when applying for a job since people are commonly asked to fill out a job application. Besides, English is known as an international language. The need to know how to read and write in English is increasing considerably. People are constantly exposed to this language. People search for information on the internet, they go to different restaurants which offer menus in English, they visit places where the information signs are in English, and they need to understand written instructions or information as well as to write them. Being skillful in writing may facilitate communication with people from many countries.

However, this is not the only reason why it is important to include writing in a syllabus. Another important reason is the fact that writing facilitates the students' learning, since they have to put into practice a lot of grammatical structures and vocabulary. Consequently, students may have the opportunity not only to reinforce the structures and vocabulary they actually know, but also to find new ways to express their ideas. In brief, writing good paragraphs entails not only searching for a specific topic and finding words related to it, but also developing coherent ideas in a specific pattern of organization.

In general terms, most high school students do not know that there is a great difference between the way ideas are organized in a paragraph in English and in Spanish. Actually, it seems that they are usually asked to produce a paragraph without having been taught that paragraphs in English have a different structure from those in Spanish. This usually happens because teachers sometimes forget to explain that difference, and have students produce paragraphs in the second language with the structure of their native language. This problem arises due to some reasons. For instance, the students' limited knowledge of the writing ability and the very little teacher training on the appropriate strategies or techniques to teach such skill. Moreover, the lack of vocabulary, Spanish interference and the absence of reading habits play an important role in this situation.



Students are not used to reading articles, newspapers or magazines in English. That is why they do not use complex structures or sophisticated lexicon when writing. The reading hypothesis proposed by Stephen Krashen in the book *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications* shows this relationship between reading and writing. Based on some research studies, he concludes that "good writers have done more reading for their own interest and pleasure than poor writers;" he also adds that "writing competence comes only from large amounts of self-motivated reading for pleasure and/or interest. It is reading that gives the writer the 'feel' for the look and texture of good writing" (19). Krashen's valuable insights strongly support the idea that students' simple language usage may be the result of poor reading habits.

Over the years, the Costa Rican government has implemented teaching English in the educational system as a priority. This language has been taught for many years in high schools. That is why special attention is given in these days to the correct teaching/learning process. Moreover, the Costa Rican government has equipped many educational institutions with several modern and special laboratories to teach this language more efficiently. According to what is stated in the English syllabus, after five years of English instruction, students must be able to produce accurate paragraphs (MEP English Syllabus 35). Nevertheless, the experience and evidence show that it is not true since, at the end of these five years, they do not produce accurate paragraphs.

According to the principles for assessing writing proposed by the Ministry of Public Education, written texts must address an audience, purpose for writing and a context (MEP English Syllabus 35). Therefore, Costa Rican teachers have to promote different kinds of context when teaching writing. For instance, they may ask the students to produce paragraphs based on real life situations such as describing their vacation or a trip, sending an e-mail to a friend and telling him/her about his likes and dislikes, among others. In this way, they provide students with a more meaningful learning process. Another problem is that students are asked to use complex structures in their pieces of writing even when they do not know how to use the simple ones. In this sense, there is a big contradiction between what teachers expect students to know and use when writing, and what they really teach students to apply in their writing. Costa Rican educational policies



encourage teaching writing for students to practice their lexical, grammatical, punctuation and syntax knowledge more meaningfully (MEP English Syllabus 35).

The MEP has trained instructors on the teaching of English and the application of different strategies and techniques to make the English classes more communicative and interesting for high school students and, in this way, to help them develop good writing skills. However, it has not been enough. There are learners who are not able to understand simple written texts and even more who are unable to write letters or take messages. Consequently, there is evidence that students lack writing skills and appropriate techniques or strategies to develop coherent pieces of writing.

A previous research on the same topic was carried out at Colegio Ambientalista Isaiás Retana Arias in the year 2005 by the researchers Cynthia Olivares and Lenna Barrantes. Their study *Useful writing techniques to increase the ability of tenth graders to write at the descriptive paragraph level in public high schools from rural areas* (UNA, 2005) was aimed at helping high school students write descriptive paragraphs level. The objective of the researchers was to determine whether or not the techniques used were meaningful to teach descriptive paragraphs. The techniques were developed with tenth graders and the results showed that the techniques were successful since students learned how to write appropriate descriptive paragraphs. Indeed, the techniques implemented in their study proved to be effective, for the students improved the quality of their writing and consequently their grades. The researchers concluded that *USEWRITE* offered a successful set of techniques teachers can use to help students write descriptive paragraphs.

Following on the steps of this previous project, the need to do further research with eleventh graders was detected because through the observations that were carried out, it was evident students at that level also had problems developing their ideas in English. A questionnaire was given to the students at the beginning of this research and the answers evidenced that the students did not know what writing techniques could be used to improve their writing skill. Besides, they did not know how to write descriptions in English. They used the structures in Spanish and had problems with vocabulary, spelling, punctuation and



organization. The techniques carried out by Olivares and Barrantes were never developed with the other levels. Also, they recommended training teachers on the appropriate use of the booklet, but it did not happen because both researchers worked at other institutions and had no time to give the training. They left the booklet at Colegio Ambientalista Isaias Retana Arias and hoped teachers would take advantage of it, but anyone ever gave it further use.

The present project differs from *USEWRITE* in the following aspects. First, it was conducted with a different level. Second, the focus of both studies is different. Olivares and Barrantes were interested in determining whether or not the techniques designed were meaningful for to the teaching of descriptive paragraphs while the focus of this study is to design a methodological proposal with attractive and innovative writing tasks to improve eleventh grade students' descriptive paragraph writing skills. In addition, the methodology applied in both studies differs. They taught six different units, one every Friday and they emphasized grammar. The units they taught are *Starting to Think*, *An Interesting Inventory*, *Linking Sentences*, *Drawing on Catchy Title*, *Writing Topic Sentences*, *Fun with Grammar*, *Giving Support*, and *Putting it an End*. On the contrary, in this study the researchers gave the students a list of topics and asked them to choose those they liked the most. So, in every class a different topic was developed and aspects such as paragraph structure, rhetoric and patterns of organization were taught. Furthermore, the topics developed in the booklet are different as well as the objectives of each unit.

### **1.3 The problem and its importance**

Teachers focus their teaching in high schools on developing the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, since the writing skill is the main focus of this investigation, it is important to know what the MEP English syllabus states in regards to this skill.

The 2005 MEP English syllabus stresses that writing is considered a skill "which emphasizes the formal expression of thoughts through written language or graphic symbols" (23). Some objectives in regards to the learners' written production proposed in this syllabus are: to be creative, to take into account



students' cognitive knowledge and skills, to be graded from simple sentence descriptions to more complex products, to include the use of appropriate language, style, punctuation, to involve the teacher and the students in the development and production of writing, to provide students with enough feedback through the process, to use real life tasks for students to write authentic texts, to integrate the other skills before, while or after the writing task is performed, and to motivate the students to express their feelings, emotions and points of view in written form. For this purpose, this skill has to be taught by practicing different techniques and types of writing to foster communication. It is necessary to teach students how to write in English in order to improve their communicative competence. Writing descriptive paragraphs is one of the most common activities practiced during the English classes in high school. That is the reason why it is necessary to provide students with appropriate techniques for writing and, in this way, help them produce good descriptive paragraphs.

Since written descriptions are part of the learning process of the English language, learners are constantly exposed to this kind of writing practice during the English classes. As a matter of fact, students from seventh to eleventh grade in Costa Rican public educational institutions are commonly asked to write descriptive paragraphs in the production part of any English written test. They are also exposed to descriptive paragraphs in the English Standardized test administered by the Ministry of Public Education. Consequently, students must learn how to develop accurate descriptive paragraphs.

As an answer to the evident students' poor descriptive paragraphs writing skill, it is pertinent to provide teachers and students with writing techniques that meet the objectives established by the MEP curriculum for teaching writing in high schools.

In this study some writing activities are proposed as an alternative for teachers to develop in their English class to improve the students' descriptive paragraph writing skills. With the development of these activities students may learn about the parts of a paragraph. Also, they might get involved in writing since the activities proposed are based on topics of their own interest and concern. The booklet designed provides students with a real context. In this way, students may



learn to use the language more meaningfully. Moreover, this project is aimed at encouraging the use of the second language in a communicative and effective way since teachers are provided with a variety of tasks which may help them develop a more dynamic writing class.

#### **1.4 Research Question:**

Based on our experience as English teachers and the observations we have done, we have found out that after five years of English instruction most high school students are still unable to write accurate descriptive paragraphs. That is why the research question that guides this study is: Why are eleventh grade students from Colegio Ambientalista in Pérez Zeledón not capable of producing well-structured descriptive paragraphs after five years of English instruction?

#### **1.5 Objectives of the Project.**

Due to the students' limitations when applying writing skills, there is a need to design a methodological proposal to improve eleventh grade students' descriptive paragraph writing skills from Colegio Ambientalista Isaías Retana Arias in Pérez Zeledón.

This proposal may be helpful for high school teachers as long as they can use all the techniques and exercises included in the booklet to help students develop accurate writing skills. Besides, it can be used to support and carry out further research on this topic.

This study comprises the following general and specific objectives:

**1.5.1 General Objective:** To design a methodological proposal with attractive and innovative writing tasks to improve eleventh grade students from Colegio Ambientalista Isaías Retana Arias in Pérez Zeledón descriptive paragraph writing skills.

#### **1.5.2 Specific Objectives:**

1. To implement teaching techniques and approaches to improve the students' descriptive paragraph writing skills.



2. To teach innovative descriptive paragraph writing techniques in order to improve the students' writing skills in English.
3. To provide instructors with a set of teaching techniques that can be adapted to the students' proficiency level.

### **1.6 Population and Sample**

Forty four eleventh grade students from Colegio Ambientalista Isaías Retana Arias were taken into account. They were chosen randomly.

The High School was founded in the year 2000. It is a public institution and it is located in Pedregoso, Pérez Zeledón. This high school was created for the purpose of educating students on protecting the environment by having them participate in many different conservation activities. Regarding the staff, the principal is in charge of 30 teachers of which, five teach English, three Spanish, three mathematics, three science, three social studies, two physical education, five environmental subjects, two technology, one music, one French, and one religion. Besides, there is a secretary, an administrative assistant, two guards, and three janitors. Concerning the population, there are approximately four hundred students. All of them are Costa Rican and they are from different urban areas of Pérez Zeledón such as Pedregoso, Pedregosito, San Ramón Sur, San Ramón Norte, Santa Rosa, and Calle Mora. Regarding their age, they range from seventeen to nineteen years old.

All the students take subjects related to conservation. Some of these subjects vary according to the students' level. For instance, students from eighth and tenth level take environmental computing subjects. Regarding English, students from seventh to ninth grade are taught three lessons a week of academic English and six of English for conversation. Then, they only take five lessons a week of academic English in tenth and eleventh grade. Every year, an estimated of 35 students graduates from fifth grade.

It is important to mention that students from this high school carry out projects related to the protection of the environment by using technology. The high school offers different services to the learners like a computer lab, basketball court, cafeteria, a copy place, and a library.



Currently, this high school has fifteen classrooms. Four of them were built in the year 2007 and they are used for conferences or official ceremonies. Regarding the environment, students work on a butterfly farm and greenhouse nursery. They also make mountain paths and raise peccaries.

It is important to mention that many foreign investigators carry out research at this high school. Every year the students and teachers from this high school are in contact with students and professors from other countries such as Canada and Austria. These student visitors spend almost four months carrying out projects and investigations as a requirement for obtaining their bachelor's degree at their universities. Most of these projects or investigations consist of planning and teaching English lessons and, in some cases, Spanish or science. They also provide teachers with useful material to develop their classes. Besides, some English teachers and students from Colegio Ambientalista participate in exchange programs with Australians and Canadians for a short period.

### **1.7 Limitations of the study**

This research was limited to the 44 eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista Isaias Retana Arias in Pedregoso, Pérez Zeledón. Their English teacher took part in the investigation by filling out a questionnaire so that researchers could find out if the methodology he applied to teach writing was appropriate.

An important aspect that really influenced the choice of this population is the fact that these students have been taught English for five years. From seventh to ninth grade, they took academic English and English for conversation, which means that they had six hours a week of English instruction for three years. Moreover, from tenth to eleventh grade, they took 5 lessons a week of academic English (three hours and twenty minutes). Consequently, the researchers inferred that these students had a very high proficiency level in English and they might want to test their skills to produce descriptive paragraphs.

The reasons why this study was limited to this population are the accessibility to commute to this high school, the availability of both the principal



and the students to carry out the investigation and the students' language competence after five years of English instruction.

Another limitation researchers found was the schedule in which they developed their investigation. The methodological proposal was carried out on Fridays in the afternoon. Consequently, most students were tired. If the research had been applied another day and in earlier hours, the results could have been better. Late hours imply being tired and not performing as well as being fresh and relaxed.

The students' little interest constituted another constrain to this investigation. Some students were not willing to collaborate with the study. They were late to class or did not go. Also, they did not perform well in class because they were not graded.

Another limitation was the teacher's methodology. The students were not used to writing descriptive paragraphs using English structures and organization. Therefore, they had problems organizing their ideas in a paragraph.

Finally, researchers concluded that a similar study with seventh, eighth and ninth graders may be developed to detect the same or similar problems. By doing further research students from all levels may actually improve their writing skill.

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**CHAPTER II**  
**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**



The purpose of this theoretical framework is to present a theoretical foundation based on different concepts and theories of language learning and teaching that might shed light on how to improve students' descriptive paragraph writing. Several concepts and theoretical principles from different experts, approaches and theories of language are explained in this chapter to support the proposal for the implementation of different teaching techniques to improve the descriptive paragraph writing skill. The main point is to show how different SLA theories are related to the issue under study in this research project.

This section presents a deep analysis of The Second Language Acquisition Theory, The Natural Approach, Input Theory, Multiple Intelligences Theory, Learning Styles, Learning Strategies and sources of error in L2 writing. However, before analyzing each of these theories and approaches in deep, a clear definition of important terms is provided.

### 2.1 Definition of terms

In order to facilitate the comprehension of this study to readers, it is important to provide a definition of some relevant terms that will be used and which might need to be specified. The terms are arranged into alphabetical order.

- Approach: It is a manner or method of doing something.
- Error: According to Rod Ellis in his book *Second Language Acquisition*, "errors reflect gaps in a learner's knowledge; they occur because the learner does not know what is correct" (17). Errors are deviations which obstruct communication.
- Global error: According to Brown, global errors are those that hinder communication. They prevent the hearer or reader from comprehending some aspects of the message (210).
- i: Students' current proficiency level. Stephen Krashen describes it as "the acquirer's level of competence" in his book *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom* (32).
- I+1: Input which is a bit beyond the students' current proficiency level. According to Krashen, it is "the stage immediately following i along some natural order" (32).



- Input: It may be defined as all the information the students are exposed to either explicitly or implicitly.
- Intake: Input that has already been processed and stored in the brain.
- L1: Native language.
- L2: Second language.
- Local error: Errors that do not prevent the message from being heard/read, usually because there is only a minor violation of one segment of a sentence, allowing the hearer/reader to make an accurate guess about the intended meaning (Brown, 210).
- Mistake: Rod Ellis defines the term "mistakes" as occasional lapses in performance which occur because, in a particular instance, the learner is unable to perform what he or she knows (17).
- Output: It is the final result, what the students actually produce after having received and processed the input.
- Pattern: A model to be followed.
- Technique: A procedure or activity for achieving a goal.
- Theory: It constitutes the general or abstract principles of a subject.
- Writing competence: The theorist Stephen Krashen defines it as the abstract knowledge the proficient writer has.
- Writing performance: It is defined as the ability to put this knowledge to use in an actual piece of writing according to Krashen.

Now that these terms are clear, an explanation of the theories that support this investigation is given.

## 2.2 Second Language Acquisition Theory

Second language acquisition theory distinguishes language acquisition from second language learning. Language acquisition stands for the act of learning a language by being exposed to meaningful input. Acquirers do not learn grammar rules or any formalities of the language consciously. Language learning, on the other hand, is the act of consciously learning a language, being aware of the process and the rules. According to Krashen in the book *Writing: Research, Theory, and Applications*; "Acquisition accounts for the ability to use the language in both production and comprehension, while conscious learning serves only as



an editor or monitor, making changes in the form of output under certain , very limited conditions" (21). Even though five hypotheses form the core of the Second Language Acquisition Theory, only the Input Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis will be included in this study because they are the ones that are pertinent to this research.

Krashen's input hypothesis provides support to this study. He suggests that learners should be exposed to meaningful input and that this input should be a bit beyond the students' current proficiency level for language acquisition to take place. According to what Douglas Brown states in the book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, "If an acquirer is at stage or level  $i$ , the input he or she understands should contain  $i+1$ " (280). Brown adds that "the language which learners are exposed to should be just far enough beyond their current competence so that they can understand most of it but still be challenged to make progress" (208). This theory advocates that the best acquisition will take place in contexts where the "affective filter" is low. It means, in environments free from anxiety. In this way, the students will comprehend the language and turn it into intake easily. This all means that if learners are not exposed to the  $i+1$  input suggested by Brown, they will not be able to learn the second language. For this project, it means that learning how to write in English could be hindered if learners are not provided with the appropriate input.

Providing comprehensible input is not a simple task. Krashen identifies several implications for classroom practice. First, he holds, it implies that whatever helps comprehension is important. The use of any visual aids provides extra-linguistic context that helps the learner to understand, so acquisition may take place. Second, it implies that vocabulary is important. That is, vocabulary should not be limited or avoided. Krashen states that with more vocabulary, there will be more comprehension and with more comprehension, there will be more acquisition. Therefore, it is vital to foster the learning of more lexical items. The third implication this author points out is that in giving input, in talking to students, the teacher needs to be concerned above all with whether the students understand the message. Thereby, teachers should not focus their attention on the correctness of the message or on the structures the students use. Instead, they should pay attention and encourage the input that is understood. Another



implication is that comprehensible input is the crucial element of a language teaching program for all students. It does not matter if students are young or old. Everyone should be regarded as an acquirer. Finally, the author stresses that the Affective Filter Hypothesis along with the Input Hypothesis imply that effective classroom input must be interesting. Accordingly, topics of universal appeal will be specifically valuable, especially those of personal interest to the students (55-56). This implies that even though it is not easy, students need to be provided with comprehensible input in order for them to acquire the language.

Another relevant hypothesis to this study is The Monitor Hypothesis. It refers to the use of conscious learning to monitor output once it has been produced. According to Krashen in his book *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*:

We can thus use the monitor to make changes in our utterances only after the utterance has been generated by the acquired system. This may happen before we actually speak or write, or it may happen after. When it happens after the utterance has been produced (uttered or written), it is called self-repair. (30)

Therefore, this hypothesis asserts that conscious learning has only the function of monitoring what has been said or written, not initiating production in a second language. Krashen sets up three requirements for the use of the Monitor Hypothesis. The first one suggests that the performer has to have enough time. The monitor cannot be used in rapid speech because thinking about rules while communicating ideas may disrupt the message. Therefore, it is best used in writing as far as the performer has the option to go back and forward at any time and it will not hinder communication. This makes the use of learners' monitor very useful in the writing process since this helps them self-correct what they produce. The second requirement proposed by Krashen establishes that the performer has to be thinking about correctness, or be focused on form. In this case, the author makes reference to the fact that when communicating with others, performers must concentrate on what they say rather than how they say it. However, in writing, people do have the opportunity to focus on form and rules when expressing their ideas. The third constraint states that the performer has to know the rule. The author argues that "even the best students fail to learn everything presented to them" (31). Nevertheless, performers usually master a set of rules



that can be certainly useful when monitoring production in a second language. These prerequisites give a clear vision of the role of conscious learning in the production of a second language and highlight the use of the monitor in situations where it will not interfere with communication, as in writing or prepared speech.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis is of great interest to the development of this research as well. It refers to the influence of certain affective variables on second language achievement. Indeed, this hypothesis suggests that acquisition takes place in environments free from anxiety. It also reveals that situations in which the affective filter is high really obstruct acquisition. Krashen summarizes this hypothesis by saying that having the right attitudes may produce two effects for second language acquirers: they actually encourage input and they contribute to a low affective filter (38). The first effect states that people who are motivated get more input and are more receptive to the input they receive. The second effect gives emphasis to the importance of lowering the affective filter in order to acquire a second language more easily. According to Krashen, this effect is of great importance to pedagogy since its goal should not only include supplying comprehensible input, but also creating an environment that promotes a low filter (38). In conclusion, in order to make the most rapid progress in the second language class, it is essential to have a good attitude. If the affective filter is high, the process of acquiring a second language may delay too much. For the specific case of this project, it means that lowering learners' affective filter is a way to ensure that they will learn how to write descriptive paragraphs more effectively.

The point here is that in order to make this study more relevant, it is necessary to review three of the most important SLA hypothesis proposed by experts. In order for students to learn how to write effectively, it is important to first give them the appropriate input. Then, they need to be taught how to use their monitor to improve their writing. At last, the teacher has to provide students with an environment that helps learners lower their affective filter, which is one of the main constraints for language acquisition. The understanding of these theories can then be connected to different approaches that are used to teach writing, which are presented in point 2.3. this might help teachers to take the necessary measures to help learners improve their writing skills.





### 2.3 The Natural Approach

All the hypotheses previously mentioned underlie The Natural Approach. This approach is communicatively oriented and very flexible. It can be adapted to different needs and many learning-teaching techniques can fit into its theoretical framework. Stephen Krashen points out that learners should be exposed to comprehensible input, and that teachers should let their students produce until they are ready because if they are pushed too early, they might be blocked. Brown gives credit to Krashen's Natural Approach in his book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* by mentioning that the role of the teacher is described as the facilitator of comprehensible input, that is, spoken or written language that is understandable to the learner, or just a little beyond the learner's level. He also says that learners do not need to say anything during the "silent period" until they feel ready to do so. Stephen Krashen gives a clear definition of what the silent period stands for in his book *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*. He remarks that it may be the time during which acquirers build up competence via input. Brown affirms in the book previously mentioned that although this silent period can be contra productive in the sense that the students' oral or written production can delay too far, teachers should also recognize that pushing the students to produce from the very beginning can raise their anxiety and reduce the possibility of further risk-taking as students strive to progress (99-100).

Stephen Krashen provides a clear explanation of the five guidelines that underlie the natural approach in his book *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*. The first of them states that the goal of this approach is communication skills. Thus, its aim is the ability to use the target language to communicate with other people. It states that grammatical accuracy will be achieved in the long run, after students have received enough comprehensible input both in the classroom and in the outside world. The second guideline says that comprehension precedes production. The author explains that if communicative ability is based on acquired knowledge, students must first learn to comprehend. Therefore, communicative competence could not be achieved without comprehension. The third guideline stresses that production emerges. Students cannot be forced to speak or write from the very beginning. There is a



process and students should be given time to internalize input and start producing. In the beginning they might make mistakes, but their communicative competence will improve as the acquisition process progresses. The fourth guideline establishes that acquisition activities are central. Consequently, Krashen suggests that teachers should devote the great majority of class time to develop activities which provide input for acquisition. He adds that one of the central tasks of the instructor is to present an optimal balance of acquisition and learning activities. The fifth and last guideline points out that the affective filter must be lowered. Providing comprehensible input in an anxiety-free environment might facilitate the acquisition of a second language and the students' language competence might be enhanced as well (58). These principles are vital for an adequate acquisition of a second language. By following all these guidelines teachers might contribute to an optimal development of any productive skill and any language might be acquired more meaningfully and easily. All this means that, the Natural Approach could be really helpful to teach high school students how to write paragraphs effectively in the target language. If students are taught writing as a process, following the sequence of guidelines proposed by Krashen, they will learn better how to write paragraphs.

#### **2.4 The Writing-Reading Connection Theory**

The second approach to writing that is pertinent to this study the Writing-Reading Connection Theory. As stated in the previous paragraphs, students must be provided with comprehensible input for them to develop the productive skills. This is why the writing-reading connection theory is relevant to support this assumption. This theory accounts for the relationship between writing and reading. According to Joy M. Reid in the book *Teaching ESL Writing*, these two skills are closely related since reading has been always part of ESL writing (64). Some studies have shown that these skills are cognitively similar. Also, researchers state that both the reader and the writer infer meaning from texts. Indeed, both language skills involve many subskills and depend on the individual's background knowledge (64). It could be pointed out here that good readers are most of the times good writers. The more reading is encouraged in the classroom, the more possibilities learners have to develop their writing skills.



Martin Nystrand, Roger Shuy and David Robison stress in the book *Teaching ESL Writing* that "teachers need to see writing and reading not merely as cognitive, constructive processes but also as social, communicative processes between readers and writers"(64). Students need to see the reasons why they need to learn how to write. Writing for the sake of writing will not be motivating to them and will hinder their learning. Joy M. Reid reviewed the studies carried out by Stostcky and found direct connection between reading achievement and writing ability: better writers read more than poor writers, and better readers tend to produce more syntactically mature writing than poorer readers"(64). Therefore, evidence shows that the reading skill greatly supports the development of the writing skill. According to what is stated in the book *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom* by Stephen Krashen, "The Input Hypothesis claims that listening comprehension and reading are of primary importance in the language program, and that the ability to speak (or write) fluently in a second language will come on its own with time" (32). If students are given comprehensible input via reading, they may be exposed to all the necessary grammatical structures and discourse rules for producing in English. This may happen if the reader is willing to internalize the input and if the affective filter is low.

## **2.5 Multiple Intelligences Theory**

Another theory that greatly influences the teaching and learning of a second language implies having deep knowledge of learners' multiple intelligences. This theory proposes that all people may have one, two, or more intelligences that may help them understand the world more easily. Teachers should know what this theory is about in order to implement their writing classes and take advantage of their students' abilities. It is even more important for teachers to be aware of their learners' intelligences and teach using a great variety of activities, exercises, materials and approaches in order to reach students more effectively.

It is a fact that for some individuals it is easy to solve math problems while for others playing a musical instrument may be even easier. Unfortunately, Howard Gardner argues that not all instructors are aware of this and its implications in the teaching process. Some teachers develop activities focused on



the same intelligences in their English writing classes instead of taking advantage of other skills. When teachers think of multiple intelligences, many questions may arise. One of the most important questions could be what intelligence is about. Gardner defines it as a group of abilities that is independent from other human skills and has a core set of information-processing operations (3). Gardner's theory's main focus is on a fundamental modification in the way schools educate and teachers instruct. Not only activities but also materials should help teachers make their classes more attractive. According to him, instructors are directly responsible for the application of the multiple intelligences theory as well as new instructional methods, purposes and changes to promote meaningful learning experiences (2).

Human intelligences are described as follows: first the *verbal-linguistic* intelligence is the ability to use words and language. Then, the *logical-mathematical* deals with people's capacity to reason, think and use numbers and recognize abstract patterns. Third, the *visual-spatial* intelligence stands for the fact that people with this ability have the facility to picture objects and spatial ranges. They can also create interior figures and illustrations. The *body-kinaesthetic* intelligence accounts for the capacity to control physical motion. The fine motor and gross motor are well developed. Furthermore, musical-rhythmic intelligence refers to the ability to recognize tones and sounds. People with this intelligence are also sensitive to rhythms and beats. The interpersonal ability deals with people's communication ability and their relationship with other individuals. Finally, the intrapersonal intelligence establishes that people with this ability are self-reflective and aware. Knowing these multiple intelligences will help teachers develop their classes more effectively.

Regarding this theory, it is very important to establish the importance of multiple intelligences in the curriculum. Indeed, the English National syllabus proposed by the Ministry of Public Education is primarily focused on the verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences. Therefore, not all learners have the chance to succeed at the same level. Besides, instruction can be greatly influenced by this theory. Most of the activities carried out in the class do not take into account the different abilities students have. Consequently, few students show interest in those activities. On the contrary, if teachers performed or promoted



activities focused on the different skills students have, there would be more students willing to work and learn. Finally, the multiple intelligences theory plays an important role in assessment. This theory refers to the kind of evaluation that involves all the students' intelligences instead of one. Usually, learners are evaluated on the basis of the same methodology and this favors some more than others.

## 2.6 Learning Styles

Another important theory teachers must be familiar with is that of learning styles. Students differ from one another not only in the intelligences they have but also in the way they learn. It is necessary that teachers know their students' learning styles to adjust their teaching styles in the classroom. In the book *Teaching ESL Writing*, Reid cites the definition of the term "learning styles" given by Keefe, who describes it as "cognitive, affective and perceptual traits that indicate how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment" (56 ). Some students have few learning styles while others have many. These students usually adapt those styles according to their needs and context. Teachers need to develop their classes according to their learners' learning styles. However, some instructors do not take into account their students' learning style, or they might not even know about this theory. Consequently, some learners might face difficulty while learning, since they have to adopt other styles they might feel uncomfortable with.

There are different learning styles. To begin with, field independent students are critical. They prefer a linear and chronological learning. They work better by following rules and instructions previously established. According to Brown in the book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, this style refers to the "ability to perceive a particular, relevant item or factor in a 'field' of distracted items" (106). Independent style learners can easily concentrate on the task at hand and they do not get easily disrupted. For instance, they may read a book in a noisy place without losing track of it. Field dependent; on the contrary, is described by Brown as "the tendency to be 'dependent' on the total field so that the parts embedded within the field are not easily perceived, though that total field is perceived more clearly as a unified whole" (106). These learners are good at



getting main ideas. They may have a larger view of a problem or event. These learners like best mutual and new inductive learning situations. They learn much better if the teacher–student interaction as interpersonal feedback remains (Chapelle and Green, Hanse and Stansfield and Witkin in Reain 56).

Two more learning styles are closely related to the extent to which people can tolerate others' ideas and beliefs. There are "open-minded" and "close-minded" learners. The former are those who accept the opinion and beliefs of other individuals even though they differ from their own. The latter includes people who cannot tolerate other people's beliefs, ideas and opinions. These people usually reject items that are contradictory or incongruent with their existing system as it is stated by Brown (111). These two learning styles have some advantages and disadvantages. As the author says, being tolerant of ambiguity means you are free to entertain a number of innovative and creative possibilities and not be cognitively or affectively disrupted by ambiguity and uncertainty (111). Therefore, students with this style are more eager to accept the differences there are between their native and foreign language than those who do not. An excess of tolerance, however, may have some negative effects as long as learners may accept almost every proposition and not think about relevant information to confirm their assumptions as it is stated by Brown in the book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (111). Therefore, it can be concluded that ambiguity tolerance may either hinder or favor the acquisition of a second language. Being open-minded means that you have a good attitude towards the second language and that linguistic and cultural differences are taken in easily and effectively. However, too much tolerance may cause overestimations and students would fail at recognizing important features of the target language. Close-minded students, contradictorily, are reluctant and underestimate those differences. Consequently, it is more difficult for them to learn a second language.

The systematic and intuitive styles are closely related to the reflectivity and impulsivity dimension. The latter style stands for those learners who tend to make a quick or impulsive guess at an answer, with possibly several successive gambles before a solution is achieved as it is described by Brown in his book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (112). These learners may be considered good guessers but their messages may not always be accurately



conveyed. Systematic learners, on the other hand, are those who think over and over again before making a decision. Brown describes these learners as those "thinkers /who/ tend to weigh all the considerations in a problem, work out all the loopholes, then, after extensive reflection, carefully venture a solution" (112). Therefore, these learners do not like to take risks. They prefer to analyze their answers, for example, before actually uttering them. Regarding second language teaching and learning, instructors should take into account some considerations regarding these learners. First, intuitive learners are more likely to reveal errors. For that reason, it is important that teachers do not judge mistakes too severely. Second, systematic learners are usually slower and demand more time to think about their responses, so, teachers should be patient to help learners move on.

The last two learning styles proposed by Brown are the visual and auditory styles. It stands for the preference learners show towards either visual or auditory input. There are people who understand easily if they are exposed to pictures or images since they have the opportunity to create a mental organization of what is being described. On the other hand, there are auditory learners who learn faster if they are exposed to oral stimuli. According to the author, "visual learners tend to prefer reading and studying charts, drawings, and other graphic information, while an auditory style is characterized by a preference for listening to lectures and audiotapes" (113). These differences distinguish one learner from another and constitute an important factor for classroom instruction. Teachers should provide students with both types of input in order to guarantee an optimal and successful acquisition of the target language.

Students should be aware of their learning styles and take advantage of them. Furthermore, syllabus designers should include all different learning styles in their instructional programs to benefit all learners and help them achieve proficiency in the second language. As it is stressed in the book *Teaching ESL Writing* "teaching students with multistyle techniques makes learning more enjoyable, improves teacher-student communication and enriches instruction" (Eliason, Stevick, Weders Pahn and Barger in Reid 59-60). Knowing about students' learning styles is important to both instructors and students. In fact, educators need to understand their students' learning styles in order to adapt their teaching methodology and techniques accordingly. Instructors should



understand the differences among students to design their activities and reinforce all students' learning processes. Moreover, if students know their own learning styles they could become better learners. Teachers have the responsibility of providing a variety of stimuli in the classroom in order to give all learners equal chances of learning.

## 2.7 Learning Strategies

It is also important to consider that learners vary in not only their intelligences and learning styles but also in the strategies they use to help themselves learn more effectively. In order to achieve an adequate mastery of the second language, students should employ different learning strategies, and teachers have to teach students about the different learning strategies because this will give them more possibilities of succeeding. The term *strategies* is defined by Douglas Brown in the book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* as "the moment by moment techniques that we employ to solve 'problems' posed by second language input and output" (114). According to Johanne Myles in the article *Second Language Writing and Research: The Writing Process and Error Analysis in Student Texts*, "Academic writing requires conscious effort and much practice in composing, developing, and analyzing ideas" (1). When learners write in the second language, they commonly face not only social but also cognitive challenges associated with second language acquisition. It is well-known that writing is not a naturally acquired skill. Myles points out that it is mostly learned or transmitted by cultural patterns. Experience in these cases is the best tool to acquire the writing skill. He also says that the ability to write includes composing, which means to tell or retell pieces of information in different kinds of writing. Indeed, the act of composing is a difficult task since people have not only to compose but also to develop and analyze ideas. However, he states that this skill is even more complex for those students who are learning to write in a second language since they have to become skillful in the use of the target language. They should also know about writing strategies, techniques and skills (Myles 1).

Cognitive factors constitute another important aspect to be taken into account when teaching and/or learning a second language. Formal writing implies a complex development. Therefore, it is difficult for L2 writers to acquire the



vocabulary and the writing style easily. The cognitive theory, according to McLaughlin in the article written by Myles, establishes that:

Communicating orally or in a written form is an active process of skill development and gradual elimination of errors as the learner internalizes the language. Indeed, acquisition is a product of the complex interaction of the linguistic environment and the learner's internal mechanisms. With practice, there is continual restructuring as learners shift these internal representations in order to achieve increasing degrees of mastery in L2. (McLaughlin, 1988 In Myles 6)

Scardamalia and Bereiter in Myles support this argument saying that sentence organization is really important to achieve effective writing. Also, the creation of meaningful and coherent ideas based on previous information is essential in the acquisition of good writing skills without leaving out the revision stage. This cognitive stage allows students to analyze the kind of feedback they have received (Myles 6).

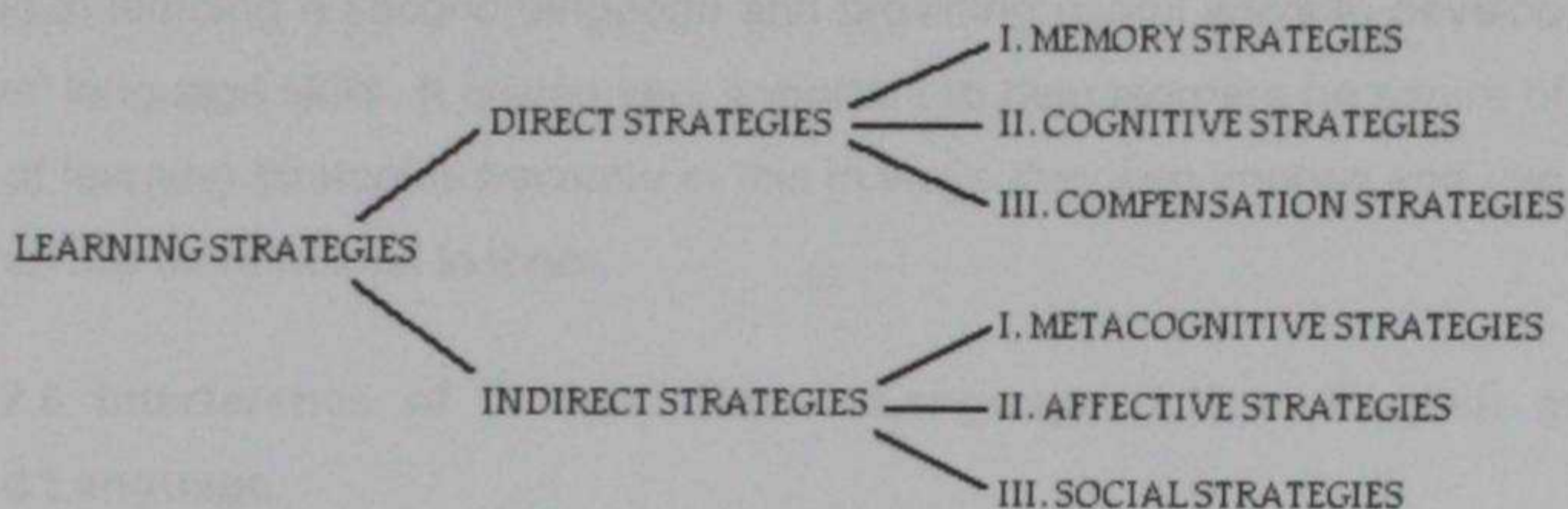
Since writing in the second language is considered a difficult task, it becomes hard for student writers to accurately follow all the stages of the writing process. Consequently, they have to use different learning strategies to assimilate the new patterns effectively. It is well known that individuals have different ways of learning. Then, developing the correct learning strategies is necessary to acquire good writing skills. Teachers should have students put into practice several strategies for different writing tasks so that they have the opportunity to find out which ones work best for them.

According to Brown in the book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, these strategies are related to input, to the way information is processed, stored and retrieved (114). Rod Ellis refers to learning strategies as the particular approaches or techniques that learners employ to try to learn a second language. According to this author, they can be behavioral or mental. He identifies three different kinds of learning strategies. First of all, he mentions cognitive strategies which are those involved in the analysis, synthesis or transformation of learning materials (77). In addition, Brown says that these strategies "are more limited to specific learning tasks and involve more direct manipulation of the learning material itself" (115). Metacognitive strategies, she explains, are those involved in planning, monitoring and evaluating learning. These strategies are



focused on actions that provide learners with a coordinated plan to organize their learning. Brown argues that these strategies "involve planning for learning, thinking about the learning process as it is taking place, monitoring of one's production or comprehension, and evaluating learning after an activity is completed" (115). Finally, social/affective strategies, according to Ellis, concern the ways in which learners choose to interact with other speakers (77). Brown supports this argument by saying that these strategies "have to do with social-mediating activity and transacting with others" (115). The following diagram shows the classification system of both direct and indirect strategies according to Oxford's Strategy Classification System. Table 1 shows the strategy sets for each strategy group.

**Diagram 1:** Direct and indirect strategies



**Table 1:** Strategy groups and strategy sets.

<b>Direct Strategies</b>		<b>Indirect Strategies</b>	
I. <i>Memory strategies</i>	A. Creating mental images	I. <i>Metacognitive strategies</i>	A. Centering your learning
	B. Applying images and sounds		B. Arranging and planning your learning
	C. Reviewing well		C. Evaluating your learning
II. <i>Cognitive strategies</i>	A. Practicing	II. <i>Affective strategies</i>	A. Lowering your anxiety
	B. Receiving and sending messages		B. Encouraging yourself
	C. Analyzing and reasoning		C. Taking your emotional temperature
	D. Creating structure for input and output		



III. <i>Compensation</i> strategies	A. intelligently	Guessing III. strategies	<i>Social</i> A. Asking questions
	B. Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing		B. Cooperating with others
			C. Empathizing with others

According to Rod Ellis, there is not such a recipe to say which strategies work best for second language acquisition; however, she remarks that research has shown that successful language learners pay attention to both form and meaning and they are also very active, show awareness of the learning process and their own personal styles and, above all, are flexible and appropriate in their use of learning strategies (77). Therefore, it can be concluded that learning strategies are really important to second language learning and teaching since they could be very helpful in guiding the students through the appropriate way to succeed in learning a second language and providing useful ways to develop the students' language skills. It is also very important to help learners be aware of the theory of learning strategies because in this in ways they can choose and use the ones that are more helpful to them.

### **2.8 Interference of Writers' Native Language (L1) in English as a Second Language**

Another outstanding aspect related to the learning of English as a second language is the interference of the students' native language. Students of English as a second language (ESL) face a lot of problems when communicating in the second language due to the interference of their mother tongue. According to Alexander Friedlander in the article *Composing in English: Effects of a First Language on Writing in English as a Second Language*, "the belief is that if ESL writers do any of their work in their first language, this will inhibit acquisition of the second language (L2) and will interfere with the generation of L2 structures, due to transfer of structures and vocabulary from the first language in an incorrect way" (Friedlander in Kroll 109). Consequently, any time a student attempts to produce a composition in a second language, he or she might experience some interference of the native language which might cause misunderstanding or miscommunication.



Friedlander also states that "writers will transfer writing abilities and strategies, whether good or deficient, from their first language to their second language" (109). Thus, it is necessary that students have good writing abilities and strategies in their L1 in order to succeed in L2 writing tasks. Being good at writing in the students' L1 (Spanish in this case) will reflect an accurate development of this skill in the L2 (English). If students lack good writing abilities and strategies in their native language, they may face the same problems in the second language particularly when writing.

## 2.9 Sources of Error

The sources of students' errors is another important topic to consider in this theoretical framework. Errors occur due to several possible general sources. According to Brown in the book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, some sources of errors are interlingual errors of interference from the native language, intralingual errors within the target language, the sociolinguistic context of communication, psycholinguistic or cognitive strategies, and affective variables (206). Interlingual errors are related to all those deviations students produce as a result of their native language interference. Put in other words, learners attempt to negatively transfer structures and rules from their native language in the learning of a second language. Brown suggests that in the beginning stages of learning a second language, the native language is the only linguistic system in previous experience upon which the learner can draw (213). That is why Costa Rican students, for example, sometimes use Spanish structures when expressing their ideas in English.

Intralingual errors, in addition, are those that occur due to a generalization of the target language rules. Brown argues that these errors arise once learners have begun to acquire parts of the new system (214). In this stage, they learn new rules and structures and apply them in any situation they are presented to. Therefore, teachers may find errors such as *Does Mary can swim?*, *Luis can plays the guitar*, among others. Another source of error is the context of learning. In the case of second language teaching in high school, context refers to the classroom, the teacher and the materials used. As stated in the book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, "in a classroom context the teacher or the textbook can



lead the learner to make faulty hypotheses about the language.” (215) Brown also says that “students often make errors because of a misleading explanation from the teacher, faulty presentation of a structure or word in a textbook, or even because of a pattern that was rote memorized in a drill but not properly conceptualized” (215). The context then can facilitate the making of mistakes as long as teachers and the materials they use lead students to misunderstand and misuse the target language rules. What is really important is to teach learners that errors or mistakes are normal and necessary during the learning process, especially in writing. In this way, they will not be discouraged by teacher correction.

### **2.10 The Sources of Error in L2 Writing: Social and Cognitive Factors**

Social factors constitute a great source of error in L2 writing. Myles states in the article “Second Language Writing and Research: The Writing Process and Error Analysis in Student Texts” that there are many social factors that lead students to continue making errors in their writing. First, she says, there might be negative attitudes towards the target language (6). Not all learners are interested in learning a second language. Students need to have positive attitudes towards the second language in order for their learning to be successful. The second factor Myles mentions is an ongoing lack of progress in the L2 despite the efforts of the writing teachers (6). Most students do not reflect an accurate development in the writing skills. Repeated mistakes and lack of progress may make the students feel unmotivated and give up trying to improve. Third, adds Myles, a wide social and psychological distance between them and the target culture makes the students fail (6). Few students are in contact with the second language and it influences their writing proficiency level. The students should have more contact with the target language and be engaged in activities such as reading articles or books, talking to native speakers of the target language, among others that favor progress. Myles argues that “if L2 learners are motivated to integrate into the L2, they will develop a higher level of proficiency and positive attitudes, which can have a positive effect on their writing” (5). Therefore, it is imperative to implement activities which promote contact with the target language. Finally, the author points out that students lack integrative and instrumental motivation for learning (6). Most learners are not interested at all in learning how to write in English, so they do not



care about being involved in the second language writing process. According to Myles, "integrative motivation involves a desire to learn an L2 because individuals need to learn the target language to integrate into the community (...) On the other hand, instrumental motivation acknowledges the role that external influences and incentives play in strengthening the learners' desire to achieve" (5). Students who are instrumentally motivated are concerned about learning the language for a specific purpose, such as getting a job.

Cognitive factors also play a crucial role in error production. According to McLaughlin, some possible reasons why errors are made are language interference or transfer, over-generalizations, little familiarity with rhetorical structures and patterns of organization. First of all, language interference or transfer stands for the fact that learners tend to apply the same structure patterns of their native language when they write in the second language. There might be a positive transfer (facilitation), a negative transfer (errors), and an evasion of the L2 forms on use (Ellis in Myles 7). There has been a lot of controversy regarding language transfer and its influence on second language writing skills. Behaviorists state that transfer is a cause of errors while from the cognitive perspective it is seen as a resource that the learner actively draws upon in interlanguage development (Selinker in Myles 7). Transfer can also occur due to students' lack of information or knowledge of the target language. Most of the time, they tend to relate the closest knowledge or structures they have of their native language to the writing practice, that is why errors in structures or organization occur (McLaughlin in Myles 7).

Moreover, learners might over-generalize the rules when acquiring new communication structures. For instance, students might over generalize the rules of the past tense of regular verbs and apply them to all verbs in the past. Finally, writers in L2 may have little familiarity with new rhetorical structures and patterns of organization. According to Myles, "students may not be acquainted with English rhetoric, which can lead to writing that appears off topic or incoherent to many native English speakers" (8-9). As much as learners are in contact with the new language, it is easier for them to get familiar with the new patterns of organization and structures, and the error rates may decrease. In this case, it is important to



mention that input as well as interaction represent important aspects in the writing process.

Learners may improve their language proficiency in the written discourse by having contact with a variety of written sources which may help learners get familiar with the use of the structures, the writing style and the way ideas are organized. Teachers are the ones in charge of providing learners with a lot of input, feedback and writing practice for them to accomplish all their goals in writing. Moreover, as it is stated by Myles, "systematically encouraging learners to reflect on what they want to write and then helping them to make an appropriate choice of language forms has pedagogic value" (11). Thus, enough contact, practice and feedback may aid learners to improve their writing skill. They also need to know that writing is a process and with time and effort they will develop their skills, the amount of mistakes will decrease gradually and they will in the end become effective writers.

### **2.11 Error correction**

The last but not less important theory to analyze is error correction. It is important to know that depending on how it is done, error correction could be helpful or harmful for students. Students' paragraphs are likely to reveal problems in language control which may be caused by interference from the native language, overgeneralizations of the target language rules, among others. According to Brown in the book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, "error treatment and focus on language forms appear to be most effective when incorporated into a communicative, learner-centered curriculum, and least effective when error correction is a dominant pedagogical feature, occupying the focal attention of students in the classroom" (219). Then, finding out a way of correcting errors and not turning the class into a grammar course is the teacher's major task. Krashen points out in his book *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom* that "the correction of errors (...) is intended to help the students adjust their conscious mental picture of the rule" (177). Conversely, there is such concern as to whether the correction of errors would cause negative effects on learners by raising their affective filter and consequently obstructing their acquisition process. First of all, it is essential to determine which errors to



correct. There are many kinds of errors, but errors which hinder or affect communication should be the teachers' main concern. There must be a hierarchy of errors so that instructors have a clearer idea of which errors are more or less serious. Kroll points out that "the best approach to feedback on errors must undoubtedly derive from considering the circumstances of the individual student coupled with the goals of the course and the stage of the composing process a particular draft reflects" (Kroll in Celce-Murcia 261).

There is no simple answer to when and how to treat an error. According to Brown in the book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, "Hendrickson advised teachers to try to discern the difference between global and local errors." (221) Hendrickson suggested that local errors do not need to be corrected because the message is clear and correction might hinder communication. Global errors, on the contrary, should be corrected since the message may otherwise remain distorted (221). There are a number of possible ways for the treatment of errors. Brown makes reference to the taxonomy recommended by Bailey (1985) which includes seven "basic options" complemented by eight "possible features" presented below.

#### Basic options:

1. To treat or to ignore.
2. To treat immediately or to delay.
3. To transfer treatment [to, say, other learners] or not.
4. To transfer to another individual, a subgroup, or the whole class.
5. To return, or not, to original error maker after treatment.
6. To permit other learners to initiate treatment.
7. To test for the efficacy of the treatment.

#### Possible features:

1. Fact of error indicated.
2. Location indicated.
3. Opportunity for new attempt given.
4. Model provided.
5. Error type indicated.



6. Remedy indicated.
7. Improvement indicated.
8. Praise indicated.

All these options and features constitute feasible modes of error correction in the classroom. However, the teacher should develop intuition to determine which option or combination of options works best at given moments (221-222).

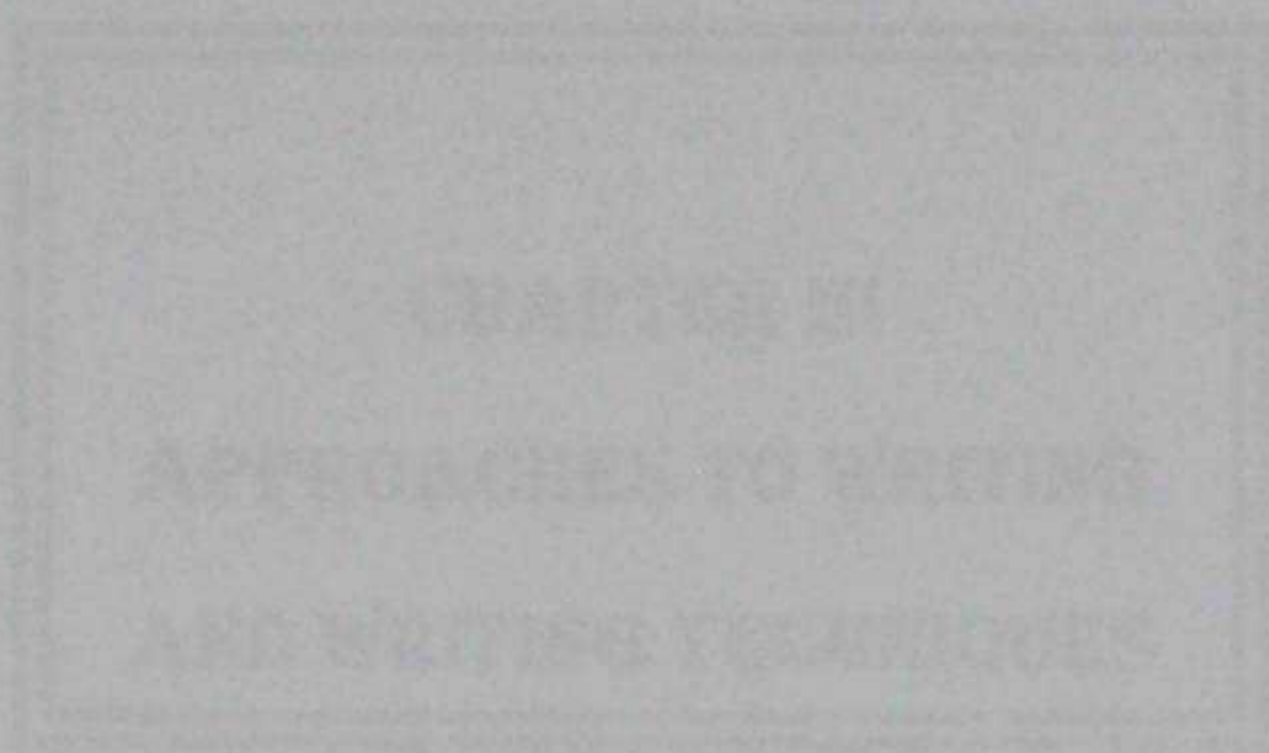
It can be said, then, that errors must be treated depending on their level of importance, the goal of the teacher and course, and the students' writing level. Teachers must value learners, praise their attempts to communicate, and then provide optimal feedback for learners to develop the target language system successfully and be able to communicate meaningfully and unambiguously. The most important point is to make students aware that errors are normal in the writing process and that there are ways to correct them such as proof-reading what they write.

To sum up, all the theorists cited provide useful and very valuable insights on the process of second language acquisition. As stated before, one of the biggest difficulties students face when learning a second language is the interference of their native language. Also, it is important to provide students with comprehensible input and challenge them with input which is a bit beyond their actual proficiency level. Another relevant aspect mentioned before is that there are multiple intelligences and different learning styles and strategies which make the students differ from each other. Therefore, teachers' biggest challenge is to help students improve their writing skills in the classroom.

All this theory is reflected in this study in the sense that to help students improve the writing skill both teachers and students need to know how a second language is learned, what aspects interfere with the acquisition of a second language, what kind of input students must be exposed to, as well as the differences students show in terms of multiple intelligences, learning styles and learning strategies. Learning a second language is a time consuming process that demands being exposed to comprehensible input or input which is a bit beyond their current proficiency level to challenge them and help them increase their



knowledge at their own pace. Moreover, it is important to be acquainted with the problems students might face when learning a second language in order to help them not to feel frustrated and to face those difficulties wisely. In addition, it is imperative that teachers who are interested in improving their students' writing skill discern the differences students show regarding multiple intelligences, learning styles and learning strategies. As a matter of fact, individuals differ from each other in many different aspects. People may have one, two or more intelligences. Also, they learn differently and the strategies a person uses with one individual might not be as useful as they are with another. That is why it is relevant to consider all these aspects when teaching and learning a second language.





**CHAPTER III**  
**APPROACHES TO WRITING**  
**AND WRITING TECHNIQUES**





The teaching of writing is not an easy process. Instructors have to deal with lots of difficulties when teaching writing and one of those problems has to do with the approaches they use to develop this skill. However, before explaining the features of each approach, a clear definition of the terms approach, method and technique is needed.

According to Marianne Celce in her book *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*, an approach "is something that reflects a certain model or paradigm" (5). She clarifies that this is the broadest term of the three. Indeed, an approach is a means of reaching something. It is like a theory. A method, on the other hand, "is a set of procedures, a system that spells out rather precisely how to teach a language" (5). It is a process of accomplishing something. Finally, "a technique" states Celce, "is a classroom device or activity..." (5). It is the procedure by which a task is accomplished.

### **3.1 The Paragraph-Pattern Approach**

To begin with, the paragraph-pattern approach, as it is explained, "is based on the principle that in different cultures people construct and organize their communication with each other in different ways. So even if students organize their ideas well in their first language, they still need to see, analyze, and practice the particular 'English' features of a piece of writing" (8). In this approach, the emphasis is on the format of the piece of writing, not on content or grammatical accuracy. It is important to remember each language has its own rhetoric patterns. Therefore, while for Spanish speakers it would be common to redound on a topic, English speakers are used to going straight to the point, and this is an aspect most students do not know or forget when producing their paragraphs in English.

### **3.2 The Grammar-Syntax-Organization Approach**

The grammar-syntax-organization approach "device[s] writing tasks that lead students to pay attention to organization while they also work on the necessary grammar and syntax. This approach then, links the purpose of a piece of writing to the forms that are needed to convey the message" (8). In this sense, students are even more involved as far as they have to pay attention to form, grammar, and syntax. It means that they have to worry about organizing their



ideas correctly and coherently, and applying the correct grammar and syntax rules of the foreign language to communicate accurate and comprehensible messages.

### **3.3 The Controlled-to-Free Approach**

The controlled-to-free approach, as described in the book *Teaching Writing in ESL classes*, "[...] is sequential: students are first given sentence exercises, then paragraphs to copy or manipulate grammatically by, for instance, changing questions to statements, present to past, or plural to singular" (6). This approach is commonly applied in beginning lessons. It is mainly used to practice grammatical structures. It focuses on grammar, syntax, and mechanics and it highlights accuracy rather than fluency of the final product. In the book *Teaching ESL Writing*, Joy Reid states that students have to copy pieces of information and make different changes or fill in the blanks. Besides, he states that "error is prevented and fluency is projected to take place out of practice of structures." Reid also makes reference to what Dykstra and J. Ross state in some journal articles. These authors say that by using this approach, students are allowed to practice and get accustomed to using correct structures so that they learn to write on their own (24). In brief, this approach emphasizes practice as the only means to achieve proficiency.

### **3.4 The Free-Writing Approach**

Another approach is called the free-writing approach. According to Reid in the book previously mentioned, "the emphasis in this approach is that intermediate level students should put content and fluency first and not worry about form. Once ideas are down on the page, grammatical accuracy, organization, and the rest will gradually follow" (7). In this case, students should focus on content, on getting their message across. According to Peter Elbow, free writing allows students to write their ideas freely on paper without any revision in words or grammar structures that can break up their ideas. Learners are able to discover not only real meaning but also what they want to express in writing (Reid 4). This approach then, leads students to write fluently without worrying about any language rule, and the role of the teacher is making comments rather than corrections. By letting



ideas flow, students center their attention on communication rather than on perfection.

### **3.5 The Language-Based Writing**

The other approach is called the language-based writing. This approach relates to the solving of written exercises in which students practice language components such as verbs, adjectives, or a specific sentence structure that may lead them to the guided and free writing. Two different applications of this approach are possible: audio transcription and sentence combining. In the former, the teacher dictates short passages for learners to recreate them partially or totally after listening to them over and over again (Kroll in Reid 28). Francis Christensen and William Strong developed the concept of sentence-combining. It refers to the chance students have to combine syntactically complex sentences to find out relationships among them and modify them easily (Reid 28). Sentence combining exercises widen the cognitive strategies of students and improve their sentence structure and compositions (Johnson in Reid 28). This approach highlights the importance of mastering the correct sentence structure and appropriate use of different language components to produce accurate pieces of writing. Once students master those aspects, they may start practicing the guided or free writing approaches.

### **3.6 The Pattern-Product Approach**

The pattern-product approach took place after a number of studies on the students' needs and proficiency level in writing in academic classes were carried out. Also, it emerged from the writing based classes which were centered on the writing of compositions. According to Joy Reid in the book *Teaching ESL Writing*, the writing based pedagogy was applied by most of ESL teachers and researchers (29). He mentions that by using this approach, teachers made emphasis on the concepts of thesis statement, topic sentence, paragraph unity, organizational strategies and development of the paragraph by patterns (30). According to the author, the exercises applied were focused on the logic of English organizational patterns such as scrambled paragraphs, irrelevant sentences, among others. Most of the writing assignments were modality-based (30). Hence, the need to produce



well-structured and unified paragraphs is underlined in this approach. By using the correct patterns of organization, students are likely to produce good pieces of writing.

### 3.7 The Process Approach

The sixth approach is known as the process approach. It concentrates on the process of writing. As it is explained in the book *Teaching Writing in ESL Classes*, “[students] explore a topic through writing, showing the teacher and each other their drafts, and using what they write to read, think about, and move them on to new ideas” (10). Also, it clarifies that “teachers who use the process approach give their students two crucial supports: *time* for the students to try out ideas and *feedback* on the content of what they write in their drafts” (10). Instructors play the role of facilitators. They may help students develop their ideas. Their goal should be to instruct students on the writing process itself.

### 3.8 The Communicative Approach

The last approach called the communicative approach “stresses the purpose of a piece of writing and the audience of it. Student writers are encouraged to behave like writers in real life and to ask themselves the crucial questions about purpose and audience: Why am I writing this? Who will read it?” (8). This could be considered as purposeful writing since students already know the conventions of writing and start producing papers for a real purpose and audience. This approach refers to the teaching/learning of different communicative strategies and techniques during the English lessons. Even though students go through different stages in the teaching/learning of English, at the end of this process the most significant objective for them is to achieve an accurate communicative competence. According to the *2005 MEP English Syllabus*, both the learner and the teacher have their own role in the learning process of this language, but they reach for the same aim: to develop good communication skills when interacting with others orally as well as in written form (25). Consequently, the main focus of the teaching of the writing skill is to encourage students to communicate comprehensible messages.



On the whole, all the seven approaches to writing previously mentioned support the theory on second language writing development. They reflect the models or paradigms to teaching writing and explain the different ways of reaching proficiency in this skill.

### **3.9 Writing Techniques**

As mentioned before, a technique is a means, a procedure for achieving something. In this particular study, it can be perceived as a set procedures or activities employed to facilitate the improvement of the writing skill. A definition of writing is given and a differentiation between written and oral language is set before going in depth regarding the different writing techniques that underlie the development of this skill.

#### **3.9.1 Definition of Writing**

Writing can be defined as the organization of ideas in written form. According to Ronald White in the book *Approaches to Writing*, it "is the act of using symbols to express or communicate someone's thoughts through written form" (260). As defined in the *Riverside Webster's II Dictionary*, writing means "to create or put down on paper" (785). As a matter of fact, both oral and written forms of expression differ a lot. White points out that writing entails more formality and awareness of the adequate academic standards that should be taken into consideration to make writing coherent, logical and clear (260). Consequently, students have to follow rules to succeed in writing any kind of paper. Thus, the paragraph format plays a very important role as it provides clarity to the message being expressed. White adds that it is also essential to support the writer's points of view on the topic with strong arguments and examples to show proficiency and to make his or her ideas clear (260). In this way, misunderstanding or miscommunication is avoided. That is why writers should place their ideas in the most logical way to communicate well, and to do this, it is imperative to follow all the rules of academic writing.

#### **3.9.2 Differences between Written and Oral Discourse**



Writing differs from speaking in many aspects. As it is stated by Ronald V. White in *Approaches to Writing*, "writing unlike speech is displaced in time" (260). That is, all the information written on a piece of paper can be referred back over and over again. It remains the same along time and readers have access to it at any moment. Besides, he explains that "as writers write, they are able to monitor their own performance and to make corrections and improvements without the reader being aware of this process of self-correction" (White 206). Indeed, this is one of the greatest advantages writers have. Unlike spoken language, writers can reread the information stated on paper and make all changes they want until making it clear, or until reaching their goal.

Another characteristic of writing has to do with the explicitness of the message. As White points out in his book *Approaches to Writing*, "[b]ecause the writer and reader are normally physically separated, it is important that the writer should be explicit and not take for granted shared knowledge with the reader" (206). In other words, writers should be as clear as possible. They should give comprehensible and simple explanations to help readers understand the intended message, and they should not assume that they and the readers share the same knowledge of a given subject omitting information they might not consider important.

Finally, another relevant difference between oral and written language is the use of expressive features. "Whereas in speaking there are many ways of indicating shades of meaning- through stress, intonation, tone of voice- such features are absent in writing" (White 206). Some expressive features White makes reference to are the use of italics, bold, and upper and lowercase print. All the characteristics mentioned before, then, provide a clear vision of the great differences between oral and written language.

### **3.9.3 The Writing Class**

Teachers must worry not only about the differences between written and oral discourse but also about making the writing process attractive, meaningful and effective. Even though they have to face lots of troubles in the teaching of this skill, instructors should use different techniques and take into account several aspects



to make the writing classes more interesting and meaningful to the students. Their tasks, according to Barbara Kroll in the article "Teaching Writing in the ESL Context", "involve designing and/or implementing a syllabus, structuring individual lessons, providing students with opportunities for writing, and responding to the writing that students produce" (Kroll in Celce-Murcia 251). The syllabus has to meet the curricular goals and the students' particular cognitive level. Currently, the groups are not homogeneous and it makes it even harder for teachers to find a specific methodology to develop the writing skill. That is why it is important to redesign or implement the syllabus in order to meet the learners' needs without leaving aside the curricular goals. Barbara Kroll says that a syllabus should include the following information:

- I. How many writing assignments students are expected to complete during the term.
- II. What the timelines and deadlines are for working on and completing papers.
- III. How many of the writing assignments will be done in class as "timed" pieces and how many will allow for the full drafting process including one or more rounds of revision.
- IV. What aspects of the composing process will be presented.
- V. What aspects of English grammar and syntax, if any, will be directly addressed in class.
- VI. What will be seen to constitute "progress" in acquiring improved writing skills as the term moves along...
- VII. How the student's grade or a decision of credit/no credit will be determined. (Kroll In Celce-Murcia 251)

If a syllabus includes all these aspects and is aimed at meeting student progress in writing proficiency, all student writers would probably find the process itself meaningful and productive as to become skillful in writing.

There are some other aspects teachers have to deal with when teaching a writing lesson and which may inhibit or affect the students' learning process and the product itself. First, Kroll argues that "when students are writing in class, teachers are often uncertain of what they themselves should be doing while the students are writing" (256). Certainly, most teachers take advantage of their students writing to provide feedback or correct the students' mistakes, but they sometimes may wonder what else to do, too. Even though feedback and error correction are two important aspects, is it appropriate to do it while the students are writing? Indeed, it might disrupt the students or make them focus on other



aspects rather on their written product, on getting their message across. Also, Kroll points out that "students generally feel pressured by the limited amount of time available" (256). Time is a key factor in producing a good piece of writing. Students need time to develop their ideas and organize the materials, create drafts, check and proofread their paragraphs. Unfortunately, most writing tasks are time limited which makes students' paragraphs poor. Another consideration has to do with paragraph length. Students sometimes worry too much about how long their paragraphs should be. Some of them are concerned with submitting very short paragraphs while others, on the other hand, produce very extensive paragraphs which sometimes are highly problematic. There should be a relationship between what the topic calls for and the length of the paragraph itself in order to avoid falling on repetitions and producing too long paragraphs which may seem unattractive and boring to readers, or writing very short and simple paragraphs which may lack information to support and illustrate the topic.

Instructors have to make some important judgments before and while responding to their learners' writing. According to Barbara Kroll, some key questions that must be taken into consideration are:

1. What are the general goals within the writing course of providing feedback to student writers?
  2. What are the specific goals of providing feedback on a particular piece of writing?
  3. At what stage in the writing process should feedback be offered?
  4. What form should feedback take?
  5. Who should provide the feedback?
  6. What should students do with the feedback they receive?
- (Kroll in Celce-Murcia 257)

Teachers should determine their general and specific goals for providing feedback on a student written composition. The main or general goal of all language teachers should be to encourage students' improvement on this skill. Besides, they have to decide which the best stage is in the writing process for giving feedback and looking for a variety of response types or methodologies to do it. In this way, they may facilitate their learning process or find out which methods or activities work best for each single student. Furthermore, it is important to determine who should provide the feedback. Sometimes, students understand



best if it is a classmate the one who corrects their mistakes and clarifies their doubts. However, others prefer their teachers to be the ones in charge of providing feedback because of their knowledge and experience. Finally, the way students respond to the feedback given is another key aspect. Indeed, there are students who do not care about the corrections made by their instructor or the suggestions given. They may do not them or use them incorrectly. Consequently, it is imperative that teachers instruct them to maximize the insights of prior feedback in order to become skillful in writing.

There are many ways in which teachers can respond to their students' composition, some of them include written feedback, oral feedback and peer response. Written feedback consists of writing notes on the students' papers for them to analyze and avoid making the same mistakes in future assignments. Oral feedback refers to talking individually to each student about his/her mistakes. In this way, teachers can expand on intended messages which are usually difficult to figure out by just reading. Also, they might avoid misunderstandings caused by written feedback since most students misinterpret their teacher's notes. Finally, peer response or peer correction consists of having students read their classmates' papers and providing input or feedback on their ideas and possible mistakes. However, this is not a very reliable method since students do not master the second language and may fail to correct their classmates. According to Kroll in the article "Teaching Writing in the ESL Context," "because ESL students lack the language competence of native speakers, who can often react intuitively to their classmates' papers, peer responding in the ESL classroom must be modeled, taught, and controlled in order for it to be a valuable activity" (Kroll in Celce-Murcia 259). Consequently, it is essential that teachers be careful when using this method in order not to hinder the learning process.

#### **3.9.4 The Writing Process: Stages of Writing**

Before teaching writing, instructors must provide students with a clear and detailed explanation of the stages the writing process entails to help them develop this skill more accurately. According to Carolyn O'Hearn in her book *Writing, Grammar, and Usage*, "to be an effective writer, you need an understanding of the writing process in general and of your own writing process in particular" (3). Unlike



Maxine Hairston and John J. Ruszkiewicz, she identifies four major stages in the writing process: invention, organization, generation of text, and revision (3). The first stage, invention, "occurs primarily between the time a person is given a writing task and the time he or she sits down to generate text" (4). It is the period in which the brain is either consciously or unconsciously working on the subject to write about. It includes all the ideas or thoughts that cross the writer's mind before he or she actually sits down to write. The second stage, explains Carolyn, "occurs when writers attempt to order, or structure their writing, determining what will come first, second, and so forth. An outline is a form of organization" (4). Then, once writers attempt to arrange all the ideas and thoughts that were generated during the invention step, they are developing the organization stage. It is worth mentioning that this phase constitutes a plan for writing, so that ideas follow a coherent and unified order.

Generation of text is the third stage proposed by O'Hearn. She defines it as "the act of sitting down with pen and paper, typewriter, or computer and producing text" (4). It is, then, the mere process of producing any written assignment. Finally, the revision phase, states Carolyn O'Hearn, "should play a major role in the writing process" (5). She explains three substeps in the revision stage: rewriting, editing, and proofreading. Rewriting includes developing complete ideas, cutting ideas that are not appropriate to the focus of the paper, restructuring and arranging ideas in the most effective order, and reworking the introduction and conclusion since after rewriting the body of the paper, the introduction and conclusion, may probably need to be rewritten (5). Editing, stresses O'Hearn, "requires looking critically at sentence structure and word choice" (5). Thus, it is like correcting grammar mistakes in your draft. Finally, proofreading means scrutinizing or examining your paper for copying errors and other mistakes writers might have overlooked earlier including spelling, punctuation, capitalization and other minor errors (5). After following all these stages, writers actually improve their writing and achieve a better written product.

This information provides students with a clearer and efficient scheme to produce their writing. It may be very useful since it explains the process to be followed to develop the writing skill effectively and efficiently. However, it does not mean that all those steps should be followed in that specific order.



Instead, another characteristic of the writing process is that it is dynamic. Therefore, writers can adapt it to their own needs.

### 3.9.5 Invention Techniques

Once students have a good understanding of the writing process, they may start writing. However, some students may face difficulties when carrying out the first step of this process. Consequently, it may be necessary to make use of invention techniques. According to Ilona Leki in her book *Academic Writing: Exploring Processes and Strategies*, "different individuals have very different styles of creating. An invention technique that is extremely fruitful for one person may produce nothing of interest for another person" (20). Some of the invention techniques she proposes are: freewriting, listing, wh-questions, clusters or branches, cubing, and outlining.

Ilona Leki identifies two kinds of freewriting. The first type, she states, "allows you to empty your mind temporarily of everyday concerns so that you can concentrate on the task at hand. The other type" she explains, "helps you begin to explore your ideas on a subject" (21). If students need to write an assignment but they feel distracted, they can use the first type of freewriting. It consists of writing down everything that comes to one's mind for five or more minutes until getting all distractions out of the mind and can concentrate on the writing assignment. The other type can be useful when writers have to develop a composition on a specific subject, but they do not know on what aspects to focus. Then, they write everything that comes to their mind about that topic for ten minutes. They cannot stop. If they do not know how to say something, they may leave a blank or write it in the native language. After they are finished, they can reread their ideas and choose the expressions that they like or that they think can be further developed (21- 22).

Listing consists of writing down everything that comes to the writer's mind about a topic, but they do not write sentences. Instead, they write only words or



quick phrases (23). As when using freewriting, writers can reread their ideas and develop those that seem useful and relevant to their topic. The third invention technique proposed by Leki is called wh-questions. She explains that it is about asking questions like who, what, when, where, why, and sometimes how to help writers find details about their subject and restart their writing if for some reason they get blocked (25). Asking questions like those may provide writers with some important details about their subject that could be missing if using any other technique. It provides them with a vision from many different angles.

Clusters or branches are the fourth technique Leki mentions in her book *Academic Writing: Exploring Processes and Strategies*. It is about writing the topic of the composition in the middle of a sheet of paper, and then writing down all the things that can be associated with it. Writers have to continue the process by finding associations for each of the things they write down. Finally, they try to group items into clusters or categories. In this way, they may get a clearer and more organized view of what they are going to write about. Another technique Leki suggests is cubing. According to what she says, cubing involves looking at an idea from six different points, each representing one of the six sides of a cube. She sets forth six different angles from which writers should examine their subject: describe it, compare it, analyze it, associate it, apply it, and argue for or against it (30). When finished, writers can reread what they have written to find a perspective on which to develop their composition.

The last technique mentioned by Ilona Leki is outlining. Actually, this is the technique most writers usually apply when creating a composition. As she states, "an outline is a structured method of exploring your thoughts on a subject. [...] the outline functions as a plan for writing. It is extremely helpful in dividing up the big task of writing a formal paper into the much more manageable task of writing small parts that will eventually make a unified and organized whole" (Leki 30). Thus, it can be said that an outline is a very detailed view or organization of what a composition is about. It exemplifies how a paper is developed and the different perspectives on a subject that are focused and explained.

There is one more strategy that has to be mentioned. It is called brainstorming. Although it is not mentioned by Leki, this is a very useful strategy



for having students get started in writing. It consists of having learners mention as much information as possible on a given topic. According to Barbara Kroll in Celce-Murcia, "all of the students in the class are encouraged to participate by sharing their collective knowledge about a particular topic... then all students can utilize any or all of the information when turning to the preparation of their first drafts" (252). This kind of group exercise is very helpful as long as many important ideas result from it. Besides, the students have the chance to share their information about a given topic with the rest of the classmates, giving them valuable information for their assignments. In sum, this technique may help students acquire more vocabulary items and ideas that may enrich their pieces of writing.

To sum up, invention techniques are very useful for getting started, developing ideas and thoughts and organizing ideas in a paragraph. As it was said before, a technique which is be very helpful for one student may not be as fruitful for another. Therefore, students have to explore these techniques and find out which ones work best for each of them. By taking advantage of invention techniques students can actually improve their pieces of writing.

### **3.9.6 What is a Paragraph?**

At this point, it becomes imperative to give a definition of what a paragraph is. A paragraph consists of several sentences that are grouped together to discuss one main subject. This has three main parts: the topic sentence or introduction, the body sentences, and the concluding sentence. A well written paragraph should have three main characteristics. It has to be unified, coherent, and complete. First, it has to be unified; all the utterances develop one main idea, stated commonly at the beginning of the paragraph. Second, it has to be coherent. All its sentences have to be logical, integrated and clear. Finally, a paragraph has to be complete. It must have sufficient facts, examples and details to support the main subject of the paragraph. A good paragraph has to be clearly stated and supported. The details and facts written have to reinforce and support the thesis or the main idea of the paragraph (Leki 77).



There are different kinds of paragraphs. Some of the most common are: descriptive, narrative, comparative, and argumentative paragraphs. All of them are composed of different elements. However, they follow the same paragraph structure; topic sentence (introduction), supporting details (development) and the concluding sentence (conclusion). The main idea is the central point or issue on which the whole text is focused. Generally, the main idea is stated in the beginning of a paragraph, but it can also appear in the middle or at the end. According to Ilona Leki in the book *Academic Writing: Exploring Processes and Strategies*, the main point of a paragraph is traditionally called the topic sentence and it helps the reader see in which direction the author intends to move in a paragraph (78). The surrounding statements serve the purpose of explaining, illustrating or supporting the main idea. These utterances are called supporting details. Finally, the concluding sentence constitutes a brief summary of what the paragraph is about. It restates the main idea.

### 3.9.7 What Makes Paragraphs Work?

In order to make any paragraph work, learners must take into consideration the parts of the paragraphs. However, there are two common paragraph problems all writers must learn to handle: paragraph sprawl and bad paragraph appearance (Hairston, Maxine and John J. Ruskiewicz 157). According to the definitions stated by the writers previously mentioned in the book *The Scott Foresman Handbook for Writers*:

Paragraph sprawl is an internal problem because it concerns the way a paragraph works. It affects its unity and coherence [...]. [It] can occur when the sentences in a paragraph go off in different directions, when a single paragraph seems to include several unconnected ideas, or when several sentences in a paragraph seem not to have a logical order; that is, if they would fit just as well in one place as another. (157)

In order to fight this problem, writers must avoid producing generalizations. It is better to write straight- to- the- point ideas, provide readers with direct ideas, be very specific, and provide details. Paragraphs must follow a pattern from general to specific. So, it must begin with a main idea and expand it with details. Sentences that do not have any relation to the topic have to be eliminated. Also, repeating the same ideas over and over again is not appropriate. The writer must



go straight to the point and illustrate it with details to make the paragraph unified and coherent.

According to Maxine Hairston and John J. Ruskiewicz in *The Scott Foresman Handbook for Writers*, bad paragraph appearance "is an external problem because it concerns the way a paragraph looks" (157). Writers should be very careful about the way their paragraphs look; that is, their paragraph length. Too long paragraphs may look boring or uninteresting. Very short paragraphs may lack information or look too simple and unattractive. Consequently, writers should find an appropriate paragraph length that excites the curiosity of their readers. It does not mean that there should not be too long or short paragraphs, but they must try to keep a balance between them to make their compositions more appealing. Maxine Hairston and John J. Ruskiewicz declare that "a piece of writing has its own 'body language' that can make readers react to it positively or negatively" (250). Consequently, creating a good appearance is imperative to get the readers' attention and invite them to read a paragraph.

Moreover, writers must take into account the audience and purpose of their paragraphs. To identify to whom a composition is aimed, writers should wonder to whom they are writing or who is going to read it. In the book *The Scott Foresman Handbook for Writers*, Maxine Hairston and John J. Ruskiewicz point out that writers should "[d]raw a mental picture of [their] readers as a group, or perhaps choose one individual who [...] typifies that audience" (14). Moreover, Maxine Hairston and John J. Ruskiewicz state that it is necessary to analyze the characteristics of the readers. They emphasize that it is imperative to know about the readers' values, attitudes, and reasons for reading the composition, knowledge of the topic, beliefs, and power of conviction (15). Recognizing the audience might provide writers with a great and powerful tool to appeal to their feelings and emotions. Also, Carolyn O'Hearn states in the book *Writing, Grammar, and Usage* that "a clear sense of audience will help make your writing easier and more effective" (7). Indeed, identifying the audience might be useful for writers to know what mechanical adaptations to produce to make their compositions more comprehensible.



Regarding the purpose, writers must be clear on what they want to achieve with their composition. They should identify what their general aim is. For instance, they have to decide whether they want to narrate, inform, entertain, persuade, argue, describe, among others. In order to determine a purpose in writing, writers have to state what they hope to accomplish, reflect on how readers shape their goals, and consider the various dimensions of their paper (Hairston, Maxine and John J. Ruskiewicz 18-19). It means writers have to know to whom they are writing and what their expectations might be in order to cause a good impression and acceptance from readers.

### **3.9.8 Descriptive Paragraphs**

There are different types of paragraphs. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this research, the descriptive paragraph is emphasized. Descriptive paragraphs are commonly taught to describe what one specific thing, place or person looks like. In academic English this kind of paragraph is more emphasized. However, most high school students do not know how to write descriptive paragraphs. They do not even know how to state the main idea of the paragraph.

When writing descriptive paragraphs, writers should provide readers with a lot of specific details. They have to take into account what the topic sentence really is and the kind of supporting details they are going to include in their piece of writing.

Carolyn O'Hearn declares in her book *Writing, Grammar, and Usage* that "description is primarily sensory in nature; when writers describe, they use the language of the senses- sights, hearing, touch, smell, and taste" (21). According to this author, a good description is filled with specific details such as color, shape and size, taste, and touch or texture. Also, writers can make use of phrases of location and figures of speech. O'Hearn explains that some writers lack development. That is, they do not provide enough details when they write descriptions. Instead, they make a generalization, a judgment about the attractiveness or appearance of a person, animal, place or object, and then they repeat the generalization in as many ways as they can (22).



Descriptive paragraphs can follow different patterns of organization. According to Carolyn O'Hearn in the book *Writing, Grammar, and Usage*, "when writing descriptions, [writers] must choose the best approach; [they] should not simply provide random details in no particular order" (23). She proposes the following methods of organizing a description:

Clockwise	Counterclockwise
Inside to outside	Outside to inside
Left to right	Right to left
Top to bottom	Bottom to top
Foreground to background	Background to foreground

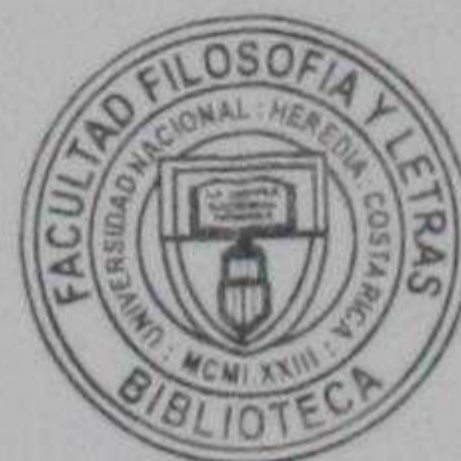
The clockwise method refers to the organization of ideas following the direction in which the hands of a clock rotate. Counterclockwise, on the contrary, accounts for the production of paragraphs following a direction opposite to that in which the hands of a clock move. The inside to outside method consists of describing items from their interior to their external part. Outside to inside is the other way around. Then, left to right refers to the description of items, pictures, scenes or people from their left side to their right side. Right to left is the opposite. Top to bottom stands for the production of ideas from the highest part or point to the lowest. Bottom to top, then, means organizing ideas from the lowest to the highest point. Finally, foreground to background is the pattern of organization in which writers begin describing the part of a picture or view depicted as nearest to the viewer to surface or area against which objects are seen or represented. Background to foreground, on the other hand, consists of describing the part of a picture or view depicted as furthest to the viewer to surface or area against which objects are seen or represented.

Descriptive paragraphs must follow one of these patterns of organization, and writers should provide a detailed description of the scene, person, animal, place, or object they are describing. Besides, they should always remember to



appeal to the five senses when describing to offer readers a more realistic picture. It is also imperative that writers use precise language to make their compositions more attractive and effective. Using vague language makes descriptions boring and uninteresting. By taking into account all these considerations, the students' paragraphs may reveal an adequate mastery of what a descriptive paragraph is.

Summing up, there is a great variety of writing techniques teachers may use to develop this skill and particularly, to improve the production of descriptive paragraphs. Once more, it is worth mentioning that aspects such as the students' different intelligences, learning styles and strategies need to be considered before determining which technique works best for a particular classroom setting, course or group of students.





**CHAPTER IV**  
**PART I**  
**METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES**  
**OF THE FIELD WORK**



#### **4.1 Type of Investigation**

The experimental method was applied in order to conduct this investigation. According to L.R. Gay in the book *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application*, experimental research is the only method of research that can truly test hypotheses concerning cause-and-effect relationships (298). Therefore, it was useful for the development of this research since it allowed researchers to work with new methodological techniques to improve the teaching of descriptive paragraph writing skills in the target language with two groups of eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista Isaiás Retana Arias in Pérez Zeledón.

Both groups are experimental because the purpose of the study was to help the students improve their writing skills. It involved direct work with the sources of information (the students), the administration of a pretest at the beginning of the research and one posttest at the end as verifying instruments. The tests are reliable because they were based exactly on the production part of the common tests that students were used to taking in the English class. Besides, the results obtained in the pretest showed that 25 students out of 37 got grades lower than the minimum passing grade, 70.

#### **4.2 Subjects or Sources of Information**

This investigation was developed with two eleventh grade groups of students, thirty eight students as a whole. Both groups were experimental. It means that the methodological proposal was applied in both groups. In addition, both groups were heterogeneous. The students had different cognitive levels. Some of them were very skillful in writing while others were not. Their lexical and grammatical knowledge of the second language was average. There were just few exceptions of outstanding students with a very good proficiency level. Regarding their knowledge of the correct paragraph structure, none of them knew how a paragraph is organized. They used the structure and rhetoric they commonly employ when writing paragraphs in their native language.

The teacher they worked with is very knowledgeable. He graduated from the University of Costa Rica and has a Bachelor's degree in the teaching of



English as a second language. He has been working as a teacher of English for eight years. From the observations made, the researchers can conclude that he has good knowledge of the English language. However, his teaching methodology is not appropriate. Most of his lessons were teacher-based. He gave short oral explanations about the topic being studied at the beginning of each class and had students work by themselves with the book "Have Fun" for eleventh grade. He clarified very few doubts and his lessons were taught in Spanish most of the time. He was usually sitting in a chair during the whole lesson and he did not check his students' performance and understanding of the topic. He did not have a good control of the group. Students were usually talking and laughing, or just doing nothing. Indeed, his lessons were not very attractive and meaningful to the students.

#### **4.3 Variables: Definition**

Some aspects may interfere in the development of this research as long as they are unpredictable, changeable, uneven or erratic. The first aspect to be cited is the Learners' proficiency level. It can be defined as the proficiency students have in writing descriptive paragraphs in the target language. There might be very skillful students as well as poor writers. Some students may have good knowledge of the foreign language vocabulary, grammar, syntax and paragraph structure while, on the other hand, there may be learners who have difficulty with all or some of those aspects. Consequently, their writing proficiency might vary from one student to the other. Another variable is called writing techniques. It stands for the techniques both teachers and students apply when teaching or learning how to write descriptive paragraphs respectively. Finally, the methodology used in the English class constitutes another possible variable. It refers to the systematic procedure or the regular way in which the teacher teaches his class. All these variables may cause the results of the investigation to be rather unpredictable since there might be changes which affect the information.

#### **4.4 Instrumentation**

The following instruments were used for the purpose of getting the information required to prove the effectiveness of this project and the new



techniques applied. The variables proposed in this investigation were mainly focused on students' individual characteristics and the teacher's current application of some methodological approaches. The instruments used to carry out the investigation and to gather valuable data include:

- 4.4.1 Questionnaire for the students:** It included ten close questions. This instrument was used to find out what the students knew about writing techniques and descriptive paragraphs. Also, it was useful for detecting some possible problems students had when writing in the target language. It helped researchers determine the students' favorite topics for writing.
- 4.4.2 Questionnaire for the teacher:** It included nine close questions. This instrument evidenced the teacher's current application of writing techniques and provided valuable information about common aspects that hinder the teaching of the writing skill.
- 4.4.3 Pretest:** It consisted of the production of two descriptive paragraphs. First, students were given a picture and they were asked to write a descriptive paragraph about it. Then, they had to write an e-mail describing their favorite kinds of music. This instrument helped researchers to determine the students' proficiency level in regards to the descriptive paragraph writing skill.
- 4.4.4 Posttest:** It was the same as the pre-test. This kind of test evidenced the effectiveness of the application of the new techniques in both groups. Besides, it helped researchers get the final results.

#### **4.5 Description of the process**

The research was carried out by following a set of steps. First, the experimental groups were administered a questionnaire to find out what their favorite topics were and what they knew about writing approaches, techniques and strategies. Also, it was useful for determining what techniques and strategies the teacher applied in his classes. Then, a pre-test was administered to find out about their weaknesses and strengths when writing descriptive paragraphs. Then, the results were analyzed and a methodological proposal was designed and applied to help students improve this skill. This methodological proposal consisted of the



development of thirteen lesson plans in which students were explained what a descriptive paragraph is and how ideas should be organized. Also, the students put into practice different writing techniques and strategies to produce accurate descriptive paragraphs about different topics. After this process was finished, a post-test was administered to draw a set of conclusions and give some recommendations to improve the way writing is taught and learned in high schools.

Also, a booklet was designed for the purpose of providing teachers and students with helpful exercises and tasks to improve the teaching/learning of the writing skill. It is innovative because the activities and techniques included are put together in a booklet aimed at a specific objective: improving the descriptive paragraph writing skill. The activities were taken from different sources (textbooks, magazines, and internet) and adapted or modified to reach this objective. Besides, the activities and techniques proved to be innovative and attractive for the students since it was the first time they studied and developed them in their English classes.

#### **4.6 Teaching Procedure Applied**

The 20 lessons taught during two months (August-October, 2007) by the researchers followed the usual order of any class. The topics taught were chosen by the students. As stated before, at the very beginning, they were required to fill out a questionnaire in which they had to arrange a list of topics into their order of preference or interest. A different topic was developed every two weeks and a different teaching technique was emphasized. The warm-up carried out every class consisted of different games or communicative tasks in which students had to apply the techniques studied in the previous class. Also, they reinforced new vocabulary related to the topic. Some of the activities carried out include playing hot potato, bumping balloons and answering questions, playing hanged man, among others.

In the presentation stage, the researchers gave some brief but detailed explanations about the paragraph and its parts, emphasizing on descriptive paragraphs. Besides, they taught different writing techniques the students could apply to develop good descriptive paragraphs. Some pictures and realia were



used in order to introduce the topics and techniques. Also, they brainstormed titles and some main ideas for their compositions. The best titles and ideas were chosen for them to develop a piece of writing. It is worth mentioning that during the presentation stage, explanations were given in English, but when the students showed difficulty understanding what the teachers were talking about, their native language was used. In addition, it is necessary to clarify that in every lesson a different part of the process of paragraph writing was explained and worked out.

Afterwards, the students began the practice stage. The students started producing titles. Then, they continued with the main ideas and supporting details. Finally, they developed concluding ideas. Most of the tasks were developed individually; however, some activities were carried out in groups and pairs. Some explanations and examples about the new techniques they had to apply were provided before they put them into practice. An outstanding aspect about the development of the lessons is that most of the students (the students from group 11-2) were always willing to participate. Also, the researchers found out that they knew nothing about writing techniques and the parts of a paragraph. Besides, they applied the writing styles they used when producing in Spanish. Most of their ideas were incomplete, out of context and lacked coherence.

For the consolidation stage, the students produced short paragraphs about the topics studied. They began step by step until they wrote a complete paragraph. All paragraphs were corrected and returned to the students. Feedback on their most common mistakes was provided every lesson.

The researchers played the role of guides and facilitators throughout the development of the teaching-learning process. They clarified doubts and provided feedback whenever it was necessary. Furthermore, they were in charge of assessing the progress of the students.



**PART II**  
**RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION**



The following data analysis presents all the results obtained in relation to the main point of study: the improvement of the students' descriptive paragraph writing skills through the development of effective writing techniques. These results were obtained after analyzing the information collected with the instruments applied. For that purpose, a graphical representation of the results obtained is offered.

#### 4.7.1 Chart #1

Results obtained from the questionnaire answered by the teacher.

Questions	Answers
1. Do you like to teach writing?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> A Little
2. Do you have enough material to teach writing?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> A Little
3. Do you use writing techniques when teaching writing?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> A Little
4. If your answer in question number 3 was yes, put an "x" next the techniques you apply in the writing class.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Titles <input type="checkbox"/> Matching <input type="checkbox"/> Making Lists <input type="checkbox"/> Taking notes <input type="checkbox"/> Brainstorming <input type="checkbox"/> Main Ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Semantic Maps
5. Do you think teaching writing is important?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> A Little



6. Are your students interested in writing?

- Yes  
 No  
 Sometimes

7. Put an "X" next to the aspects you consider are the most difficult for your students when learning how to write in English.

- Orthography  
 Vocabulary  
 Coherence  
 Punctuation  
 Main Ideas  
 Concluding ideas  
 Supporting Ideas  
 Grammar

8. Do you think your students need to improve their writing skill?

- Yes  
 No  
 A Little

9. Put an "X" next to the topics your students consider are interesting to write about.

- Health  
 Trips  
 Music  
 Family  
 Animals  
 Sports  
 Education  
 Environment  
 Entertainment  
 Social problems  
 Others



The application of this instrument is relevant since it provides researches with important information to confirm that the teaching of the writing skill is not given enough importance in high school and that teachers lack training in the teaching of that skill. The answers show that although the teacher likes teaching writing, considers it important and has enough material to help students develop this skill, he does not take advantage of those aspects and focuses his teaching just in producing titles as he replied to question number 4. Besides, according to the answer given to question number 6, we can conclude that the teaching of the writing skill may be negatively affected as far as students are not motivated enough. Therefore, learners need to be encouraged to express themselves in written form. Question number 7 evidences the main problems students face when writing according to the teacher's perception. Finally, the teacher agrees that students need to improve the writing skill.

**Results obtained from the questionnaire answered by the students.**

#### 4.7.2 Chart #2

##### Students' Preferences about English

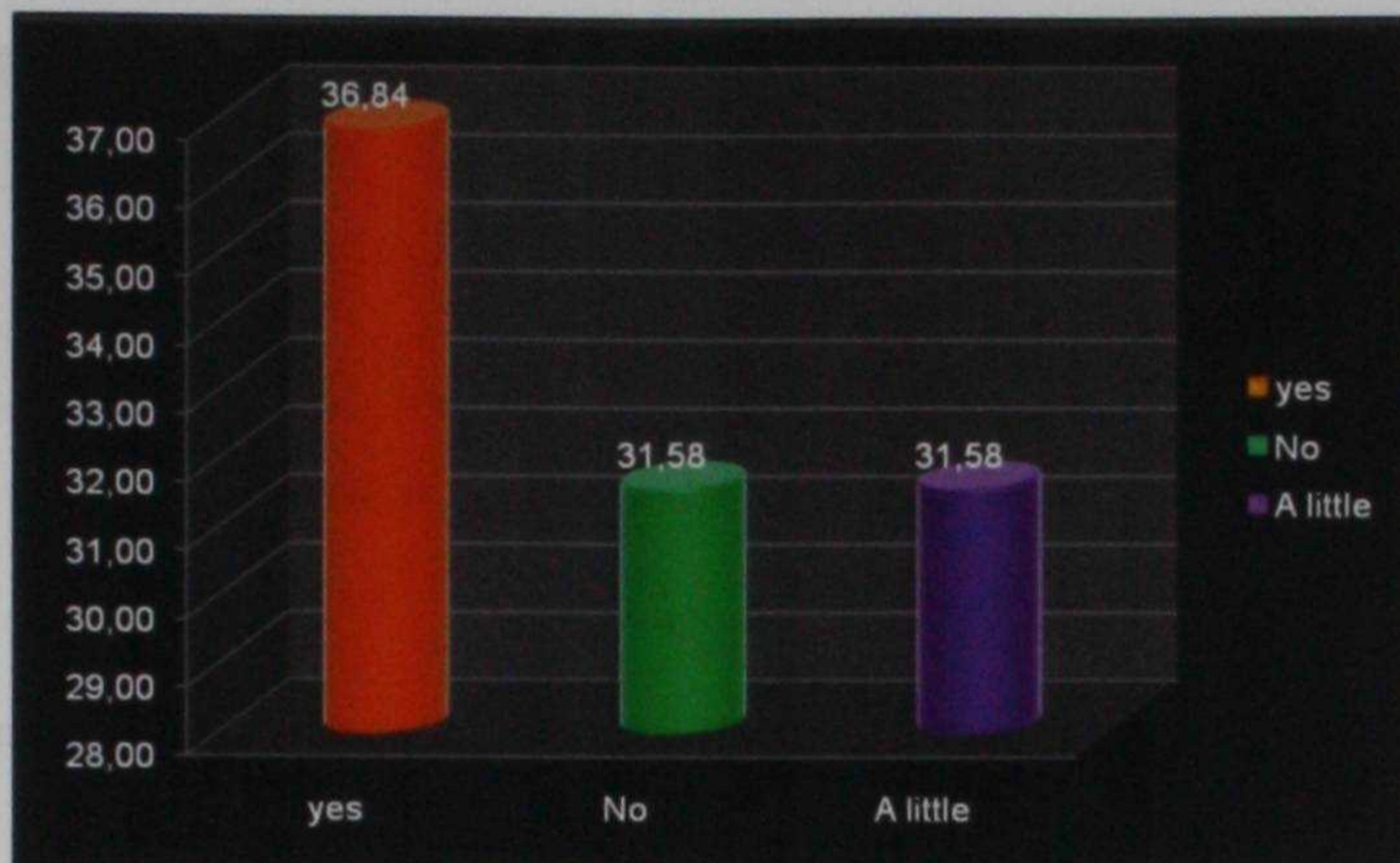
Series	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	14	36,84
No	12	31,58
Little	12	31,58
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100,00</b>

**Source:** Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006



## 4.7.3 Graph #1

Students' Preferences about English



**Source:** Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006

In a sample of 38 students, there were only 14 students (36.84%) who liked English while 12 students (31.58%) disliked it and 12 students (31.58%) showed little interest in this language.

The results obtained in this first question show that the students' preferences about English are not good enough. Most of them do not like English or like it a little which might interfere with the learning of this language. Motivation plays an important role in the teaching of a foreign language. If students are not interested enough, they will not perform as well as those who are interested. This information is relevant for researchers since they can work on this aspect and motivate students to learn the language.



#### 4.7.4 Chart #3

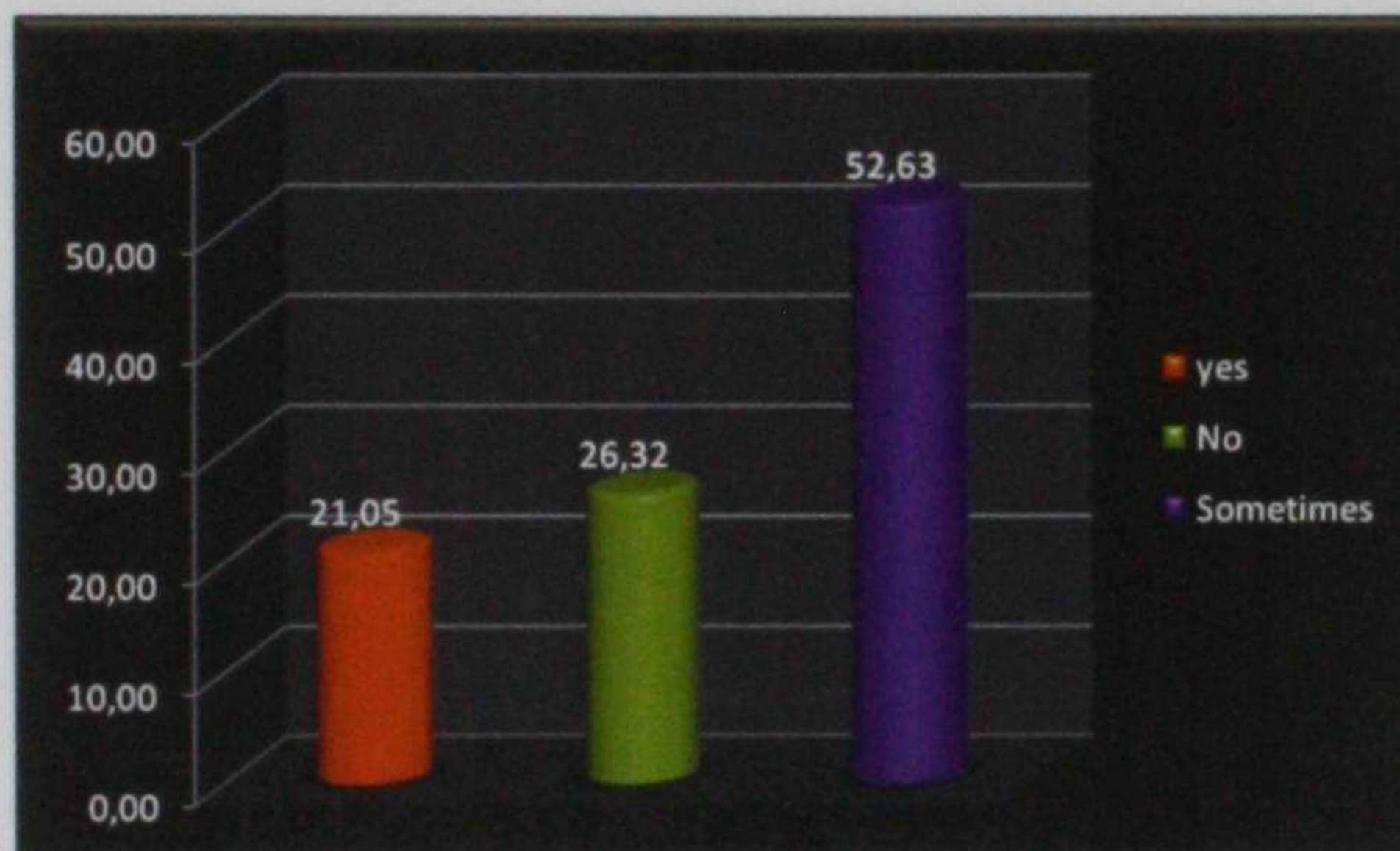
Use of Appropriate Material to Develop the Writing Skill during the English Class

Series	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	8	21,05
No	10	26,32
Sometimes	20	52,63
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100,00</b>

**Source:** Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006

#### 4.7.5 Graph #2

Use of Appropriate Material to Develop the Writing Skill during the English Class



**Source:** Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006

The students' answers showed that only 21.05% agreed that the teacher used appropriate material to develop the writing skill during the English class while 26.32% answered that he did not, and 52.63 % stated that he sometimes used material.

This graph evidences that students are not exposed to appropriate teaching material to develop the writing skill which might be an obstacle to become



competent enough in that skill. The aim of this study is to provide both teachers and students with a booklet to enhance the writing skill.

#### 4.7.6 Chart #4

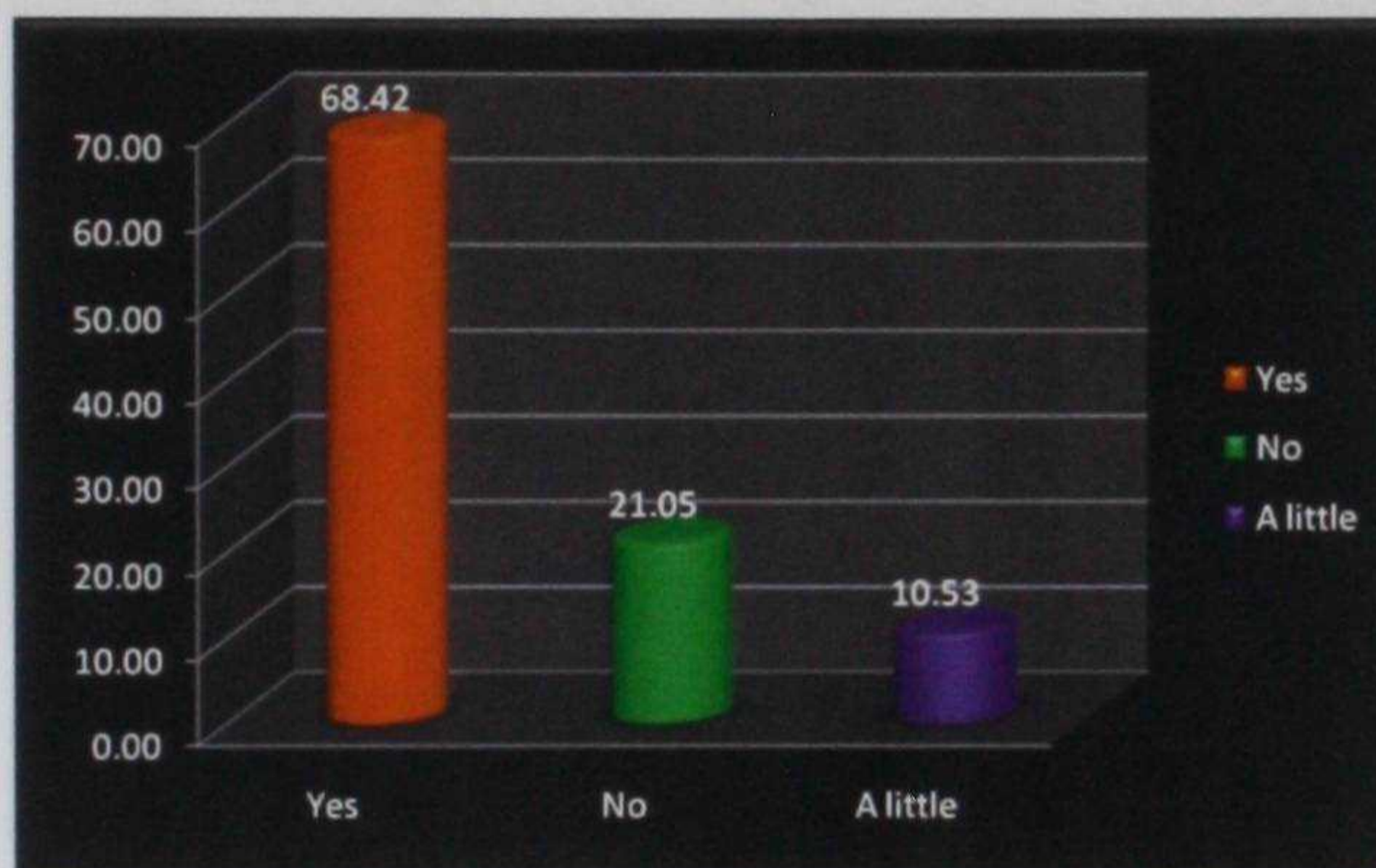
Students' Knowledge of Descriptive Paragraphs

Series	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	26	68,42
No	8	21,05
A little	4	10,53
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006

#### 4.7.7 Graph #3

Students' Knowledge of Descriptive Paragraphs



Source: Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006

This graph shows that 68.42% of the students knew what a descriptive paragraph is and only 21.05% of them did not, while 10.53% had a little idea of what it is.



This is a positive aspect for researchers as long as the great majority of the students had knowledge of what a descriptive paragraph is; however, it does not mean that they know how to produce descriptions in English. As a matter of fact, there are some students who need to be explained what a descriptive paragraph is.

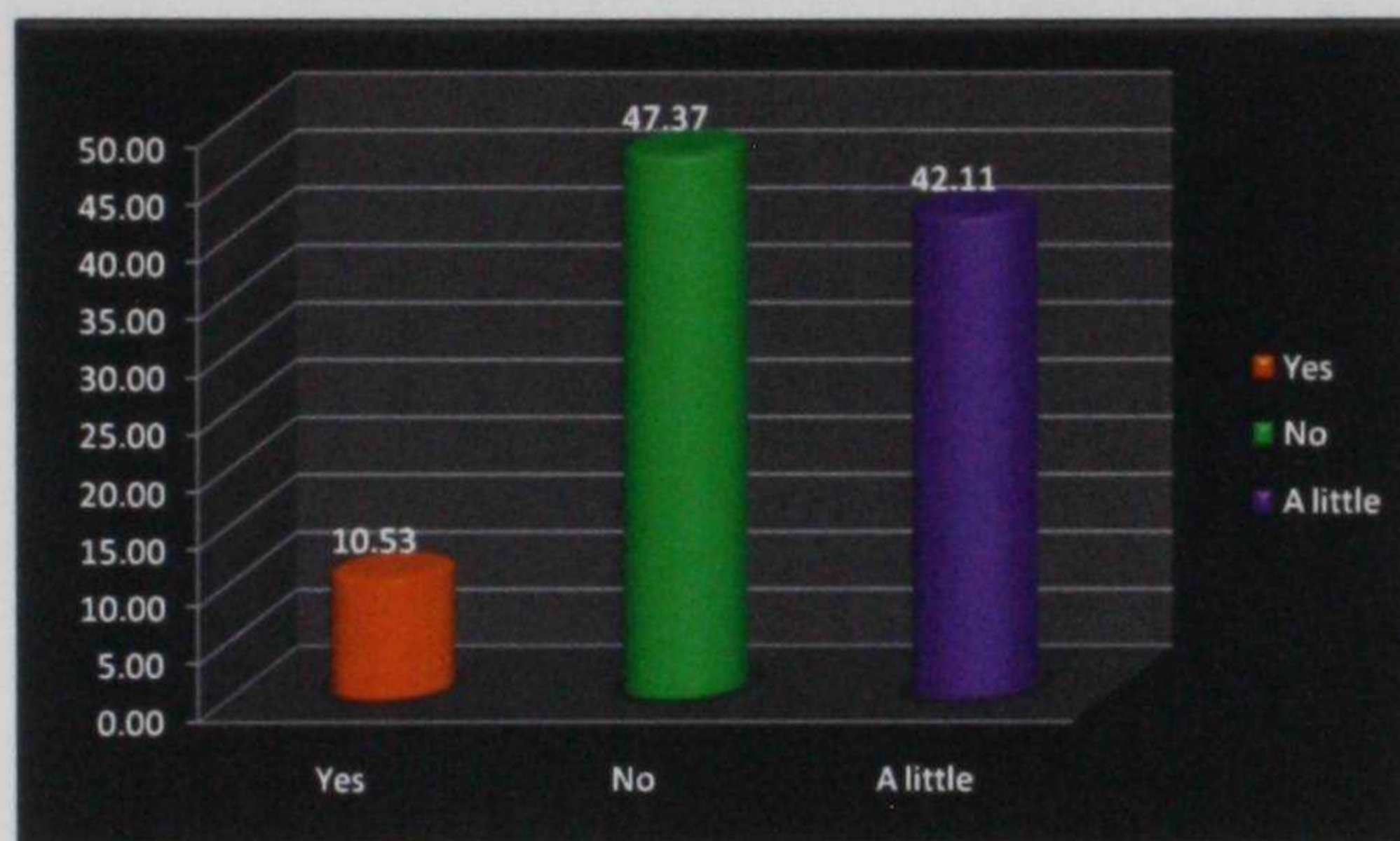
#### 4.7.8 Chart #5

Students' Knowledge of Writing Descriptive Paragraphs

Series	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	4	10.53
No	18	47.37
A Little	16	42.11

#### 4.7.9 Graph #4

Students' Knowledge of Writing Descriptive Paragraphs



**Source:** Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006

This graph evidences that 47.37 % of the students did not know how to write a descriptive paragraph, 42.11 % knew a little, while only 10.53% of them did know how to write this type of paragraph.



It can be concluded that students are not properly taught how to write descriptive paragraphs. Only four students knew how to write descriptions and after five years of English instruction, it constitutes evidence to prove that students lack training.

#### 4.7.10 Chart #6

Problems Students Face When Writing in English

Series	Number of students	Percentage
Spelling	26	17,81
Punctuation	8	5,48
Vocabulary	34	23,29
Coherence	24	16,44
Main Ideas	16	10,96
Supporting ideas	16	10,96
Concluding ideas	22	15,07
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006





## 4.7.11 Graph #5

Problems Students Face When Writing in English



**Source:** Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006

As it can be seen, the students' main problem relates to vocabulary which represents 23.29%. Also, 17.81% of the students said they had problems in spelling, 16.44% in coherence, 15.07% in concluding ideas, 10.96% in writing main and supporting ideas, and 5.48% in punctuation. In this case, the question was answered by 38 students the same as all other questions; however, the total is 146 since each student had the chance to mark more than one option.

This information is useful for this research since knowing what problems students face when writing is relevant to determine how difficult it is for them to express their ideas in written form. Lack of coherence may cause unclear ideas. Not writing correct main ideas, supporting ideas and concluding ideas could make the paragraph uninteresting, senseless, and vague. In addition, poor language management might result in poor paragraph development. Finally, errors in spelling and punctuation may cause misunderstandings. Obviously, it is necessary to work on these aspects during the application of the new methodological proposal to help students avoid committing errors and express their ideas more effectively.



## 4.7.12 Chart #7

Students' Knowledge of Writing Techniques

Series	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	0	0,00
No	30	78,95
A little	8	21,05
TOTAL	38	100,00

Source: Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006

## 4.7.13 Graph #6

Students' knowledge of Writing Techniques



Source: Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006

This graph evidences that 78.95% of the students did not know any writing techniques while 21.95% of them said they had little knowledge of them.

Evidently, most of the students did not know what techniques they could apply to write paragraphs more efficiently and easier. It can be concluded that most of the time students are asked to produce pieces of writing without having



even practiced and being explained any writing technique. These techniques help students get started, produce ideas and develop thoughts. Not knowing about them may cause the students trouble when writing. This information is relevant for researchers to find out and provide both teachers and students with new and better techniques to improve their writing skills.

#### 4.7.14 Chart #8

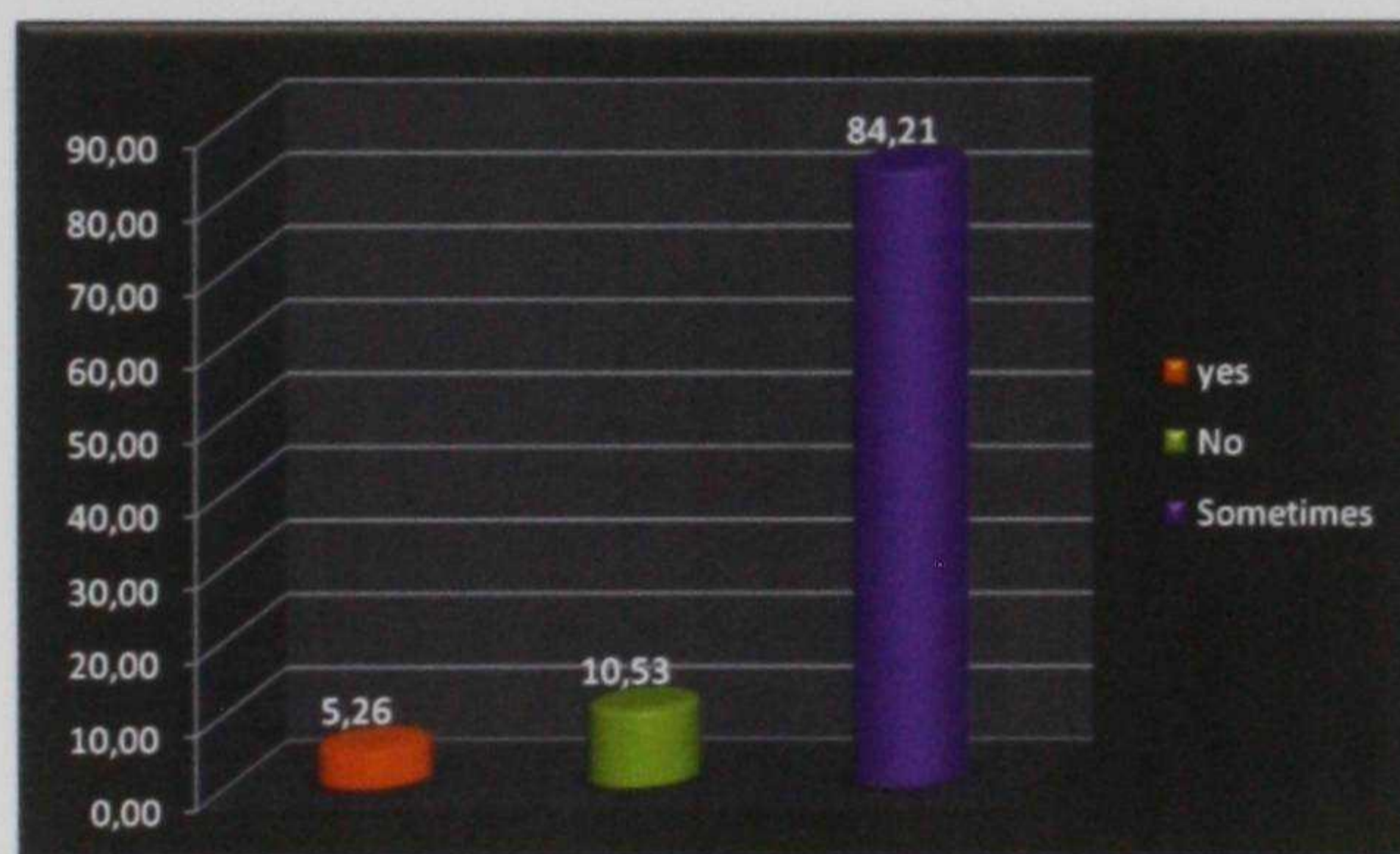
Teaching of Descriptive Paragraphs in the English Class

Series	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	2	5,26
No	4	10,53
Sometimes	32	84,21
TOTAL	38	100,00

Source: Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006

#### 4.7.15 Graph #7

Teaching of Descriptive Paragraphs in the English Class



Source: Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006



This graph shows that only 5.26% of the students said the teacher taught them how to write descriptive paragraphs, 10.53% of them disagreed with this idea, and 84.21% of the students replied that the teacher sometimes taught them how to write this type of paragraph.

As it can be observed, only two students said the teacher taught them how to produce descriptive paragraphs. Therefore, the great majority did not know how to write descriptions or did not know at all due to the lack of teacher instruction on this aspect. Researchers should take into consideration this aspect and give clear explanations about how to write descriptions in English.

#### 4.7.16 Chart #9

Teacher Application of Writing Techniques

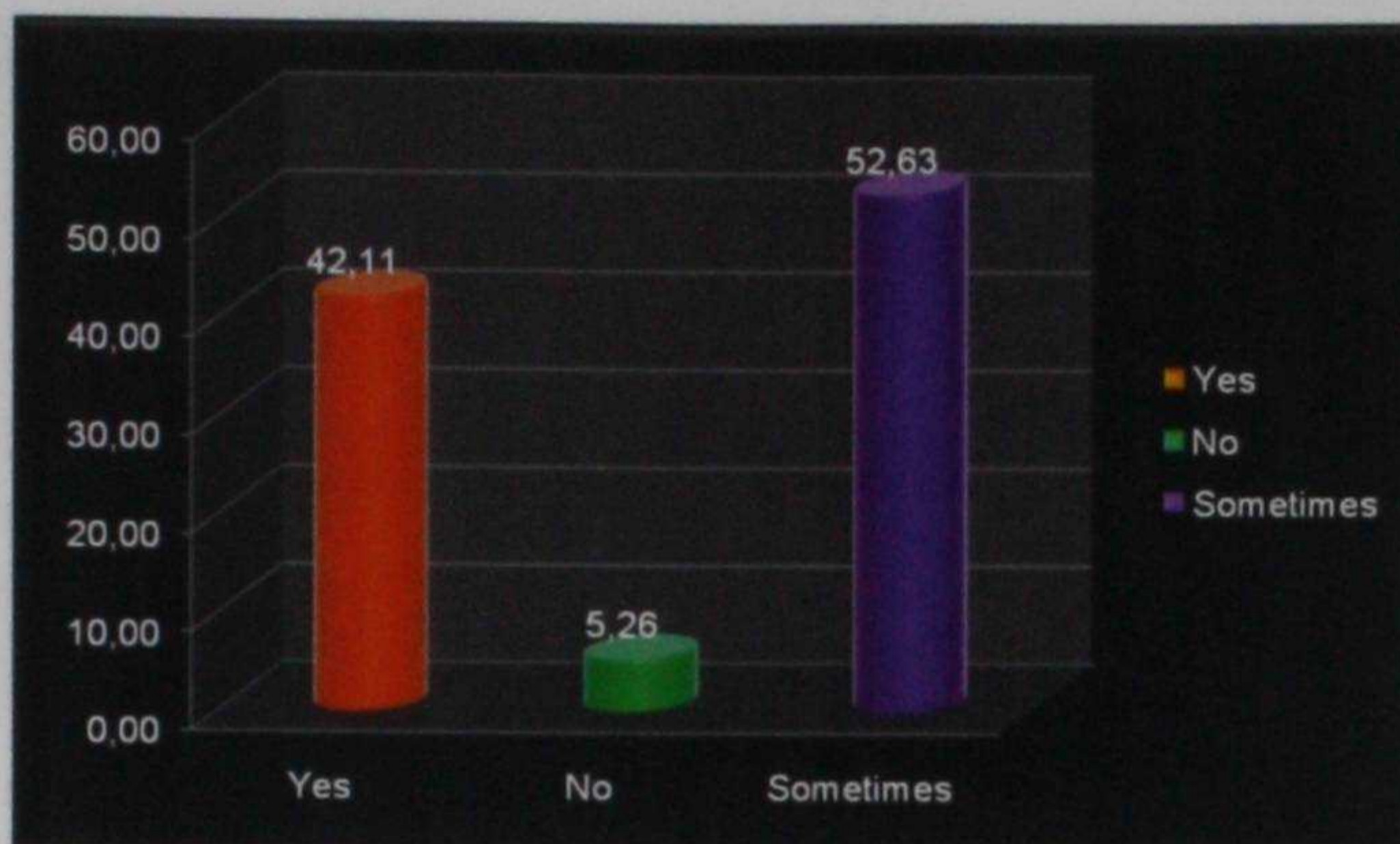
Series	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	16	42,11
No	2	5,26
Sometimes	20	52,63
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100,00</b>

**Source:** Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006



## 4.7.17 Graph #8

## Teacher Application of Writing Techniques



**Source:** Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006

This graph indicates that 52.63 % of the students said that the teacher applied a few writing techniques during his class, 47.37% of them said that the instructor did apply writing techniques, and only 5.26% said that the teacher did not apply those techniques.

This graph also evidences that during the English class the teacher did apply writing techniques to help students write more easily. However, this answer causes controversy because in graph number six no student said that he or she knew what a writing technique was. Therefore, the researchers cannot assure that the students' answers are reliable. This information is relevant to determine whether or not students knew what writing techniques they could employ to produce paragraphs more effectively.



## 4.7.18 Chart #10

## Techniques Applied in the English Class

Series	Number of students	Percentage
Titles	24	27,27
Matching	12	13,64
Making Lists	18	20,45
Taking notes	12	13,64
Brainstorming	8	9,09
Main Ideas	10	11,36
Semantic maps	4	4,55
TOTAL	88	100,00

Source: Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006

## 4.7.19 Graph #9

## Techniques Applied in the English Class



Source: Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006

This graph shows that 27.27% of the students agreed that titles was the most commonly used technique in the English class, 20.45% of the learners



considered that making lists was the second most practiced technique, 13.64% said that taking notes and matching are also used, 11.3% recognized producing main ideas as a technique applied in their class, 9.09 % are familiar with the brainstorming technique, and only 4.5% identified semantic maps as a technique employed in the English class. It is important to clarify that this question was answered by 38 students the same as all other questions; however, the total is 88 since each student had the chance to mark more than one option.

Once again, this information differs from the answers given in graph number six. However, from the list given, the students identified the techniques they put into practice in their English class which makes it evident that the teacher did apply writing techniques and that the students were provided with enough tools to write descriptive paragraphs.

#### 4.7.20 Chart #11

Topics Students were Interested in

Series	Number of students	Percentage
Health	10	6,85
Trips	16	10,96
Music	24	16,44
Family	4	2,74
Animals	22	15,07
Sports	26	17,81
Education	4	2,74
Environment	18	12,33
Entertainment	16	10,96
Social problems	6	4,11
Others	0	0,00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006



## 4.7.21 Graph #10

Topics Students were Interested in



**Source:** Eleventh grade students at Colegio Ambientalista, 2006

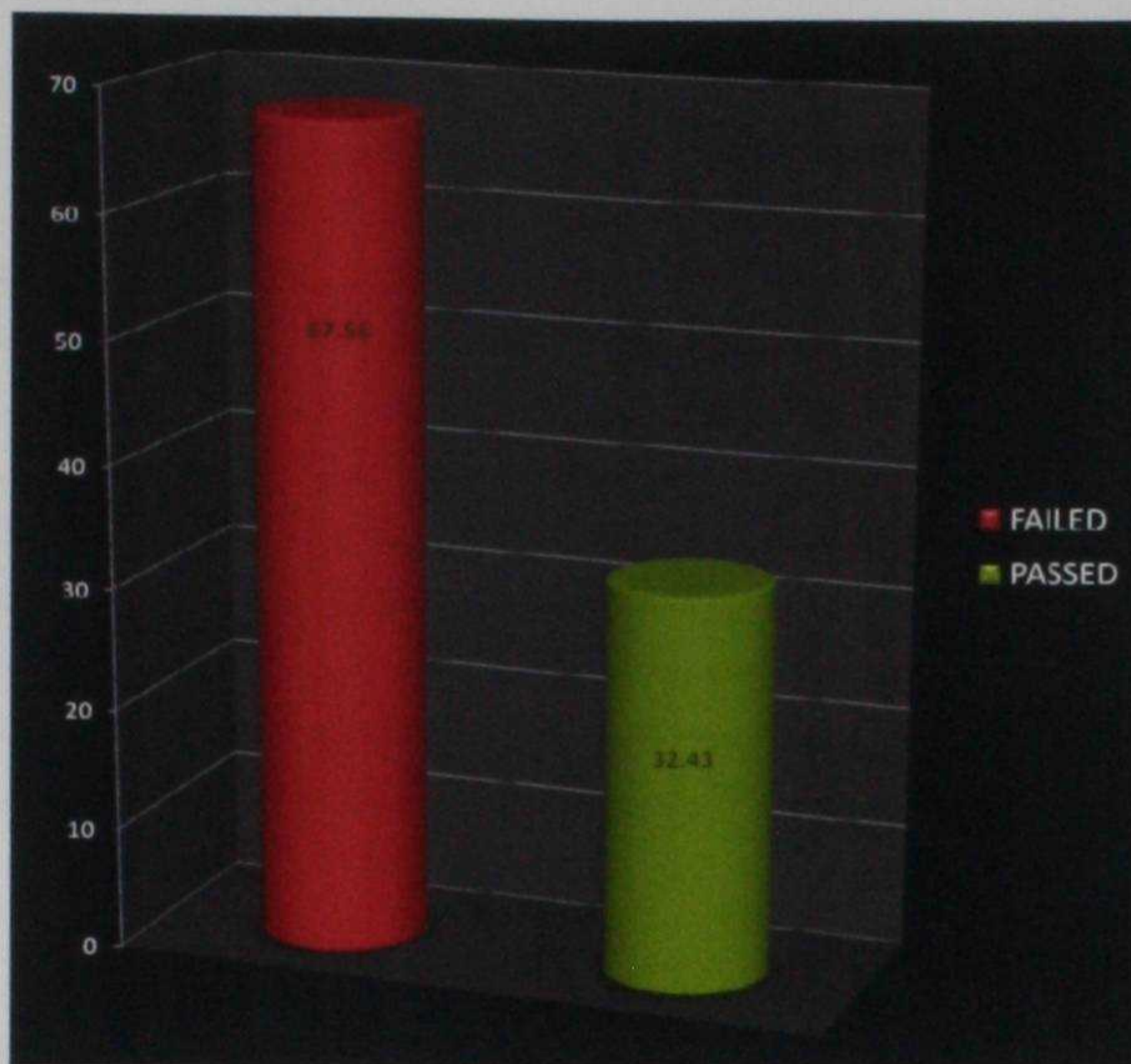
In a sample of 38 students, 17.85% of them considered sports an interesting topic, 16.44% liked music, 15.07% preferred to write about animals, 12.38% was interested in environmental subjects, 10.96% liked topics about trips and entertainment, 6.85% considered health an attractive topic, 4.11% said that social problems are a good topic to write about and only 2.74% of the students preferred topics related to family and education. The students did not propose any other topic to develop their ideas. This question was also answered by 38 students; nonetheless, the total is 146 since each student had the chance to mark more than one option.

This information is valuable for researchers since they will consider those topics in their booklet and students will be asked to write about topics they are interested in. Motivation plays an important role in writing. Writing about topics one does not like or has little knowledge of may cause paragraphs to be poorly developed. Besides, being interested in a topic helps students write as long as they are motivated. Ideas are generated more easily.



#### 4.7.22 Graph #11

Information Obtained from the Pretest



**Source:** Pretest

This graph shows the information gathered after the administration of the pretest. The results evidence that twenty five students out of thirty seven obtained a grade lower than seventy on the pretest which is the minimum score to pass the test. This means that 67.56 % of the students did not pass the test and 32.43 % of the students passed the test. It is important to clarify that there were forty four students when we began our research, yet only thirty seven learners took the pretest. Then, seven students did not take the pretest.

This information shows that students did have problems producing descriptions in English. To make this information more reliable, some copies of the paragraphs students wrote are attached. Spelling problems, paragraph sprawl, lack of vocabulary, punctuation errors, and poor development of main, supporting



and concluding ideas are some of the most common problems these paragraphs evidence.

Alejandro Navarro

### In the beach

The beach is good for the recreation of the family ~~and general~~ <sup>(for many people)</sup> The beach is very important for the tourists and <sup>Costa Rican</sup> nationals. This is important (for the grand tourist in Costarican that is good) <sup>to get</sup> economic <sup>incomes</sup> ~~ingress~~ to the country.

My ~~music~~ <sup>music</sup> preferred is ~~the~~ rock, hip-hop, reggae ~~and~~ My favorite singers ~~are~~ ~~are~~ Daddy Yankee and others ~~and~~ <sup>I like</sup> groups ~~is~~ U2, cold play ~~the~~ singers and groups ~~I~~ <sup>I</sup> don't like is Yonidia, Beloda, "Ramsting" and Korn.



Yolanda

### The beach.

The beach is beautiful ~~and in the~~ There ~~is~~ are palms, coconuts, ~~and~~ and others.

Also, I like <sup>to</sup> go to the beach and ~~disfrutar~~ enjoy with my family and friends.

The beach is exelent to ~~go~~ <sup>have</sup> in vacations.

I like the music romantic and my ~~genger~~ favorite is kalimba but also like chayanne. I dont like the rock music because is <sup>an</sup> ~~very~~ <sup>evil rhythm</sup> ~~satánico~~. The listening to music is my ~~shobbie~~ favorite <sup>and</sup> also the futbol.

I like also the ~~music~~ the type reggae.



Daniel Chaves

Our travel

That was a week ago. The sun was perfect, the day was perfect. Every things was perfect for a ~~massive~~ special moment, the sound of the sea made the moment perfect.

It ~~is~~ <sup>was</sup> a summer day with a easy ocean, the sunrise ~~was~~ <sup>set</sup> special ~~between~~ <sup>for</sup> us.

Hi, I like to listen to reggae. My favorite singer of reggae is Bob marley. That music is perfect when you are in the beach I don't like the some kinds of rock because well. (I just don't like the rock) I like the <sup>kind</sup> of rock that the Red Hot chili peppers <sup>band</sup> ~~make~~ sings.



Adriana Navarro

### The travel

~~In~~ ~~the~~ last week Peter and Ellen <sup>went</sup> to the beach to have the family adventure. The beach of travel ~~is~~ was in Samara the ~~that~~ <sup>it is</sup> local location in a province of Costa Rica. Samara ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> very beautiful, important to preserve for the fauna and flora of the country. In Samara the tourism ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> very important and ~~is~~ <sup>it</sup> very help<sup>s</sup> for the progress in Costa Rica. In the ~~beach~~ <sup>beach</sup> the variety of ecosystems ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> essential for the ~~existence~~ <sup>of</sup> ~~many~~ <sup>many</sup> animals and other ~~species~~ <sup>species</sup>.

Hello! My name is Adriana and my <sup>Favorite</sup> music ~~favorite~~ is Rock classic and Pop. My favorite songs ~~are~~ <sup>are</sup> What I've done, Ity you and the saints are comming but I prefer <sup>Spanish</sup> pop in español. And my <sup>singer's</sup> favorite ~~are~~ <sup>are</sup> Gwen Stefanny and Bon Jovi. But finally, my favorite bands are Green Day, U2, Coldplay and the Pissy Cat Dolls.



Felipe Quirós

~~The beach~~ the beach is ~~so~~ a  
 attractive tourist <sup>place</sup> ~~very~~ good. It is a  
 ✓ ~~place~~ perfect to ~~the~~ get relaxed and  
 also ~~at~~ ~~all~~ comfortable.

My favorite music is  
 reggae music. It's relaxing.  
 Other ~~also~~ I like ~~is~~ Romantic music.  
 I listen to reggaeton.



Gerald

## Beach

The beach is nice <sup>and</sup> beautiful, ~~It is very~~ <sup>It is very</sup> sunny, ~~water and~~ <sup>there are many</sup> Also, ~~many~~ <sup>there are many</sup> people. The beach ~~is~~ <sup>The</sup> water ~~at the beach~~ <sup>at the beach</sup> is ~~very~~ <sup>very</sup> salty, but the people ~~go~~ <sup>go</sup> to ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> beach to swimming and also to ~~take~~ <sup>take</sup> the sun.

Oney, today, I talk <sup>ed</sup> about the music with my friend, ~~I spite~~ that I like ~~much~~ <sup>much</sup> the pop music a lot. ~~and~~ <sup>He</sup> ~~talk~~ <sup>told</sup> me that ~~don't~~ <sup>he</sup> ~~like~~ <sup>doesn't</sup> like the reggaeton music, but ~~that~~ <sup>that</sup> he likes <sup>to</sup> listen to Don Omar.



Juan Gabriel

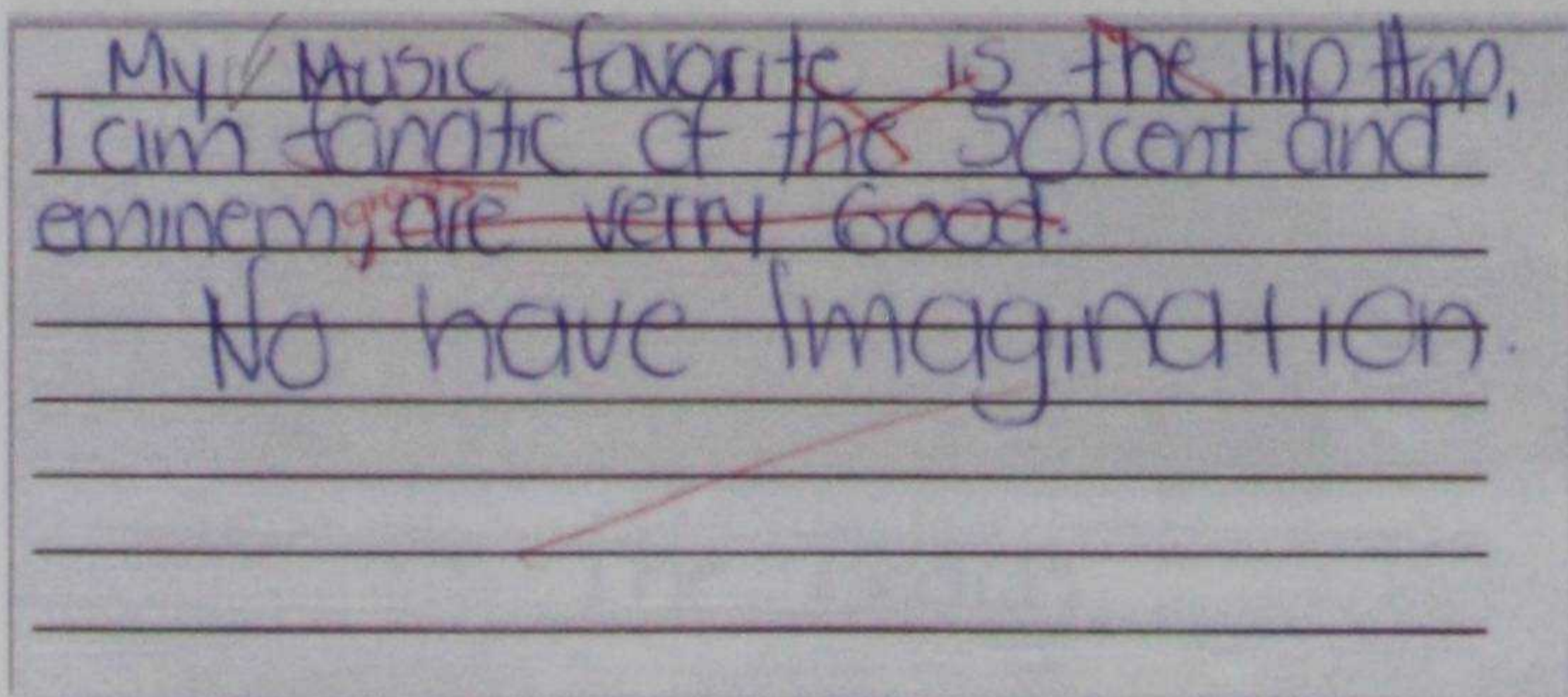
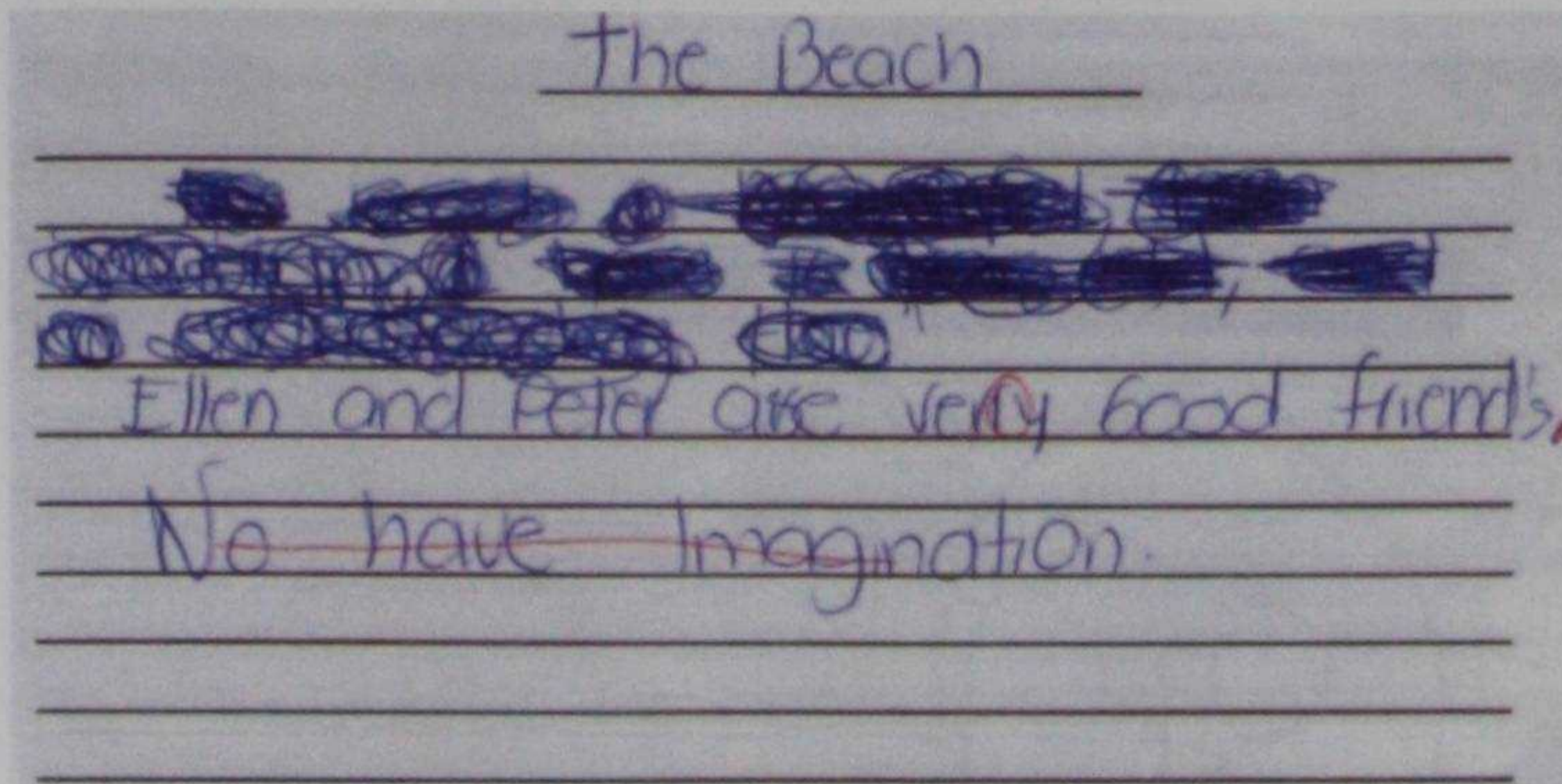
The beach

The last week I visited my family  
 at Dominical beach. ~~It is~~ Saturday,  
 I and Ellen visited ~~many~~ <sup>many</sup> ~~places~~ <sup>places</sup>. One of  
 the ~~places~~ <sup>places</sup> we visited ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> a park Maine  
 Ballena National Park

My music favorite ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> ~~singers~~ <sup>singers</sup>  
 Reggae ~~and my~~ <sup>and my</sup> ~~singer~~ <sup>singer</sup> favorite ~~singer~~ <sup>singer</sup> are  
 Daddy Yankee, Wisin / Yandel,  
 De la Ghetto



Sebastián Cascante

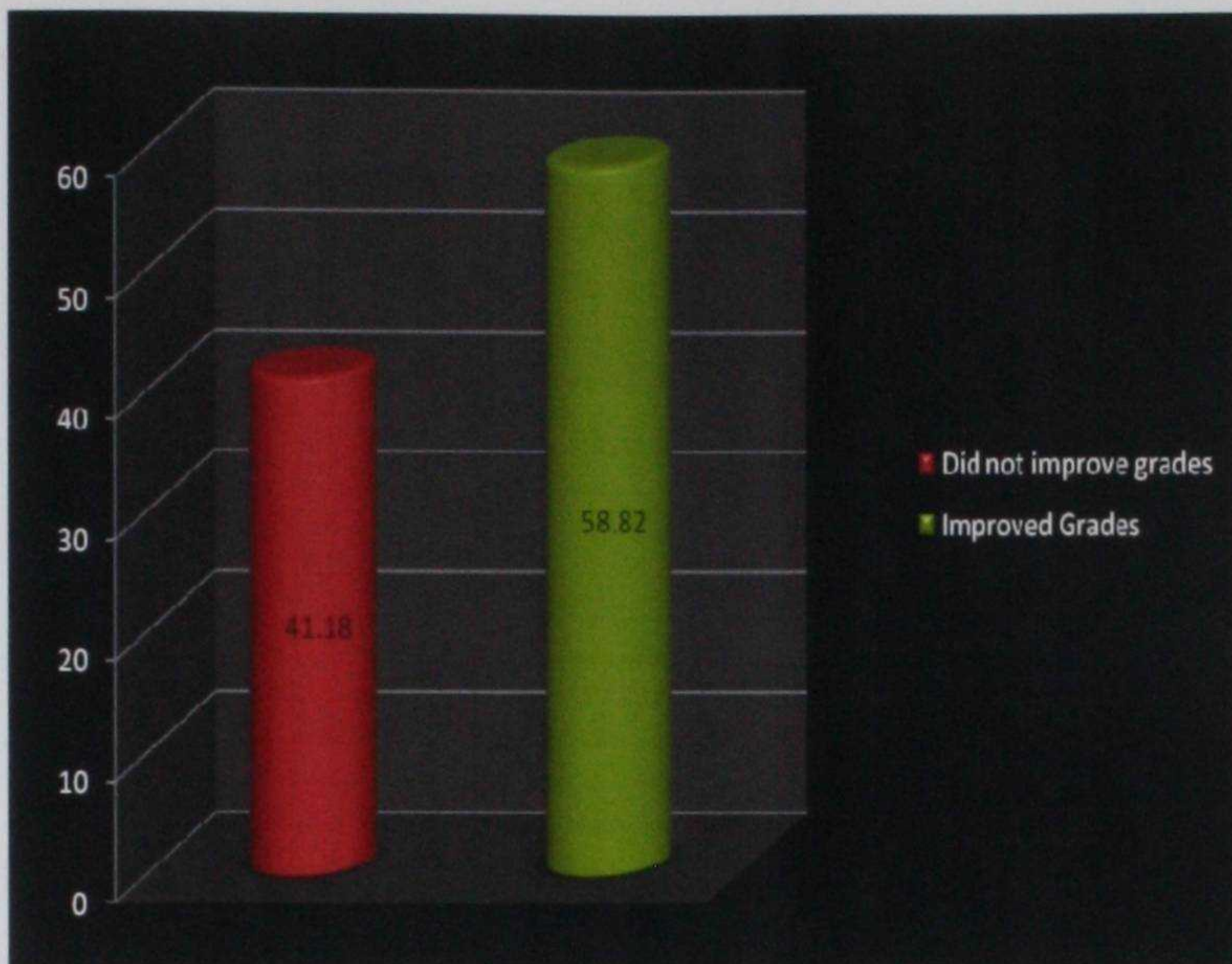


As it can be observed, these paragraphs show the following problems. First, students used Spanish structures in their writing. Most paragraphs lack an introduction and a conclusion, and they do not have enough details to support the main idea. Some students run out of ideas or lacked vocabulary and grammatical structures to develop them more effectively. In addition, some paragraphs lack coherence.



## 4.7.23 Graph #12

Grade Improvement during the Posttest



**Source:** Posttest

This graph shows the results of the information collected after the administration of the posttest. The outcomes evidence that 58.82% of the students did improve their grades and only 41.18% did not. It means that twenty students out of thirty four improved their grades compared to the pretest and fourteen did not improve their grades compared to the pretest. It is worth mentioning that ten students out of forty four did not take the post test.

Some of the paragraphs students produced in the post test are also attached. Evidently, the problems they had in the pre test show some improvement now which makes researchers wonder what could have happened if their teaching proposal had been applied for a longer period. Certainly, there is






improvement after two months of instruction on how to write descriptive paragraphs.

Alejandro Navarro

T.S.  
Beaches in CR  
are beautiful



The Beach and its Attractions

(~~The~~ Beaches <sup>are</sup> beautiful) In Costa Rica they are ~~extensive~~ public. The sky is blue and clean. The beach is very important for the progress of Costa Rica. Also, it is ~~a~~ good for the recreation of the family and tourists of other countries.

No concluding idea.

The music helps <sup>to</sup> relax the persons. The music <sup>that I</sup> dislike is heavy metal and others ~~likes~~ such as ~~the~~ Rock, pop, reggaeton and instrumental. The singers ~~girls~~ <sup>that I like</sup> are Daddy Yankee, Eminem and groups is U2, cold play and others. ~~Not like~~ <sup>I do</sup> Kern and others.



Yolanda Mora

The beautiful and pacific beach.

The beach is very beautiful, ~~and in the~~ There are much things that I can see.

In the beach there are much sand a lot of ~~water~~ water of color blue. Also, in the beach there are big waves and a big sky.

I like <sup>to</sup> go to the beach with my family, friends and <sup>my</sup> boyfriend to enjoy with them.

In conclusion, the beach is a place great to visit, ~~since~~ <sup>since</sup> there are many ~~at~~ attractive things that makes it interesting.

I prefer ~~the~~ music romantic, but also I like ~~the~~ regueton, Cumbia and merengue, I like <sup>so</sup> much <sup>to</sup> dance and enjoy of ~~the~~ music.

I don't like ~~the~~ music salsa because is very boring.

My singer favorite is Elvis Crespo and also I like Daddy Yankee.



Daniel Chaves

### The Best Ocean View

In the picture you ~~will~~<sup>can</sup> see all the elements of the beach. You can see the sun, a perfect sky, the palms and of course the ~~perfect~~ calm sea. The color of the sky (orange) makes that you feel better than in other place. When I see this picture I can just ~~im~~ <sup>im</sup>immaginate how <sup>cool</sup> feel I there? I just think that all the elements of the beach ~~are~~<sup>are</sup> perfect on this day. So, I can just ~~watch~~ <sup>watch</sup> watch the picture and immaginate all the things that ~~can~~ will happen righ there at the beach.

Excellent!

N.C

hello, I like to listen to all kinds of music from some rock until the music of Andrea Bocelli. I like to listen the Red hot chilli pepper's <sup>im</sup> and reggae. My favorite singer of reggae is bob marley. I like to <sup>listen to</sup> ~~hear~~ other kinds of music I like 50 cent, Will smith, maroon 5, Justin timberlake and many more.



Adriana Navarro

In the beach

The ~~last~~ <sup>went</sup> summer, Peter and me, ~~to~~ <sup>went</sup> travel to Maricao Insular National Park. In the park ~~there was~~ <sup>there was</sup> a beautiful beach with the ~~blue~~ <sup>blue</sup> ocean, ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> palm trees and ~~the~~ <sup>a</sup> beautiful sky. In the beach ~~people can~~ <sup>people can</sup> practice sports: surf, snorkeling, swimming and fishing. The National Park ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> awarded the award "Sundera Azul" for protecting flora and fauna (and other animals). I'll remember the beach forever ~~because~~ <sup>since</sup> it is very important for the conservation of the world.

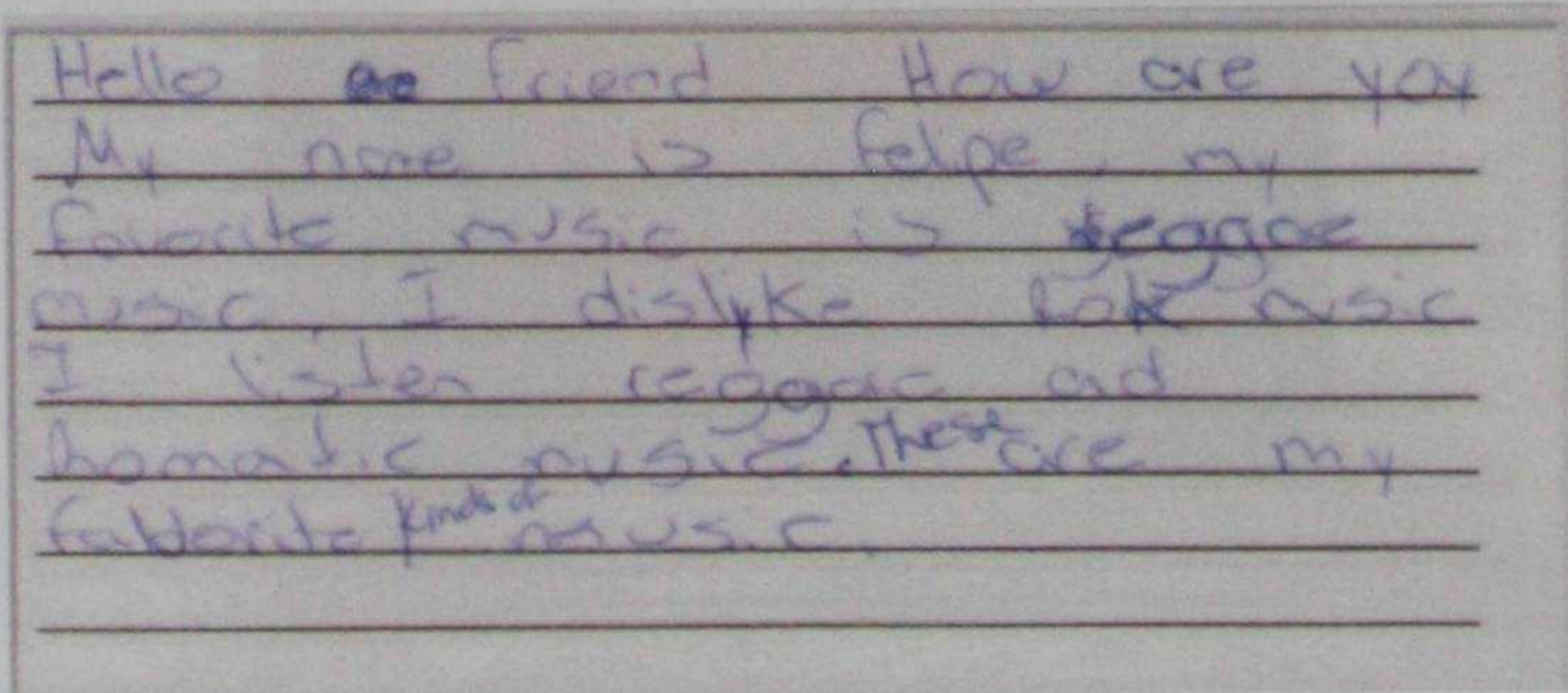
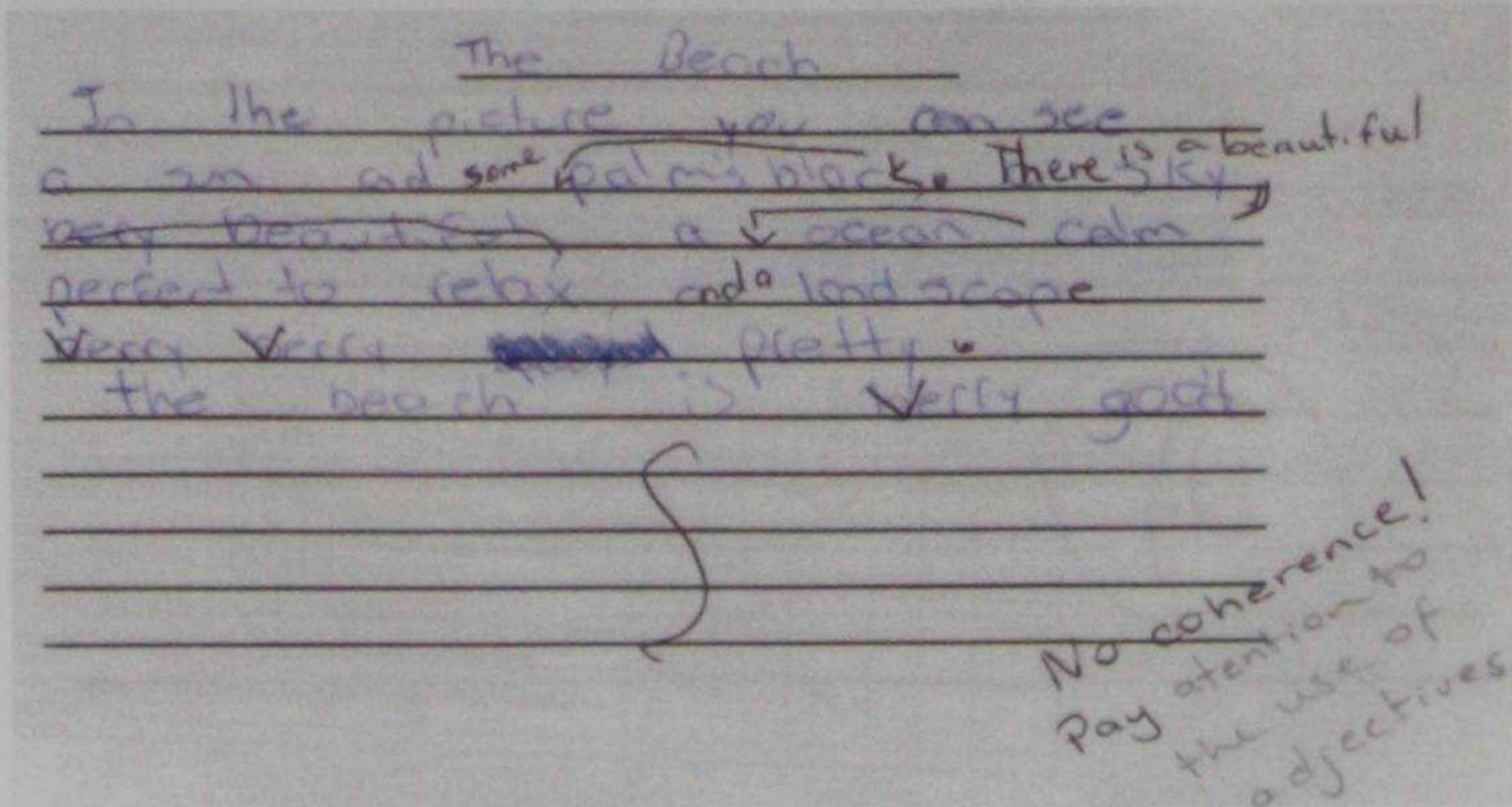
No concluding idea!

Hello! I am Adriana and my preferences are I like pop and rock music. My preferred singers are Bon Jovi, Robbie Williams and my ~~favorite~~ <sup>favorite</sup> bands are U2, Green Day, Coldplay and others. On the other ~~part~~ <sup>hand</sup>, I like songs such as The Saints are coming or What I've done, Goodbye, Mississippi...  
Adry.

Final Review



Felipe Quirós





Gerald

My perfect beach

My perfect beach is with ~~with~~ sun and  
 with ~~much~~ <sup>many</sup> people ~~to~~ play. Also, ~~there~~ <sup>it has</sup> palms,  
~~and~~ <sup>some</sup> food, ~~in~~ the sand and ~~in~~ the water  
 so much food. In the water I see ~~jump~~ a  
 fish of color red, as ~~they~~ <sup>is</sup>. At the  
 night I eat the beautiful fish red  
~~with~~ <sup>under</sup> the ~~the~~ sky (and more next that  
 rainy for sleep)

Hello, today I ~~heard~~ <sup>to</sup> talk <sup>to you</sup> about  
 the music that I prefer. I prefer  
 the romantic music but also  
 I listen pop, rock and reggaeton  
 music. I don't like listen to  
 "Don Omar" with the song "salid el  
 sol", but I think that ~~the~~ music  
 is the most important <sup>things</sup> in my life



Juan Gabriel

The Beach

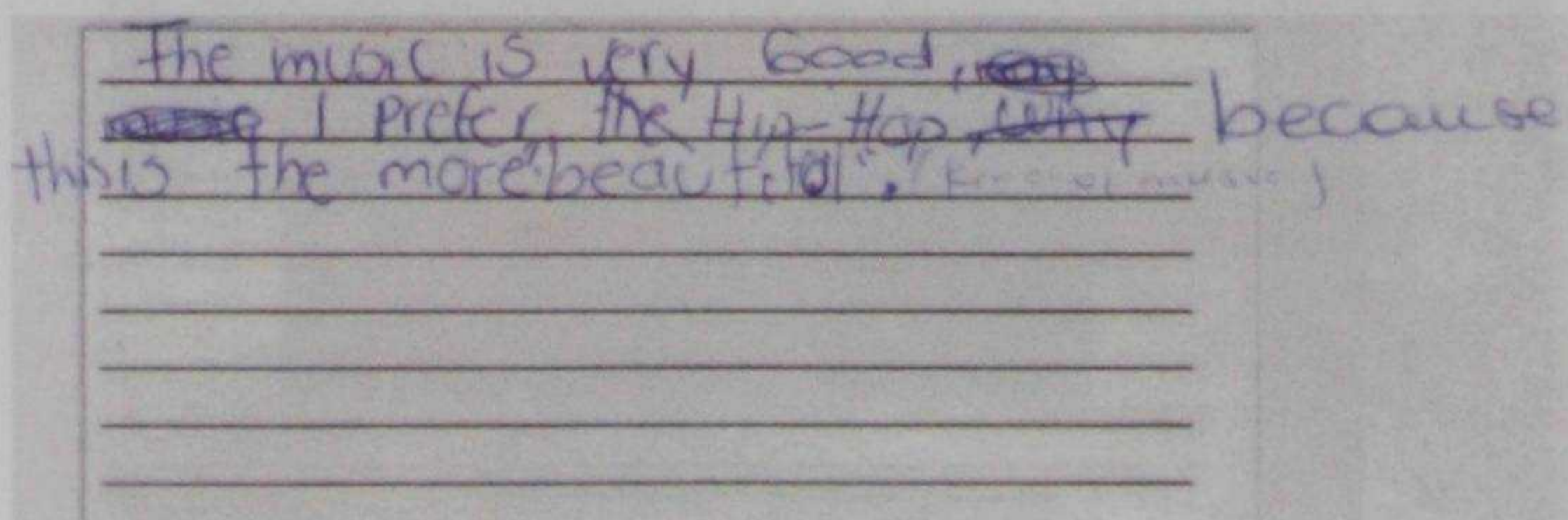
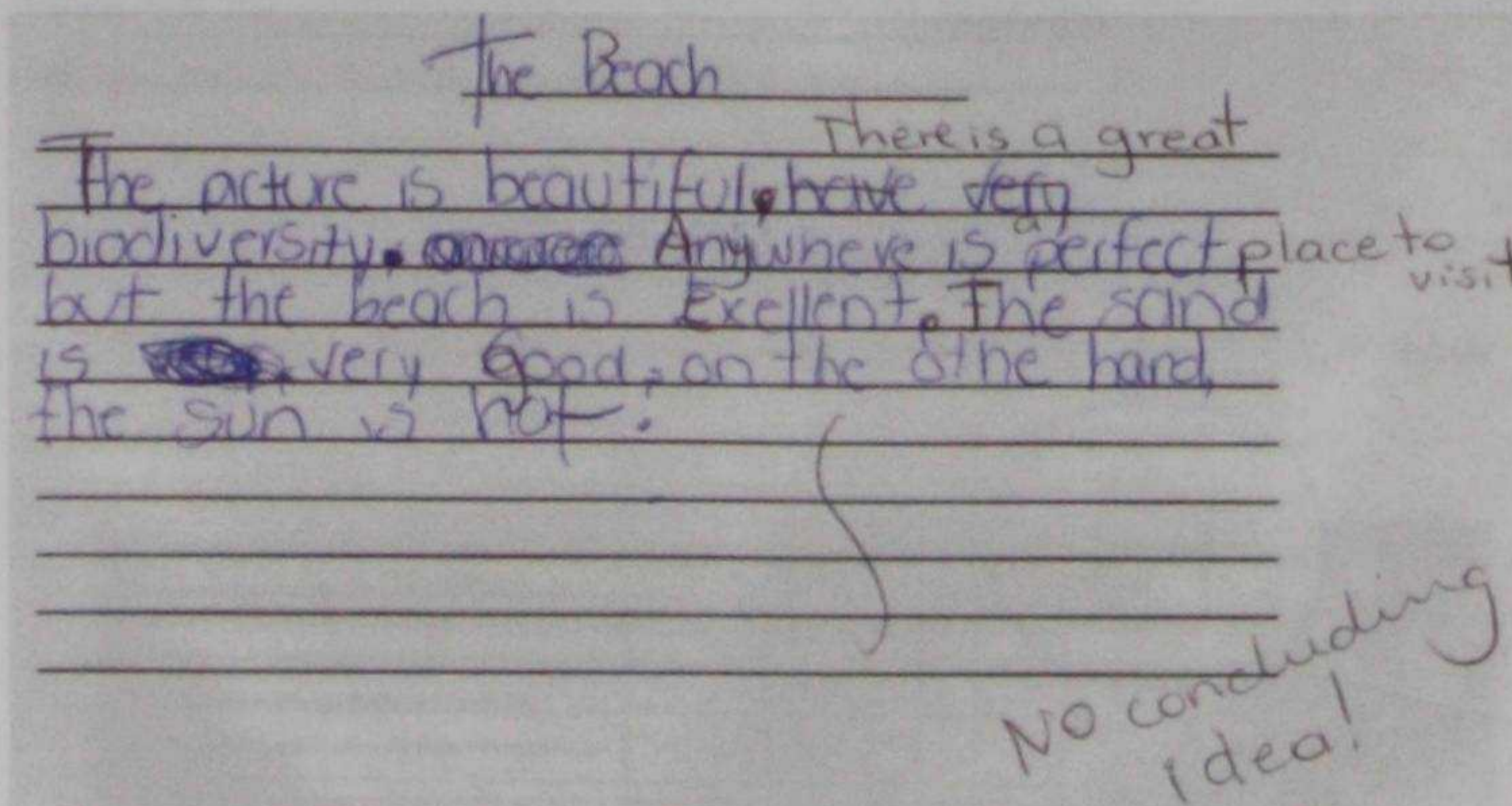
The beach is beautiful. The beach is very important <sup>to</sup> ~~the~~ preserve people's lives. Here there are palm trees, sun, sand, crabs, fish, and sea stars. In the ocean <sup>people can</sup> practice activities <sup>such</sup> as surfing, fishing, <sup>however</sup> and more people ~~prefer~~ swimming. <sup>through</sup> The beach is very beautiful, I don't throw any garbage in it.

Well done

My favorite music is reggaeton and music classic. I don't like salsa, merengue and heavy metal. My ~~favorite~~ preferred is Daddy Yankee and Bethaveen, I ~~dislike~~ <sup>dislike</sup> some bands <sup>such</sup> as Ramstein.



Sebastián Cascante



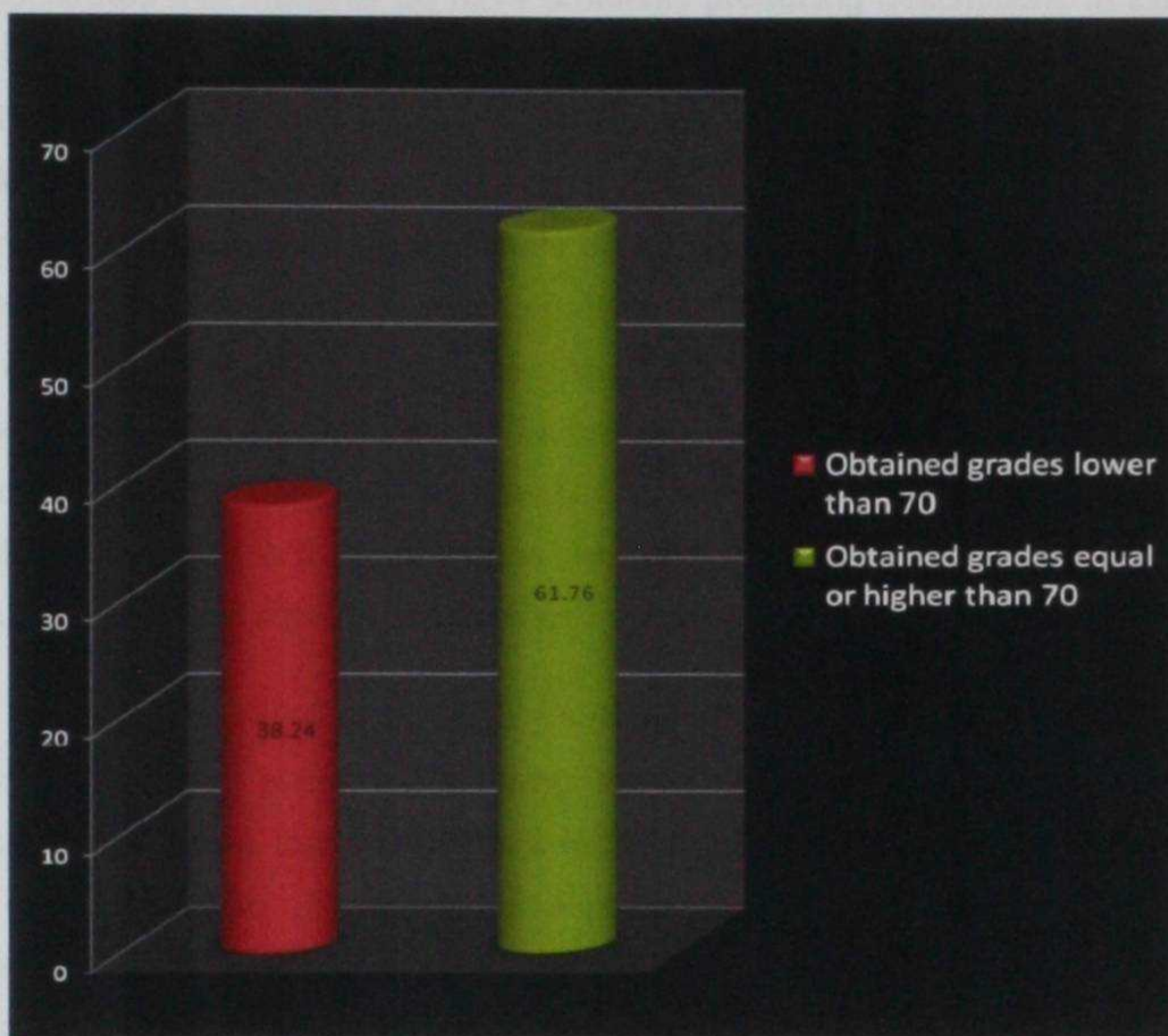
Some techniques were put into practice to improve the students' writing at the descriptive paragraphs level. For instance, researchers emphasized the use of mental linking, semantic maps, brainstorming and outlines. They also taught some organizational patterns such as clockwise, counterclockwise, left to right and right to left, among others so that students had a better understanding of how to organize their ideas. Furthermore, researchers explained the differences there are between Spanish and English writing, and they provided feedback and promoted peer correction after their classes to polish the students' paragraphs. By doing all these, most students actually improved their writing as it can be observed in the previous paragraphs. They followed the English structure, their main ideas were clearly established, enough supporting details were included in their paragraphs,



and coherence was not a problem anymore. Some students did not show improvement. Nonetheless, the great majority did and that is enough evidence to prove that by providing students with clear explanations and writing techniques their paragraphs are likely to reveal fewer problems.

#### 4.7.24 Graph #13

Improvement of the Academic Efficiency in Relation to the Minimum Grade



**Source:** Posttest

This graph illustrates the improvement of the academic efficiency in relation to the minimum grade. In a sample of 34 students, twenty one students (61.76 %) obtained grades equal or higher than seventy and thirteen students (38.24%) obtained grades lower than seventy.



This information is valuable only for academic purposes. It shows that students improved their grade and most of them obtained grades equal or higher than seventy which is the minimum score to pass a test in tenth grade in high school. Consequently, an appropriate teaching on how to write descriptive paragraphs may help students improve their academic proficiency.

To sum up, the results obtained after the administration of the instruments described before prove that students really need to improve their writing skill in English. Only twelve students out of thirty seven passed the pretest. It demonstrates that students do have problems producing descriptions in English. The questionnaire answered by the teacher shows that the teacher lacks training on the teaching of the writing skill, and the questionnaire answered by the students evidences that the teaching of the writing skill is not given enough importance in their English class. Also, most of them do not like English or like it a little, which means that they need to be motivated. Besides, the answers show that students are not properly taught how to write descriptive paragraphs and that they do not know what writing techniques could be applied to produce paragraphs more effectively. The main problems students face when writing are lack of vocabulary, spelling errors and lack of coherence. All these aspects should be worked out to help students avoid making mistakes and express their ideas more smoothly.

Finally, the three main topics students like the most for writing about are sports, music and animals. By taking the students' preferences into account, teachers make sure that students will produce better paragraphs as long as they are motivated. After the implementation of the new writing techniques, the researchers achieved an improvement of the students' descriptive paragraph writing skills. In fact, the post test demonstrated that twenty students out of thirty four improved their grades. It can be stated that appropriate teaching on how to write descriptive paragraphs may help students improve their writing skills and consequently their academic proficiency.



**CHAPTER V**  
**PROPOSAL: SKILLFUL WRITING**  
**BOOKLET FOR ELEVENTH GRADERS**



Universidad Nacional

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje

# **Skilful Writing for Eleventh Graders**



Compiled and designed by  
Angélica Alvarado Chinchilla  
Jessica Ureña Salazar

2010



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## 5.3

## **Presentation**

This booklet consists of ten units aimed at eleventh grade students for the purpose of making them more innovative, imaginative and practical writers in and out of the classroom.

It may help learners to improve their writing proficiency and become more skillful when writing descriptive paragraphs. Throughout these unit students will be taught to develop descriptive paragraphs following the appropriate stages. The level of difficulty of each unit increases as students move on to the next step, thus their learning will be easier and they will feel more confident because the tasks go from very simple to complex exercises. Another important aspect about this sequence is that learners will understand better what a descriptive paragraph is and they will gain mastery writing each of its parts.

Besides, this booklet provides students with useful tools to expand their knowledge of different vocabulary items related to several everyday life topics, as well as different grammatical structures and mechanics that will help them communicate their ideas better and efficiently.



## 5.4

**Dear teacher:**

Nowadays, knowing how to write in English gives people lots of opportunities to succeed in different fields. That is why it is important to provide learners with useful techniques for them to learn to express their ideas in this language since they are in high school.

This material accounts for eight different techniques to help teachers make the teaching of the writing skill in their classroom easier and, consequently, entertaining.

Skillful writing offers many fun activities such as multiple choice tasks, filling in charts and grids, writing letters, among others. It also involves team and individual exercises. It is a useful tool to teach students to write well structured descriptive paragraphs. In consequence, it is of great importance to take advantage of this material when teaching how to write descriptive paragraphs in English.



## 5.5

**Dear Student:**

In order to learn English, you must know how to write in this language. People who know how to write in English have more job opportunities. Besides, it is easier for them to communicate with other individuals all over the world as long as English is considered an international language. Therefore, take advantage of the great opportunity you have nowadays that the teaching of this language is being implemented all over the country.

Learning how to write a well structured descriptive paragraph is the beginning of a successful trail. This booklet was created for the purpose of guiding you through it. So, start practicing while having fun and improving your writing skills.



## 5.6

## ***What is a Paragraph?***

A paragraph is considered the basic unit of composition. It consists of several sentences that are grouped together to develop one main subject. A paragraph has three main parts: the topic sentence or introduction, the body sentences, and the concluding sentence. A good paragraph has to be clearly stated and supported. The details and facts written have to reinforce and support the thesis or the main idea of the paragraph.



## 5.7

## **What is a Descriptive Paragraph?**

It is defined as the paragraph commonly used to describe what one specific thing, place or person is like. Carolyn O'Hearn declares in her book *Writing, Grammar, and Usage* that "description is primarily sensory in nature; when writers describe, they use the language of the senses- sights, hearing, touch, smell, and taste" (21). According to this author, a good description is filled with specific details such as color, shape and size, taste, and touch or texture. Also, writers can make use of phrases of location and figures of speech. O'Hearn explains that some writers lack development. That is, they do not provide enough details when they write descriptions. Instead, they make a generalization, a judgment about the attractiveness or appearance of a person, animal, place or object, and then they repeat the generalization in as many ways as they can (22).



5.8

**Unit 1****Description**

Students will be provided with a list of names and descriptions of various animals. They will be asked to write a short story about one of the animals.

**Breaking ideas**



# Description

In this unit, the students will be provided with some pictures and sentences for them to start producing ideas. They will start from simple to more complex ideas.

## **Objective:**

The students will be able to develop ideas from simple sources of information.

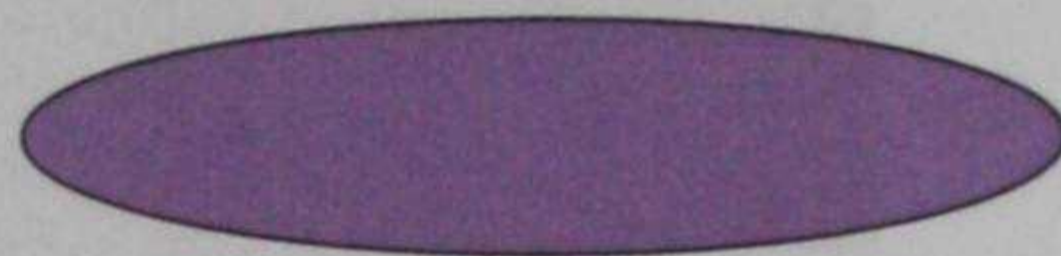


# Safari

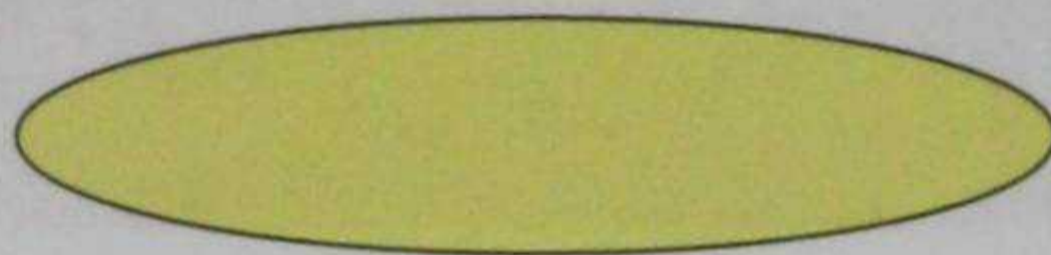
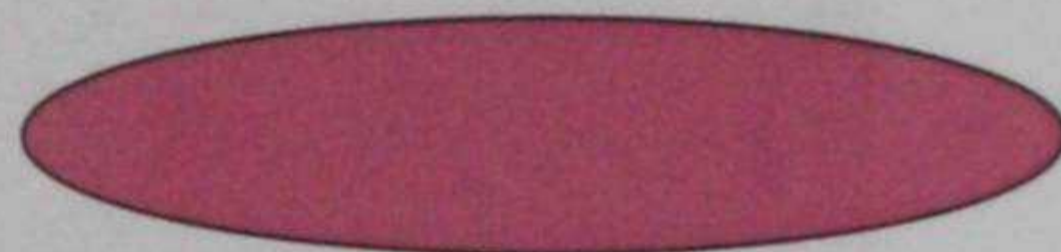


## Exercise #1

Read the word in italics below and write words or ideas related to it inside each balloon.



*Wild Animals*





# The Sleeping Dog

## Exercise #2

Susie took a picture of her dog while it was sleeping. Look at it and write all the words or ideas that come to your mind on the corresponding lines.



A large rectangular area with a red background and horizontal white lines, intended for writing responses to the exercise.





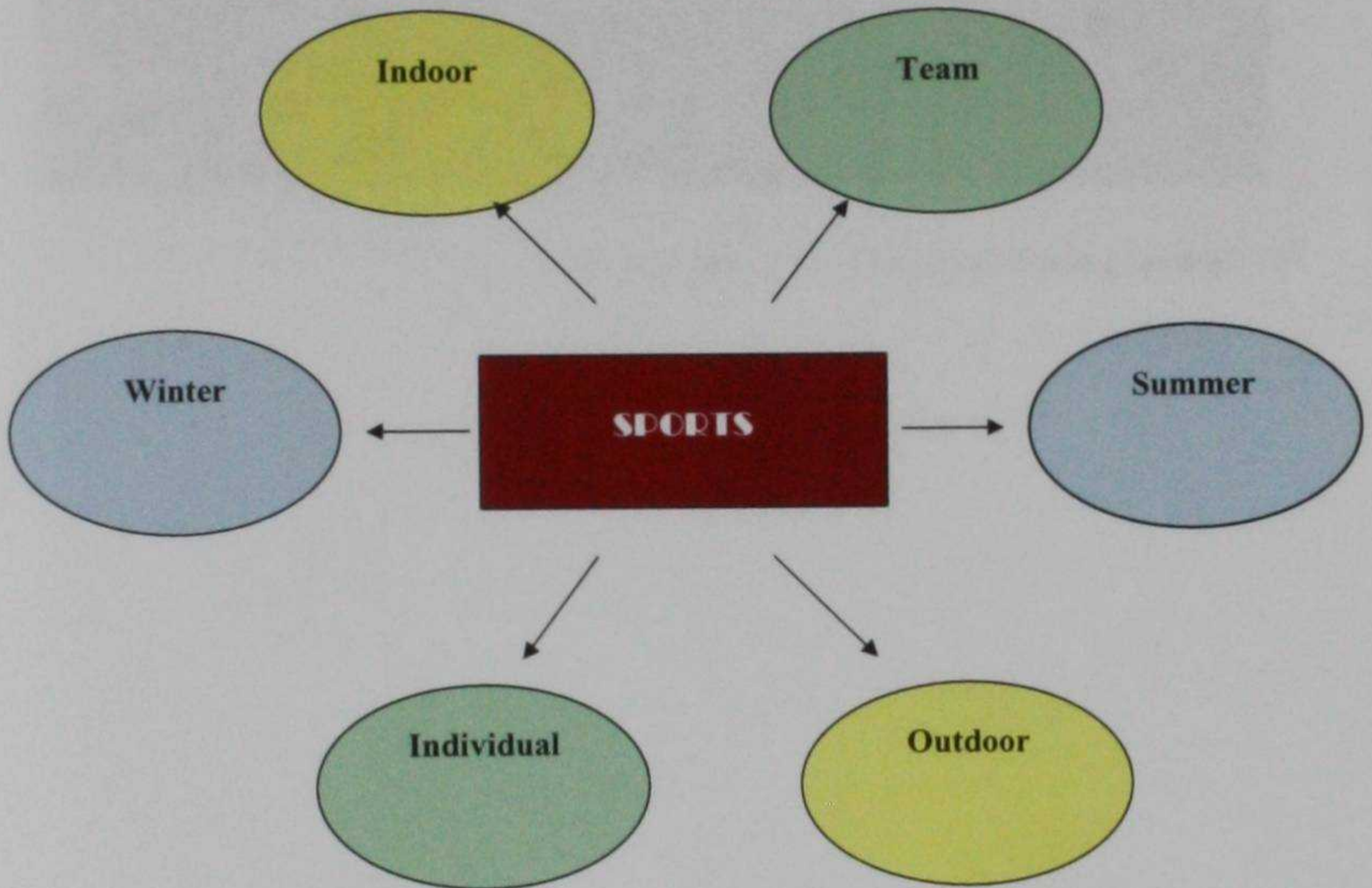


# Are you a sports person?



## Exercise # 4

Write a list of sports for each category written inside the balloons below.





# Becoming Healthier!



## Exercise #5

- a. Which expressions would you use to describe an excellent and a mediocre athlete? Write the words or expressions under the correct title. Use a dictionary if necessary.

Excellent Athlete	Mediocre Athlete
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

*Taken and adapted from Traveling: Reading Strategies 9<sup>th</sup>*





# Are you ready?????

## Exercise#6: Sentence construction.

Read the ideas in the boxes .Then, write complete and coherent sentences by combining the phrases that go together.

Animals	Dogs are considered	My hobby	Natural resources
must be cared to preserve life.	Smoking	Most TV programs	a way to express our feelings.
Writing is	show violence.	Practicing sports helps	provokes lung cancer.
people to be in shape.	are also living beings.	is playing video games.	people's best friends.

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*Taken from Developing Writing*





5.9

**Unit 2**

# Blooming titles











### Rules for Writing Titles

- Capitalize the first word and the last word.
- Capitalize all other words except *a*, *an*, and *the*, and prepositions with fewer than four letters.
- Underline or italicize titles of books, movies, plays, TV shows, magazines, newspapers, and other full-length works.
- Put quotation marks ("...") around titles of articles, short poems, short stories, and songs.

*Taken from Gateways 2: Student Book.*

*For example:*

Raiders of the Lost Ark was a terrific movie.

"Hang on to Your Love" is my favorite Sade song.

### Strategies for Generating a Topic

**Freewriting:** it "consists of writing down everything that comes to one's mind for five or more minutes until getting all distractions out of the mind and can concentrate on the writing assignment." (Ilona Leki, 21)

# Check it out!

### Exercise #1

Write whatever comes to your mind in response to the word **Sports**. Then, reread what you wrote and write the most interesting idea.

### Sports

---



---



---



---



---



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*Taken from Writing and Grammar: Communication in Action.*



# My School

## Exercise # 2

Think of places that are important to you such as your school. Draw a map of the place, marking different areas. For each location, list connected memories. Choose a memory from this list as your topic and write it down.

Example:

**Blueprinting**  
Here is how Emily used blueprinting to come up with a topic:

The blueprint shows the following areas and memories:

- Living Room:** I played the piano sometimes
- Dining Room:** We have holiday dinners here!
- Kitchen:** Baked a pie with Grandma
- Hedges**
- Garden** (circled in red)
- Bush** (two locations)
- Tree**
- get stung by a bee**
- dogs nearly ruined**

Emily decided to write about some of the events that had taken place in her Grandpa's garden.

Draw your map here:

Topic:

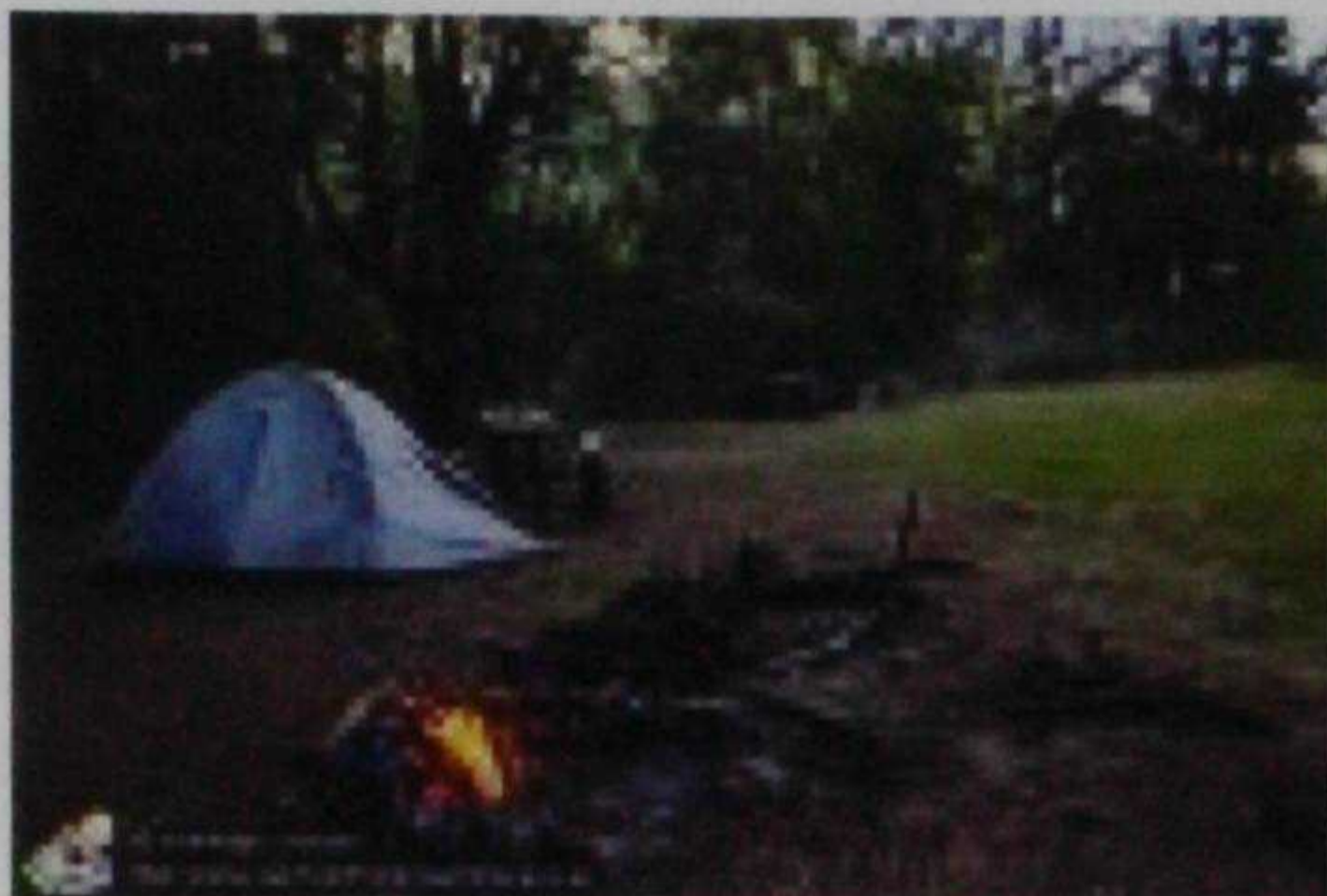
---



# Do you like to go camping?

## Exercise # 3

Look at the following picture and write all the ideas that come to your mind. Then, choose the best and most complete idea to describe a camping day.



1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

**Idea to be developed:**

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---

*Taken from Writing and Grammar: Communication in Action*



# Where is the title? Have you seen it?

## Exercise #4

Read the following information. Then, write an appropriate title for it.



People have food habits and customs. We tell our children not to take too much food. "Your eyes are bigger than your stomach" we say. It is too bad to take more food than we can eat.

Other food customs tell us not to eat certain kinds of food. The health food movement is new, but it is popular. These people don't eat too much sugar, and they don't drink strong coffee, tea, or alcohol. Vegetarians don't eat meat. There are many reasons for this. They don't want to kill animals. They don't want to become fat, and meat has a lot of fat. Some vegetarians just don't like the taste of meat.

*Taken from Developing Writing*



# Creative Titles

## Exercise #5:

Here you find three different titles. Write your own title by using the information in the given titles.

- Costa Rica is a beautiful country.
- The natural resources found in Costa Rica are unique
- Costa Rica is considered a natural paradise.

Title

---

---







5.10

**Unit 3**

# *Formulating topic* **sentences**





# Description

The main aim of this unit is to provide students with different exercises in which they are asked to write complete topic sentences.

## **Objective:**

Students will be able to write complete topic sentences about different topics.



**Exercise # 1:**

Read the paragraph in the box and then write a topic sentence for it.

**I don't have time to play!**

No Time for Sports

\_\_\_\_\_ .Of all these sports; however, basketball is his favorite because he really likes to play sports. Estrada played a lot of basketball when he was a child."My brother and I spent a lot of time shopping hoops together", he said. Unfortunately, nowadays he does have a lot time to play basketball. He and some of his friends can only get together about twice a month to play.

Like Manuel Estrada, a lot of my friends enjoy sports but they don't have enough time to play. For some reason, playing sports and getting exercise isn't very important in our society. When people have some free time, they don't play sports. They watch sports on T.V, go to the movies, or go out to eat.

*Taken from Transitions 1*



# Brainstorming Topic Sentences!

## Exercise# 2:

Read the following paragraph and choose the most appropriate topic sentence for each one .

A recent study showed that people with pets have lower blood pressure and lower anxiety levels. This study also showed that people with pets actually live longer than people who don't have pets.

1. Owning a pet can bring people a lot of benefits.
2. Owning a pet can make you happy and healthy.
3. Pets help people to feel better.

*Taken from Transitions 1*

Topic Sentence 1:

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Topic Sentence 2:

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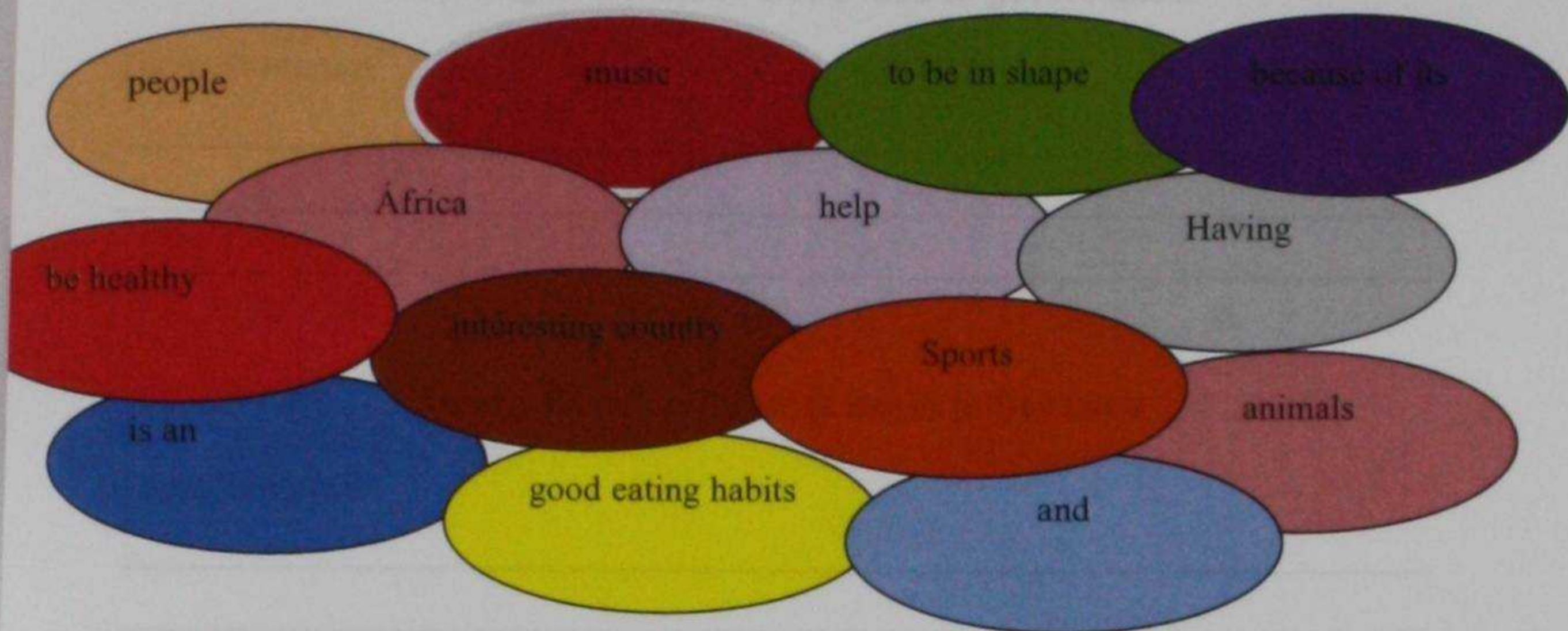
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# What a mess of ideas!!!!!!

## Exercise #3 :

Read the words and ideas in the boxes and make up complete topic sentences using those words .Use the titles given as reference.



### Africa: A Nice Country to Visit

Topic Sentence 1

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---

### The importance of Good Eating Habits

Topic sentence 2

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---



# Making up Topic Sentences!!!!

**Exercise #4**

You will be provided with some titles. Write a full topic sentence for each of them.

**Listening to Music: A Good Idea to get Relaxed**

Topic Sentence:

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**Family Relationships: A Basis to Succeed**

Topic Sentence:

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**Guanacaste: A Nice Place to Go on Vacation**

Topic Sentence:

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# I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE MAIN IDEA IS

## I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE MAIN IDEA IS

**Exercise #5:** Below you will find some titles. Choose the best topic sentence for each one.

**Topic 1:** *Music: A Solution for Stressful People*

- (a) Nowadays music may help stressful people.
- (b) Music has a lot of benefits on people's health.
- (c) Listening to music helps people to get relaxed and have fun.

**Topic 2:** *Environmental problems: The Cause of Earth Destruction*

- (a) Environmental problems are now the main cause of people's health, problems and animal extinction.
- (b) Environmental problems are causing serious effects on Earth.
- (c) The Earth has been destroyed by environmental problems.

**Topic 3:** *The Benefits of Practicing Sports*

- (a) Sports help people in many ways.
- (b) Practicing sports may help people.
- (c) Sports help people to be healthy, fit and happy.



# Let's Read!!!

**Exercise #6:** Below you will find several paragraphs .Read them carefully and choose the best topic sentence for each one.

## Paragraph 1:

Alcohol consumption has adverse social and economic effects on the individual drinker, the drinker's immediate environment and society as a whole. Indeed, individuals other than the drinker can be affected, for example, by traffic accidents or violence. It has an impact on society as a whole in terms of resources required for criminal justice, health care and other social institutions.

- (a) Individuals other than the drinker can be affected.
- (b) It has an impact on society as a whole in terms of resources required for criminal justice, health care and other social institutions.
- (c) Alcohol consumption has adverse social and economic effects on the individual drinker.

## Paragraph 2:

All of us inherit our physical attributes from our parents. However, when you start interacting with the outside world, you realize that they are not enough to ensure your success, not even your survival. When you find yourself in such a situation, what is it that sustains and supports you. The values which were passed to you by your family make your survival and growth possible. The values such as patience, care, understanding and commitment etc. instilled in you, differentiates you from the rest. If you are already a successful person, then it only underlies the importance of family and the values inherited by you.

- (a) All of us inherit our physical attributes from our parents.
- (b) If you are already a successful person, then it only underlies the importance of family and the values inherited by you.
- (c) The values which were passed to you by your family make your survival and growth possible.



**Paragraph 3:**

Most people like music and listen to it for fun, but music may also be able to make some people healthier. Scientists know that music has a certain influence over our emotions and thoughts, but new studies are emerging that show that music does more than just relax certain people. It can reduce stress, anxiety and even depression as well as relieve some symptoms experienced by heart patients and pregnant women.

- (a) Music has a certain influence over our emotions and thoughts
- (b) Most people like music and listen to it for fun, but music may also be able to make some people healthier.
- (c) Music can reduce stress, anxiety and even depression as well as relieve some symptoms experienced by heart patients and pregnant women.



5.11

**Unit 4****Description**

In this unit students will organize different ideas into groups or in a logical order.

**Objectives**

Students will be able to:

**Organizing ideas**





# Description

In this unit students will organize different ideas into groups or in a logical order.

## **Objective:**

Students will be able to organize ideas in context to elaborate more on their pieces of writing.



# A Nice Trip to the Beach!

## Exercise #1

Here are a student's notes about the picture below. Number the sentences from 1 (most general) to 8 (most specific). Put the writer's opinion last. Follow the foreground to background organization pattern. Show your organization to another student. Does he or she agree with it? More than one correct answer is possible.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ A man is walking on the sand.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Some boats are sailing.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ The picture shows the beauty and serenity of the beach.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ There are some foot prints on the sand.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ The water moves quietly.
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ The hot sun is reflected on the water
- g. \_\_\_\_\_ A big green mountain is in the back of the picture.
- h. \_\_\_\_\_ The flowers and leaves are moved by the breeze.





# A view to the Alphas

## Exercise #2

Look at the following picture and write ten descriptive sentences about it. Arrange them from general to specific. Follow the background to foreground organizational pattern.

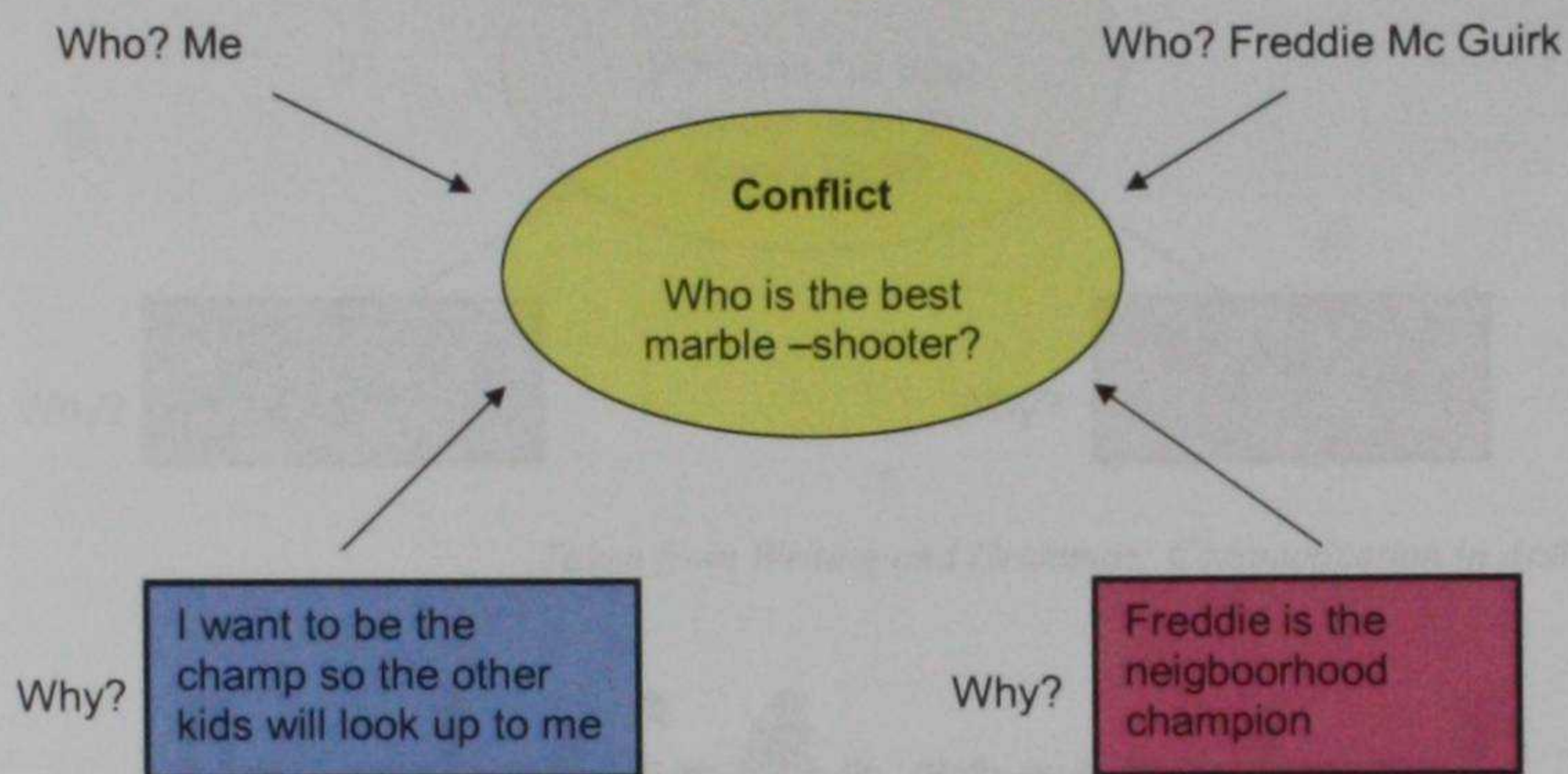


1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_



# Conflict Map

**Conflict:** It is a struggle between opposing forces. If an obstacle prevents a character from getting what he or she wants, there is a conflict.

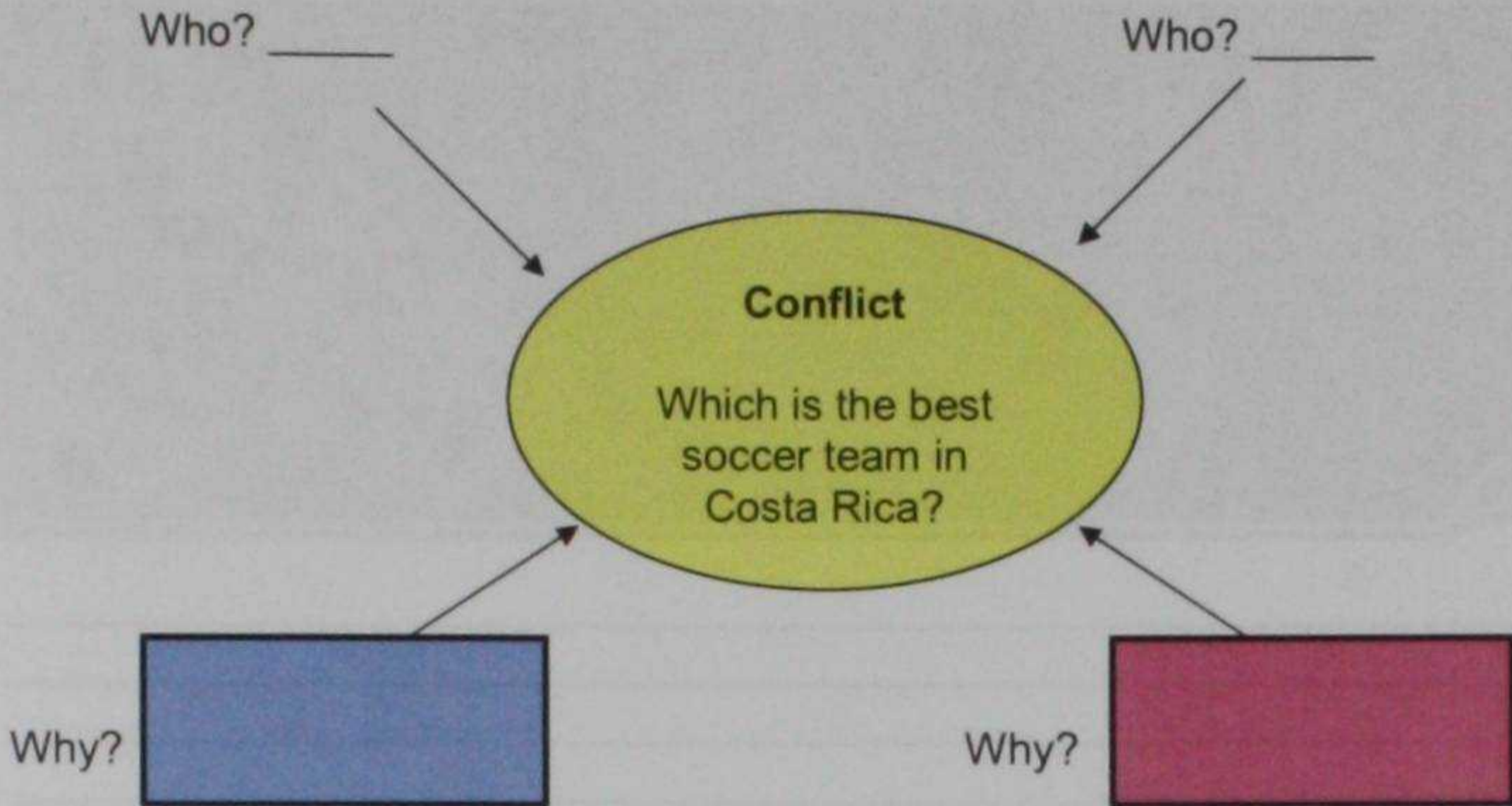




# Are you a fan of Saprissa or La Liga soccer team?

### Exercise #3

Create a conflict map about the topic below.



*Taken from Writing and Grammar: Communication in Action*

# So, what is the soccer team?

### Exercise # 4. Create a sequence of events.

Sequence the events related to your conflict in the previous exercise.

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*Taken from Writing and Grammar: Communication in Action*



# Let`s go to Manuel Antonio!!!!!!

## Exercise #5

The sentences in the boxes describe a trip to Manuel Antonio National Park. However, the sentences are not in the correct order now and they are not in proper paragraph form. Arrange the sentences and write the paragraphs on the lines below.

### Paragraph 1

Many Costa Ricans and tourist people visit this park every year.

Manuel Antonio was always a place that I wanted to know because of its beauty and sea.

Thus, I decided to visit Manuel Antonio to know the different attractions it offers.

Manuel Antonio is one of the most famous parks in Costa Rica since it is a natural paradise.

But it was until vacation that I could go to this place.

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### Paragraph 2

I swam in the ocean and I saw beautiful and big ships.

Actually, the trip was very nice. I met a lot of people and I enjoyed a lot.

The first day I went to the discotheque at night

Last December I took the best vacation I could ever have.

The next day I walked around the beach to appreciate the landscape.

This trip to Manuel Antonio was really enjoyable.

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# It does not make sense !!!

**Exercise# 6:** Put the sentences below in the correct order to get an organized and logical paragraph.

## Paragraph 1:

\_\_\_\_\_ These include typhoid, intestinal parasites, and most of the enteric and diarrheal diseases caused by bacteria, parasites, and viruses.

\_\_\_\_\_ Human infectious diseases are among the most serious effects of water pollution, especially in developing countries, where sanitation may be inadequate or non-existent.

\_\_\_\_\_ Among the most serious parasitic diseases are amoebiasis, giardiasis, ascariasis, and hookworm.

\_\_\_\_\_ Waterborne diseases occur when parasites or other disease-causing microorganisms are transmitted via contaminated water, particularly water contaminated by pathogens originating from excreta.

## Paragraph 2:

\_\_\_\_\_ There are some very big volcanoes. Hardly anyone lives there, but there are some small villages on the edge of the desert.

\_\_\_\_\_ Life is hard, and everything needs to be imported-food, building materials, and of course, water.

\_\_\_\_\_ The Atacama Desert in Chile is a spectacular place.

\_\_\_\_\_ There is little vegetation and it looks like the moon-in fact NASA tested their lunar vehicles there.





5.12

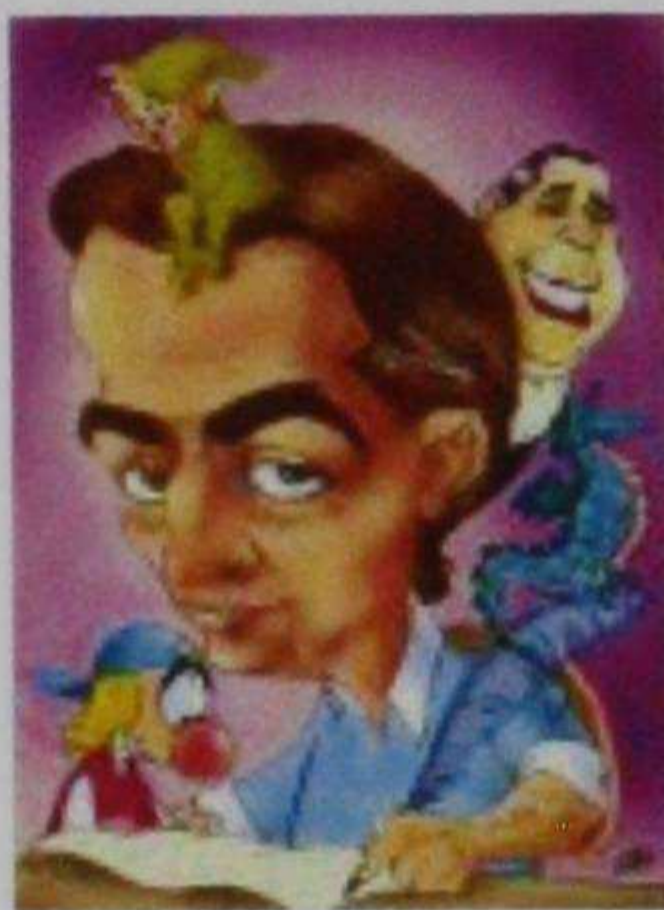
**Unit 5**

In this unit learners will write various details to support the topic sentences.

**Objective**

Students will be able to write supporting details to develop paragraphs.

# Adding details





# Description

In this unit learners will write various details to support the topic sentences provided.

## **Objective:**

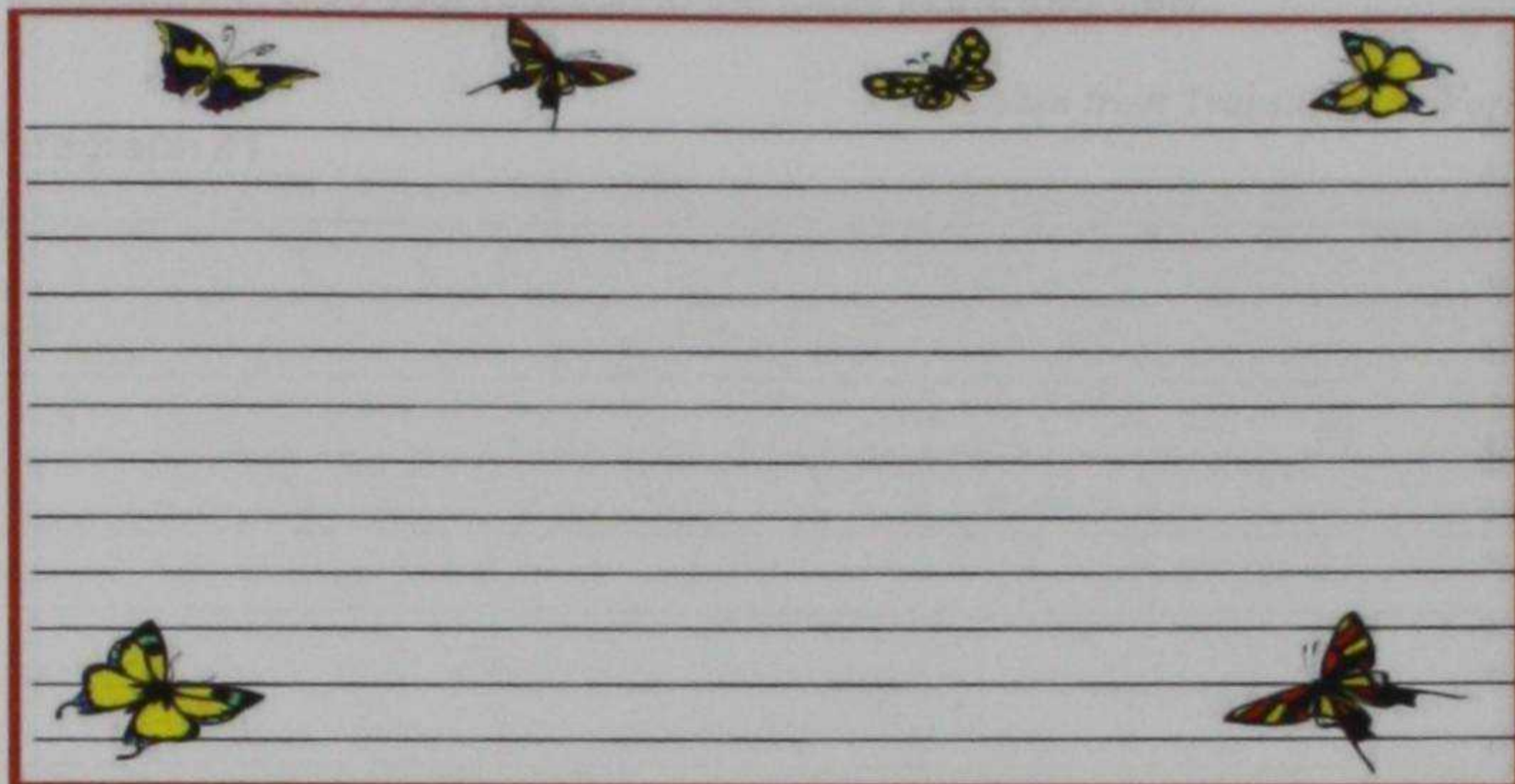
Students will be able to write supporting details to develop paragraphs about different topics.



# Have you ever played any sports?

## Exercise #1

Interview a classmate. Find out about this person's interests and experiences in sports. Take notes.



A writing area with a red border, containing ten horizontal lines for notes. The area is decorated with six colorful butterflies: four at the top and two at the bottom.

### Writing tip

#### Quickwriting

Quickwriting is a good way to collect ideas for writing. Follow these instructions when you quickwrite:

- ✓ Write fast- as fast as you can.
- ✓ Don't worry about grammar or spelling.
- ✓ If your mind goes blank, write: I can't think of anything to write. I can't think of anything to write.
- ✓ Re-read your quickwriting and circle the ideas you might want to use in your writing.







# Let's go to the Town!

## Exercise #2

Brainstorm a list of interesting places in your area (parks, cafes, streets, clubs, etc.). Then, choose one place to investigate. Visit the place and take notes.

## Writing Tip

### Taking Notes

Before you begin to write, it often helps to collect your ideas.

a. Where is this place?

---

b. When did you go there?

---

c. What's special or unusual about this place?

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d. What can you do and see there?

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---

e. What's your opinion about that place?

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1. Spend five minutes using ideas generated in the lesson.

2. Look over your list. Circle the most interesting items.

3. Look for connections among the items you have circled.

4. Highlight details that will add to the story you want to tell.

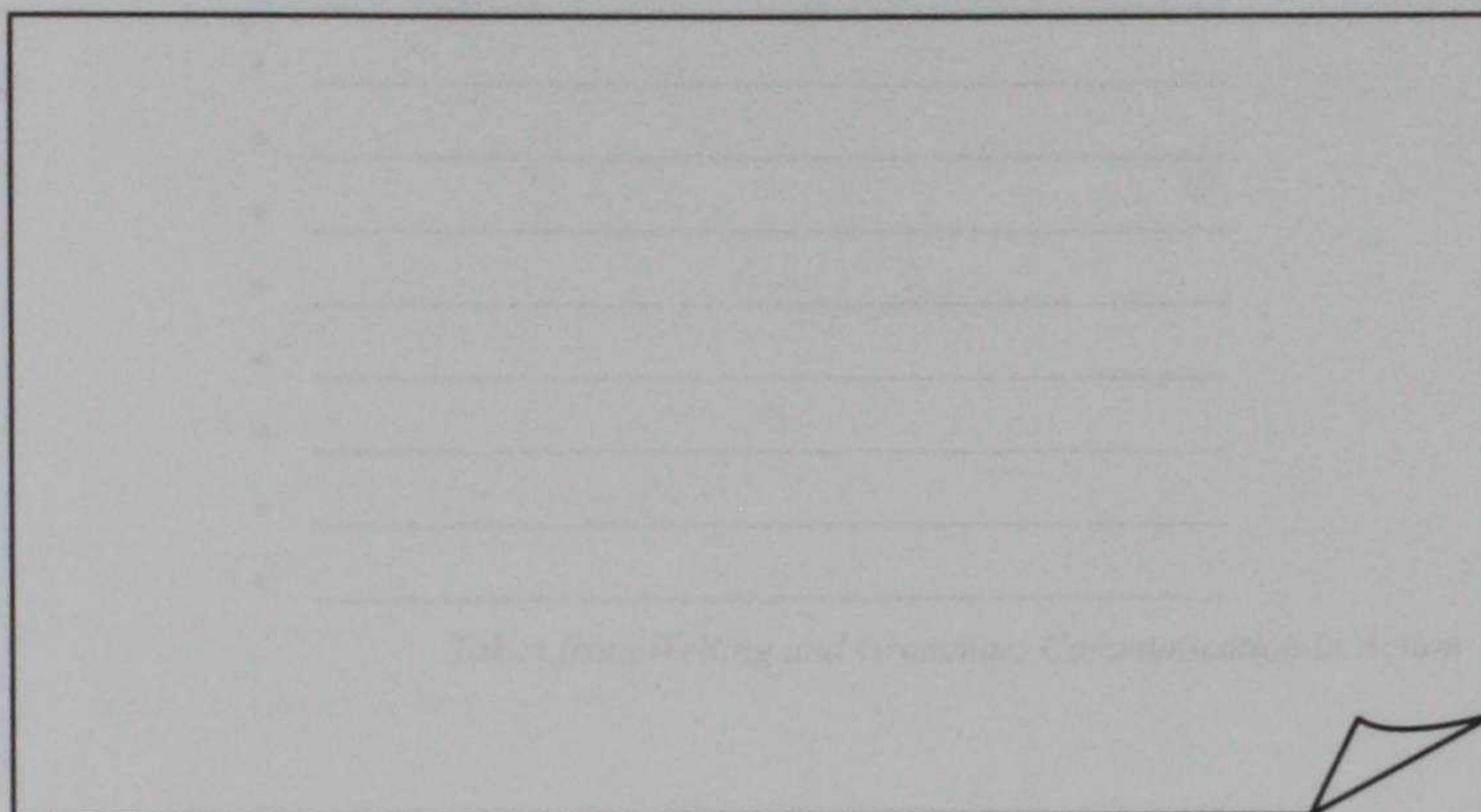


Read the writing tip below. On a separate piece of paper, brainstorm several ways to start your writing.

**Writing tip****Getting your reader's attention**

Think of an interesting way to begin your writing. Start with an idea or information that gets your reader's attention.

- ✓ Begin with a question. (Have you ever been to ...?)
- ✓ Begin with an interesting quote. ("Be careful," said someone when I got off the train.)
- ✓ Start with a description. (The first thing I saw in Harvard Square was a man with purple hair.)

**Strategy:**

**Listing and itemizing:** This strategy helps writers to find details to enrich their writing.

**Steps:**

1. Spend five minutes listing ideas connected to the topic.
2. Look over your list. Circle the most important items.
3. Look for connections among the phrases you have circled.
4. Highlight details that will add to the story you want to tell.





**Exercise #3**

Read the following topic. Then, list details about it.

**Men Play Soccer While Women Talk**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

*Taken from Writing and Grammar: Communication in Action*



Characterize Through Details

# Are Dogs People's Best Friends?

**Exercise #4**

A. Look at the picture of the animal below and find characterizing details. Take into account the following questions:



1. What two details would I use to describe this animal to a friend?
2. What kind of food does this animal eat?
3. Where does it live?
4. What is its color?
5. What is unique in its behavior?

B. Describe two details in the picture that could be used to characterize this animal.

A large red oval shape containing several horizontal white lines, intended for writing a response to question B.



# I want to know your opinion

## Exercise #5

- a. Choose ( ✓ ) one of the opinions below.
- ( ) Costa Rica's fauna and flora is the richest in Latin America.
  - ( ) Sports help you be in shape.
  - ( ) Pop music is better than reggae music.
  - ( ) Traveling is the best way to relax.
- b. Write your opinion in the box. Then, list possible reasons to support and explain your opinion.

**Writing tip:** Before you start writing, spend time collecting your ideas. List every idea that comes to your mind. Later you can go back and choose the ideas you want to include in your writing.

<p><b>Opinion:</b> _____</p> <p><b>Reasons:</b></p> <p>1. _____</p> <p>2. _____</p> <p>3. _____</p> <p>4. _____</p> <p>5. _____</p>
---

- c. Read your list of reasons again and choose the three you like best. In writing, state your opinion and present your reasons to your classmates.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



# Do you believe in Genies?

## Exercise #6

a. Use some or all of the pictures below to write a story. Before you begin to write, write your ideas on the story map below.



Story map

**Title**  
 (What's the title of the story?) \_\_\_\_\_

**Characters**  
 (Who are the characters in the story?) \_\_\_\_\_

**Plot**  
 (What happens in the beginning of the story?) \_\_\_\_\_  
 (What happens in the middle of the story?) \_\_\_\_\_  
 (What happens at the end of the story?) \_\_\_\_\_



b. Write your story using the story map.

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*Taken and adapted from Transitions 1 Workbook.*

Connecting Ideas



5.13

**Unit 6****Description**

Through the development of this unit, students will learn how to  
connect ideas together by using comparisons.

**Objectives**

Students will be able to compare and contrast using  
comparisons.

**Connecting Ideas**



# Description

Through the development of this unit, students will learn how to put ideas together by using conjunctions.

## **Objective**

Students will be able to join ideas and sentences in context using conjunctions.



Good writers connect the ideas in their paragraphs. A paragraph with connected ideas has cohesion. Good writers also use clear and simple language. This makes their writing easy to read. A paragraph with clear and simple English has good style.

### Using *and*, *but* and *so* to connect sentences.

You can connect two sentences with *and*, *but* or *so*. Use a comma before these words when they connect two complete sentences.

- *And* introduces additional information.

Example: Some schools offer everything from Asian studies to zoology. +

They have many recreation facilities and student services. =

Some schools offer everything from Asian studies to zoology, and they have many recreation facilities and student services.

- *But* introduces contrasting information.

Example: He thinks his English class is excellent. +

He thinks the food in the cafeteria is terrible. =

He thinks his English class is excellent, but he thinks the food in the cafeteria is terrible.

- *So* introduces a result.

Example: His company sells equipment to American hospitals. +

He needs English for his work. =

His company sells equipment to American hospitals, so he needs English for his work.



# Can they get together?

**Exercise #1:** Connect the following sentences with *and*, *but* or *so*.

1. Alberto lives with his sister. She drives him to school every afternoon.

---

---

2. Maria can speak English well. She needs more writing practice.

---

---

3. She likes school life. She is homesick for her family.

---

---

4. Her company is opening an office in the United States. It needs English speaking workers.

---

---

5. The school offers a good program in business. Its recreational facilities are excellent.

---

---



# Periods get out of here !!!!

## Exercise #2

Read the ideas below and combine them with *and*, *but*, *either*. Leave out the main verb and the words that come after it.

1. Animals were created by God. Human beings were created by God

2. \_\_\_\_\_

Young people like pop music. Adults love classic music.

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Traveling by bus is cheaper. Traveling by plane is faster.

4. \_\_\_\_\_

Eating vegetables help people to have a good physical condition. Doing exercises

5. \_\_\_\_\_

Volleyball is not a rough sport. Tennis is not a rough sport.

\_\_\_\_\_

*Taken from Developing Writing*



# They are so short!

## Exercise #3

Combine each pair of sentences below using the conjunction **and**.

**Sentence combining:** When two sentences are very similar expect for one part, they can often be combined into one longer sentence with a compound part. The most common conjunction for this kind of sentence is and

Example:

Ana (likes pop music).

Peter likes pop music.

Peter and Ana like pop music.

1. Poverty (is a social problem )

Discrimination is a social problem.

---

2. Lung cancer (is considered a serious health problem).

Leukemia is considered a serious health problem.

---

3. Young people (expect to study in a prestigious university).

Young people expect to have a good job

---

4. Watching TV (is a way to have fun).

Listening to music (is a way to have fun).

---

5. Costa Rican (is known by its natural resources).

Costa Rica is known by its friendly people.

---

*Taken from Developing Writing*



# I don't like this!!!!

## Exercise #4

Rewrite the paragraph below and vary the length of the sentences. Make some sentences longer and change the word order in some of them. Combine some sentences with **and**, **but**, **or** and **so**.

### Young People

Today, the youngest have different likes and dislikes regarding hobbies. Some of them like to do dynamic activities. Others prefer relaxing activities. Also, teenagers have fun by playing video games. They like using the internet, too. Reading books does not seem attractive at all for the majority of these people. The sale of books in bookstores is decreasing considerably.

Young people prefer watching TV to going to the park. They also spend more time listening to music than playing football in the park. Unfortunately, they are just worried about their physical appearance. Moreover, they worry about buying the best and the most expensive cell phone, mp4, iPod or computer. Few of them think of morals and values. Technology has a big influence on this kind of behavior. Actually, young people have other interests in activities.



A large rectangular area with a light blue background at the top and a series of horizontal orange lines below, intended for writing a rewritten paragraph.

*Taken from Developing Writing*







5.14

**Unit 7**

# Description

Students will be able to write complete sentences for the paragraphs provided in the exercises.

## Objective

Students will be able to write complete sentences for descriptive paragraphs.



# Coming to an end



# Description

In this unit students will write complete concluding ideas for the paragraphs provided in the exercises.

## Objective

Students will be able to write complete concluding sentences for descriptive paragraphs.



**Concluding Sentence:** It is a sentence at the end of the paragraph which summarizes the information that has been presented. It is also a sort of topic sentence in reverse. It "holds" the supporting sentences in the paragraph.

<p>All in all Certainly Clearly Truly</p>	<p>Definitely In conclusion In fact</p>	<p>Obviously Surely To sum up</p>
---	---	---

# It needs an end!

## Exercise #1

Read the following paragraph and write a concluding idea.

My hometown is famous for several amazing natural features. First, it is noted for the Wheaton River, which is very wide and beautiful. Also, on the other side of the town is Wheaton Hill, which is unusual because it is very steep. The third amazing feature is the Big Old Tree. This tree stands two hundred feet tall and is probably about six hundred years old.

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*Taken and adapted from Writing and Grammar: Communication in Action*



# What's your favorite band?

## Exercise # 2

Read the paragraph below and choose the best concluding sentence from the options given. Put an X in the correct parentheses.



**Now!** It is your last chance to convince your readers about your point of view

### Sentences in

**"After I tried out a band, I learned that there were several things that I had to do for a good performance. The first reason why I like the band is that it has given me the chance to play on my drums. Practicing on my drums allows me to be a better performer. Becoming a better player makes it easier for me to be in front of people on stage". Neron Green.**

- ( ) Also, playing with my mates made me feel satisfied.
- ( ) To sum up, playing in the band has given me the opportunity to know what a good person is.
- ( ) Clearly, what I have experienced by being in a band has helped me to grow and be a better musician.
- ( ) The drums played an important role in my participation in the band.

*Taken and adapted from Writing and Grammar: Communication in Action*



# WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE HOBBIES?



## Exercise #3

Read the list of activities below and complete the charts. Then, write two descriptive paragraphs with the activities in each chart.

### Activities

- Go shopping
- Listen to music
- Play soccer
- Exercise
- Go camping
- Take a vacation
- Go to the movies
- Do the homework
- Study
- Go dancing
- Watch TV
- Have a picnic
- Play in the computer
- Chat on the internet



Activities I like to do alone	Activities I like to do with other people



**Paragraph 1: Activities I like to do alone**

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**Paragraph 2: Activities to do with other people**

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*Taken from Interchange*

# Please, help me with my cat!

**Exercise #4**

Look at the picture. Make up a story with the phrases in the box and write a descriptive paragraph.

Past Simple	Past Continuous
ran up arrived put up called rescued frightened him couldn't get down invited tried to tempt him down	was waiting was watering the plants were leaving was playing were having coffee and talking.





A large rectangular area with a purple border and horizontal lines, designed for writing. The top-left and bottom-left corners are rounded and feature a small circular graphic element. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the area.

*Taken and adapted from American Headway 3*

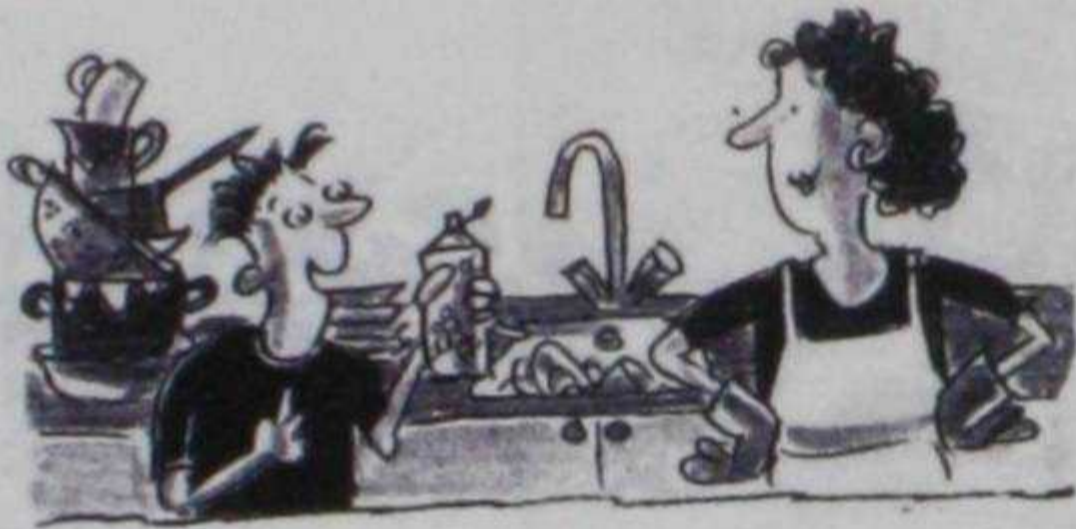


# Would you like to have dinner with me?



### Exercise #5

Look at the pictures and write a complete descriptive paragraph about what you think happened in the restaurant.



1 \_\_\_\_\_



2 \_\_\_\_\_



3 \_\_\_\_\_



4 \_\_\_\_\_

A large blue rectangular area with rounded corners, containing horizontal lines for writing a descriptive paragraph.

*Taken and adapted from American Headway*

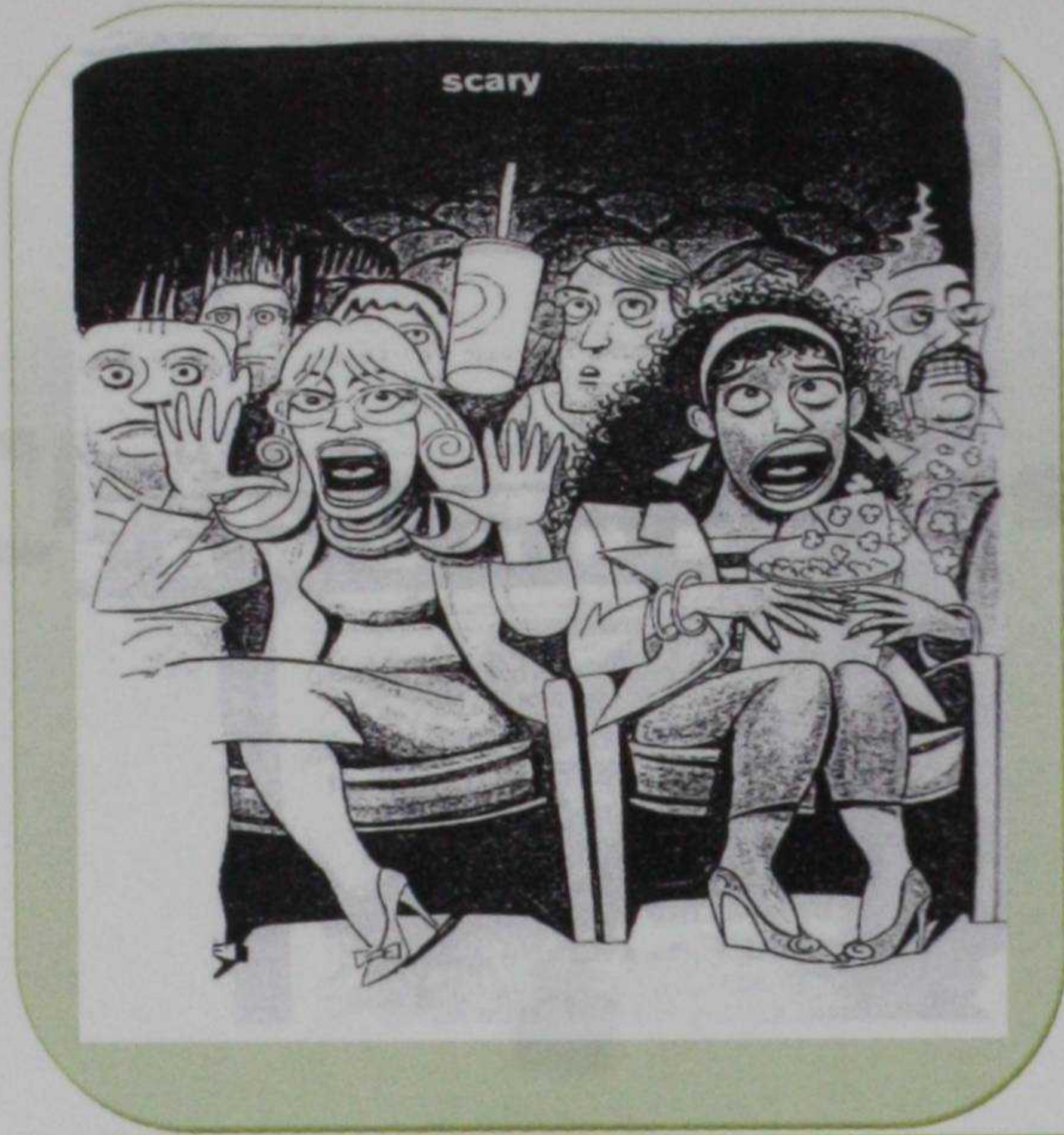


# Let's Imagine !!!!!



## Exercise #6

Look at the picture below and write a descriptive paragraph about it. Take into account all the parts of the paragraph: topic sentence, supporting details and concluding idea.



Handwriting practice area with ten horizontal lines.



5.15

**Unit 8**

# Checking the Task













## Revising the sentences

### Kinds of Transitions

Show sequence	Identify Cause and Effect	Show comparison and Contrast	Identify Conclusions
First, next, then, finally ,before, after, soon	Since, because, if	Like, also, similarly, Although, however, despite, but, on the other hand	Therefore, thus, so, consequently, as a result.

### Strategy: Coding Events for Transitions

- B. Read your paragraph and circle each sentence that tells of an event. Number the circle sentences in the order of the events they narrate. Then, reread the paragraph. If the connection between circled sentences is clear, draw a link in a new color between the circles. If the connection is not clear, add a transition from the list above.

**Coding for Transitions**

*Emily coded events in this paragraph, and then added a few needed transitions.*

① We conscientiously followed the instructions and spaced them apart exactly as the box directed. *Then, my* My grandfather

② and I led the dogs from their home and over to the testing site. *By that time, a* A neighborhood crowd had gathered around the

③ lawn, anticipating the dogs' reaction, for news spread quickly there. My grandfather and I carefully guided the

④ dogs to the bush most heavily covered in the artificial berries. *At the moment of truth, one* One of the animals leaned forward and began to

⑤ sniff the bush, and promptly took a bite out of it!

riting

*Taken from Writing and Grammar: Communication in Action*



# I really enjoyed the trip!




## Exercise#2

- A. Write a postcard to a partner about your last vacation or an interesting place you visited recently.

Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

To: \_\_\_\_\_

From: \_\_\_\_\_




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*Taken and adapted from New Interchange Student Book 1*

- B. Check your writing by answering the following questions:

1. Does it have a topic sentence? If so, is it very specific?
2. Is the paragraph supported with strong details related to the topic sentence?
3. Are the ideas organized following an order from general to specific?
4. Are the ideas linked with adequate words and connectors to make the paragraph coherent and unified?
5. Does it have an idea that summarizes the paragraph? Is it closely related to the topic sentence and supporting ideas?



### Editing checklist

1. Content
  - a. Are there interesting adjectives in the paragraph?
  - b. Do the adjectives describe the picture/ subject well?
2. Organization
  - a. Does the paragraph move from general to specific?
  - b. Do you need to change the order of the sentences?
3. Cohesion and style
  - a. Can you connect any sentences?
  - b. Are the pronouns correct?
  - c. Are the adjectives in the correct place?
  - d. Are the prepositional phrases appropriate?
4. Grammar
  - a. Are the verb forms correct? Is there an -s on all third-person singular verbs?
  - b. Is the use of *a/an* and *the* correct?
  - c. Are the present participles correct?
5. Form
  - a. Does the paragraph follow the rules for correct form?

*Taken from Interactions I: A Writing Process Book*

# il love my country!

### Exercise #3

Find a picture or a photo of a scene from your home country, or describe a scene that you remember. First, write about the picture. What can you see in it? Are there any people there? What are they doing? Then, edit your description taking into account the checklist above.

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# What beautiful tourist places to visit!

## Exercise #4

Pretend you are writing a travel brochure about your home country. Describe the country. Why should tourists visit there? What will they like? What interesting, beautiful, or historical sites are there to see? Bring in pictures if you can and make a travel brochure with your pictures and descriptions. Edit your description taking into account the checklist above.

*Taken from Interactions I: A Writing Process Book*

# What a nice place

## Exercise #5

Below you will find a paragraph about Sue's report to her trip to Thailand. Read it carefully and then:

- Write a title
- Underline the topic sentence.
- Circle the supporting details.
- Put in brackets the concluding idea.





### *Sue's report*

*Last summer, we spent our vacation in Thailand. We were very excited – it was our first trip there. We spent two days in Bangkok. Of course, we got a river taxi to the floating market. We bought some delicious fruit there. The next day we went to a very interesting temple called the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. We didn't have time to visit any other temples. However, we went to two historic cities – Ayuthaya and Sukhothai. Both have really interesting ruins. Everything was great. It's impossible to say what was the best thing about the trip.*



*Taken and adapted from Interchange*



# Are you good at drawing?



## Exercise #6

**Pair Work:** Look at the picture given by the teacher and write a descriptive paragraph about it. Then, choose a partner and ask him or her to read your paragraph and make a drawing to illustrate it.

Your partner's drawing



5.16

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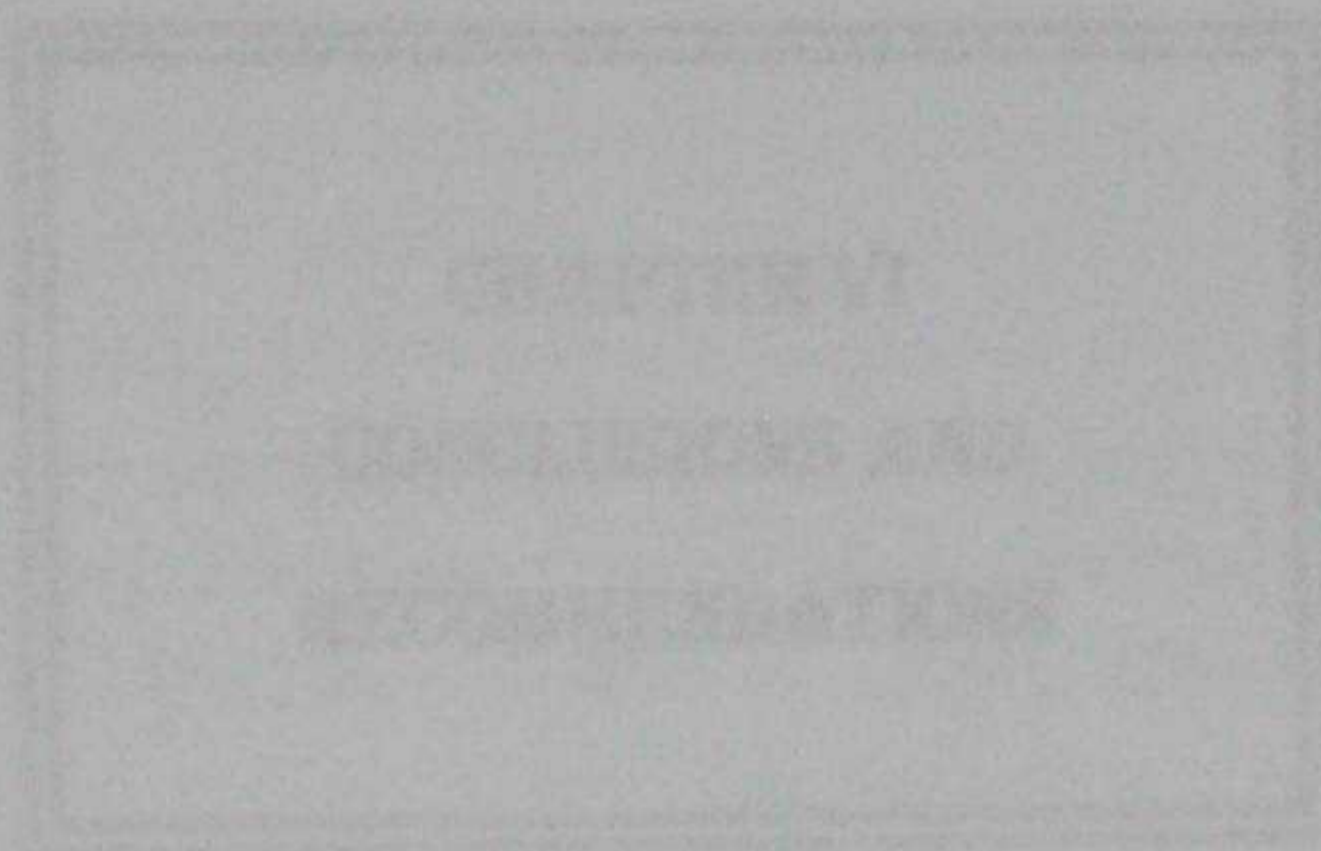
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**CHAPTER VI**  
**CONCLUSIONS AND**  
**RECOMMENDATIONS**



## 6.1 Conclusions:

The teaching of appropriate descriptive paragraph writing techniques in public high schools should be reinforced because students have to satisfy their need to communicate with foreigners and succeed in a world where English is considered an international language.

Through our experience and based on this research, we found out that there are some serious problems regarding the teaching of this skill at Colegio Ambientalista Issais Retana Arias. According to the results of this study, we concluded that learners had problems developing coherent and unified descriptive paragraphs because of their lack of vocabulary. The students had very limited vocabulary related to different topics which interfered with their expression of ideas. They commonly learn very few and simple words about different topics. That is why they sometimes did not find the appropriate words to express their ideas. Besides, students are not used to using a single word in different contexts or situations. They usually learn a single meaning of a specific word and they do not that the word can be used in different contexts or situations. Therefore, they face difficulties when expressing their ideas and it causes their paragraphs to be awkward. Vocabulary and different grammatical structures are learned more meaningfully by using different contexts for writing. In addition, the students' paragraphs reveal some other problems such as spelling, punctuation errors and lack of coherence which must be worked out.

Another conclusion is that the Spanish language had a big influence on the students' writing. They used Spanish structures in their paragraphs. Most of the time, they went around the same idea. They also inverted the order of words in sentences and used the structures of their native language. Intralingual transfer then greatly influences and interferes with the development of paragraphs in the target language.

Another problem found is that the topics included in the syllabus are not appealing to the students and not even to the teachers which affects their motivation. It would be much better if instructors had the chance to provide students with real life situations to write. Also, it would be more motivating for the



students to choose the topics for writing so that they feel interested and encouraged to produce their paragraphs.

Another relevant aspect is that the length of paragraphs depends on the topic assigned. When students were asked to write many lines they ran out of ideas, and when they were asked to write very few lines they lacked important information to support their main idea. Consequently, it can be concluded that teachers really need to take into account the topics they assign their students to write before determining the length of their paragraphs.

Students need to follow all the stages of writing for their paragraphs to be effective. Besides, they need to be provided with a prewriting activity in which the vocabulary needed to start writing is presented. By following all the stages of writing, paragraphs are likely to reveal fewer errors.

Also, by providing the students with clear and detailed explanations of what a descriptive paragraph is students actually improved their cohesion and paragraph structure. Most of them wrote the correct topic sentence, supporting ideas, and concluding idea in their paragraphs after that explanation.

Researchers found out that the teacher lacks training on the appropriate teaching of the writing skill. It would be helpful to hold workshops and provide educators with appropriate teaching material and writing techniques to guarantee improvement of the writing skills. Besides, appropriate teaching on how to write descriptive paragraphs may help students improve their academic efficiency.

Furthermore, if instructors get acquainted with the different approaches to teaching writing and choose one that could be adapted to the students' needs, they could make the writing process more meaningful to learners. Indeed, there are many approaches to teaching writing; however, identifying one or several is necessary to teach writing.

If instructors knew about the sources of error in L2 writing, it would be much easier for them to help students avoid or at least assimilate such interference in writing. Besides, teachers who choose the appropriate method for correcting errors may help students see errors as something natural. If teachers



explain to learners what errors are and how to avoid them, learners may feel relaxed when writing.

Besides, it is relevant to highlight that the students showed more willingness to learn when they were presented with new and more dynamic tasks and exercises for them to get started and develop their paragraphs. Indeed, the variety of tasks really triggered their motivation.

The positive results in terms of grade improvement by implementing new teaching techniques were not evident in a short period. It takes a long time to continue improving the students' descriptive paragraph writing skills even more. The more adequate teaching techniques are developed, the more students learn along the process.

As a matter of fact, the writing techniques develop in this investigation proved to be successful enough in just two months. Then, the following questions arise: What would have happened if the writing techniques had been developed during a longer period? Would the outcomes have been better? The answers to such questions may be found only if further research is carried out.



## **6.2 Recommendations:**

We advise high school teachers to follow these recommendations:

For students to improve, there has to be a profound change in the classroom methodology. It is imperative to train teachers on how to teach writing and how to implement the booklet proposed in this research. Instructors need workshops on how to develop the writing skill by providing students with authentic classroom activities, real life situations and different writing techniques to promote the development of writing skills.

Provide the students with authentic material and real-life situations and contexts for them to write their compositions. By doing this, they get more familiar with the proper context in which words are used and also feel more motivated because they can write about topics they are interested in. Give the students clear explanations of what a descriptive paragraph is, the difference between the way ideas are organized in Spanish and in English, and the different patterns of organization they can use when writing to avoid incorrect paragraph structure and rhetoric. Teachers must always give a clear explanation of useful concepts regarding the teaching of descriptive paragraphs before asking their students to do any writing task.

Put into practice different techniques so that students do not get bored doing the same tasks over and over again. Be dynamic, creative and praise the students' efforts to produce. It makes them feel motivated and encouraged to continue writing. Actually, teachers should encourage learners to participate in writing exercises to help them develop their writing skills. In addition, try as many writing techniques as possible to determine which is the most appropriate to your own teaching situation and your students' needs. Remember that students have different intelligences and their learning styles or the strategies they use differ from each other. This is why it is important to employ as many different techniques as possible. Also, reinforce the topics assigned by the Ministry of Public Education by designing writing booklets for each single unit. By creating a set of innovative writing techniques for each unit, the students' interest and motivation are likely to increase.



Have students write texts according to their proficiency level. Do not expect students to produce perfect paragraphs since the very beginning. The development of this skill is a process and in order to achieve good results, students need to go step by step. There are stages of writing students need to go through in order to develop accurate paragraphs. So, adapt their writing to their own proficiency level and move on at their own pace.

Another relevant aspect is not to ask students to write too long paragraphs because they may get stuck and run out of ideas, nor too short because their paragraphs may lack information. Try to find a balance. Remember that the length of a paragraph is greatly influenced by the topic assigned and the background knowledge students have of the topic. If their background knowledge is poor, they need time to brainstorm their ideas with their classmates and teacher.

Another useful recommendation is to design appropriate rating scales to evaluate students' paragraphs so that they only test what is supposed to be tested and take into account the students' cognitive level before determining what criteria to evaluate.

We also recommend teachers to design a placement test and administer it the first day of classes so that it could be used to place students with similar cognitive levels in the same group. This is a good strategy to make sure students learn together at the same pace.

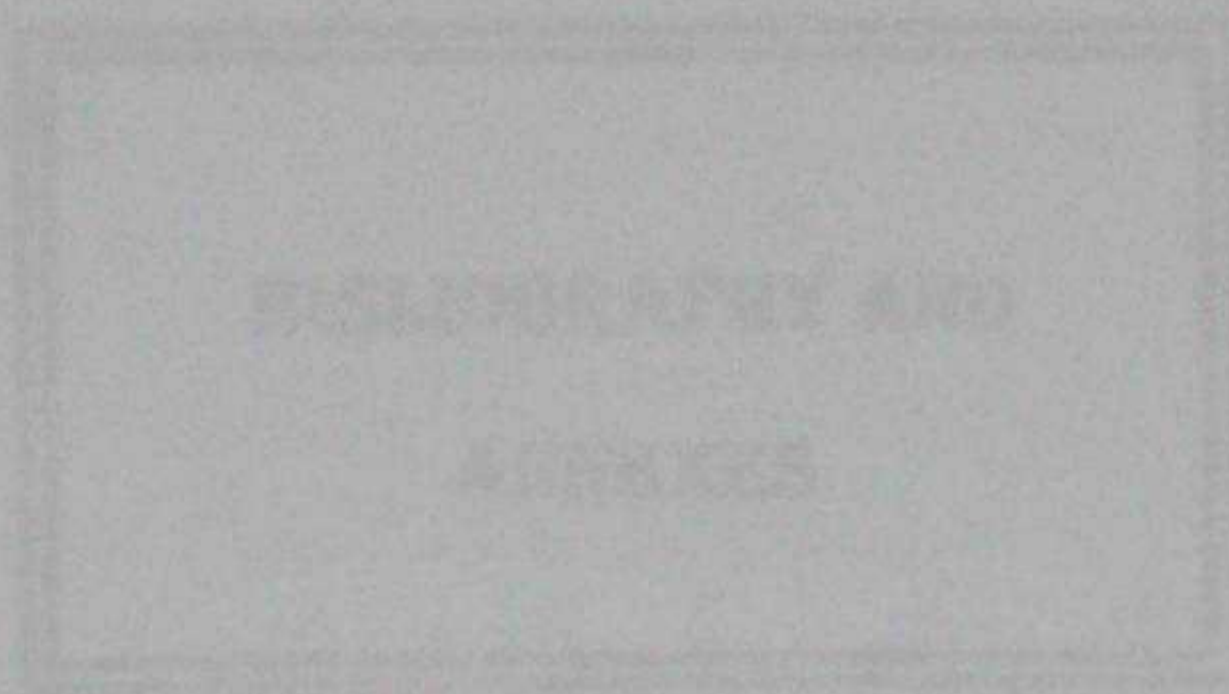
It is very important that teachers carry out the three stages of writing: prewriting, while- writing, and post-writing in order to get the students acquainted with the right process to follow and offer diversity of tasks in each lesson.

Be updated. Learning is an ongoing process that demands being familiar with new theories of learning and teaching procedures. Consequently, teachers improve their teaching styles and students get to know new ways to learn that may help them learn the language better.

Finally, do further research. Develop studies with lower levels to detect new or similar problems and work them out at early stages of the learning process so



that students develop the writing skill accurately since they start having contact with the English language.





**BIBLIOGRAPHY AND  
ANNEXES**



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**ANNEXES**



Universidad Nacional  
Sede Central de Heredia  
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras  
Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias  
del Lenguaje

Proyecto de Graduación  
Aplicación de Cuestionario  
Prof.: Angélica Alvarado Chinchilla  
Prof.: Jessica Ureña Salazar

**Cuestionario N° 1**  
**Cuestionario para los Estudiantes**

**I. Complete con sus datos personales.**

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

Edad: \_\_\_\_\_ Sección: \_\_\_\_\_

Lugar de residencia: \_\_\_\_\_

**II. Aspectos Lingüísticos:**

*Instrucciones:* Lea las siguientes preguntas y escriba una "X" dentro del paréntesis que antecede la(s) respuesta(s) correcta (s) a cada enunciado.

1. ¿Le gusta escribir en inglés?

- ( ) Si
- ( ) No
- ( ) Un poco

2. ¿Utiliza su profesor de inglés el material necesario para desarrollar la habilidad de escritura en los estudiantes de forma satisfactoria durante sus lecciones?

- ( ) Si
- ( ) No
- ( ) A veces

3. ¿Sabe usted lo que es un párrafo descriptivo?

- ( ) Si
- ( ) No
- ( ) Un poco

4. ¿Sabe usted escribir párrafos descriptivos en Inglés?

- ( ) Si
- ( ) No
- ( ) Un poco



5. Marque con una X los aspectos de la siguiente lista que representan un problema para usted a la hora de expresarse de forma escrita.

- Ortografía
- Puntuación
- Vocabulario
- Coherencia
- Ideas centrales
- Ideas secundarias
- Ideas de conclusión

6. ¿Sabe los que son técnicas de escritura?

- Si
- No
- Un poco

7. ¿Le enseña su profesor de inglés a escribir párrafos descriptivos en la clase de inglés?

- Si
- No
- Algunas veces

**Técnica:** Conjunto de procedimientos y métodos de una ciencia, arte u oficio. Habilidad para utilizarlos. Conjunto de aplicaciones prácticas.

8. ¿Aplica su profesor algunas técnicas de escritura durante las lecciones de Inglés tales como:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Títulos      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lluvia de ideas |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Asocie       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ideas centrales |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hacer listas | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mapa conceptual |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tomar notas  |   |

- Si
- No
- Un poco

9. Si contesto que sí a la pregunta anterior, marque con una X cuales de esas técnicas aplica su profesor durante las lecciones de inglés.

- Títulos
- Asocie
- Hacer listas
- Tomar notas
- Lluvia de ideas
- Ideas centrales
- Mapa conceptual



10. Marque con una X los temas de su interés para escribir

- ( ) Salud
- ( ) Viajes
- ( ) Música
- ( ) Familia
- ( ) Animales
- ( ) Deportes
- ( ) Educación
- ( ) El medio ambiente
- ( ) Entretenimiento
- ( ) Problemas sociales
- ( ) Otros: \_\_\_\_\_



## Cuestionario N° 2

### Cuestionario para el Profesor

#### I. Complete los siguientes datos personales

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

Título: \_\_\_\_\_

Lugar de trabajo: \_\_\_\_\_

Grupo profesional: \_\_\_\_\_

Años de experiencia: \_\_\_\_\_

#### II. Aspectos Lingüísticos

**Instrucciones:** Lea las siguientes preguntas y marque en el paréntesis correspondiente.

##### 1. ¿Le gusta enseñar escritura en Inglés?

Si ( )

No ( )

Un poco ( )

##### 2. ¿Cuenta usted con el material necesario para enseñar la producción escrita?

Si ( )

No ( )

Un poco ( )

##### 3. ¿Utiliza técnicas de escritura para enseñar producción escrita?

Si ( )

No ( )

Un poco ( )



4. Si marcó "SI" en la pregunta anterior, marque con una X cuales de las siguientes técnicas usted ha aplicado.

- Títulos
- Asocie
- Hacer listas
- Tomar notas
- Lluvia de ideas
- Ideas centrales
- Mapa conceptual

5. ¿Considera importante la enseñanza de la escritura en Inglés?

- Si ( )
- No ( )
- Un poco ( )

6. ¿Sus estudiantes se muestran interesados en la producción escrita?

- Si ( )
- No ( )
- Alunas Veces ( )

7. Marque con una X los aspectos en los cuales los estudiantes presentan mayor dificultad a la hora de producir en Ingles.

- Ortografía
- Vocabulario
- Coherencia
- Puntuación
- Ideas Centrales
- Ideas de conclusión
- Ideas secundarias
- Uso de estructuras gramaticales



8. ¿Cree usted que sus alumnos necesitan mejorar la producción escrita?

Si ( )

No ( )

Un poco ( )

9. Marque con una X los temas que considera de interés para sus estudiantes al escribir

\_\_\_ Salud

\_\_\_ Viajes

\_\_\_ Música

\_\_\_ Familia

\_\_\_ Animales

\_\_\_ Deportes

\_\_\_ Educación

\_\_\_ El ambiente

\_\_\_ Entretenimiento

\_\_\_ Problemas sociales

\_\_\_ Otros: \_\_\_\_\_







**Situation B:** You met a very nice boy/girl on a chat room last week and you have been sharing some information about yourself. He/she asked you to tell him/her about your likes and dislikes regarding music.

**Instructions:** Write an eight -line e-mail describing your favorite kinds of music, singers, and songs. Also, write about the kind of music you do not like and explain why. Do not miss any detail.

Send Saved Discard

To:

Add Cc | Add Bcc

Subject:

Attach a file Insert: Invitation

**B I U F rT T** Plain Text Check Spelling ▼

Send Saved Discard Draft autosaved at 7:01 AM (20 minutes ago)







**Situation B:** You met a very nice boy/girl on a chat room last week and you have been sharing some information about yourself. He/she asked you to tell him/her about your likes and dislikes regarding music.

**Instructions:** Write an eight -line e-mail describing your favorite kinds of music, singers, and songs. Also, write about the kind of music you do not like and explain why. Do not miss any detail.

The image shows a screenshot of an email composition window. At the top, there are three buttons: "Send", "Saved", and "Discard". Below these is a "To:" field with a yellow highlight. Underneath the "To:" field are links for "Add Cc" and "Add Bcc". A "Subject:" field is located below that. Further down, there are links for "Attach a file" and "Insert: Invitation". A rich text toolbar is visible, containing icons for bold (B), italic (I), underline (U), strikethrough (ABC), text color (T), background color (T), link (chain), unlink (chain with slash), list (bulleted), list (numbered), indent (left), indent (right), quote (left), quote (right), and a "Plain Text" dropdown menu. To the right of the toolbar is a "Check Spelling" button with a downward arrow. The main body of the email is a large area with horizontal lines for typing. At the bottom, there are "Send", "Saved", and "Discard" buttons again, followed by a status message: "Draft autosaved at 7:01 AM (20 minutes ago)".



## Rating Scale for Writing

CRITERIA	SCALE	Excellent 5	Very good 4	Average 3	Fair 2	Poor 1	Total points
<b>Content</b> (Complete and well developed ideas relevant to the assigned Topic)							
<b>Grammar</b> (Accurate use of grammar structures: agreement, tense, number, Word order, articles, pronouns, prepositions, connectors)							
<b>Vocabulary</b> (Appropriate choice of words according to the topic.)							
<b>Mechanics</b> (Adequate mastering of spelling, punctuation, capitalization and indentation)							
<b>Coherence</b> (Ideas clearly stated and supported with specific details that create well organized and logical paragraphs)							
<b>Total store</b>							

Scale: 1 to 5

Total points: 25

Points of the test :

$$\text{Formula: } \frac{\text{Pts. Obt} \times 100}{\text{total points}} = \text{Total points}$$

$$\text{Points of the test} = \frac{\text{Total pts} \times \text{pts of the test}}{100}$$

Taken and adapted from compilation of materials used in the course "Evaluation" taught by Oscar Rojas in the Licenciatura program.





**SIDUNA**



\*FI18596\*