

LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF DEVELOPING ENGLISH WRITING COMPETENCE IN UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract: *This article examines the linguistic aspects of developing English writing competence among Grade 10-11 students, focusing on vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, cohesion, and coherence. Based on a theoretical analysis of second-language writing research, it identifies common difficulties in writing paragraphs, emails, and short essays. The article suggests practical teaching activities, including model-text analysis, guided practice, independent writing, and revision. It emphasizes the importance of integrating linguistic knowledge with meaningful writing tasks to improve students' written communication skills.*

Keywords: *English writing competence; upper secondary school; Grades 10–11; vocabulary; grammar; cohesion; EFL writing; formative feedback.*

Аннотация: *В статье рассматриваются лингвистические аспекты развития компетенции письменной речи на английском языке у учащихся 10–11-х классов с акцентом на лексику, грамматику, структуру предложений, связность и логическую последовательность текста. На основе теоретического анализа исследований в области обучения письменной речи на иностранном языке выявляются основные трудности, возникающие при написании абзацев, электронных писем и коротких эссе. Предлагаются практические методы обучения, включающие анализ образцов текстов, выполнение упражнений, самостоятельное письмо и редактирование. Подчеркивается важность интеграции языковых знаний с практическими письменными заданиями для совершенствования навыков письменной коммуникации учащихся.*

Ключевые слова: *компетенция письменной речи на английском языке; старшие классы общеобразовательной школы; 10–11-е классы; лексика; грамматика; связность текста; обучение письменной речи на английском языке как иностранном; формирующая обратная связь.*

INTRODUCTION

Writing in English is an important part of learning a foreign language in upper secondary school. Students in Grades 10-11 are expected to communicate ideas in written forms such as emails, descriptions, opinion paragraphs, and short essays. To complete these tasks, they need

more than knowledge of separate grammar rules. They must choose suitable words, construct clear sentences, and connect information in a way that readers can understand.

In English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms, students may understand a reading text and answer grammar questions but still find it difficult to write an independent paragraph. Their writing may contain repeated words, inaccurate verb forms, short disconnected sentences, or inappropriate informal expressions. These difficulties show why linguistic knowledge should be practised within complete written texts rather than only through isolated exercises.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) describes writing in relation to communicative purposes and the ability to produce connected texts [1]. Guidance for teaching secondary-school writing also recommends explicit instruction, model texts, and feedback based on students’ work [2]. Therefore, the development of linguistic accuracy needs to be linked with meaningful writing tasks.

The aim of this article is to explain the main linguistic components of English writing competence and suggest accessible teaching activities for Grades 10–11. Particular attention is given to vocabulary, grammar, text cohesion, and appropriate language use. The focus is on classroom practice rather than advanced linguistic theory.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Writing competence involves using language resources to express a clear message for a reader. In upper secondary classes, linguistic development should support the types of text that students are learning to produce. Although vocabulary, grammar, and text organization can be taught separately for practice, students need to combine them in their final written work.

Vocabulary is one of the foundations of good writing. Students need words that fit the topic and convey the intended meaning. Knowing a word also involves knowing how it combines with other words. P. Nation emphasizes the importance of vocabulary use and productive knowledge in language learning [3]. For this reason, teachers should help students move from recognizing new expressions in a text to using them in their own writing.

For example, in a lesson about work and future careers, students may initially write: “A good job gives many good things.” A clearer statement is: “A suitable career can provide financial stability and opportunities for professional growth.” The revised sentence makes the idea more precise without requiring unnecessarily difficult vocabulary. Useful combinations such as “gain experience,” “develop skills,” “make a decision,” and “apply for a job” can be highlighted in a reading text and reused in short paragraphs.

Word-choice activities may include replacing vague words, matching verbs with common noun combinations, and selecting expressions for formal and informal situations. Teachers should encourage accuracy and natural use rather than the memorization of long lists of complex synonyms.

Correct grammar helps readers understand the writer’s meaning. At this level, relevant features include verb tense and agreement, articles, word order, modals, relative clauses, and sentence combinations. However, grammar work is most useful when linked to the purpose of the text. For example, students may practise the modal “should” when making recommendations and “although” when presenting a contrasting point.

Learners should be able to move beyond a sequence of very short sentences while maintaining clarity. Compare: “Many teenagers use phones. Phones help them study. Phones also distract them.” A more connected version is: “Although smartphones can support independent learning, they may also distract teenagers during study time.” The second version expresses a relationship between ideas through sentence structure.

Teachers can use sentence-combining and rewriting tasks before an independent writing assignment. The aim is not to make every sentence long; it is to help students vary sentence patterns and make grammatical choices that support meaning.

Cohesion refers to language features that connect parts of a text, including pronouns, repeated key terms, and linking expressions. Coherence concerns whether the ideas are organized in a logical and understandable way. M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan describe cohesion as a set of linguistic relations contributing to textual connectedness [4]. In classroom writing, both clear links and a logical order are necessary.

Students sometimes use connectors such as “firstly,” “moreover,” and “finally” without developing a clear argument. Simply adding many linking words does not create a coherent paragraph. A stronger approach is to teach a basic progression: topic sentence, explanation, supporting example, and concluding statement. Students may then choose a few links, such as “because,” “for example,” and “however,” according to the relationships they need.

A short editing activity can ask students to put sentences in a logical order, underline the main idea, and replace unclear pronouns. Such activities develop awareness of how individual sentences form a complete paragraph.

Upper secondary students also need to adjust language to the type of text. An email to a friend allows a more informal style, whereas an email to an organization requires an appropriate greeting, clear request, and polite closing. K. Hyland’s work on genre pedagogy stresses that written texts are shaped by their communicative purposes and readers [5]. Therefore, students benefit from comparing short examples of the genres they are asked to produce.

Teachers may make this difference visible through a simple comparison. For a message to a friend, a student could write, “Can you tell me about the course?” In a formal enquiry, the same request might be expressed as, “I would appreciate information about the course requirements.” Students can discuss why the expressions differ, then write two short messages for different readers. Such comparisons connect the linguistic features of register with realistic communication.

Spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing also contribute to readability. These conventions should be checked during revision, but they should not replace attention to the quality of ideas and the accuracy of the language used to communicate them.

CLASSROOM APPLICATION

For effective writing instruction, language practice can be organized around one meaningful task. Research-based guidance for adolescent writers identifies explicit strategies, collaborative writing activities, and the use of models among useful approaches [2, 6]. The following sequence offers a practical option for English lessons; it is a suggested lesson design, not a fixed curriculum requirement.

Step 1. Observe a model text. The teacher provides a short paragraph or email related to a familiar topic, such as career choices, environmental problems, or healthy habits. Students identify useful vocabulary, key grammar structures, and the main idea of each sentence.

Step 2. Practise selected language. Students complete two or three short tasks: improve vague expressions, combine sentences, or choose appropriate connectors. The teacher focuses on the features needed for the next writing task instead of correcting every possible error.

Step 3. Write an individual draft. Grade 10 students may produce a short opinion paragraph or practical email, while Grade 11 students may work with a longer opinion text including a counterargument. This is an example of differentiation; text length and difficulty should be adjusted to the learners’ actual proficiency.

Step 4. Exchange and revise. In pairs, students check whether the text has an understandable main idea, suitable vocabulary, accurate sentences, and clear connections. They revise selected points and submit the improved version. This final stage helps them see writing as a process of making choices rather than completing a single attempt.

Consider the prompt “Should schools provide more career guidance?” A student may write: “School must give many information about jobs. It is very good. Students can choose good work.” The teacher can guide the learner to revise it as follows: “Schools should provide more information about different careers because this can help students make informed decisions about their future.” The revision illustrates accurate word combinations, article and noun use, a clearer argument, and a causal link. It should be discussed as an example of improvement, not memorized as the only acceptable answer.

One way to connect reading and writing is to use a short text about a familiar school issue. For instance, after reading about traffic and air pollution, students note useful phrases such as “reduce traffic,” “public transport,” and “environmental impact.” They then write a paragraph recommending one change for their town. The teacher can ask them to use one reason, one example, and an appropriate contrasting expression. This makes the link between vocabulary learning and practical written communication visible.

Grade 10 learners who need more support can receive a short paragraph outline or two model sentences. Grade 11 learners who are ready for a greater challenge can compare two possible solutions and justify their preferred option. In both cases, the teacher should adapt

support to proficiency and the demands of the task rather than assume that all students in one grade have the same writing ability.

Once students understand this process, similar activities can be used for other Grade 10-11 topics. Writing tasks based on reading materials are especially useful because students first encounter relevant vocabulary and text patterns in context and then adapt them to express their own views.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Assessment in upper secondary classes should be understandable to learners. A short checklist can help teachers evaluate not only the number of errors but also whether students communicate their intended meaning. The proposed indicators below are intended for classroom feedback and have not been tested as a standardized scale.

Table 1

Proposed formative assessment criteria for Grade 10-11 writing tasks.

Criterion	What the teacher and learner check
Vocabulary	Words and common combinations fit the topic and meaning.
Grammar	Verb forms, sentence structure, and punctuation support understanding.
Cohesion and coherence	Ideas follow a logical order; sentences are clearly linked.
Task and register	The text addresses the prompt and uses suitable language for its reader.

Feedback should identify a small number of priorities. For instance, when a student uses mostly suitable vocabulary but repeatedly makes errors in verb agreement, the teacher may focus on that pattern first. R. Ellis distinguishes several approaches to written corrective feedback, including direct correction and indications that encourage learners to repair their own errors [7]. Teachers can combine a clear example with an opportunity for revision.

A short feedback exchange can be organized using two questions: “Which sentence expresses the main idea most clearly?” and “Which sentence needs a more accurate word or stronger connection?” Students first suggest one improvement and then explain why it helps the reader. This discussion is more useful than asking classmates to mark every error without guidance. The teacher can model respectful comments and check that peer suggestions are linguistically appropriate.

Comparing a first draft with a revised draft provides useful evidence of progress in a single task. Periodically asking students to apply the same linguistic feature in a new topic can also show whether they are becoming more independent writers. Grammar quizzes may support this process, but they should not be treated as the only measure of writing competence.

DISCUSSION

The reviewed literature suggests that linguistic features of writing should be taught together with clear communication. In Grades 10–11, students can gradually develop a stronger written style by learning how vocabulary, sentence structure, and connections between ideas function in texts. Learning specific language forms is valuable, but the forms become useful when students apply them to a purpose and audience.

For teachers, the practical implication is to select a small number of language objectives for each writing lesson. A writing task on environmental problems might emphasize cause-and-effect expressions, while a formal email could focus on polite requests and register. Model-text reading, guided practice, independent drafting, and feedback can then be connected around those objectives. The proposed approach remains a methodological recommendation and requires classroom-based investigation to establish its effectiveness in a particular school context.

CONCLUSION

The linguistic aspects of English writing competence in upper secondary school include appropriate vocabulary, accurate grammar, clear sentence construction, meaningful links between ideas, and correct written conventions. These elements need to be developed through practical writing tasks rather than taught only as separate rules. For Grade 10-11 English lessons, a manageable sequence of model-text analysis, targeted language practice, drafting, and revision can help students use what they know in their own texts. Regular feedback on a few clear criteria may also make progress easier to understand. Future research could test this sequence in school classrooms using students’ first drafts, revised texts, and writing assessment results.

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