



TexTESOL III Newsletter

Texas Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

October 2005

www.textesol.org/region3

Letter from the President

Katrina. Rita. At one time, when we heard these names, we may have thought of names of our students. No more. The names seem more synonymous with the word “awful.” If we look in a dictionary, the word means very bad or terrible. But it wasn’t always defined this way – like many things in life, the word’s meaning has changed with time.

The recent weather events made me wonder about other things that time has changed. At the beginning of every term, we get emergency instructions to share with our students. Sharing these in the past always seemed out of context, an insert or a filler to other information that had little or no meaning to any of my students. This time it was different. I walked to the map plan in each of the rooms that I teach in and instructed the students on emergency procedures as well as advised them to check each room where they have classes so that they would know where the nearest emergency exit is. I also asked if any of them had experienced a hurricane, tornado, or earthquake. Most of the class had experienced at least one of them. We shared tips on what to do and what type of emergency supplies we should have on hand. A few of my students had families both in New Orleans and Houston.

My students did seem more serious than usual during the week when Rita was approaching. The hurricanes made them see their lives and where they were in a different way. Even a short story had new meaning for them. After discussing “To Build a Fire,” I asked my students if the story’s main character was real to them. They agreed he was

stubborn, and almost arrogant, in his perception that he can make it to camp in weather that was 75 degrees below zero. He was, as one student said, focused on his goal to make camp. But I asked why he, as a newcomer, didn’t take the advice of the old timer. Why didn’t he consider the dangers? The weather conditions were awful. So why? One of the other students shared that the main character was very much like her and her fellow students. “We didn’t think of the dangers of crossing many countries’ borders to get to the United States; we only thought of getting and being here. Nothing or no danger was too big to get in our way.” I asked her if she was saying that it is like having blinders on, not seeing what’s around you and thinking only of the results of your efforts. She nodded yes; “Sometimes,” she continued, “you can’t look around you because if you do, you will stop and get trapped, so it’s better to keep moving in the direction of the goal and not think of the effort that we are using.”

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I thought about the Renaissance's definition of awful, full of awe or wonder. Katrina. Rita. Two events of nature that were both catastrophic and awe-inspiring –awful in the old and the new sense. This reminded me of my dual role as a teacher; I need to not only facilitate meaning in what my students study but also remind them of the meaning of life experiences. And thanks to one of my students, I know that my eyes and ears are open in a new way.

Keep in touch,
Anne-Marie
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Mark your calendar!!!



TexTESOL III Fall Conference "Come Learn and Grow with Us!"

October 29, 2005

Ragsdale Center, St. Edward's University

Poster Sessions, Exhibitors, Networking, Business Meeting

Keynote Speaker

Michele Sabino

TESOL President, 2004-2005

Please visit our website for more detailed information on conference registration.

<http://www.textesol.org/region3/>

For information about St. Edward's University, visit
<http://www.stedwards.edu/map/campmap.htm>

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Maintaining and Improving a Tutor Training Program

Robert Pinhero

This article is Part III of a three-part series. Part I and Part II can be found in the February and May 2005 Newsletters respectively.

Previously, we explored the steps involved in developing and implementing a volunteer training program. This final piece addresses your program's maintenance and continuous improvement and includes a brief list of resources.

1. Update training periodically. Initially, it is not uncommon to modify your training workshop to accommodate the realities encountered in its delivery. Even the best planned workshops often need adjustments in time, topics, or techniques based on attendees' feedback. Gather feedback by providing tutors with routine evaluation forms. Also, programs should periodically evaluate their training to ensure that it continues to address the volunteer and learner needs and embraces new strategies and delivery methods that have proven successful. Many programs are currently exploring the use of more technology in delivering their tutor training.

2. Conduct in-service workshops. Pre-service training is inherently a broad-brush approach to training since so much information must be shared with the tutor trainees. Once tutors gain some experience with the materials and their learners, they will have more specific issues and questions. These issues are possible topics for in-service trainings. Survey your tutors and listen to their questions and feedback to help determine the topics to offer. In-service trainings help maintain instructional quality and maintain good contact between the program and the tutors. The length and frequency of these workshops will vary depending on local circumstances. Some programs offer them monthly or quarterly and they may span one to three hours or in some cases be a full day or more.

3. Establish tutor support systems. As previously mentioned, in-service trainings offer additional opportunities for tutor support and contact. Newsletters also are a way of maintaining support. A newsletter section devoted to tutor issues such as "Tutoring Tips" would be valuable to tutors. Most tutors have email and Internet access, and this is a great way to disseminate information and share resources among tutors. A tutor bulletin board (whether online or physically at your center) can also help. Don't leave tutors feeling like they're on their own and isolated! Offer events or gatherings that bring tutors together to exchange ideas and share experiences. Monthly coffees or roundtables work well. Consider drop-in times for tutors to receive special help. Establish a tutor networking system that is maintained by tutors. You may need to have a staff person assist with the networking system at first. Remember tutors are volunteers, so always be mindful of recruitment and retention.

Conclusion

Tutor training is an integral part of building an effective literacy organization. While addressing the volunteer and learner needs, it should also reflect the program's vision and mission, as a part of its strategic plan. Tutor training should be interrelated with all elements of the organization. Quality training can be an important tool in attracting funding, and it has a tremendous impact on volunteer and student retention. Poorly trained tutors often result in poorly tutored learners, which consequently leads to high turnovers in both areas. Training is the vehicle that puts the program curriculum and strategies into action. Training programs

should illustrate the same principles we advocate when teaching our learners: Have respect for the trainees; make certain the training is always relevant; draw on your trainees' life experiences, and allow multiple opportunities for practice.

Every step of the way, from the establishment of the training program, through implementation, and during maintenance, stay focused on your program's goals and objectives and be excited! Training should be informative but it should also be fun, and they are not mutually exclusive. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm."

Resources for Tutor Training Information

These resources can provide training information online or by calling the organization at the number listed:
National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) 800-228-8813 <http://www.nifl.gov/>

ProLiteracy America (PLA) 888-528-2224
<http://www.proliteracy.org/>

Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE) <http://www.coabe.org/>

American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE)
<http://www.aaace.org/>

American Society for Training and Development 1-800-628-2783.
<http://www.astd.org/>

New Readers Press is the publishing division of ProLiteracy. They can be reached at 800-448-8878 or <http://www.newreaderspress.com/>
One resource that they publish that is particularly useful is Planning literacy and ESL workshops (ISBN 1-56420-136-8).

The Literacy Volunteer Connection can be found at:
<http://literacyconnections.homestead.com/index.html>

A monthly newsletter published by Lakewood Publications called Creative Training Techniques can be obtained by calling 800-707-7769.

Robert Pinhero was the director of a literacy program, held positions on several non-profit boards, and has instructional and training experience in Adult and Family Literacy, ESL, GED, and Workforce Literacy. Locally he served as an adjunct consultant to the Texas Family Literacy Center; serving on the original committee that developed the Texas State Plan for Adult Education. He operates a consulting business and serves on the National Governance Council of ProLiteracy America, the Board of South Central Literacy Action and the Board of the Texas Association of Nonprofit Organizations.

Write for the TexTESOL III Newsletter & share helpful tips, web resources, etc. with other TESOLers! Please refer to our website for submission information.

<http://www.texteol.org/region3>



An Effective Algorithm for Writing a Letter of Complaint

Alina Chitova, St. Petersburg State University

At the recent TESOL conference in San Antonio, the Presidents of all the TexTESOL chapters were invited to meet with a group of Russian teachers in hopes to start a sharing of ideas, books, and teachers! The following is an article from the St. Petersburg English Language Teachers' Association's Newsletter.

Whenever we turn the radio on and listen to some programs on social issues, we hear the reiterated request to commit all the complaints to paper. Often as they may be used in the West, letters of complaint remain rather alien to the Russians, which in turn makes it even more difficult to master them. Mostly we are used to complaining orally, but aren't accustomed to doing it in the written form. Thus, the ability to write such an essential kind of letters effectively seems to be a useful skill both for Russia and foreign countries.

The major difficulties EFL students experience while writing this sort of letters are those with explaining the problem, emphasizing the seriousness of a complaint, with language and with imaginary data, necessary to make the complaint letter sound real. In addition, those sample letters given in textbooks are rather neutral in style and don't possess any character, unlike the students who are unique individuals with a shaped personality and a settled system of beliefs and values, with an adamant opinion on how everything should be done. Thus, to meet the needs of all the students, it might be necessary to present the 5 subtypes of the letters of complaint.

Stage 1: Lead-in

First, elicit the problems you have experienced in your life. What was the problem? What did you do? Who did you complain to? What outcome did you expect? Show a list of possible complaints. What outcome would you expect in each case? Speak about your "potential audience." What kind of letter would they prefer to receive? On what condition would they be more likely to respond to your

request positively?

The elevator in your apartment complex has been out of service for weeks. You live on one of the upper floors, along with elderly people and those with little kids and prams. Write a letter to the head of the condominium.

Your wooden floors have become dull, but you were told they would not lose their shine. In addition, they creak and are splintered. Write a letter to the manufacturer.

The mascara you've just bought made your eyes water though the manufacturer claims it's hypoallergenic. Write a letter to the manufacturer.

On a business trip, your boss and you reserved two separate hotel rooms for two nights. When you arrived, there was only one room reserved for one night. Write a letter to the hotel manager.

The books you ordered by mail (from a catalogue) never arrived, and you have already sent them a check. Write a letter to the company.

You called a store that sells electrical appliances, and they misinformed you about their assortment. Write a letter to the store manager.

Stage 2: To each - his own

The next step is presenting the 5 subtypes of letters of complaint to meet the needs of people with different temperaments:

1. Concise
2. Authoritative
3. Factual
4. Constructive
5. Friendly

Concise letters are short and can be understood quickly by the reader. This subtype can be used even with a group of pre intermediate students. We all receive too many communications these days, especially letters. People in complaints departments probably receive more letters than most and cannot read every letter fully. The only letters that are read fully are the most concise, clear and compact letters. We can guess that rambling or vague letters will not be read properly. So to be acted upon, first your letter must be read, and to be read, your letter must be concise. A concise letter of complaint must make its main point in less than five seconds. The complaint letter may subsequently take a few more seconds to explain the situation, but first the main points must be understood in a few seconds.

Authoritative letters - letters that are well written and professionally presented - have more credibility and are taken seriously. This subtype is crucial for problems affecting someone's health and well-being when a matter should be dealt with seriously. What makes a letter authoritative? It is professional presentation, good grammar and spelling, firmness and clarity of language. Using sophisticated words (provided they are used correctly) - the language of a broadsheet newspaper, for instance - can also help to give a letter a more authoritative impression.

Factual letters enable the reader to see immediately the relevant details, dates, requirements, etc., and to justify action to resolve the complaint. This subtype comes in

handy with FCE tasks with multiple particular complaints.

Constructive letters - with positive statements, suggesting positive actions - encourage action and quicker decisions. That suits the needs of calm, amicable people.

Friendly/humorous letters - with a considerate, cooperative and complimentary tone and a positive request for the reader to react to - are prioritized because the reader warms to the writer and wants to help. This complaint method is based on cooperation, relationships, and constructive problem-solving. They might also include something complimentary about the organization and/or its products, service, or people. The use of humor dissipates conflicts and immediately attracts attention because it's different. A bit of humor in a complaint letter also creates a friendly, intelligent and cooperative impression.

You can also mention that there might be abusive letters of complaint with strong, or even rude, language, but it's a big question if they produce the desired effect; most likely the opposite.

Stage 3: To be or not to be

After that, it is helpful to decide which facts are necessary and should be included in a letter of complaint and which shouldn't. For example:

Karen's roof started leaking again after it had been fixed 6 months ago.

IDEAS	YES	NO
customer for 30 years		
is 62 years old		
had the roof fixed 6 months ago		
is very frustrated		

the roof leaks in the kitchen and bathroom		
the roof was nice		
keeps a daycare center at home		
no one returns her phone calls		

Jack got a phone bill with calls he never made.

IDEAS	YES	NO
his account number		
receives the phone bill every month		
the date of the bill in question		
unrecognizable phone numbers		
needs a new phone		
the cost of calls in question		
to remove the charges		
can be reached at 123-4567		

Joy wanted to visit her sick aunt in Chicago and reserved a room at a hotel. When she arrived though, there were no rooms available.

IDEAS	YES	NO
confirmed one week in advance		
dates of her reservation		
loves her aunt		
third time in Chicago		
her aunt has arthritis		
stayed at a high-priced hotel		
to reimburse the difference		

Stage 4: Words to the wise

Then discuss the most appropriate style for each subtype of complaint letters and build up the vocabulary for mild and strong complaints:

- complain about
- get a refund
- replace an item
- get moral compensation
- take the matter further

- long been a user of your products/services
- always regarded you as an excellent supplier/organization
- have every faith that you will rectify this situation
- mistakes happen
- not blaming anyone
- sure this is a rare problem/single occurrence/isolated incident

Stage 5: Persuade!

Letters of complaint possess a shade of persuasiveness because we want someone to act respectfully. The following passage (though not from a letter of complaint) is full of persuasive devices - facts, figures (underlined) and strong words (italicized).

One out of every three teens has an accident during his or her first year of driving.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for American teenagers.

Someone is killed in a crash every thirteen minutes. However, seat belts save over 11,000 lives a year. Teens and young adults are the groups least likely to buckle up and most likely to die in traffic accidents. Your voice matters and your actions can make a difference if you spread the message that seat belts save lives.

Stage 6: Writing process

Finally, the students are ready to put ideas on paper. When finished, exchange and review the letters, emphasize and discuss strong and weak points - first in pairs and then with the whole group to highlight the common mistakes.



Calendar of Events

October, 2005

29. TexTESOL Rigion III Fall Conference. “Come Learn and Grow with Us!” More information will follow on our Website at: <http://www.textesol.org/region3/>

20-23. Mexico TESOL Conference, "Crossing Boundaries in TEFL," Zacatecas, Mexico. Email voespino@hotmail.com. Website <http://www.mextesolzacatecas.org>

November, 2005

3-5. 2005 TexTESOL State Conference. “No Teacher Left Behind.” Renaissance Dallas-Richardson Hotel. Website <http://home.flash.net/~presv/Frames/Frames.htm>

October, 2006

2006 TexTESOL State Conference
Austin, TX

Information of more international conferences can be found at

<http://www.tesol.org>
<http://www.royfc.com/confer.html>

Call for Newsletter Submissions

Do you have some thoughts on the teaching of English to speakers of other languages? Do you have personal stories to share that are related to TESOL issues? Do you have some helpful tips or websites for other TESOLers? If you do, please consider submitting an article to TexTESOL III Newsletter. Submission deadlines:

Submission	12/1	3/1	6/1	9/1
Publication	1/15	4/15	7/15	10/15

Visit <http://www.textesol.org/region3/> for submission types and guidelines.