Course
ENG-5107-1
English Writing Skills

English Language Arts

Introduction

The ability to write clearly and correctly is a valuable skill. Although it is now increasingly acceptable for texts such as e-mails and text and instant messages to employ a kind of shorthand language that bends the grammar, syntax, spelling and punctuation rules of standard English, many common texts in the business and academic worlds require the strict application of these very rules. These texts also require that writers express their ideas in a coherent, cohesive, concise and precise manner. Formal writing skills, in other words, are necessary for effective communication in certain everyday situations.

In this 25-hour course, the first of three courses in Secondary V (for which adult learners earn credits in elective subjects), adult learners participate in a variety of learning situations and activities to develop their formal writing skills. They examine common grammar, syntax, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation errors in sentence-level texts, and in the process, they explicitly learn the rules of Standard written English. To consolidate their learning, they do error correction and sentence-combining exercises. Adult learners also examine paragraph development. Specifically, they examine the general features of paragraph construction, such as the inclusion of strong topic sentences and supporting details, as well as the specific features of different types of paragraphs such as definition, classification, cause/effect, comparison/contrast and descriptive or persuasive paragraphs. Adult learners also revise model paragraphs containing various sorts of errors. The paragraphs that adult learners examine and revise may fall under any of the text genres. (See the explanation on social functions and their corresponding genres in Chapter 1, Section 1.2.)

The course helps adult learners broaden their knowledge of proper sentence and paragraph construction. By the end of the course, adult learners will be able to apply this knowledge when they correct various types of errors in model sentences and paragraphs and when they construct sentences and paragraphs of various types.

Subject-Specific Competencies

Competencies are developed and demonstrated through the mobilization and effective use of various resources. Among these resources are language processes, strategies and textual and linguistic knowledge. The subject-specific competency targeted in the course *English Writing Skills* is shaded in the table below.

Competencies	Key Features		
Uses language/talk to communicate and to learn (C1)	Develops resources for communicating orally and for learning	Interacts with others in different contexts	Interprets how speakers shape an oral message to create a relationship with the audience
Reads and listens to written, spoken and media texts (C2)	Develops resources to make sense of various written, spoken and media texts	Extends understanding of various written, spoken and media texts	Interprets his/her relationship to the text and the context
Produces texts for personal and social purposes (C3)	Develops resources to produce written and media texts	Follows a process to produce written and media texts	Creates a relationship with his/her audience suitable to the text and context

Although only C3 is targeted in this course, C1 and C2 are implicit as speaking and reading activities complement the learning situations.

For more information on the subject-specific competencies, refer to the following sections:

- *Uses language/talk to communicate and to learn* (C1), Chapter 3, Section 3.2

- *Reads and listens to written, spoken and media texts* (C2), Chapter 3, Section 3.3

- *Produces texts for personal and social purposes* (C3), Chapter 3, Section 3.4

Processes and Strategies

Language processes are series of actions or operations that support competency development. In other words, they are important resources that adult learners may use to become more effective speakers, listeners, readers, viewers, writers or producers of texts. In all, there are four language processes (Research, Reading, Writing and Production). The process suggested for this course is illustrated in the table below.

Process	Phases
Writing	Planning task at hand Mobilizing resources Reflecting on the resources employed to achieve the task

Communication and learning strategies are actions, behaviours, steps and techniques that enable adult learners to overcome obstacles, attain goals and achieve success. They are additional resources that adult learners may use to become more effective speakers, listeners, readers, viewers, writers or producers of texts. The communication and learning strategies suggested for this course are illustrated in the table below.

Strategies		
Communication		Verbal and nonverbal
		Rhetorical
		Organizational
		Writing
Learning	**Cognitive**	Activating prior knowledge
		Meaning-making
		Reading/viewing
		Information-gathering
	Socioaffective	Feedback
	Metacognitive	Procedural
		Feedback
		Self-evaluation

Additional information on processes and strategies is provided in the following sections:

- Chapter 3, Section 3.5
- Appendix (Inventory of Strategies)

Cross-Curricular Competencies

The cross-curricular competencies are generic skills that can be developed and applied outside the school setting. They are developed in tandem with subject-specific competencies. Given the nature of the course *English Writing Skills*, the shaded cross-curricular competencies listed horizontally could easily be developed simultaneously with the shaded subject-specific competencies listed vertically. Since teachers have the option of choosing learning situations other than the ones suggested in this program, they may decide to develop cross-curricular competencies other than those shaded in the table below.

Cross-Curricular Competencies → Subject-Specific Competency ↓	Uses information	Solves problems	Exercises critical judgment	Uses creativity	Adopts effective work methods	Uses ICT	Cooperates with others	Achieves his/her potential	Communicates appropriately
Produces texts for personal and social purposes	■				■			■	■

For more information on the key features and manifestations of the cross-curricular competencies, refer to the Diversified Basic Education Program.

Subject-Specific Content

The subject-specific content includes knowledge and cultural references.

Knowledge

The prescribed textual and linguistic elements, necessary for the development of the competencies targeted in this course, are listed below in alphabetical order.

Textual Elements

- ✓ audience and communication context
- ✓ coherence, cohesion and conciseness
- ✓ consistency or logical presentation of ideas
- ✓ emotional/aesthetic/intellectual appeal of ideas
- ✓ main and supporting ideas
- ✓ methods of organization (e.g. analogy, cause/effect, chronological order, comparison/contrast, example, explanation)
- ✓ relevant vs. irrelevant details
- ✓ social function(s) of text
- ✓ sufficient vs. insufficient development of main ideas
- ✓ textual features of paragraphs: use of indentation or spacing to indicate the beginning of a paragraph
- ✓ topic sentences and controlling ideas; concluding sentences
- ✓ well-developed paragraphs

Linguistic Elements

- ✓ agreement (of person, subject and verb, verb tenses, pronoun and antecedent)
- ✓ appositive phrases
- ✓ apostrophe "s"
- ✓ capitalization
- ✓ common sentence errors (e.g. fragments, run-on sentences, dangling and misplaced modifiers)
- ✓ commonly misspelled or misused words
- ✓ language (descriptive, aesthetic, connotative, neutral, colloquial)
- ✓ language functions (contextualizing, summarizing)
- ✓ language tone and register (style/level of language suitable to the context)
- ✓ parallel structure (e.g. words, phrases, sentences)
- ✓ punctuation rules (commas, colons, semicolons, quotation marks, hyphens, dashes, end punctuation)
- ✓ relative pronouns
- ✓ simple, compound and complex sentences (coordinators, subordinators)
- ✓ syntax
- ✓ transition expressions (of time, sequence, space, causality, comparison, contrast)
- ✓ verb tenses (active and passive voice); verb form errors (e.g. dropped endings)
- ✓ word choice and form (e.g. different forms of the same root/base word – noun, adjective, adverb, verb)

Cultural References

In this course, adult learners can explore the sociolinguistic aspect of the culture by considering some short formal written texts and comparing their construction, vocabulary and tone with popular informal texts such as e-mails. When adult learners examine the acceptable use of informal and abbreviated language in the latter texts, they discover that it is connected to the social roles these texts play. For example, writers often use e-mails when they need to send messages quickly and briefly to people who already have some background information on the subject at hand. Similarly, writers also use various digital social network tools to send messages to family and friends. Typically, these messages are far more informal and fragmented than messages to employers, clients, company representatives, teachers, professors, and so on. Slang and buzzwords are also generally more acceptable in these informal texts, and standard punctuation and capitalization rules are often ignored.

In contrast, many other written texts are meant for an unfamiliar audience, and the communication context is formal. Consequently, the audience expects these written texts to comply with the rules of standard English (e.g. concerning grammar, syntax and mechanics), to use suitably formal language, and to deliver information that is clear, correct and complete. All of these factors demonstrate the care the writer has taken to adjust to the needs and expectations of an unfamiliar audience, i.e. to establish a respectful tone.

By considering how the differences in language formality and content are connected to the roles the previous texts play in our society, adult learners become aware of how social conventions influence the language used in specific texts and communication contexts.

Alternatively, teachers can focus on the aesthetic or the sociological aspect of culture. (See Chapter 4 for additional information on the three cultural aspects.)

Families of Learning Situations

The term "families of learning situations" refers to groupings of learning situations that vary in style and complexity but share some common characteristics. The family of learning situations targeted in this course is shaded in the table below.

Family of Learning Situations
Exploring and creating literary diversity
Seeking and imparting information
► Developing and supporting a stance

Developing is associated with the communication purpose of formulating ideas to be conveyed in sentences and paragraphs of different types. **Supporting** is associated with the communication purpose of providing clear, specific, sufficient and well-connected supporting details for the main ideas in these paragraphs.

Broad Areas of Learning

The table below illustrates the broad areas of learning. These five areas are selected on the basis of their importance to society. Each comprises an educational aim and focuses of development that help teachers delineate the knowledge that can be explored in specific learning situations.

Broad Areas of Learning → / Subject-Specific Competency ↓	Health and Well-Being	Career Planning and Entrepreneurship	Environmental Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities	Media Literacy	Citizenship and Community Life
Produces texts for personal and social purposes					■

As demonstrated in the previous chart and the examples of learning situations below, Citizenship and Community Life is a broad area of learning well suited to this course.

When adult learners focus on Citizenship and Community Life, they may develop:

- involvement in community action projects (e.g. involvement in activities that contribute to the growth and health of the community)

Other broad areas of learning could also be selected to create different learning situations.

For more information on the broad areas of learning, their educational aim and focuses of development, refer to the Diversified Basic Education Program.

Examples of Learning Situations

Community Promotion

In this learning situation, adult learners are presented with the following scenario:

You see a notice in a local newsletter: a provincial tourism magazine is offering to publish short promotional blurbs that could attract tourists to your village, town, suburb, city or region. The notice asks for written submissions, and you decide to send a promotional blurb about your area. The guidelines are as follows:

Submit a 150- to 200-word paragraph explaining why people should visit your region/town/suburb/ city. Begin your paragraph by highlighting the main reason tourists should come to your area (provide the place name). Then provide several concrete and convincing reasons or details that support your main point or idea. Use language that is persuasive or colourful. Make sure your text is suitable for distribution to the general public and is submitted in publishable form.

Invitation to Join a Public Discussion

In this learning situation, adult learners are presented with the following scenario:

Your favourite radio station has run a program featuring short stories about people who have made a contribution of some kind to the life of their small or large communities. As a follow-up, they have invited the members of their listening audience to submit a short text (150-175 words) expressing their views about what constitutes an ideal citizen. They have asked contributors to describe an ideal citizen in general terms. In other words, they do not want contributors to mention a specific person; they want them to define the necessary characteristics of anyone who deserves this title. They will read some of the best submissions on air. You decide to send a written submission and join the discussion.

End-of-Course Outcomes

In this course, adult learners are required to do the following:

Discuss and analyze

- **different types of sentences and sentence errors**

- **general features of paragraph construction and specific features of different types of paragraphs** (e.g. definition, classification, cause/effect, comparison/contrast, descriptive, persuasive)

When adult learners discuss different types of sentences, they focus on the standard features of all sentences, i.e. capitalization of the first word in the sentence and end punctuation following the last word. They examine declarative, interrogative and exclamatory sentences and identify differences in their construction. For example, adult learners determine that a declarative sentence requires a subject, a verb and a complete thought, while an interrogative or exclamatory sentence does not. They also discuss and compare different examples of simple, compound and complex sentences. They identify the coordinators, subordinators and transition expressions used to connect phrases/sentences and analyze the placement, purpose and level of formality of these expressions. When they examine model sentences, they also discuss the rules concerning a specific feature of the language, such as agreement (of various types), verb tense and form, parallel structure, modifiers, pronouns, word choice and word form, coordinators, subordinators and transition expressions.

Adult learners examine and discuss features of sentence mechanics (spelling, capitalization and punctuation). They examine the use of semicolons, colons, dashes/brackets, quotation marks and various uses of the comma. They then compare correct model sentences with sentences containing a selected error type, such as fragments, misplaced modifiers, awkward syntax as well, as errors in parallel structure, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, pronouns and pronoun reference, verb forms, agreement (of person, subject and verb, verb tenses, pronoun and antecedent), adverb/noun/ adjective clauses, word choice/form, etc. Adult learners identify the error type and discuss possible revisions. They also identify the formal or informal tone of these sentences.

When adult learners identify the general and specific features of paragraph construction, they focus on different types of paragraphs, such as definition, classification, cause/effect, comparison/contrast, descriptive and persuasive. They discuss and identify the placement and contextualizing role of the topic sentences used, as well as the controlling ideas these sentences contain. They then focus on the differences in the content and construction in the different types of paragraphs. They identify the number of specific, concise, clearly-connected details that support the topic sentences of each paragraph examined, and identify the linking words or transition expressions that are used to make connections clear. They discuss the concluding sentence and analyze its unifying or summarizing role. They evaluate any persuasive, argumentative, explanatory or informative elements in each model paragraph and discuss its social function(s). They identify and analyze the use of capitalization, commas and other punctuation marks. In addition, adult learners compare model

paragraphs intended for unfamiliar and familiar audiences. They analyze the language elements that contribute to the formal or informal tone of the paragraphs. For example, they analyze how the use of an extensive and more elaborate vocabulary creates a formal tone whereas the use of colloquial or abbreviated language creates an informal tone.

Adult learners then compare well-developed paragraphs with poorly developed ones, identifying errors in the construction of the latter texts (e.g. weak or no topic sentences, insufficient/vague/ redundant/irrelevant/confusing/unconnected supporting details) as well as various types of grammar, syntax, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation errors. They discuss the main problem areas in the poorly developed paragraphs and suggest and submit possible revisions of some of these paragraphs.

Write

- **sentences of different types** (e.g. interrogative/exclamatory/declarative; simple/complex/ compound)

- **paragraphs of different types** (e.g. definition, classification, cause/effect, comparison/ contrast, descriptive, persuasive)

When adult learners write their own sentences, they observe the conventions of sentence construction: they write sentences that are complete, grammatical and correctly capitalized and punctuated. They write sentences of different types (e.g. declarative, interrogative and exclamatory). They also practice writing simple, compound and complex sentences, incorporating selected coordinators, subordinators and a variety of transition expressions (of time, sequence, space, causality, comparison, contrast, etc.).

When adult learners write paragraphs, they observe the conventions of paragraph construction. For example, they clearly indent and/or space paragraphs and correctly apply punctuation and capitalization rules. They begin their paragraphs with a clear topic sentence that contains a controlling idea, and in the sentences that follow the topic sentence, they include a sufficient number of specific, relevant and clearly-connected supporting details.

Adult learners incorporate suitable linking words and transition expressions. They provide concluding sentences that summarize or unify the details in the paragraph. They also write several types of paragraphs (e.g. definition, classification, cause/effect, comparison/contrast, descriptive, persuasive). Some of these paragraphs are intended for an unfamiliar audience and thus require a formal tone.

Text length of paragraphs: 100-200 words, depending on the paragraph type

Communication context: unfamiliar and familiar audience; formal and informal tone and register suitable to the text type and audience

Teachers need to ensure that adult learners use planning tools such as brainstorming, lists, outlines and discussions as they begin creating their texts. Teachers also need to ensure that adult learners actively reflect on what they learned and how well they communicated in the texts they created. For example, adult learners may use self-evaluation checklists or participate in feedback discussions to appraise how clearly they conveyed their ideas in their paragraphs, as well as to appraise how effectively they used various learning and communication strategies. Learners may use the same type of evaluation tools to reflect on what they learned as a result of discussing and creating these texts.

Evaluation Criteria for the Competency Targeted by the Course

Competency	Evaluation Criteria
Produces texts for personal and social purposes (C3)	- Effective organization of texts to communicate - Appropriate adaptation of language for audience and purpose - Appropriate use of structures, features, codes and conventions of texts - Correct application of language conventions (usage and mechanics)