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Writing skills: Tips for teachers

- Selecting the correct question is an important skill for learners: they should ask themselves do they understand what the question is asking them to write about and do they have sufficient things to write in response to the prompt.
- Underlining the key words in questions should give learners a steer as to the focus of the question and what they should be constructing an argument about. Rather than writing about a topic in general such as music or artificial intelligence, learners will be asked to argue a stance on a view related to a topic or theme.
- Learners should be strongly encouraged to plan what they are going to write before they begin their essays. This should help them to decide if they have enough to write, whether they have potential balance in their arguments and if they have enough supporting examples to use.
- Essays should be clearly structured so there is a clear introduction, set of body paragraphs each focusing on a different aspect of the argument and a conclusion which offers a final view and evaluative summary.
- Learners should avoid using overly formulaic opening words and phrases for each paragraph. Words and phrases such as, ‘To begin with’, ‘secondly’, ‘thirdly’, ‘fourthly’, ‘to round things off’ can be awkward and do not give the right tone for an academic register.
- It is good practice for learners to give a range of views on a topic and to avoid asserting points that cannot be supported by evidence.
- Evaluation is a crucial skill that will enable learners to offer a judgement on the topic. Getting learners to be able to step back and offer an evaluative judgement will help them access the higher levels.
- General examples can be used to support ideas, such as what a country might be doing, but it is better to have specific, named examples which strengthen the argument as these are much more convincing.
- Fabricated examples are to be avoided as they are often unconvincing. Encourage learners to use real examples that they have researched over the duration of the course.
- Learners should write in clear, formal English and should avoid informal vocabulary such as ‘yeah’, ‘sure’, ‘okay’, ‘gonna’.
- Learners should avoid using contractions in their writing which is informal. For example, ‘isn’t’ should be written as ‘is not’, ‘can’t’ should be ‘cannot’, ‘doesn’t’ should be ‘does not’
- Time should be left, at the end of the examination, for learners to check over writing to ensure that basic errors are corrected.

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