



Straightforward

Second edition

Three-sentence stories

by Jim Scrivener

By the time students reach an intermediate level of English a lot of classroom writing work tends to be very long and complex. Students are often asked to take great care over things such as paragraphing, cohesive links, style and appropriacy. This is all very useful, but can also make writing seem like nothing more than a demanding chore, requiring great time and energy to do. There is also a case for keeping alive the fun of writing short, creative, interesting or amusing texts - especially if the tasks relate directly to a grammatical or lexical feature being studied. Here is an idea for a very concentrated small writing task to fulfil these goals.

1. Write up the following titles on the board: The Film Star's Mistake, The Island of Dinosaurs, The Collector, Trouble at the Airport.
2. Ask each student to prepare a three-sentence story about one of these titles. The story may only have three sentences (though there is no restriction on the length of a sentence as long as it's grammatically correct) and must tell a complete story with a beginning, middle and end.
3. Each of the three sentences must include a time adverbial (e.g. at the beginning, later on, to begin with, afterwards, after a while, in the end, initially, finally).
4. Allow time for students to think of and write their three-sentence story. When they have finished, they can meet up and share stories. Encourage them to read their story aloud to each other rather than just handing the text over.

Use this idea with many different grammatical or lexical items, e.g. specify the tenses that may be used in each sentence, or state six words, two of which must be used in each paragraph.

Here are two examples of three-sentence stories. You could read these out after students have written and read theirs, but be wary of reading these as examples or models before they do the task as they might discourage students' own creative ideas.

The Film Star's Mistake

Initially, he thought the fan only wanted his autograph, so he happily signed it. Afterwards, as she was walking away, he noticed how beautiful her hair was and he called her to come back. Eventually, they got married, but then got divorced and she is now two million dollars richer!

The Island of Dinosaurs

To begin with, they believed the whole place was completely uninhabited. But, after a while, they started to notice the giant footprints and hear its roars. In the end it found them and ate most of them for supper.