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# Diploma Paper

# Communicative Tasks to Enhance the English Written Expression in Eleventh Graders at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" Senior High School

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Holguín

2014-2015

# *Abstract*

The learning of English as a foreign language has a great importance in senior high school in Cuba. In this level, students combine what they already know with new contents and experiences. This way prepares them for the future.

This present research has been developed with the aim at improving the teaching-learning process of English for eleventh graders from "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school, giving priority to the formation and development of the elaboration of project works but taking into consideration the English written expression.

According to the logical order followed for the development of this investigation, the paper is going to be divided into three chapters. Chapter One comprises the theoretical foundation about written expression and the project work. It also provides the characterization of the research object. Chapter Two presents the theoretical and practical proposal of communicative tasks and their methodological guidelines planned to reinforce the written expression in senior high school, and Chapter Three consists of corroborating the effectiveness of communicative tasks proposed.

# *Dedication*

I dedicate this research to my family, specifically to my son who is just a baby because they gave me strength to continue. Also to teachers at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school for the support and the guidance.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all people who helped me in this investigation and specially to my tutor Zaida Varona Escobar because she was the person who worked with me in every moment, even in the difficult ones. Besides, I would like to thank to my family, they were my at my side all the time.

# Thought

"Writing is a way of talking without being interrupted." — Jules Renard

# *Introduction*

Language is a way to know the world, considering that each language is the expression of information, feelings, traditions, among other aspects. As a social phenomenon, it permits the conservation of information produced and negotiated by all members of society. It also favors an all-covering training to the individual, fomenting the respect for other people and their cultures allowing a better understanding of our own language.

The evolution of the contemporary society has demanded people to manage several languages in order to interact and to get acquainted with the improvements of science and technology. Taking into account that English is known as one of the most spoken languages in the world, the necessity of learning it has been increasing. Therefore the study of this language plays an important role in the education of children and youth in national and international contexts.

Consequently, the Cuban National System of Education has undergone changes to improve the English teaching-learning process. These modifications are aimed at attaining a main objective: the students' development of the English communicative competence; a concept that implies the expression, interpretation and negotiation of meanings in the interrelation between two or more persons.

In fact, English as a subject is studied in all levels of education in order to widen the students' knowledge, enhance their culture and prepare them for life. It also contributes to a scientific formation because it helps them to value the world from different points of view fostering values and dignifying them as human beings. Regarding these elements, the English language has become a priority as one of the main objectives of the pedagogical process to improve the effectiveness of the students' comprehensive learning.

The teaching of the English language is divided into four skills: listening comprehension, oral expression, reading comprehension and written expression, but there is a trend to focus mainly attention on oral work. This tendency actually recycles and places emphasis on language items, but does not integrate skills in equal sense; the written expression remains behind. In addition, the use of traditional methods and methodologies do not bring the

expected results in developing the written expression which constitutes one of the main objectives of the subject.

In fact, the methodological conception of English as a subject has a communicative approach. Antich (1981) declared "…the primary aim of all writing is communication". However, the teaching of written expression, as part of the communicative competence, should be recognized as a special element of language teaching with its own aims and techniques in Cuban schools, where it has become in a very useful teaching objective.

As learners of a foreign language, the students should learn how to build a good paragraph; how to write a particular type of writing which is useful for communication. They should also learn to write acceptably, to organize and present the material clearly. It means that while teaching written expression, structural characteristics should be taken into consideration.

Regarding these elements, it is essential to consider how sentences are built, about the types of words and word groups that make up sentences in any language. Basically, all these aspects give meaning to language, but in turn, they require research and interest in how language and words work and help greatly to the composition of the structures necessary for obtaining a good text.

To contribute to the development of the written expression in foreign languages, much research has been done: Byrne (1979), Antich (1981), Nunan (1989),Lee (2000), Medina (2002), Wendling & Mather (2009), among others. These authors give a great importance to the ability; they coincide when stating that written expression is a very concise activity and a way of communicating ideas or thoughts.

Clearly, the written expression is a process which requires knowledge about the nature of words, their forms, and their uses and relations in the sentence considering that there are some grammatical characteristics of spoken language which are different, in significant ways, from those of written language. These differences are related to the permanence of the written form, and the need to be concise and explicit, and because often the intended reader is separated from the writer by time and space. For all these reasons, students should learn to plan, draft, revise, edit, present, and evaluate their writing. Each of these elements is important in the production of a piece of writing.

After analyzing the elements, the author of this investigation considers that an effective teaching of the written expression will give the students a correct writing and essentially an accurate use of patterns and grammatical structures. Regarding this aspect and its implications in the teaching-learning process of English, an investigation made in "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school demonstrated that eleventh graders show difficulties in extensive writing. During the exploratory stage, empirical methods, such as the analysis of official written documents, observation, surveys and interviews were applied and the insufficiencies below were noted:

The written expression is not taught as a **process.** Students are mostly asked to write short answers and brief notes from the contents of the lessons which do not favor the development of high level written tasks assigned as a final evaluation. Besides the written activities are not integrated across the curriculum and are not totally in correspondence with the students´ collective and individual learning needs.

In addition, writing is rarely incorporated into a lesson, ending up relegated to homework which reduces the possibilities to be communicative.

The heedful study of the situation exposed so far, allowed the identification of the **research problem**: The necessity to enhance the written expression in the teaching-learning process of English in eleventh graders at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school.

The part of the objective reality in which the problem is manifested is the **research object** of this investigation: the English teaching-learning process in eleventh graders at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school.

In order to solve the problem the **objective** formulated is: the elaboration of communicative tasks to enhance the written expression in the students mentioned before.

**Scope of Action:** The English written expression in eleventh graders at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school.

In order to fulfill the objective and solve the problem the author stated the following **research questions**:

1. What are the main theoretical and methodological foundations concerning the written expression in the foreign language teaching?

2. Which is the current state of English written expression in eleventh graders at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school?

3. Which communicative tasks are useful to improve the English written expression in eleventh graders at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school?

4. How effective are the communicative tasks to improve the English in eleventh graders at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school?

Taking into consideration the scientific questions, the following **research tasks** were stated:

1. To determine the theoretical foundation that supports the teaching-learning process of written expression.

2. To diagnose the current state of English written expression in eleventh graders at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school.

3. To elaborate communicative tasks to improve the English written expression in eleventh graders at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school.

4. To corroborate the effectiveness of the communicative tasks proposed in eleventh graders at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school.

Through the course of this investigation, the following **research methods** have been used:

**Theoretical Methods:**

**Historical-logical:** This research method allows the researcher to make a historical study from the beginning of the problem.

**Inductive-deductive**: It was used to detail and generalize events, phenomena and processes related to project works.

**Analysis and Synthesis**: it was applied in order to study the theoretical basements on the development of the written expression as well as to analyze how it works as a whole.

**Empirical Methods:**

**Analysis of official written documents**: Lesson Plans, Syllabus.

**Observation to lessons:** to define regularities and the main characteristics of the teaching-learning process at the school mentioned and the work with the written expression.

**Interview:** To teachers in order to diagnose the problem, object of investigation

**Survey:** it was applied to students to obtain important information from the sample and about how the English written expression and project works are carried out at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school.

The **Population** was taken from eleventh graders at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school, one hundred forty three (143) students.

The **Sample** selected was group 7 from eleventh grade, with forty (45) students. This investigation has a very specific **contribution**, because its main objective is aimed at proposing communicative tasks and methodological guidelines that can contribute to solve a real problem that affects students and the English written expression in the teaching-learning process.

**The Scientific Novelty** of this paper lies on the simple but concise way this problem is being treated.

**Chapter One: Theoretical Foundation of the Research**

This chapter concentrates on theoretical elements about the written expression in English. It also includes an analysis of the English teaching-learning process in eleventh grade at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school emphasizing in the mentioned skill's development. Some criterions about the project work's importance are also presented as an essential part of English classes at school.

**1.1. Theoretical elements concerning written expression in foreign language teaching**

Rosa Antich in her book, "Metodología de la Enseñanza de las Lenguas Extranjeras" states: "Writing is a process where the immediate receptor is missing and there is no feedback, the writer can check out his own writing process and verify the coherence of ideas; writing contributes, therefore to the formation of the written expression."

According to the investigator Rodolfo Acosta, writing is, in its simplest form, "a graphic representation of speech that is letters or combinations of letters which represent the sounds one makes in speech. It involves the correct association of convention graphic symbols with sounds which have no meaning and no significant interrelationship for the writer. In a more complicated process the graphic others are matters of aptitude."

These authors expressed that writing goes beyond the limits of space and time to the absence of the receptor, the interaction is not immediate or it is never produced, generally the one who writes does not know for sure who or whom will read the text. That is why, it is said that words are along in the written text. It is also adjusted hardly to grammatical rules that make possible the textual coherence, its syntactical structure is complex and possess more lexical richness and precision.

In the English teaching-learning process, written expression is a form of communication that allows students to put their feelings and ideas on paper, to organize their knowledge and beliefs into convincing arguments, and to convey meaning through well-constructed text. As students learn the steps to write, and as they build new skills upon old, the written expression evolves from the first simple sentences to elaborate stories and essays. Spelling, vocabulary,

grammar, and organization come and grow together to help them demonstrate more advanced writing skills each year.

It is a very complex process, and there are few for whom these skills evolve easily. When mastery of this skill becomes an overwhelming obstacle for students, they are often diagnosed with a learning disability in written expression. It is said that often, but not always, a student with a disability in written expression will have similar difficulties with reading and/or oral language. This disability looks different in every person, but the student will commonly have difficulty with spelling, punctuation, capitalization and learning basic grammar rules early on. As he/she moves through the school years and the demands placed on the student become more complex, different difficulties such as planning, organization, editing, and revising will often become apparent.

Learning to write is a linear process, and the tackling of new skill depends upon mastering the skills that came before it. Early struggles with basic skills become magnified and more problematic as academic tasks become more challenging. Writing becomes a chore for them, and they will often try to avoid it at all costs. So that, there are several things that teachers can do to support the learning of the writing skills that will help their students believe that they, too, can write.

## 1.2. Psycho-methodological and pedagogical foundation of the written expression in the teaching of English as a foreign language

There are some elements connected to the psycho, methodological and pedagogical relations teachers should keep in mind when approaching the teaching process regarding written expression. Teachers who want to develop this skill must make a balance between the students' feelings and interests and the materials and exercises they plan to work out the process. The researcher believes that the advances in teaching written expression lie on the teacher´s efforts while implementing new techniques and strategies to achieve this goal. Thus, the English language must be in close connection with the following teaching principles:

- Knowing what to write about
- Organizing the information to be conveyed
- Deciding on the relative prominence to be given to any particular points
- Incorporating what students learnt from listening and reading

- Understanding and respecting cultural constraints
- Knowing, and then persuading one´s reading
- Writing accurately.

Besides, the students should know that before writing they have to organize and develop their ideas sorted in order to communicate them. In correspondence, the teacher must guide the process through the development of communication skills so they can, in appropriate form, express in writing using proper punctuation, spelling words correctly and with a legible handwriting.

Regarding these aspects, Medina (2002) defines the written expression as "The process through which the students represent their speech in a written text, beginning with short words, brief paragraphs and texts of moderate complexity, until a clear expression of ideas and meaning are reached. As a skill to be developed, it goes through different phases, and then the final text is the result of many versions, and requires the development of writing strategies. Its efficient development is linked to the integration of the other of verbal skills."

This researcher also stated that … "Writing has been identified as an ability to express and fulfill a given or giving communicative function through the use of symbols, the appropriate orthography, punctuation marks as well as unity and coherence." (Medina, 2002)

Wendling & Mather stated that the written expression is "a complex task that requires the integration of multiple cognitive, linguistic, and motor abilities. Written expression involves both low-level transcription skills (handwriting, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar) as well as high-level composition skills (planning, content, organization, and revision). There are at least three distinct language levels involved in this ability: letter formation (handwriting); word formation (spelling or keyboarding); and text formation (composition)."

The author of this investigation assumes the criteria quoted by Medina because the definitions give importance to the development of written expression and coincide that it is a very concise way of communicating. On the other hand, it is clear that written expression is not really about grammar; it is about communication. A writer's goal is to share ideas, information, and entertain, but grammar is essential to clear writing. If you write without understanding grammar, it is like playing a game without learning the rules.

Thus, the author coincides that developing the skill:

- Provides one more way to learn, especially for those students who do not learn easily through oral practice alone.
- Provides the learners with some evidence that they are making progress in the language.
- It is a way to integrate skills properly.
- Provides variety in classroom activity.
- Increases the amount of language contact through work that can be set out of class.
- It is needed for testing the other skills.

The formation and development of written expression should be consequently assumed as the extension of the learning of oral expression the students have been exposed within the first segment of lessons from the system of the unit of study. The previous fact demonstrates that the written expression complements the other skills of the language to be transferred into the communicative competence as the result of a coherent transition all through the stages established for the teaching-learning process of English as a foreign language.

## 1.3. Why writing is difficult to teach

As mentioned before, writing is often a single activity by its nature, done silently, involving mental and physical effort and taking a lot of time. This may not make it attractive to learners or teachers as a classroom activity. In addition to this, writing is difficult, even in mother tongue. There are linguistic, psychological and cognitive problems involved, making teaching it and learning it a considerable challenge. While dealing with the problem, teachers need to make a distinction between writing to learn (other things, like structures, spelling and vocabulary) and learning to write. Understanding this distinction and make sure our learners do too then the communicative purpose of writing will be clearer.

Teachers need to work hard on developing ways of responding to the content of what our learners write - the message - and not just the level of language. If we can do this effectively, then our learners will make more effort to communicate when they write. This can support an emphasis on the importance of writing for a real reader. That is why, teachers should provide the students with tasks that are intellectually satisfying, especially when writing.

0n the other hand, teachers should find ways to integrate writing with other skills and activities, giving it more relevance and importance - and also making it more interesting. They must use meaningful, realistic and relevant writing tasks, based on the students' needs and interests. It is also necessary to talk about writing with them, how to write well, and its purpose and for who, and what makes it difficult. Learner training like this can provide valuable support and motivation.

## 1.4. The teaching of written expression as a social process

Writing, like all other aspects of language, is communicative. It is a social activity of a rather specialist and restricted kind, and to learn to write is to learn a kind of social behavior. Some authors think that writing is a normal social activity for the professional minority who produce institutional writing, and for a small number of people who produce the occasional professional writing. For a very large selection of society, it is not normal that students write. It is not for them a natural means of social interaction, so students should be encouraged to find an addressee and to persuade themselves that they are engaged in some kind of meaningful social activity.

Writing influences deeply on society since it is a vivid reflection of all what is going on around the student. The better way the students reflect the natural environment they live in, the more creative they will be; so, they will produce interaction between their own ideas, feelings and thoughts within society.

In the process of writing, a good idea is to have the students learn how to think while writing. One idea generates another and the gap in class when writing goes on, it is a productive one. Writing does not necessarily presuppose a receiver. People may write for their own sake in order to sort out their thoughts. This way, they could express inner feelings and ideas. Undoubtedly, it helps them to develop fluency in a foreign language. People write whatever comes into their minds. As a result, whenever students decide to begin writing, new ideas will come to their minds emerged from certain social behavior.

## 1.5. Characteristics of the written expression

The teaching-learning process of English will help understand the differences between both processes of communication. However, knowing each characteristic will permit to have a wider view of all communicative facts, and of

course, this vision will allow the language teacher to go further beyond the language function approach methodologically each code.

- **Permanence**

Once something is written down and delivered in its final form to its intended audience, the writer abdicates a certain power, power to emend, to clarify, to withdraw. That prospect is the single most significant contributor of making writing a very scary operation. Student writers often feel that the act of releasing a written work to an instructor is not on like putting yourself of a firing squad.

Therefore whatever you can do as a teacher, guider or facilitator to help your students revise and refine their work before final submission will help to give them confidence in their work.

- **Production time**

The good news is that, given appropriate stretches of time, a writer can indeed become a "good" writer by developing efficient processes for achieving the final product. The bad news is that many educational contexts demand student writing within time limits, or "writing for display" as noted in the previous section (examination writing, for example). So, one of your goals, especially if you are teaching in an EAP context, would be to train your students to make the best possible use of such time limitations.

This may mean sacrificing some process time, but with sufficient training in process writing, combined with practice in display writing, you can help your students to deal with time limitations.

- **Distance**

One of the thorniest problems writers face is anticipating their audience. That anticipation ranges from general audience characteristics to how specific words and phrases and sentences and paragraphs are going to be interpreted. The distance factor requires what the author have called cognitive empathy, in that good writers can "read" their own writing from the perspective of the mind of the targeted audience.

Writers need to be able to predict the audience's general knowledge, cultural and literary schemata, specific subject-matter knowledge, and very importantly, how their choice of language will be interpreted.

- **Orthography**

Everything from simple greetings to extremely complex ideas, are captured through the manipulation of a few dozen letters and other written symbols. Sometimes we take for granted the mastering of the mechanics of English writing by our students. If students are non-literate in the native language, you must begin at the very beginning with fundamentals of reading and writing. For literate students, if their native language system is not alphabetic, new symbols have to be produced by hands that may have gotten too.

- **Complexity**

Writers must learn how to remove redundancy (which may not dig with their first language rhetorical tradition), how to combine sentences, how to make references to other elements in a text, how to create syntactic a lexical variety, and much more.

- **Vocabulary**

As we noted, writing places a heavier demand on vocabulary use than does speaking. Good writers will learn to take advantage of the richness of English vocabulary.

- **Formality**

Writing normally uses a generally acceptable standard variety of the language, when there is a student filling out a questionnaire or writing a full blown essay, the conventions of each form must be followed.

**1.6. General considerations on the developmental written expression**

A good written expression conveys meaningful messages and uses the language well, but the messages are more important than correct presentation. If you can understand a written message or even part of it, your students had succeeded in communicating on paper and should be praised for that. This does not mean that they should not be challenged to write, but you should consider their needs and balance your class time appropriately. Many students who do not need to write will enjoy it for the purpose of sharing their thoughts and personal stories, and they appreciate a form where they can revise their work into better English than if they share the same information orally.

The purpose of developing the written expression, in principle, is to express ideas, to convey a message; so the ideas themselves should be seen as the most important aspect of the message itself. On the other hand, the writer

needs to pay some attention to formal aspects: neat handwriting, correct spelling and punctuation, as well as, acceptable grammar and careful selection of vocabulary. This is because much higher standards of language are normally demanded in writing than in speech: More careful constructions, more precise and varied vocabulary, and correctness of expression in general.

Such reflections invite teachers to deepen on some features of the written language in English stated by Penny Ur, in his book "A Course in Language Teaching".(P-211)

- **Individuals vary**. Different writers may produce equal good results through widely different processes. This means that there is probably no one right system of writing that we should recommend; rather, we should suggest and make available various possible strategies encouraging individuals to experiment and search for one that is personally effective.

- **Writing is a messy business**. Most people progress through a number of untidy drafts before reaching a final version. Nor do the steps they always follow may see a rational order of priority: It is true that a great amount of writers think about content first and form later. It may be useful to advise learners not to worry too much about spelling and grammar at the beginning, and to get down their ideas first. It may not be wise to try to impose this as a rigged rule. More helpful, perhaps, is to encourage learners to work through a number of revisions; to accept messy draft as positive, even essential, stage in writing; to treat early drafts as transition stages to be criticized but not formally assessed.

- **Writing in potentially satisfying**. If you are writing on a topic about what you feel, you have something worthwhile or interesting to say, the process of writing can be absorbing and enjoyable; and if it is worked through to a final product, most people feel pride in their work and want it to be read. It is therefore worth investing thought in the selection of topics and tasks that motivates learners to write; and extremely important to provide an appreciative reader audience, whether teacher or co-learners.

- **You learn to write through writing.** This may sound obvious the same can be said of all the other skills nevertheless it needs to be emphasized, reading of course, helps, since it familiarizes learners with the convention governing kinds of texts and in general improves their language, but it is not enough, and is no substitute for hands on writing experience. One of our main tasks then, as

teachers, is to get our students to write a lot thinking as they do so and learning from their own writing experience.

## 1.6. Items to be measured from the internal structure of the written text

- Set the theme
- Quality of ideas
- Consistency
- Good sentence
- Extension
- Originality
- Capitalization, addition, change or omission
- Delimitation of sentences and paragraphs
- Scripture without any error of condensation or fragmentation.

In general, it is a process through which the writer-student, in thinking way, elaborates the meaning and later transforms it in a written text, bringing with short words, brief paragraphs and texts of moderate complexity, until the clear expression of ideas and meaning are reached, considering the adjustment writing rules in correspondence with the type of the text. As a skill in formation it goes through phases, and then the final text product is the result of many versions and requires the development of writing strategies. Its efficient development is linked to the rest of verbal skills integration and it has a strong connection among effective-motivational and cognitive elements.

**Stages to develop the written expression:**

- Pre- writing (have the students know the essence of the written task)
- Ordering (give an order for the task, students must have an outline in their mind)
- Drafting (have students write a draft. It is not a final copy)
- Revising (unity of ideas, mistakes, spelling, too much repetition, coherence, grammar errors, punctuation, capitalization, etc.)

## 1.7. An analysis of the English written expression during the teaching-learning process in eleventh grade

The analysis of official documents showed that students should develop the four basic skills working hard with the use of the dictionary and also comprehending oral texts regarding the topic of the unit. Besides they have to express orally and in written way using the communicative functions given and to process information of medium complexity texts.

In the syllabus, it also states that the student will **communicate by writing** compositions, reports, etc. The specific ability of writing will be approached and developed teaching the students to:

- Sum up the gathered information from oral and written sources in résumés, paragraphs, diagrams considering the particularities of the content of the information.
- Write paragraphs, résumés and essays about cultural, social, and professional topics.
- Keep developing the ability of taking notes.
- Continue developing the ability of a creative written expression through creative and individual practice.
- Keep working with the preparation in communicative and investigative abilities for writing a good project work or research.

(Taken from Eleventh Grade Syllabus and translated from Spanish into English by the author)

The analysis of the syllabus provides that the skill has never been neglected, at least from a curricular and organizational point of view. It is clearly defined and fully integrated in the objectives and the contents. It means that the students should be more trained in written expression, even more when they will be asked, at the end of the course, to write a project work that requires a high level of written skills. That is why; teachers should motivate them to write, but also to prepare them to do so.

In a daily and direct contact with the object of investigation, that is, the direction of the teaching-learning process of English written expression with eleventh graders, the author of this investigation, in a first approximation, noticed that there was not exact coincidence between the social expectations, that is, the objectives of the grade stated above and the results in their fulfillment.

## 1.8. Project Work in the English Classroom

Through this investigation, the author considers necessary to highlight the project work, as it is a learning experience which aims to provide students with the opportunity to synthesize knowledge from various areas of learning, and critically and creatively apply it to real life situations. Project work is an essential part of English classes at school. Students can benefit in different ways from

this creative approach to learn English as a foreign language. This process enhances students´ knowledge and prepares them for lifelong learning and the challenges ahead because when teachers create vibrant learning environments that require active student involvement then they are stimulating higher-level thinking skills, and give students responsibility for their own learning.

The project work is a task that allows the integration of knowledge and abilities students have been developing in the English language and in the curriculum in general, taking into account that it is a small project generally made in teams. The use of written expression is usually limited to a few sentences per lesson which are contributed by a small number of students. Contrasting to this, project works give the students the opportunity to contribute to the lessons but also to make use of what they have learned in classes.

Project works also aim at motivating students to learn the language that is taught and to use it in a meaningful context (Stoller, 2006). Furthermore, the stimulation of the students´ interest in and curiosity for a good preparation in the written aspect of project works help creating a positive learning environment and thus supports their learning success. After all, project work can be real fun and students benefit from this way of dealing with English as a foreign language.

Students must follow certain steps for writing a project work:

- To determine the topic of the project
- To structure the project
- To gather the information
- To process the information and to elaborate the final product
- To present in oral and written ways the final product
- To evaluate the project

## 1.9. Characterization of the research object

During the work as a teacher of English developed by the author at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school, there were registered many problems such as:

- The students are not motivated in the topics for writing because teachers conceive them without assuming the student's needs and interests.

- Students are mostly asked to write short answers and brief notes from the contents of the lessons which do not favor the development of the writing and do not prepare them for project works.

In order to know the characteristics of a group of 45 students, the following empirical methods were applied: Analysis of official written documents, observation guide, surveys to students and interviews to teachers.

Lesson plans and the eleventh grade syllabus were consulted in order to know the main and specific aspects regarding written expression and what the objectives of the year were, considering this ability and the activities that teachers proposed for working on it. Besides, observations were carried out to determine how the professors dealt with the written expression in class. Five lessons were visited (See Appendix I) and it was noticed that teachers have a set of activities and exercises emphasizing oral expression and reading comprehension. They orient the students write briefly without regarding the structure as such.

The interview to teachers (See Appendix II) rendered the following regularities:

1. They are willing to develop oral skills in the lesson, giving stress to it.

2. They declare there are many ways to achieve writing skills.

3. They state that many of the exercises proposed by the syllabus are for reading and speaking.

4. They affirm that writing practice is neither properly nor fully implemented.

5. They say that writing activities are rarely prepared.

The survey (See Appendix III) was applied to 20 students of the group object of the investigation. With the implementation of this method it was detected that they are not interested, or just need to know the bases of communication or reading. Most of the students mark that the activities they do are mainly oral and writing short notes -related to (answering written questions, summarizing in writing, completing sentences, changing a verb tense, etc.). The 72% of the students does not like or have limited skill in writing with little degree of complexity. The 15% of the students expressed how bored writing is, and also, how lost they feel when the teacher orients them to write. They declared they do not know the requisites for written expression when, for instance, the project work is assigned.

In general, the researcher realized that the strategies used by English teachers do not favor the development of the written expression in class. The empirical methods demonstrated that much is to be done still to improve the teaching-learning process and the development of written expression. Most of the teachers do not emphasize on the students' written expression when they express themselves through communicative functions. Teachers do not use the content the book provides as a way to stimulate writing skills and the exercises do not fulfill the objective of the lesson. For all those reasons, students do not realize what the importance of learning good written expression is.

The ways traditionally used by teachers nowadays do not help to fulfill the objective of the syllabus by teaching the students "How" to write effectively in English as a foreign language, nor about what the students want to write as opposed to what they have to write. This is something that we will have to bear in mind in any consideration of the teaching of the written expression.

Teachers are in charge of the enhancement of the teaching-learning process of English and of the development of the written expression particularly, but the researcher considered the main insufficiencies derived from the application of different instruments to make the following generalizations:

- The students are not motivated towards the written expression.
- Students are limited to mechanically copying from the board, books and workbooks.
- The students prefer to write about topics, other than the ones teachers bring to class.
- The activities developed in class are not creative, and attainable.
- Teachers do not know how to guide the students' written expression through the English lessons.
- Most teachers teach written expression because it is examined.

In conclusion, the researcher assumes that language teachers need to be aware of a broad range of relevant issues if they are to have a reasonable basis for teaching the written expression. This includes the nature of the skill and the way to deal with it efficiently.

**Chapter II: Theoretical and practical proposal aimed at reinforcing the English written expression in Senior High School**

This chapter is devoted to the presentation of the proposal of communicative tasks to improve the English written expression, as the main contribution of the research, with a brief analysis on the term task, followed by general suggestions.

**2.1. Content distribution in eleventh grade syllabus**

The syllabus suggests the following contents to be dealt with:

Unit 1: What have I done? (Narrating life stories and the use of the perfect tenses)

Unit 2: Telling stories. (Narrating stories and the use of the past perfect tense)

Unit 3: What will you be doing? (Speaking about plans and intentions and the use of the future tense to speak about plans and intentions)

Unit 4: What would you like to eat? (Giving instructions)

Unit 5: Professions (Describing jobs and professions and describing someone´s skills)

Grammatical structures:

- Past perfect tense,
- Future progressive,
- Present continuous tense with future meaning,
- Countable and uncountable nouns,
- Imperative,
- Modal verbs.

**Defining the term ´Task´**

A task is a classroom activity or exercise that has an objective attainable only by the interaction among participants, a mechanism for structuring and sequencing interaction, and a focus on meaning exchange; a language learning endeavor that requires learners to comprehend, manipulate, and/or produce the target language as they perform some set of workplans. Lee, J. (2000)

The author assumed the term "task" as defined by Medina and Fernández (2006) as well as the one given by David Nunan (1991) who declared that it is a special kind of technique and, in fact, may actually include more than one

technique. Besides it is considered that tasks should be meaningful and graded, as conceived in this work.

Alberto Medina quotes, in his Glossary, that a communicative task is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the language while their attention is principally focus on meaning rather than in form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its right. (Nunan, D. 1989)

The author assumes the definitions above and adds that a communicative task is intended to practice foreign language functions and notions within a meaningful contextual situation, but remarkably designed to activate the learners' motives and interests towards writing.

According to Lee, J. (2000) a communicative task requires cognitive, linguistic and communicative aspects to be developed. It is important to strike a balance when designing a task (aka "the Goldilocks Principle"—not too hard, not too easy). Next, we will look at the features that most well-designed communicative tasks have in common.

- **Linguistic complexity** (vocabulary, grammar, textual/genre conventions)
- **Communication** (face-threatening topic or task; number of people involved; relationships of those involved)
- **Cognitive demands** (familiarity with topic; memory requirements; processing demands)

## 2.2. Proposal of tasks to deal with the written expression

The proposal is aimed at working with written expression in eleventh graders and to guide them through the development of the final project work as a final result. These tasks are focused on training this skill for having a better result at the end of the course. For that reason, the author of this research planed communicative tasks and considering the sequence of the tasks, students will practice their written expression. Finally, they will be prepared for writing a good project work, because in that way students will put into practice what they learned.

The communicative tasks proposed can be developed in co-operation with the students, who can contribute to the preparation, analysis and evaluation of the

task by explaining their needs, motivations and capacities. Such co-operation can, moreover, be accompanied by an explicit realization of the objectives, structure of the task and expectations of the role to be played by participants. It may comprise periods of conciliation not only between the teacher and the learners but also within a group of learners.

The tasks enable teachers to:

- motivate learners (the task may be highly relevant to the learners, and carrying out a task is rewarding/satisfying in itself)
- differentiate and adapt objectives according to the learners' needs, motivations and capacities
- prompt reflection and comprehension, discuss and negotiate the activities in a language class
- illustrate the objectives
- observe and evaluate learning processes
- encourage learner autonomy and self-evaluating capacities
- combine learning and the use of the language
- encourage learner autonomy by enabling them to independently manage the various stages or phases in the task, which forms a coherent, although complex whole.

## 2.3. Requirements taken into account when elaborating the communicative tasks proposed

In previous courses students studied the paragraph as a construction for writing. Eleventh graders have the opportunity to remind this content by implementing what they learned, trying to create texts that motivate their imaginations and showing their thoughts in a piece of paper. Besides, teachers must prepare some tasks in each unit of the course for practicing and rehearsing written expression because it is the only way to learn and to develop the skill.

In correspondance, when each task is presented, the first element considered is its specific purpose, as its general goal is obvious in correspondence with the objective of the paper. The tasks have almost the same procedures because teachers must use the workbook for preparing students in the written expression process. Sections such as ¨Communication Tips¨ and ¨Writing Tips¨ are very useful for working with students and letting them know what and how to

do with the tasks teachers will assign, but the use of the workbook cannot be the only source teachers have for preparing their students. In some lessons teachers will deal with aspects about written expression. That is why, they should present the contents of the units as very important ones because they will demand from their students, and students should know what the teacher wants. Therefore, the communicative tasks proposed:

- are related to the students' age, level, interests and needs,
- include contents studied during this school year,
- favor individual, pair and group work,
- are focused on the development of the written expression since it is the skill less treated, and
- include an instruction for the teachers.

Finally, as it is a proposal, the teacher at schools is the one who decides when and where the tasks proposed are going to be assigned.

**Task #1**

Objective: to express in a written way some lexical items from previous units.

Procedures: The teacher writes a word on the board and then students write down words that follow using the last letter(s). The more last letters they use, the more points they get. The teacher keeps writing as quick as possible as the students offer up more correct words.

- Write down some word using the last sound you hear. Be sure to use the vocabulary of the unit.

Follow the example below:

E.g. Smilengthosentencementality…

**Task #2**

Objective: to express themselves in writing telling a story that had already happened.

Procedures: In this task, the teacher guides the students to create several serial stories by following his/her oral commands. Each student needs a plain piece of paper to start. Students sit in a circle of 8 or fewer.

After each command the student writes down the information that s/he has been asked to provide, folds the paper over to hide what s/he has written and then passes to the right. The next command is given and the procedure is repeated. When all commands are completed, the students open up the papers and read

out the resulting stories. They should be encouraged to connect the sentences with transitional phrases and/or small additional details to create continuity to the story.

- Narrate a story!

a) Write a boy's name with a brief description of him.

b) Write a girl's name with a brief description of her.

c) Tell where the two met.

d) What were his first words to her?

e) What was her reply?

f) What happened next?

g) What was the reaction of people who knew them?

h) What was the result of all this?

**Task #3**

Objective: to make the students narrate life stories by using the perfect tenses for developing their written expression, and preparing them for the final project work.

Procedures: the teacher can provide a list with some important personalities for the students to select one. Then, the students should write about the selected one saying important things about that personality. The teacher also should remind the use of the grammatical tenses studied, and the teacher can also encourage the students to be creative at writing.

- Choose an important personality and write a summary of what he/she does/did or an anecdote of a relevant aspect of his/her life. Remember using the present perfect tense, and try to be creative when you write about him/ her.

**Task #4**

Objective: to make the students narrate life stories by using the past perfect tense for developing their written expression.

Procedures: the teacher will write on the board the introduction of text and will explain the students that they should write a development and a conclusion for it. Besides, the teacher should remind briefly the grammatical aspects studied.

- Complete the following story creating a development and a conclusion for it. Try to use your imagination and do not forget using

the grammatical tenses you have studied. I really hope you can show your writer spirit!

<div align="center">¨A few words to begin¨</div>

Most of the adventures in this book really happened. One or two were my own experiences. The others were experiences of boys in my school. Huck Finn really lived. Tom Sawyer is made of three real boys.

My book is for boys and girls, but I hope that men and women also will read it. I hope it will help them to remember pleasantly the days when they were boys and girls, and how they felt and thought and talked; what they believed, and what strange things they sometimes did.

(Taken from *The adventures of Tom Sawyer;* Mark Twain. Adapted version, A. Ladder Classic Edition)

**Task #5**

Objective: to make the students write about their plans and intentions and the use of the future tense as a grammatical aspect for enhancing students´ written expression.

Procedures: first of all, the teacher motivates the students to talk about friendship and the activities they share with their friends and how the communication among them is. After that, the teacher will orient to write a letter to a friend in another country talking about some plans for vacations.

Note: the students can consult the Workbook on page 23 to see an example of a letter.

- Imagine you have a pen friend in Canada. Write a letter to him/her and tell what you think to do in your vacations, but also you can refer to your future studies. Remember the correct structure of a letter that you studied in class.

**Task #6**

Objective: to express in writing the communicative functions and the lexical items studied in the unit# 4 What do you want to eat?

Procedures: The teacher reads a list of food aloud and have the students say whether it is countable or uncountable. Then, the teacher writes the list on the board divided into columns according to the classification and orients the students to write down interrogative sentences with answers.

- Listen to the list of food and say whether it is countable or uncountable.

a) Write interrogative sentences using more than three nouns. Answer them.

List: cucumbers, wine, cake, carrot, cheese, sugar, banana, eggs, ketchup, bread.

**Task # 7**

Objective: to express themselves in writing giving instructions and using the passive voice, countable and uncountable nouns, and how many/ much.

Procedures: the teacher will remind briefly grammatical aspects related to meals already studied, and also to explain the students what to do in the task. If the students need any help, the teacher can provide an example for them to understand in a better way, but s/he should explain very well what the students should do trying to make them think by themselves on a given topic.

- Write a dialogue between a customer and a waiter/ waitresses referring about the client´s favorite dish, the desserts he/ she likes the most, or about favorite beverages. Select one dish you know well and explain the customer how to prepare a typical Cuban one.

**Task #8**

Objective: to express themselves in writing using the knowledge acquired in decribing people and occupations.

Procedure: the teacher shows some pictures and have the students identify occupations on them. After that s/he orients the students select one of the pictures and write a description including physical appearance and occupations. They should also imagine personality portraits.

- Look at the pictures and identify the occupation on them.
- a) Write a description about it taking into consideration physical appearance and occupations. Provide some personality portraits that you can imagine.

**Task #9**

Objective: to make the students assume positions and write a creative situation.

Procedures: the teacher makes the students to play the role of a journalist. So that, the students should write an article about the profession they would like to study. The students can explain the skills they have for studying this career.

- Imagine you work for a newspaper as a writer and the editor an article about jobs and professions, but he wants that you focus your

attention on the profession you would like to study when you were in eleventh grade.

**Task #10 Project work**

Objective: to gather all the contents studied and to put them into practice considering students´ interests and needs.

Procedures: An important aspect that teachers should ensure is that the work in the groups is distributed among students equally. They are assigned to work in groups, with each project them having four to five members,depending on the amount of students the class has. This activity is designed to be broad enough to allow students to display their various skills and abilities.

At the end of the project, each group is required to present a piece of written work based on the task they have completed. This component assesses students on their performance concern knowledge application and written expression. This is an opportunity for students to apply the skills they have learned and to demonstrate their abilities collectively in a final product, but also it is the possibility for selecting a topic of the units studied in the course and to write and learn about.

- Select one of the topic studied during the course and write about it. Try to be creative and use the grammatical aspects learned.

Note: the students can also choose a free topic and write about it taking into account their interests.

**Chapter III: The effectiveness of the communicative tasks to improve the English in eleventh graders at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school**

The communicative tasks proposed in the diploma paper contributes to achieve a higher level of effectiveness in developing the written expression in eleventh graders.

In order to corroborate the effectiveness of the communicative tasks to develop the written expression in English in eleventh graders at Juan George Soto Cuesta senior high school, a pedagogical experience was implemented during the school year 2014-15. Thus, there could be noticed that teachers from Juan George Soto Cuesta senior high school faced problems in developing the written expression and some of the tests applied rendered that most teachers teach writing because it is examined, not because it is a need to learn how to write. They focus neither on current nor in future needs. Besides they do not take into consideration that what will guide the students, may be different from what they are obliged to do.

In consequence, the author carried out a pre-test (see appendix 1) and a post-test (see appendix 6) to have an idea about how teachers dealt with this ability in their lessons and how the students worked with written expression, it means if they were able to write a text in English. The group selected was group 7 from the grade in question (30 students).

The **pre-test** was applied to determine the real level of development of writing in English. It was applied through an activity and it proved that the 89, 5% of the students did not get the expected level in writing. It demonstrated that the majority of the students found it difficult to express themselves in writing, not to mention unity, coherence, punctuation, among other aspects. They do not showed enthusiasm and commitment towards writing in English.

The **Post-test** was applied to determined the effectiveness of the communicative tasks proposed related to the development of the written exprssion in English in the students presented. It rendered that 26 students obtained good evaluations which represented a 86,7 %, 3 students were evaluated of regular representing a 10,0 % and 1 students got a bad evaluation representing a 3,3 % (See Appendix 9).

After analyzing the situation, the communicative tasks proposed and implemented demanded more production on the students´ part. That is why, the initial stage of students regarding written expression´s development was, in general, poor, but as the number of tasks increased the researcher started to notice a sustained ascend in the students´ writing skill. Surprisingly, the 96.7 % of the total population of the group could do them with no teachers´support.

The results demonstrated that the contribution of the investigation was suitable, and it could be implemented as a part of teacher's preparation in the subject English senior high schools.

In addition to the results of the methods mentioned, a survey applied to students (see appendix 8) with the objective to know their opinions about the satisfaction after the communicative tasks were applied, and also the degree of the writing skills the students reached.

All the students declared that the way the communicative tasks were developed was good and developmental. The communicative tasks made possible that the students reached better English writing skills when they finished eleveth grade.

This improvement was manifested on the development of letters and short paragraphs, the great use of grammatical elements and the type of language appropriate for each situation. The students expressed that the main expectation they had for the English subject of having a better writing skills was fulfilled.

# Conclusion

Teachers in senior high school do not develop teaching-learning tasks as a suitable way to enhance the English written expression. They develop the same traditional and unmotivated techniques and activities and, most of the time they just focus their attention on oral expression activities.

Definitions referred to the categories analyzed were presented. It was also evident the necessity to demonstrate to teachers how the written expression could be treated when it is taught as a process. This way, the teaching-learning process will be getting better.

The communicative tasks proposed were elaborated by the author who considers that they could be implemented to solve the problem detected in the teaching-learning process of English in the eleventh graders at "Juan George Soto Cuesta" senior high school.

# Recommendations

- To implement these tasks in the English lessons at a wider scale.
- To continue the practice of writing in the English language.
- To deepen on the theoretical and methodological elements of writing as a skill in foreign language teaching and learning.

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# Appendixes

**APPENDIX 1**

**OBSERVATION GUIDE**

Objective: Diagnose how the professors give treatment to the development of written expression through lessons.

**ASPECTS TO FOCUS ON:**

1. The amount of activities the teachers prepare to treat the ability of writing through the lessons.
2. The students´ attitude towards written tasks
3. The way the activities are carried out in class.
4. The quality of the activities prepared.
5. The students´ motivation toward the activities oriented.

**APPENDIX 2**

**INTERVIEW TO TEACHERS OF ENGLISH**

Objective: To know the level of methodological preparation that teachers have for developing the written expression in eleventh graders.

Name of the teacher:

We are developing an investigation about the English written expression's treatment in class and we need your help answering the following questions:

1. Which skill (s) do you usually develop in your lessons?
2. Do you consider written expression as one the main skills to be developed while teaching English?
3. What procedures do you follow when implementing the right methodological treatment to written exercises in lessons in which you work with communicative functions?
4. What kind of exercises do you use for working the written expression in your students?
5. Are those exercises the right ones to develop in you students a good written expression considering their needs and interests?
6. When you are assigning your students a project work, do you follow steps to have them lead the research?
7. What other activities do you suggest for preparing in better way students´ written expression?

**APPENDIX 3**

**ENCUESTA A LOS ESTUDIANTES**

Objetivo: Constatar la opinión de los alumnos en cuanto al trabajo con la habilidad escritura en las clases de Inglés.

Estimado estudiante, como parte del esfuerzo por favorecer el aprendizaje de los estudiantes, en nuestro centro se lleva a cabo una investigación acerca de las características que poseen las actividades que se desarrollan en las clases de escritura, considerando principalmente como se maneja la preparación para los trabajos finales de la asignatura Inglés y además de la vinculación de esta habilidad con las restantes. Su cooperación es muy importante, por lo que se hace necesario sinceridad en las respuestas que emita. Estaremos muy agradecidos por su participación.

1-¿Los ejercicios que desarrollas en clases, o fuera de ellas, propician el desarrollo de la habilidad de escritura?

Sí_____            No_____ ¿Por qué?

2- ¿Qué tipo de ejercicios de escritura realizas en clases?

- Responder preguntas de manera escrita_____
- Escribir textos breves relacionados con temas de tu interés_____
- Resumir de forma escrita_____
- Completar oraciones_____
- Crear un párrafo introductorio y uno conclusivo para completar con el desarrollo de un texto dado para desarrollar tu creatividad_____
- Cambiar el tiempo gramatical_____

3-¿Te han sido explicados y enseñados los pasos para aprender a escribir un texto en Inglés?

Sí_____            No_____            Los explicaron, pero a grandes rasgos_____

4- Los temas que el profesor propone para desarrollar la habilidad de escritura son:

- Aburridos_____
- No me motivan a escribir_____
- Poco interesantes_____
- Geniales_____

- Casi desconocidos para mi_____
- Difíciles de escribir sobre ellos pues no sé cómo hacerlo_____
- Muy fáciles de redactar_____
- Imposibles de desarrollar porque no me preparan lo suficiente como para escribir un texto en Inglés_____

5- Una de las actividades que integra habilidades es el Project Work. ¿Cómo los profesores te preparan para que el resultado sea satisfactorio?

- En las clases, los profesores no enfatizan mucho la habilidad de escritura, pues están más centrados en la expresión oral_____
- La atención a la escritura no es favorable porque solo tenemos que responder con preguntas cortas y eso no nos prepara realmente a la hora de enfrentarnos a un trabajo final_____
- Los trabajos finales son muy fáciles de preparar porque tenemos la preparación necesaria en todas las habilidades_____
- El trabajo final está más dedicado a la expresión oral, por eso la escritura no es tan trabajada por parte de nosotros_____
- No somos capaces de escribir textos por nosotros mismos, por lo que recurrimos a otras fuentes para hacerlos_____

**APPENDIX 4**

**PRE-TEST**

Objective: to express in writing about actions that have occurred in the past.

Activity: Write a short paragraph about your last vacation; write no more than five sentences.

**Result**

| Evaluated | Good | % | Regular | % | Bad | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 30 | 2 | 6.7 | 12 | 40 | 16 | 53.3 |

**APPENDIX 5**

**OBSERVATION GUIDE (Pedagogical experience)**

Objective: To obtain preliminary reliable data on the actual effectiveness in class of the application of the proposal.

Lesson:                                  Visit:

Note: In all cases

a) Indicates a high positive corroboration of the indicator.

b) Indicates an average (mid) corroboration.

c) A low negative corroboration.

I. In communication.

1. Quality of the written ideas stated.

a. Good

b. Fair

c. Bad

2. Richness of the written ideas expressed.

a. Good

b. Fair

c. Bad

**APPENDIX 6**

**SURVEY TO STUDENTS**

Encuesta a los estudiantes después de aplicado los ejercicios.

Objetivo: Conocer las opiniones de los estudiantes sobre el desarrollo de la escritura en inglés al terminar la aplicación de la propuesta.

Estudiante:

Una vez concluida la aplicación de las tareas comunicativas para el desarrollo de la habilidad escritura en inglés, es necesario conocer sus opiniones sobre la misma.

1-¿A que nivel fueron superadas sus expectativas?

__alto    __medio    __bajo

2- Las tareas comunicativas desarrolladas en clases han sido:

Excelentes_____  Buenas_____  Regulares_____  Malas_____

Otra:_____

2-A continuación les ofrecemos un grupo de afirmaciones para que escoja la que más se relaciona con el logro de sus expectativas a través de los ejercicios de escritura.

__Desarrollo de la comunicación escrita relacionada con sus necesidades, intereses y aspiraciones.

__Satisfacción de las expectativas con las que iniciaron onceno grado en la asignatura.

3-¿Qué otras actividades les gustaría que se desarrollaran en las clases de escritura?

**APPENDIX 7**

**POST-TEST**

Objective: to express in writing about actions that have occurred in the past using the past perfect tense.

Activity: Select one of the following topics and write a brief paragraph.

- Last vacation…

- My last love…

- My last travel…

Indicators:

1. The use of grammatical aspects
2. The use of lexical items
3. Unity and coherence
4. Communicative intention of the topic

Further                                                                                      Reading

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