

Home writing tasks during school closures

EAL JOURNAL [eal_journal March 24, 2020 0 Comments](https://ealjournal.org/2020/03/24/home-writing-tasks-during-school-closures/)

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During school closures we are publishing descriptions of short activities that EAL learners can do independently at home or with their parents, or that can be set by teachers for online learning. Today's activity comes from Pete Clements of St Andrew's School in Bangkok, Thailand. Here he sets out a range of writing activities to use with older EAL learners. Improving as a writer is all about practice, practice, practice! I teach Secondary-aged learners who are often reluctant writers. However, there are a few writing tasks I've used over the years that have worked really well with teens. Seeing as my learners here in Bangkok are facing a long Songkran break on lockdown, it's a good time for me to send out some fun links to encourage them to do some creative writing. Fellow teachers and/or parents might find these sites useful too. Although I've compiled these with writing practice in mind, some of these could be used as speaking or drama activities too.

Writing prompts

This [blog post from Bryn Donovan](#) includes 50 plot ideas for young adult fiction. These are great inspiration for learners, who could create stories or dialogues using some of the prompts.

Improv prompts

Plot ideas are useful, but sometimes it's great for learners to just jump into a bit of free-flow creative writing. [Englishprompts](#) is a simple scene improv generator. It's pretty basic- it just provides a prompt of the first line of a scene, and you can also generate emotions for the characters. This is meant more for drama, but there's no reason why they can't be used as story writing prompts. It might surprise you just how effective such a simple tool like this can be!

Making a comic

The old ones are the best! [Make Beliefs Comix](#) is a good site allowing students to create their own comic strip. It's fairly easy to use on a desktop computer (mainly drag and drop, plus typing into the speech bubbles). There is a good feature for language learners - [ESOL comic starters](#). These give learners sentence stems or a writing frame for support. There are other comic strip creation sites such as Powtoon, but they are often subscription-based.

Story cubes

Whether the task involves speaking, writing, listening or acting, my set of [Rory's Story Cubes](#) rarely fail to spark interest in the classroom. Story cubes are simply picture dice. Students roll them and tell stories (often crazy ones) which include the different pictures on each dice. The physical cubes are more for classroom use and are a tad expensive, but they are also available as an app. A quick scan of the App Store shows lots of similar (and cheaper) story dice apps. There are various other ways to use these cubes for language learning (check out my post [here](#) and the comments on it for ideas), but in this instance they are great for creative writing inspiration! If you want to personalise the activity more, get the students to make their own story dice.

Ode to an object

Beth Skelton mentioned poetry in [her recent post](#) too. Writing poems about everyday inanimate objects is a good way to practice adjectives and bring the mundane to life! There are lots of different writing frames online for this, a simple search for 'ode to an object' should give you lots of ideas.

Musical postcards

This is a very simple writing task I came across many years ago. Give learners a postcard template or get them to make one. Play an interesting piece of music and instruct them to draw what they hear on the front of their postcard. Once finished, tell them that the image on the postcard is from their last holiday. They write a postcard to a friend or family member, describing their holiday and what they can see in the image. Low-prep, high engagement. I usually play an extract of classical music for this task. Four minutes or so of [Jupiter from Holst's The Planets](#) is perfect, as the music changes so much.

All of the ideas above are aimed more at creative writing. Here are a couple of other sites for writing which may also be useful.

An email to the future me

I said these ideas were tried and tested – not all of them! I came across this one recently via fellow blogger [Sandy Millin](#), and thought it would be a great task to try at this time. [Futureme](#) allows you to send an email to your future self, which will be delivered in either one, three, or five years' time. Seeing as this is a tough time for many of us and our students, recording our thoughts at this moment may be cathartic, and provide us with an interesting reflection down the line. The fact that this is an email perhaps has novelty value, after all many people keep diaries anyway. Still, the digital nature of the letter to yourself might be the nudge some teens need to get writing.

Write and Improve

This is a more serious suggestion – it might take a bit more persuasion to get your secondary learners using this site! [Write and Improve](#), from Cambridge English, allows you to complete a range of writing tasks and gain feedback on your work in seconds. The writing tasks are linked to the CEFR for languages, and gives learners feedback at word and sentence level. It is specifically designed for non-native speakers so is tailored to their needs, and it's free. The tasks are at three different levels (beginner, intermediate and advanced) and there is also a set of 'just for fun' tasks with many involving creative writing.

My international school has a high percentage of EAL learners. However, most of the tasks mentioned can be used with any learners. If you are doing online check-ins with your form group, you could set them one of the creative writing tasks and they can share their progress with friends in breakout groups the next day.

I hope you found something from this post useful. Stay safe, stay sane, and keep your learners' creative juices flowing!

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