

Think-Talk-Write Design: Digital Tools for Language Autonomy and Writing Literacies

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Do you have students who struggle with writing skills despite having studied English for several years? Have you tried different strategies in the classroom to help them? If so, look no further. There are L2 teaching techniques that integrate form and function guidelines to promote greater linguistic competence and performance. Language learners who receive meaningful feedback at the right place and time tend to repair, restate, or draw meaningful hypotheses about certain linguistic rules, so they can review their own work and use language forms in appropriate functions. Meaningful feedback plays a crucial role in language learning by naturally contextualizing significant language rules and usage. Today, technology-based instruction can offer new and innovative ways to deliver this meaningful feedback.

Utilizing technology-based instruction can create enhanced exposure, accessibility, and interactivity in the language-learning classroom. Thus, integrating free online resources will make visible our students' analytical process and help them develop the ability to edit their own work, encouraging them to become more adept, autonomous, and invested in their own learning. The ubiquity of digital tools, including open-generative artificial intelligence (AI)

technologies, among Generation Zs these days prompts us to take advantage of networked systems for enhanced learning.

In this manner, I outline below a Think-Talk-Write design that will advance the cognitive, communicative, and applied contexts of implicit and explicit language literacies.

1. THINK: Introduce cognitive awareness.

To enhance cognitive awareness of language learners, teachers might apply this two-pronged approach: (1) encourage students to analyze the differences between their first language and their target language, and (2) share their findings in an online forum. Thinking about how these language forms differ from their native language may jump-start critical thinking. Though I teach advanced students, the two-part exercise below can also be effective for intermediate-level language learners:

- (1) **Part 1:** For example, when teaching the English articles (*a*, *an*, *the*) and plural *-s*, we may focus on the article distinctions (e.g., how *-s* plural endings only occur after *the* or zero articles in English) and ask students to describe the contrasts between their native language and

English with the help of open-generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT (openai.com), but making sure they include their own perspectives and experiences. Here are possible AI prompts: “How do English articles differ from articles in [your native language]?”; “How are plural nouns formed in [your native language] compared to English?”

Other possible lessons may focus on word order and sentence structure, verb tenses and conjugation, prepositions, formal and informal language, and so forth. Here are two sample lessons:

○ *Word Order and Sentence Structure:*

- (a) Provide students with simple sentences, such as “I walked the dog.”
- (b) Talk about the S-V-O word order/sentence pattern.
- (c) Have them compare it to their language.

○ *Verb Tenses and Conjugation:*

- (a) Provide sentences in different tenses, such as “I wash – I washed – I will wash”
- (b) Ask students to translate the sentences into their own language.
- (c) Have them compare what they noticed about English to what they know about their language (e.g., focus on how English uses *will* for future tense or *-ed* for past tense and how their language may use distinct verb forms or time markers, and so forth).

- (2) **Part 2:** Then, to share their findings, students may blog about the comparisons in any open-source discussion platform, such as Blogger (blogger.com), WordPress (wordpress.com), or Live Lingua (livelingua.com/tweducate), to enable

retention by association. The following questions may be used or modified for blogging: “In your language, how do you arrange words in a sentence? ... Is it the same as the S-V-O pattern of English, or different? ... How does your language show past, present, and future actions?”

These report blogs, published in open forums to a designated audience, will create a free space for language learners to recognize the unique structure (and share the value) of their first language, as well as enhance their appreciation for the rules of the English language. When we give them blogging opportunities, they are forced to analyze the structures of both their native and their target languages; when we have them share these language points with the class, we promote awareness to speakers of other languages and illustrate how diverse languages influence each other. Even if we do not fully grasp the structure of a student’s first language, the process of dissecting these differences independently would increase retention and develop measures to correct systemic problems. In effect, tapping into their critical thinking for cognate awareness is a good start.

In contrast to formal grammar lessons dedicated to hunting down errors and fixing them, online discussions about linguistic differences based on various experiences tend to create a safe space for everyone across linguistic, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. An electronic environment allows even the disenfranchised to participate, and once the teacher understands both the constraints and possibilities of a digital tool, students can reap the benefits of an enhanced and more personalized learning experience. Consequently, I enjoy posing discussion questions to challenge my students online, acting as a coach who stimulates their interests with collaborative learning tasks and making sure they persist in accomplishing each set goal in the writing process. Teaching students to discuss language differences fosters an awareness of how words and structures connect across languages, enhancing their cognate recognition. This awareness not only

aids vocabulary development but also deepens their understanding of linguistic patterns and relationships.

2. TALK: Utilize communicative activities.

Teachers may also utilize communicative activities in the classroom to help students practice and recognize language rules in authentic and meaningful contexts. The goal here is to improve their accuracy through technology-based interactive exercises, prompting students to discuss their responses in class. These interactive exercises are applicable for students from beginner to advanced, in order to support their communicative skills:

- Ask a student to simply share their blog post from the “Think” section above; then others can talk about what they found to be interesting about the post, what question(s) they may have, and so on.
- Other communicative activities may focus specifically on pointed language exercises based on Yule’s (1998) “Spot the Difference,” where students work with partners to practice attention to detail and descriptive writing. Here is a sample two-part teaching technique:

(1) *Warm-Up:*

- (a) Show two images on the board with five to ten subtle differences (e.g., two versions of a living room).

- The following digital tools may be used to prepare images: AI generation tool DALL•E 2 (openai.com/product-dall-e-2), online photo-sharing service Instagram ([instagram.com](https://www.instagram.com)) (Sarkar 2022), or open-source platform for royalty-free images Unsplash (unsplash.com) to access digital images in support of language-learning activities.

- (b) Ask students to quickly identify and describe differences orally (e.g., “The clock is above the sofa in the first picture, while the clock is above the table in the second picture”).

(2) *Pair Work:*

- (a) Find two more images with five to ten subtle differences, make copies, and divide students into pairs.
 - (b) Distribute one image per student and instruct them not to show it to their partner.
 - (c) Ask students to write a 150-word, detailed description of the image. Encourage them to include positions of objects such as “on the left” and “in the corner”; colors; shapes; sizes; unique or unusual features; etc.
 - (d) Have students exchange their descriptions (but not their images), read them, and identify the differences between the written description and their own image (e.g., “You wrote that the vase is red, but in my picture, it’s green”).
 - (e) Bring the class together and respond to the following reflection questions: “What made some descriptions easier or harder to understand?”; “Which details are most helpful in spotting the differences?”; and “How could the descriptions be improved?”
- For variety, incorporate the game-based learning platform Kahoot! (kahoot.com) and have each group fill in the blanks of a passage with correct articles, nouns, or verbs. Their answers can be projected onscreen while students explain their choices.

The authenticity of lively discussions following these technology-based communicative activities is often guaranteed and priceless.

The practice of teaching language forms is positively reinforced by class discussions that provide opportunities for everyone to make rhetorically effective choices. Digital collaboration tools allow students to freely speak up and employ trial-and-error deliberations without the repercussions of individual exercises that are common in graded or isolated quizzes. Teaching language lessons with an emphasis on exploring structural alternatives applies critical thinking and concept attainment within the framework of dialogues. In fact, “Dialogue is a constructive activity that leads to a new and heightened understanding of the issue at hand. The Bakhtinian tenet that all knowledge is created dialogically has been taken up time and again in the existing scholarship on Bakhtin in composition studies . . . and the implications for writing instruction are far reaching” (Halasek 1999, 4–5). Here, conversations pertaining to language forms enable students to negotiate meanings or syntactic options suitable for specific contexts. Peer feedback in any form already embodies audience sensitivity, helping students validate or redirect their purpose with reference to writing.

3. WRITE: Apply grammar in writing contexts.

Finally, providing opportunities to apply grammar lessons in the context of writing will help learners develop writing literacies. To illustrate, here are three tried-and-tested technology-based activities that energize my classes (for intermediate to advanced students, although the last activity may also work for beginners):

- *Editing and Reflecting on Grammar:*

- (a) Give each student a paragraph filled with ungrammatical sentences.
- (b) Ask them to edit the paragraph by paying attention to verb tenses, subject–verb agreement, articles, prepositions, word order, punctuations, or whatever grammar focus you have been covering in class.

- (c) Have students post their edited paragraph on Canvas (instructure.com/canvas), Anthology (previously called Blackboard; anthology.com), or other learning management systems.
- (d) Ask them to write a short summary of the grammar points that they focused on and share their reflections in class.

- *Collaborative Sentence Critiques:*

- (a) Assign students in small groups.
- (b) Give each group access to a Google Docs file with ten sentences that need to be critiqued in terms of length and effectiveness (Schuster 2003).
- (c) Tell students that as a group, they need to read each sentence carefully and discuss the following:
 - Length: Is the sentence too long, too short, or just right?
 - Effectiveness: Does each sentence clearly communicate its message?
- (d) Have them write their group critique directly in the Google Docs file.
- (e) Ask each group to share their critique.

- *Self-Editing and AI Assistance:*

- (a) Tell students to open their essay draft in Microsoft Word.
- (b) Review the grammar points discussed in class during the week (e.g., verb tenses, articles, subject–verb agreement).
- (c) Have students carefully read and edit their own work based on the week’s grammar points.
 - Encourage them to use AI language-assistance tools like Grammarly (grammarly.com), Perplexity AI (perplexity.ai), ChatGPT (openai.

com), or DeepSeek (deepseek.com) if unsure about certain grammar rules or corrections. For example, students may copy and paste the text into Grammarly to identify and explain grammar mistakes; alternatively, they might ask ChatGPT/DeepSeek to help correct specific sentences and/or explain grammar rules.

- (d) Tell students to save their edited essay in Microsoft Word.

Applied exercises like these that utilize innovative programs can prove to be more valuable than isolated grammar lessons because they allow students to examine language structures in the context of writing (see Figure 1). Using digital tools that enhance the visibility of the writing process tends to engage students as they pay close attention to language use, relate back to the rules, and edit their own work more effectively.

This approach to teaching grammar in the context of writing is just as central to teaching embodied simulation and critical thinking (Rule 2017). Technological tools can make each class session useful and productive; with careful planning and strategic implementation, it would be possible to promote accuracy-building skills within a short period of time to help students monitor their own progress and develop

learner autonomy. Class sessions that include examining correct forms in the context of writing effectively train students to recognize their own mistakes.

Since building fluency is primary in any language-learning situation, teaching rhetorical grammar instead of formal grammar can redirect focus on understanding the rhetorical effects of grammatical choices (Kolln and Gray 2021; Micciche 2004). Thus, language learners who rely on their own ideas when prewriting have already acquired some confidence, knowing that editing happens after the drafting stage. Advanced language learners who embrace autonomy understand that drafting allows creativity and ideas to flow freely, while editing is the stage where precision and clarity are honed. By focusing on grammar as a tool for effective communication rather than as a set of rigid rules, students can develop the confidence to draft freely and the skill to edit with purpose.

BOTTOM LINE

Teachers need to explore learning methods that enhance students' cognitive, communicative, and applied writing skills through using digital tools in workshop classroom environments. They should also find creative ways to engage students actively in the classroom, avoid passive learning, and foster critical-thinking skills. Integrating digital resources responsibly, including

<p>Student's Original Sentence:</p> <p><i>"The character in the story, he was really brave because he did not afraid of the monster and fought it to save his friend."</i></p> <p>AI-Edited Version:</p> <p><i>"The character in the story was very brave because he faced the monster without fear and fought it to save his friend."</i></p> <p>Key Improvements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Removed redundancy ("he was" → "was").2. Corrected grammar ("did not afraid" → "without fear," "fought" → "fought").3. Improved flow and conciseness.

Figure 1. Sample AI editing and feedback

open-generative AI tools, into lesson plans that involve the Think-Talk-Write design will make different language points become more visible, allowing students to apply analytical thinking without the barriers of assessment.

In fact, technology can turn a boring classroom into something more meaningful and productive through strategic tasks that involve pair work or group work, show-and-tell projects, game-based learning, and individual writing and/or editing workshops. Learner autonomy has always been a desired outcome in higher education, but assisting speakers of other languages to reach that goal rests on our capacity to fuel their imagination. In this regard, using technology-based techniques that support language development and autonomous learning needs to continue to promote writing literacies in the classroom and beyond.

I am convinced that using digital tools is aligned with the principles of enhancing our students' critical thinking and audience awareness. I also believe that a technology-based pedagogy geared towards online communication can positively revitalize language teaching. It is not surprising that research studies support the effectiveness of technology-infused lessons. For instance, language teachers have maximized the benefits of new communication technology features in the classroom (Muntaha, Chen, and Dobinson 2024); English language learners who used online collaborative learning outperformed those who used the conventional approach (Kuo, Huang, and Chu 2015); and technology has helped writing students learn grammar (Kim 2019). Students nowadays seem to be more interested in using innovative technology, and as aural/oral interactive software is consistently being developed, "a blended approach allows learners to make use of the online platform at their convenience [and] allows learners to receive additional support and guidance in a face-to-face environment" (McLellan, Kartchava, and Rodgers 2021, 227). Therefore, using technology-based practices that involve digital tools in a face-to-face class can revitalize language teaching and foster student learning.

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