

(55) A DAY IN THE LIFE OF [YOU]**How to write a novel between waking up and going to bed**

Language focus	Speaking and writing.
Duration	Stage One: 40 mins Stage Two and beyond: several months
Materials	Audacity and tenacity Blank cards to write single words and phrases on. A book to write a book in. Dictionaries

Introduction

Nobody rises to low expectations. Challenging students to do something they would never imagine doing or think they could ever do extends their view of themselves in important ways – like running a marathon or competing in a chess Olympiad.

Teachers can have students write a simple description of their day, expand it to tell the reader how they feel, what they are thinking, and how things relate to the past, present and future, etc. Teachers scaffold the process of expanding a simple outline of a day into a novel.

The basic structure can be done with the whole class. Those who wish to develop this into a major piece of writing may do so. Two options for taking this further are discussed on the next page.

Procedure**Stage One**

- Step 1. Ask the students to make a list of ten things they do in a normal day. If they have similar days, they can do this in groups. They should write each thing on a small card.
- Step 2. Ask the students to structure their things into a timeline of their typical day. The group members then give an oral presentation of their day to

each other. Provide them with time phrases as necessary, e.g.,

- The first/last/next thing I/we do is ...
- After ...-ing, we ... After [something] we ...
- The next thing we always/usually do is ...
- And then we ...
- Just before/after ... we ...

Step 3. Ask the students to arrange their cards in various orders, e.g., duration, importance, enjoyment level, and then discuss their orders in their groups. Provide them with dictionaries and question / sentence stems as necessary, e.g.,

- How long does it take to ... ? It takes about ... mins to...
- Why does it take (you) so long to ... ?
- Do you think that ... is more important than ... ?
- I think it's really/very important to ...
- I don't think it's really/very important to ... (note the position of *don't*)
- I think ... is a waste of time.
- Everyone (really) likes/hates ...-ing. (See Clines p.172)
- No one likes ...-ing. No one wants to ...
- What do you like about ...-ing?
- I find ... quite + adjective.

Step 4. Tell the students that they are going to write a story called "A Day in the Life of ..." and that they need to choose a voice: 1st or 3rd person. Explain the ins and outs of these choices. Ask them to give their person a name.

Note: The 1st person voice can be about themselves which will be autobiographical, honest and revealing. Or about a fictitious "I", where the imagination can roam free. The 3rd person voice can be about someone real or fictitious: "he" or "she".

Step 5. Students write a sentence or two for each stage of their day. In addition to saying what and when, they should write about the duration, importance and enjoyment levels of some of the stages.

Step 6. **Several variations:** They can do this in class or for homework. Students can submit their homework to the teacher or share it in groups in class. They may submit drafts in class and workshop them

with each other and the teacher. And submit a final version later.

Stage Two

The teacher needs to plan for either option:

Option A: the novel can be written as a class activity throughout a large part of a school year. Some time can be devoted to it in regular lessons.

Option B: novel writing could be a Writing Club activity, out of normal class hours and involving students from different classes.

Step 1. Tell the students that they are going to write a novel. In English. The working title of their novel is *A Day in the Life of ...*. The action of the novel will take place in one day. It will expand on the previous work of the same name.

Note: Some students may be a little surprised because they do not consider themselves writers, let alone writers in a foreign language. Some students might not even read very much.

Step 2. Tell the students that they need to choose a time perspective.

- Are you writing your story as the day goes along? e.g., And now we are standing on the parade ground waiting. We are always waiting. The commander has just arrived and now we ...
- Or as a journal entry? e.g., I had a nice day today. My English teacher liked our presentation. ... I felt so strong in the water at swimming practice.
- Or about the distant past, e.g., There was no hot water that day and everyone ... I saw something on Jamal's neck and wondered ... It was the day after the election and ...

Step 3. This is enough to get the students thinking about writing a novel. Explain that this will be a long-term process, spanning several months. It will be a major project. The teacher may choose to offer the two options. Find out how many students would like to be involved.

Stage Three

For students who would like to proceed with this long-term project, let us assume that they are familiar with writing from outlines, with sentence stems and functional language, and that they use dictionaries willingly. If not, this needs to be built into the classroom teaching.

The students can be referred to as *authors* while working with them on this project.

The authors will be drafting and rewriting, reading each other's work and giving each other feedback. It will be time-consuming and mind-expanding.

At some point the authors will need to decide whether they are writing by hand or on a computer. There are advantages and disadvantages of both. The author must use what suits them.

The basic idea of this novel is that each moment of the day triggers ideas and emotions – the feeling of repetitiveness, seeing/hearing/smelling a tiny thing that is different today from every other day, things from the recent and distant past, today's reaction to the alarm clock, somebody's voice, the presence or lack of a mobile phone, the craving for a cigarette, the value of friendship and love, and many other things.

Questions trigger thoughts

To get the authors thinking along these lines, ask them sets of leading questions. Brainstorm. The questions can be introduced all at once in a first session to give students an idea of where they are heading. They can think about them quietly and make notes. The questions could be used in a slip swapping format (p.69) or an AGM (p77). Or each set of questions could be the topic of a lesson or a writing workshop.

Some questions follow. Every teacher will have their own questions to add. Every student will have their own answers. It is important that they answer as their first or third person character, not as themselves, owing to the quite personal nature of the questions.

Sets of questions

- In your story, when is your day? In winter, spring? How do you feel at that time of year? What do you wear? What do you eat? Are there any festivals, celebrations, birthdays, etc? What are they? What do they mean to you?
- When do you look in the mirror? What do you see? Who in your family has that chin, those eyebrows, etc.? How would you describe your best features? What don't you like? Why? What would you like other people to see? Do they? How do you know?
- Does anything happen before you wake up? Something in the natural world? Movement in your general environment or in your room? Is your mind or body already experiencing something mental or physical?

- Is your day very full? Do you have time to relax? What do you do in your down time? Do you like to be alone or with someone, or with a group of people?
- What do you love and hate about the food available to you? About your uniform or whatever you wear? About the rules and regulations of everyday life? About ...
- What do you love and hate about being a student (if you are one)? What are you looking forward to today? Next year? After graduation?
- What role in your life does learning English play? Is it time-consuming, rewarding, frustrating? Can you function in the world through English in ways that were not available to you before you started learning English?
- How old are you? What is good and bad about being this age? Was it better being younger? When is your birthday? Did anything special happen on your last birthday?
- What important things have happened in your past? Births, deaths, marriages, divorce, prizes, failures, achievements, learning how to do something.
- Who are the people in your family? Do you get on well with all of them? Equally? Who do you turn to when you need to talk?
- Who is your best friend? What do you love and hate about him or her? Do you two have any secrets from the world or from each other?
- Have you been in love? If so, how did it happen? When did you know? Do they know about all your feelings? What are or were the wonderful and difficult things about being in love?

Moving forward

- Step 1. In the writing sessions that follow, teach the authors the language of each of the topics above, e.g., weather, food, relationships, hobbies, describing a face. The **language of a topic** is much more than a list of nouns. Reuse the relevant sets of questions above.
- Step 2. Provide the authors with language for describing their feelings about their reactions to these topics. They might need to talk about the past with affection and regret.
- Step 3. Help the authors find links between something like the lack of hot water today and something in their childhood, between a friend annoying them and their brother's actions, between peace after lights out in a dorm room and looking at the stars. This is how they hook

their thoughts and reflections to the structure of their day.

The students are always writing these ideas down, writing paragraphs in response to these prompts. They gradually take the shape of a novel.

I have written a novel

After considerable reading and writing and revising and sharing, the authors will arrive at a finished product.

They could write a blurb, a note about the author and a dedication. They could design a cover and then get several copies printed and bound at a local print shop.

It will have been an amazing process and it will be an amazing product. For the authors, the experience will be part of who they are forever.