Reviewing Literature

by S. Razı
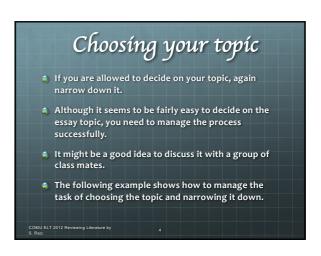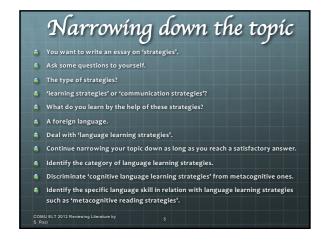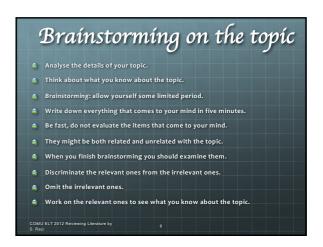
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COMU ELT Department

Introduction: Essays and articles

- Essays and articles are similar pieces of writing.
- A short piece of writing which deals with a single topic might be considered as an essay.
- If it is published in a newspaper, magazine, or journal; then, we call the essay as an article.
- An essay constitutes of four parts:
  - introduction, body, conclusion, and references.

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Working on an assigned topic

- If your lecturer delivers a writing task on a restricted topic, you need to understand what you are expected to do.
- Think about your purpose in writing the paper and more importantly, think about your readers.
- Identify the correct level for the formality of your paper.
- Consider the probable restrictions with the topic to identify it better.

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Choosing your topic

- If you are allowed to decide on your topic, again narrow down it.
- Although it seems to be fairly easy to decide on the essay topic, you need to manage the process successfully.
- It might be a good idea to discuss it with a group of class mates.
- The following example shows how to manage the task of choosing the topic and narrowing it down.

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Narrowing down the topic

- You want to write an essay on 'strategies'.
- Ask some questions to yourself.
- The type of strategies?
- 'learning strategies' or 'communication strategies'?
- What do you learn by the help of these strategies?
- A foreign language.
- Deal with 'language learning strategies'.
- Continue narrowing your topic down as long as you reach a satisfactory answer.
- Identify the category of language learning strategies.
- Discriminate 'cognitive language learning strategies' from metacognitive ones.
- Identify the specific language skill in relation with language learning strategies such as 'metacognitive reading strategies'.

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Brainstorming on the topic

- Analyse the details of your topic.
- Think about what you know about the topic.
- *Brainstorming*: allow yourself some limited period.
- Write down everything that comes to your mind in five minutes.
- Be fast, do not evaluate the items that come to your mind.
- They might be both related and unrelated with the topic.
- When you finish brainstorming you should examine them.
- Discriminate the relevant ones from the irrelevant ones.
- Omit the irrelevant ones.
- Work on the relevant ones to see what you know about the topic.

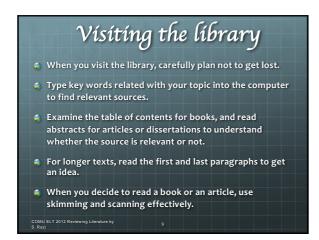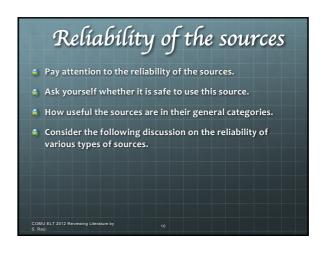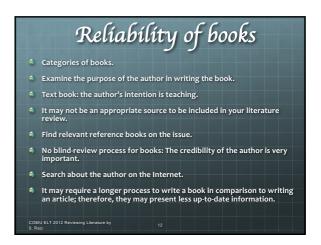COMU ELT 2012 Reviewing Literature by S. Razı   6

Brainstorming on the topic

- You will also also what you need to know about the topic.

- Suppose that you brainstorm on 'language learning strategies'.

- You realize that you do not know the definition of strategy.

- You need to know its definition; it means that you need to review relevant literature for your study.

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7

Obtaining relevant information

- Although the Internet seems to be the easiest way of obtaining information on your topic, remember that this is not secure enough.

- Lack of authority on the Internet.

- Advantageous: easy to share information.

- Disadvantageous: the information suspicious.

- Visit library to retrieve reliable information.

- Your library may provide you an online username and password to retrieve reliable information from academic journals and e-books by using your own computer outside school.

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8

Visiting the library

- When you visit the library, carefully plan not to get lost.

- Type key words related with your topic into the computer to find relevant sources.

- Examine the table of contents for books, and read abstracts for articles or dissertations to understand whether the source is relevant or not.

- For longer texts, read the first and last paragraphs to get an idea.

- When you decide to read a book or an article, use skimming and scanning effectively.

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9

Reliability of the sources

- Pay attention to the reliability of the sources.

- Ask yourself whether it is safe to use this source.

- How useful the sources are in their general categories.

- Consider the following discussion on the reliability of various types of sources.

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10

Reliability of journal articles

- Journal articles, especially the ones in well-established journals, are considered reliable sources to retrieve up-to-date information.

- An article is carefully evaluated by other researchers.

- When a researcher prepares the manuscript, it is sent to the editor of the journal.

- The editor sends it to several researchers (referees).

- A blind-review process: the referees do not the author; they simply report their comments to the editor.

- The editor decides whether to publish the article or not.

- For many cases, the authors are expected to make necessary changes, either minor or major, recommended by the referees.

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11

Reliability of books

- Categories of books.

- Examine the purpose of the author in writing the book.

- Text book: the author's intention is teaching.

- It may not be an appropriate source to be included in your literature review.

- Find relevant reference books on the issue.

- No blind-review process for books: The credibility of the author is very important.

- Search about the author on the Internet.

- It may require a longer process to write a book in comparison to writing an article; therefore, they may present less up-to-date information.

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12

Reliability of edited collections

- *Edited collections:* every chapter in the book is written by different authors and they are woven together by the editor.

- It is also quite common to find such edited collections for *conference proceedings.*

- The organizers of conferences may prefer publishing oral presentations in their conference proceedings in a written fashion.

- Although it is easier to publish a chapter in conference proceedings in comparison to publishing an article, they can also be regarded as reliable sources.

Reliability of theses & dissertations

- Post graduate students submit them to graduate.
- Under the guidance of a supervisor.
- There may be a committee responsible for checking progress regularly.
- Post graduate students present to a committee constituting of professors from the related field.
- Therefore, MA theses and PhD dissertations are reliable sources.
- Writing a thesis/dissertation requires a long process.
- Written by students who might be regarded as inexperienced researchers; therefore, you had better treat their findings with caution as there might be some mistakes in them.
- BA theses have the potential risk of presenting ill-formed ideas because of the inexperience of their authors.
- You will be safer by not referring to BA theses.

Reliability of newspapers & magazines

- Avoid newspapers and magazines despite their possibility of being integrated in your reference list appropriately in APA style.

- Although, they can provide recent information, at the same time they also aim to refer to a general audience.

- Thus, the information that you obtain from such sources will be very limited.

- Besides, the first and foremost aim of publishing a newspaper or a magazine is in relation with economical concerns, not with scientific contribution to the field.

Reliability of Internet sources

- Many academic journals are also published online.

- They allow covering a larger number of audiences in this way.

- Articles obtained from online academic journals are reliable.

- When you obtain any article from the Internet, you need to indicate this to your readers.

Keeping records

- Make some notes when you read the other sources for your literature review.

- Record full details of the source when you quote or paraphrase an idea from it.

Preparing your outline

- *Outlining:*
- Consider your purpose.
- Organize your paper by examining your notes.
- An essay consists of four parts; namely, introduction, body, conclusion, and references.
- For the body of your paper, you need to organize subsections.
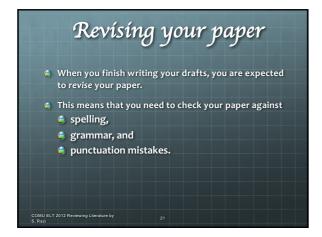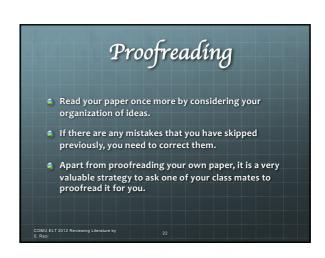- They will function as subheadings.
- Remember not to present any new idea in the conclusion section.
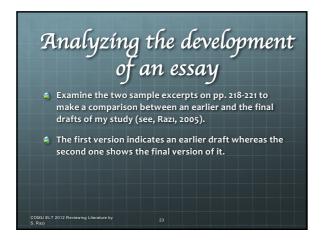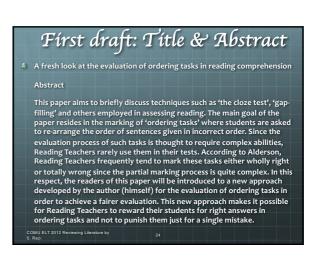- If you are presenting something new; then, it must appear in the body.

Writing your drafts: First draft

- First draft:
- Combine your notes.
- Avoid plagiarism; use your own words and sentences, of course, except from quotations.
- In your first draft, it might be a good strategy for you to start with writing the main body of your paper.
- Do not pay much attention to your vocabulary selection at this stage.

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Writing your drafts: Second draft

- Ask one of your class mates to read your first draft.
- Discuss the main ideas and flow of ideas in your first draft with her.
- With the help of this discussion, write your *second draft*.
- Make some changes in your paper.
- For the second draft you may need to make some arrangements with lexical items.
- When you finish writing your second draft, you may ask the same or another class mate to read it.
- If necessary, you may continue with the third, fourth, and so on drafts.

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Revising your paper

- When you finish writing your drafts, you are expected to *revise* your paper.
- This means that you need to check your paper against
  - spelling,
  - grammar, and
  - punctuation mistakes.

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Proofreading

- Read your paper once more by considering your organization of ideas.
- If there are any mistakes that you have skipped previously, you need to correct them.
- Apart from proofreading your own paper, it is a very valuable strategy to ask one of your class mates to proofread it for you.

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Analyzing the development of an essay

- Examine the two sample excerpts on pp. 218-221 to make a comparison between an earlier and the final drafts of my study (see, Razı, 2005).
- The first version indicates an earlier draft whereas the second one shows the final version of it.

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First draft: Title & Abstract

- A fresh look at the evaluation of ordering tasks in reading comprehension

Abstract

This paper aims to briefly discuss techniques such as 'the cloze test', 'gap-filling' and others employed in assessing reading. The main goal of the paper resides in the marking of 'ordering tasks' where students are asked to re-arrange the order of sentences given in incorrect order. Since the evaluation process of such tasks is thought to require complex abilities, Reading Teachers rarely use them in their tests. According to Alderson, Reading Teachers frequently tend to mark these tasks either wholly right or totally wrong since the partial marking process is quite complex. In this respect, the readers of this paper will be introduced to a new approach developed by the author (himself) for the evaluation of ordering tasks in order to achieve a fairer evaluation. This new approach makes it possible for Reading Teachers to reward their students for right answers in ordering tasks and not to punish them just for a single mistake.

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Second draft: Title & Abstract

A Fresh Look at the Evaluation of Ordering Tasks in Reading Comprehension: *Weighted Marking Protocol*

Abstract

After briefly discussing techniques such as 'the cloze test' and 'gap-filling' employed in assessing reading, the main focus of the paper resides in the scoring process of 'ordering tasks', where students are asked to re-arrange the order of sentences given in incorrect order. Since the evaluation of such tasks is quite complex, Reading Teachers rarely use them in their tests. According to Alderson, Reading Teachers frequently tend to mark these tasks either wholly right or totally wrong since the partial marking process is very time-consuming. In this respect, the readers of this paper will be introduced to a new approach, namely *Weighted Marking Protocol*, developed by the author for ordering tasks in order to achieve a fairer evaluation. This new approach makes it possible for Reading Teachers to reward their students for all right answers and not penalize them just for a single mistake.

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25

First draft: Literature review

Language Testing

Testing takes places at every stage of our lives, as well as in the language learning process. McNamara (2000) argues that there are a number of reasons for administering language tests. According to him, language tests play a powerful role in people's lives as they affect an individual's social and working life. Language teachers, too, work with language tests since they need to administer tests to evaluate their learners. Finally, McNamara points out that are interested in language testing for research purposes.

Language tests have been categorised under four headings by Alderson (1996) and Harmer (2001) as 'placement', 'diagnostic', 'progress or achievement', and 'proficiency'. Harmer argues that the aim in administering placement tests is to place learners in the right classes according to their level in the target language. In comparison, diagnostic tests aim to find out where learners have difficulties in a language course. On the other hand, progress or achievement tests, in which the aim is exploring progress, not failure, reflect how well the students are learning a particular subject. Finally, proficiency tests aim to give a general idea about a student's proficiency in the target language. This paper does not go into the details of language testing; the main focus is on how to assess reading comprehension and especially on how to solve the problem of partial marking in ordering tasks.

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26

Second draft: Literature review

Language Testing

Testing takes places at every stage of human life, as well as in the language learning process. McNamara (2000) argues that there are a number of reasons for administering language tests, which play a powerful role in an individual's social and working life. Language teachers work with language tests since they need to evaluate their learners; language testing is also carried out for research purposes.

Language tests have been categorised under four headings by Alderson (1996) and Harmer (2001) as 'placement', 'diagnostic', 'progress or achievement', and 'proficiency', that is; to place learners in the right classes according to their level, to find out where learners have difficulties in a language course, to explore progress or reflect how well the students are learning a particular subject, and to give a general idea about a student's proficiency in the target language. This paper does not go into the details of language testing; however, the main focus is on how to assess reading comprehension and especially how to solve the problem of partial marking in ordering tasks.

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27

First draft: Literature review

Techniques for Testing Reading

As there appears to be no best method for testing reading (Alderson, 2000), then reading teachers are supposed to be aware of what they need to test in terms of selecting the most appropriate testing method for their students. Teachers are supposed to use discrete-point techniques when they intend to test a particular subject at a time, however they are supposed to use integrative techniques when the aim is to see the overall picture of a reader. Now, let us briefly discuss the most frequently used techniques in testing reading, one by one.

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28

Second draft: Literature review

Techniques for Testing Reading

As there appears to be no best method for testing reading (Alderson, 2000), then reading teachers should be aware of what they need to test in terms of selecting the most appropriate testing method for their students; discrete-point techniques when they intend to test a particular subject at a time, or integrative techniques when the aim is to see the overall picture of a reader. Following is a brief survey of the most frequently used testing techniques.

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29

First draft: Literature review

C-Tests

As an alternative integrated approach (Weir, 1990, 1993) *the C-test is* acceptable in that it "... is based upon the same theory of closure or reduced redundancy as the cloze test" (Alderson, 2000: 225). Test takers are asked to restore the second half of every second word deleted beforehand. Alderson (2000) and Cohen (2001) points out that C-tests are more reliable and valid than cloze tests in terms of assessing but on the other hand completing C-tests are thought to be more irritating than cloze tests. In the marking process, the testers do not face with difficulties since expect to see the restored word.

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30

Second draft: Literature review

C-Tests

As an alternative integrated approach (Weir, 1990, 1993) the *C-Test* is acceptable in that it "is based upon the same theory of closure or reduced redundancy as the cloze test" (Alderson, 2000, p. 225). Test-takers are asked to restore the second half of every second word deleted beforehand (See Appendix C). Alderson (2000) and Cohen (2001) point out that C-tests are more reliable and valid than cloze tests in terms of assessing but are thought to be more irritating than cloze tests. In the marking process, the testers do not face difficulties since they expect to see the restored word.

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31

First draft: Conclusion

Conclusion

This new approach towards ordering tasks in Reading Tests enables testers to make a partial evaluation. According to the traditional approach, test-takers get full-points or zero in such a section. This means that test-takers who answer half the ordering task in the correct order are equal to those who have no mistakes, or those who have no sensible order. The major benefit of this new approach is that it enables professionals in this field to reward their students according to their right answers in ordering tasks, not to punish them just for a single mistake.

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32

Second draft: Conclusion

Conclusion

This new approach towards ordering tasks enables testers to make a partial evaluation. According to the traditional approach, test-takers get full-points or zero in such a section. This means that test-takers who answer half the ordering task in the correct order are equated with those who have no mistakes, or those who have no sensible order. *Weighted Marking Protocol* does not require advanced computer knowledge; every teacher can do it by following the steps indicated. It does require a little more time than the traditional approach but is not so time-consuming. The major benefit of this new approach is that it enables teachers to reward students according to their right answers in ordering tasks, and thus give credit where credit is due.

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33

Conclusion

- After familiarizing yourself with academic writing, you were presented with your new assignment which will continue till the end of the term in this chapter.

- In relation with this task, you learned how to review literature for your paper.

- In the following chapter, you will learn about the components of an academic paper.

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34