Speaking and writing frames

What are speaking and writing frames?
Speaking and writing frames provide models of sentence construction, language structures, and vocabulary for EAL learners to use orally within a curriculum context.

There are various different types:
- **Sentence starters**: where learners are given the first word, or first few words, of a sentence
- **Sentence frames**: where learners are provided with useful structures with gaps in for them to complete
- **Paragraph starts**: can provide scaffolding for pieces of extended writing, by giving learners the first few words of each paragraph

Examples of activities
Speaking and writing frames can be used in any curriculum area and with any learner who has basic literacy skills. They can be differentiated according to the English language proficiency of the learner.

1. **To help learners to describe a practical activity**:
   EAL learners who are New to English can be supported to describe what they have done after taking part in a practical activity. For example in Electrical circuits, a simple grid with pictures and names of components (wire, bulb etc.) is provided together with useful sequencing language (first, next etc.).

2. **Modelling the use of a particular language function**: and helping learners to organise their thoughts in a particular way, for example comparing and contrasting: ‘One similarity between _____ and _____ is that…’, ‘A key distinction between _______ and __________ is that…’
3. **Scaffolding** writing in a particular genre such as writing an evaluation of a practical task and describing what they have learned from taking part. They can be given prompts in the form of sentence starters like: ‘I learnt that…’ ‘One thing I discovered was…’, ‘I found out that…’.

One example of this on EAL Nexus is Science investigations, where three different writing frames are provided for learners at different levels of English language proficiency. The simplest of these, for learners who are New to English, gives very simple sentence starters (*The investigation worked / didn’t work well because*…), whereas the version for learners who are Competent models more academic language (*My prediction proved correct / incorrect because my investigation into_________ showed that*…).

### Evaluation
- I made the experiment a fair test by ...
- My investigation produced reliable/unreliable results because ...
- Another variable I could test would be ...
- If I did the experiment again I would ...
  - make the measurements more accurate by ...
  - increase the number of times I did the experiment because ...
  - take better safety precautions, for example, ...

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**How speaking and writing frames work**

Speaking and writing frames can be introduced in a range of contexts, for example:

- **In a guided small group activity**, the teacher or teaching assistant introduces a new curriculum topic and models new vocabulary and language structures. Learners use a speaking frame, which provides examples of the modelled language, so they can engage purposefully in the activity.

- **Pair work** where an EAL learner is placed with a peer who can provide a good model of English for a purposeful speaking activity (e.g. making predictions in science). The language learning focus is made explicit through the use of a speaking frame which ensures that talk is focused and accurate.

- **Writing or speaking frames** can be displayed in the form of mats, classroom posters, on the whiteboard.

- **Orally rehearse language structures with a speaking frame first**, as a class, small group, or in a pair work activity, before using it to scaffold writing.

**Top tip:** To create a speaking or writing frame, think about how you would give or write a model answer and decide which words and phrases you would be most likely to use to frame your response.
Why are speaking and writing frames a Great Idea for EAL learners?

EAL learners need support to structure their speaking and writing, to use new language forms and functions appropriately and consistently, and eventually to speak and write independently using appropriate genres, as emphasised by NALDIC (1999).

Speaking frames offer the opportunity for EAL learners to hear, repeat and explore new language through talk and listening. This both reinforces their understanding, and encourages accurate, effective communication. EAL learners should always have the opportunity to rehearse language orally before writing.

Writing frames provide a scaffold for writing in different genres. They model how EAL learners should organise their work, the language structures they need to use for a specific genre, as well as ways to link sentences or paragraphs. Scaffolding is a key concept in Vygotsky's work on the relationship between thought and language and Bruner's research in the 1970s also looked at this and suggested that language learning is scaffolded by what he termed the learner's Language Acquisition Support System (e.g. Vygotsky 1962, Bruner 1975). More recently, practitioners like Gibbons emphasised the importance of scaffolding language as well as learning when working with EAL learners (Gibbons 2015).

By using a writing frame EAL learners begin to gain familiarity with form and language relevant to a particular curriculum context, so that they can gradually use language appropriately to write independently. Practitioners like Gibbons emphasise the importance of scaffolding language when working with EAL learners (Gibbons 2015).

References

