

FLUENCY MADE ACHIEVABLE BY KERSTIN HAMMES

The following text is a sample chapter from [Fluency Made Achievable](#), one of the new Fluent Guides which are out just now! You can order the combo pack of both guides through my website now to gain confidence, improve techniques and become a successful language learner.

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Writing Training: Composition Tricks for Writing in a Foreign Language

For many language learners, writing is one of the most important ways that they connect with the outside world. You start the day updating your status on Facebook, maybe you sit in an office typing emails or you have to produce reports and essays for your studies. Recently, I had the pleasure of running a special writing-focused German class with one of my students. We looked how written language changes depending on the situation, how pronunciation and spelling are related and where to put all those pesky commas.

On a practical scale, writing will serve the foreign language learner extremely well because it really shows up every part of your grammatical and stylistic weaknesses, and gives you a chance to improve on exactly where you are weak. But there is more to this act than just improving grammar or spelling: When you write, you are able to share your thoughts and make them last.

Like most big and intimidating projects, things get so much easier when you break them down into smaller tasks, and that is exactly what the composition process will do for you.

Today let's have a detailed look at writing great texts. It can be broken down into three stages: Before Writing, During Writing and After Writing.

Before Writing

When you are planning to write something in a foreign language, the planning stage is even more important than it already is. Writing something of more than 50 words requires structure, writing 200 words requires structure and research, and if you are working on something even longer, your writing will improve 200% from just putting 10 minutes into planning.

As a language learner, here are the questions to consider and answer before starting to write:

- What is the writing style you're working on? Letters, formal and informal language, journalist reports and creative writing all have their own style set of suitable vocabulary and phrases. The best trick here is to read and analyse the type of text that you are planning to write. Underline words and phrases that you can use in your own writing.
- Is there a set of relevant vocabulary to prepare? You should have the most important words on hand without looking each up in a dictionary. Before you start, build a word cloud or mind map of relevant words and phrases. Research set lines that you can use over and over again, like greeting formulas in letters and classic story structures.
- What is the structure of your project going to be? Sketching out a very rough draft of your letter or article is so useful here. It will help you make sure all the important points are covered, in a logical order and that you know how to end your piece of writing. At this stage, work with bullet points and notes. Right now, I am working off a scribbled note from a piece of paper — not surprising!
- Check if you have covered the 5 core questions journalists work with when writing anything: Who? Where? When? Why? How? Answering those five tells a complete story, no matter if you are sending a postcard or analysing Shakespeare.
- Note why you are writing your piece and what you want the reader to do. For a letter to a friend (an exercise you can find in any language exam!), the reader's questions are going to

be about how you are feeling, what happened to you recently and what you want them to write in return. But if you are writing to book accommodation on your next trip, the questions are a lot more practical: When do you want to come, who are you bringing, what do you need, how are you getting here? You should always include a part in your writing that tells the reader what to do next, if you are expecting a reply or if you want them to think about something. Even when you are putting a creative story to paper, the things you are describing are designed to make the reader feel or think certain things.

During Writing

Once the planning stage is done, you can start writing successfully. Connect the notes and bullet points you made before you started, and always keep in mind who your readers are going to be and what they need to know and hear. Don't forget to think about your reader, and the kinds of expectations that they will have.

The structure of a good writing process is to draft, revise, edit and expand.

- Draft a few sentences, some lines or the whole text based on the notes you made before.
- Revise what you have written, read through it first time, check if all the important points are covered. * Edit your text, pay attention to words and verb endings and grammar, weed out mistakes. At this stage, reading the text out loud is one of my favourite tricks for finding little mistakes that are just too easy to overlook otherwise. Reading aloud and printing text that you typed on screen are going to make you a better writer, guaranteed.
- Expand what you have written, see if there are extra points, descriptions and polite notes to be added if they suit the style of what you are writing.

For productivity and concentration during the writing process, my own advice for you is to:

- Eliminate all distractions: Turn off music, go somewhere quiet, sit down comfortably.
- Focus on your writing: Turn of the screen or close your eyes while typing if you are a good touch typist.
- Turn off the internet: Do not allow yourself to do anything but write until the chapter, page or point is done.
- Expect that it won't be any good: It is more important to put something down that you can fix, than to produce nothing at all because you aren't perfect yet.

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