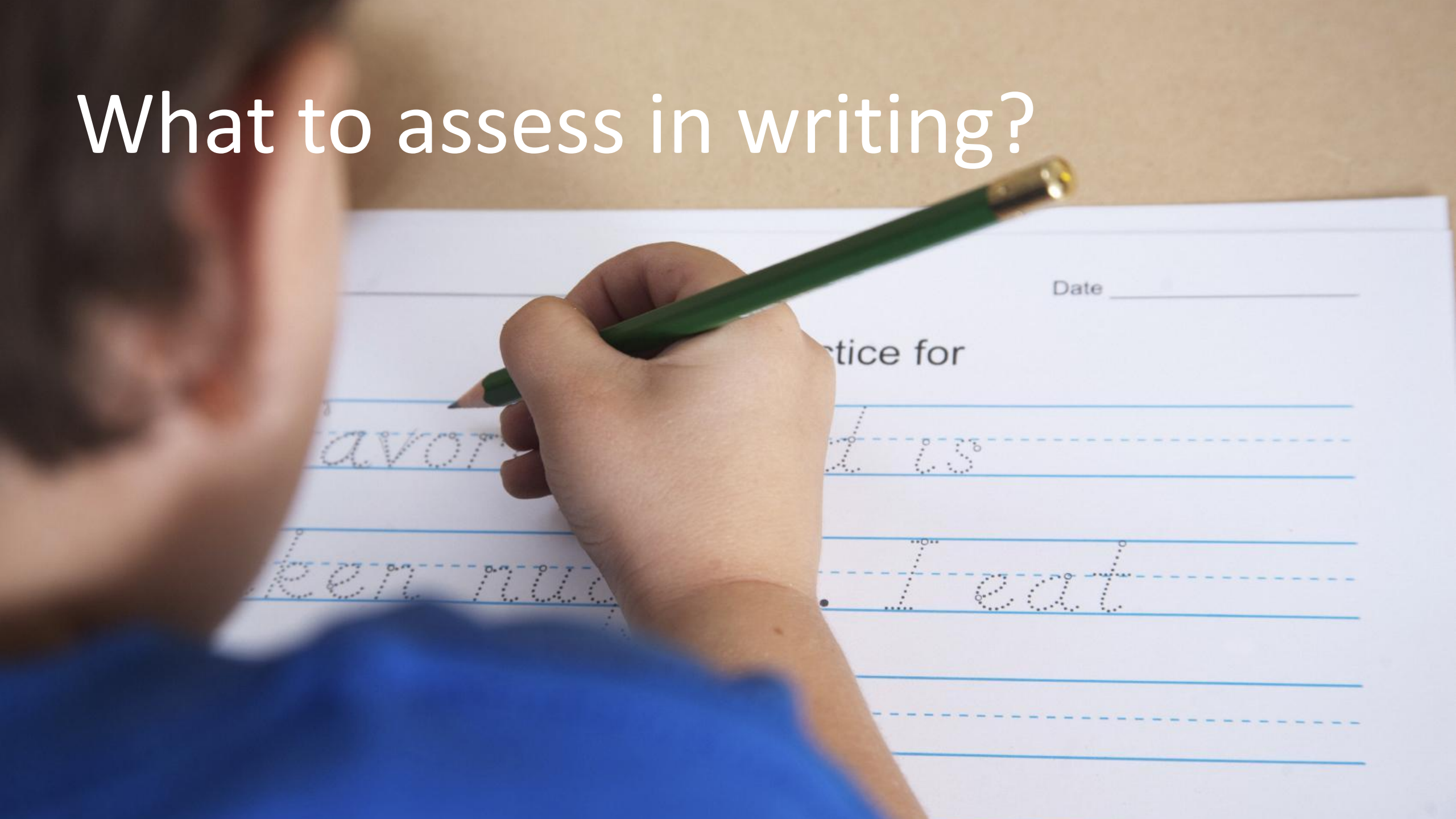


Lecture 8: Assessing Writing

By the end of this lecture you will:

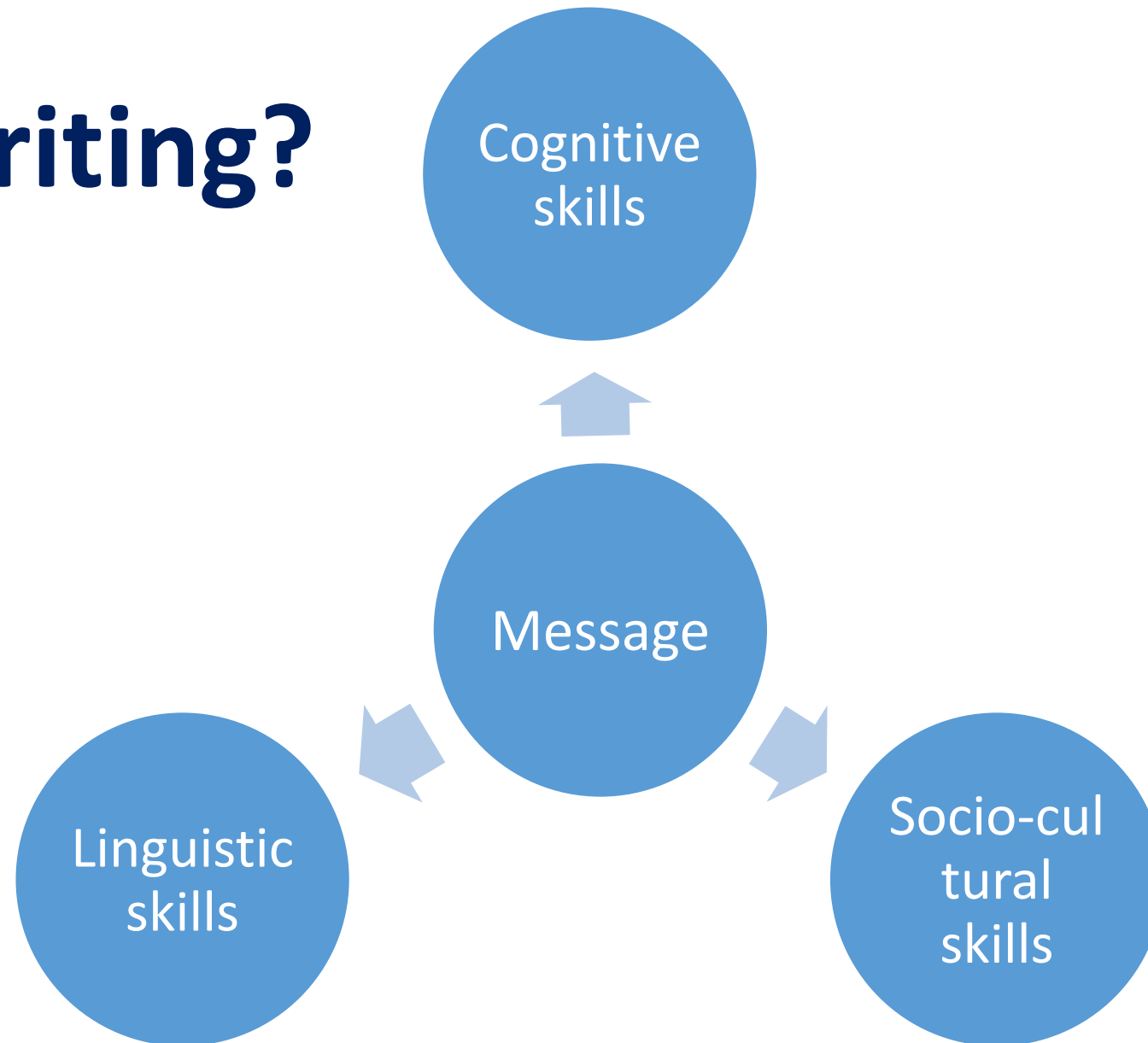
- Learn what to assess in writing
- Be aware of historical and modern day approaches to writing
- Learn how to elicit writing
 - Be aware of the importance of clear wording in writing tasks
- Learn how to evaluate writing
 - Be aware of holistic and analytical assessment criteria

What to assess in writing?



What is writing?

- Learned
- Productive
- Visual
- Social act





Handwriting

Spelling

Grammar

Accuracy

Vocabulary

Originality

Coherence

Cohesion

Structure

Creativity

Style

Editing

Planning

Clarity

Genre

Synthesis

Argument

Punctuation

Register

Organisation

Use of humour

Authorial voice

Reviewing

Monitoring

Micro-Skills

- Produce English graphemes
- Employ correct spelling
- Produce an acceptable core of words and appropriate word order patterns
- Use acceptable grammatical systems (tense, agreement, pluralization, patterns and rules)
- Express a particular meaning in different grammatical forms
- Use appropriate cohesive devices

Macro-skills

- Use of rhetorical forms and conventions of written discourse
- Accomplish the communicative function according to form and purpose
- Communicate main idea, supporting details, new info, given info, generalization, exemplification
- Distinguish between literal and implied meaning
- Develop and use a battery of writing strategies:
 - Assessing the audience's interpretation
 - Using pre-writing strategies
 - Writing with fluency in the first draft
 - Using paraphrases and synonyms
 - Revising and proofreading

Approaches to Writing Assessment

Indirect

- Also referred to as 'recognition measure'
- Assess S's knowledge of writing subskills, such as grammar, spelling, sentence construction
- Objective: MCQs, cloze tests

Direct

- Also referred to as 'production measure'
- Assess S's ability to communicate in the writing mode (both micro and macro skills)
- Require producing a piece of writing on pre-selected topics

Examples of Indirect Assessment

Test-takers read:

Choose the word with the correct spelling to fit the sentence, then write the word in the space provided.

1. He washed his hands with _____.
A. soap
B. sope
C. sop
D. soup
2. I tried to stop the car, but the _____ didn't work.
A. braicks
B. brecks
C. brakes
D. bracks
3. The doorbell rang, but when I went to the door, no one was _____.
A. their
B. there
C. they're
D. thair

Reordering words in a sentence

Test-takers read:

Put the words below into the correct order to make a sentence:

1. cold / winter / is / weather / the / in / the
2. studying / what / you / are
3. next / clock / the / the / is / picture / to

Test-takers write:

1. The weather is cold in the winter.
2. What are you studying?
3. The clock is next to the picture.

Directions: The following sentences contain errors in mechanics. But there are *no* spelling errors. Find the part of the sentence where the mistake occurs. Then circle the letter of that part.

A

B

C

(6.13) We sent for / a repairman to take / a look at the /

*D

telephone. In the office where I work.

*A

B

C

(6.14) The Doctor told / the young soldier / to drive south

D

through the valley / for supplies at the nearest city.

Teaching writing to EFL learners

- Writing skills: “the creation of original text for a specific purpose using the individual’s intellectual and linguistic resources, rather than copying someone else’s text, using a prepared list of words to create sentences or stories, filling in the blanks, or practicing handwriting”
(Hudelson (1988))

Types of texts we might want to elicit

1. Academic writing

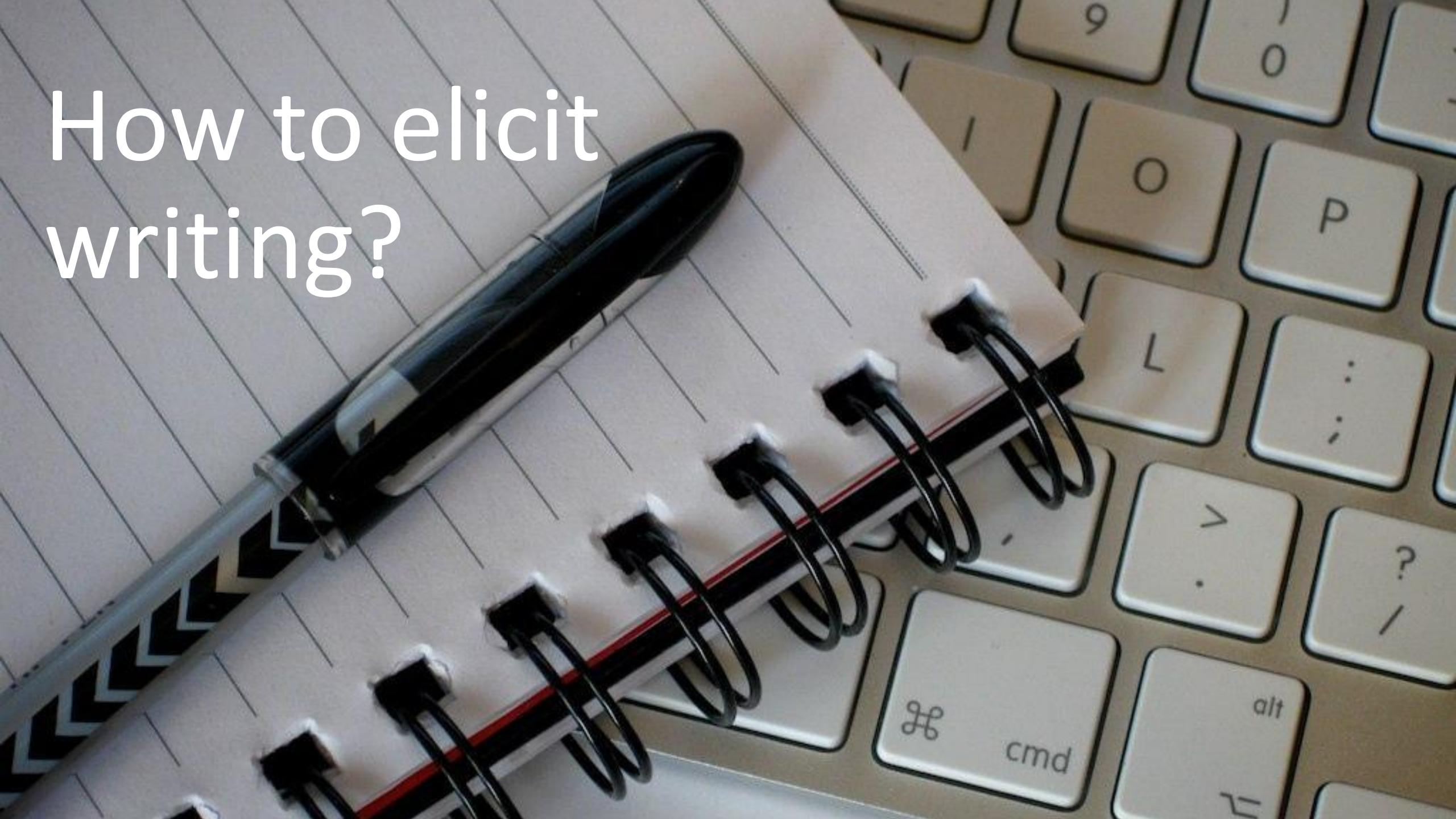
- papers and general subject reports
- essays, compositions
- academically focused journals
- short-answer test responses
- technical reports (e.g., lab reports)
- theses, dissertations

2. Job-related writing

- messages (e.g., phone messages)
- letters/emails
- memos (e.g., interoffice)
- reports (e.g., job evaluations, project reports)
- schedules, labels, signs
- advertisements, announcements
- manuals

3. Personal writing

- letters, emails, greeting cards, invitations
- messages, notes
- calendar entries, shopping lists, reminders
- financial documents (e.g., checks, tax forms, loan applications)
- forms, questionnaires, medical reports, immigration documents
- diaries, personal journals
- fiction (e.g., short stories, poetry)



How to elicit
writing?

Considerations in designing writing assessment tasks

Clear instructions (rubric)

- Rhetorical pattern
- Length of writing
- Timing
- Available resources
- Delivery method
- Weighting

A writing prompts should...

- generate the desired type of writing
- involves Sts in thinking and problem-solving
- be accessible, interesting and challenging to students
- address meaningful topics
- not require specialist background knowledge
- use appropriate signpost verbs
- provide equal opportunities
- be clear, authentic, focused and unambiguous;
- **specify an audience, a purpose, and a context.**

(Davidson &

Lloyd, 2005)

Writing prompts – base, framed and text-based

1. Many say that “money is the root of all evil.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement?”
2. On a recent flight back home to the UAE, the Airline lost your baggage. Write a complaint letter to Mr. Al-Ahli, the General Manager, telling him about your problem. Be sure to include the following:...
3. You have been put in charge of selecting an appropriate restaurant for your senior class party. Use the restaurant reviews below to select an appropriate venue and then write an invitation letter to your fellow classmates persuading them to join you there.

Topic restriction

- Do we give Sts a choice of tasks?
- What are some benefits and drawbacks of giving Sts an opportunity to select the prompt from a variety of alternative topics?

An example of a B2 writing task

A TV company owned by a multi-millionaire celebrity is deliberating whether to make a film about life in your area and has asked you to give them some information. They want reports by the end of next month.

Write your letter.

You **must** answer this question. Write your answer in **120–150** words in an appropriate style in your answer booklet.

A British TV company is thinking of making a film about life in your area and has asked you to give them some information. Write a report describing the advantages of living in your area **and** saying how the area might change in the future.

Write your **report**.

Summarize

Analyze

Discuss Evaluate

Outline Describe

Compare

Explain

Define

Contrast

Expected response

- A description of what the teacher intends students to do with the writing task
 - Hand in or send in
 - Formats and formatting
 - Deadlines



How to evaluate writing?

Marking Procedures for Traditional Assessment

- Benchmarking: selection of papers from previous years or completed exam papers
 - Clear pass
 - Borderline pass
 - Borderline fail
 - Clear fail
- Developing scoring criteria
- Calibrating raters

Options for marking writing

- Two main options
- Holistic (“impressionistic”) scoring
 - Using a banding scale, 1 mark is given
 - Each score has descriptive criteria
 - Quick grading, but interrater reliability problems
- Analytical
 - Separate scores for subskills (usually content/communication, organization, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics)
 - Slower, but more reliable

4 points

- the main idea was clearly stated
- the essay was well organized
- the choice of words was good
- very few minor grammatical errors

3 points

- the main idea was fairly clear
- the essay was moderately well organized
- the vocabulary was good
- some minor grammatical errors

2 points

- the main idea was indicated, but not clearly
- the essay was not so well organized
- the vocabulary choice was fair
- some major grammatical errors

1 point

- the main idea was hard to identify
- the essay was poorly organized
- the vocabulary was weak
- many grammatical errors

Advantages of Holistic Marking

- Quick and reliable if done under no time constraints
- Liked by administrators and teachers
- Perceived by teachers to be less time consuming
- Since overall writing ability is assessed, Ss are not disadvantaged by one lesser ability
- Emphasis rests on what is done well, not deficiencies

Disadvantages of Holistic Marking

- Does not provide a “profile” of Ss ability (Hamp-Lyons 1990)
- Longer essays may receive higher ratings (Cohen 2004)
- Gives one score for possibly uneven abilities (Cohen 2004)
- Raters can overlook one or more aspects of writing ability
- No feedback on how or why score was awarded (Hamp-Lyons 1991)
- Not designed to offer correction, feedback or diagnostics (Charney 1984)
- Rating scale may confuse writing ability with language proficiency (Cohen 1994)

Originality of Content

- **4 points:** interesting ideas were stated clearly
- **3 points:** interesting ideas were stated fairly clearly
- **2 points:** ideas somewhat unclear
- **1 point:** ideas not clear

Organization

- **4 points:** well organized
- **3 points:** fairly well organized
- **2 points:** loosely organized
- **1 point:** ideas disconnected

Vocabulary

- **4 points:** very effective choice of words
- **3 points:** effective choice of words
- **2 points:** fairly good vocabulary
- **1 point:** limited vocabulary range of vocabulary

Grammar

- **4 points:** almost no errors
- **3 points:** few minor errors
- **2 points:** some errors
- **1 point:** many errors

Cohesion & Logical Consistency

- **4 points:** sentences logically combined
- **3 points:** sentences fairly logically combined
- **2 points:** sentences poorly combined
- **1 point:** many unfinished sentences

Advantages of Analytical Marking

- Provides profile of Ss strengths and weaknesses
- Reliable with inexperienced Ts, time constraints and little training time
- Guards against the collapsing of categories (Cohen 1994)
- Training raters is easier because scales are thought to be more explicit and detailed

Disadvantages of Analytical Marking

- Difficult to develop assessment criteria
- Perceived by Ts to be more time consuming
- Scores are often lower than holistic
- No assurance that scales will be used according to stated criteria (Cohen 1994)
- Writing is more than the sum of its parts
(takes out integrative nature of writing assessment)

Marking Procedures for Traditional Assessment

- Classroom teacher as rater: Should classroom teachers mark their own students' papers?
- Multiple raters: Do we really need more than one marker for student writing samples?
- Assessment scales: Should we use holistic or analytical scales to assess writing?

Responding to Student Writing

- Do you correct mistakes or use correction codes?
- How do you provide feedback to your Sts on their written papers?
- Is it appropriate to use a red pen to correct mistakes?

Correction codes

sp	Spelling
vt	Verb tense
ww	Wrong word
wv	Wrong verb
😊	Nice idea/content!
□	Switch placement
¶	New paragraph
?	I don't understand

1. The most important thing in a piece of written work is how accurate it is. There should be as few errors as possible.
2. It is important for the teacher to correct all of the mistakes in learners' written work.
3. Mistakes made by more than one student should be dealt with on a one-to-one basis in a tutorial.
4. The teacher always needs to collect in written work for marking.
5. Errors can be identified by underlining and showing the type of error with a symbol in the margin.