

## Using Focused Free-Writing to Help English to Speakers of Other Languages Students Generate Ideas for Critical, Academic Writing

**Authors :** Ratnawati Mohd Asraf, Sabreena Ahmed

**Abstract :** This paper describes how the method of focused freewriting can be used to help teachers to foster critical thinking through writing. In this study, we used focused freewriting during the pre-writing stage of our writing course to help our English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students to generate ideas and to think critically about the issues they were to write on. In each of the four classes where we applied this technique, we used pictures or videos to stimulate their thinking during the prewriting stage of writing and then asked them to write non-stop for ten minutes about whatever that came to their minds as a result of being presented with these prompts. We then asked them to focus on the themes that emerged from their brief writing. Using observations, in-depth interviews, and an analysis of their brief essays, our study found that focused freewriting helped our students to generate ideas and think critically about the issues they were writing on. We postulate that by using focused freewriting and discussions during the prewriting stage of writing, instructors can help their students to think critically about various issues and facilitate their efforts at organising their arguments for critical, academic essays.

**Keywords :** academic writing, critical writing, critical thinking, focused free-writing, pre-writing

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