



Educational
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How to Set Up Writing Clubs in High Schools



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Setting Up Writing Clubs

1. RATIONALE AND OVERVIEW

This module has been developed to assist lower secondary schools to organize expanded opportunities for students to engage in creative writing. Such opportunities are intended to address certain features in the educational environment of students that are not conducive to the development of good writing skills. These include poor access to good exemplars of contemporary writing, positive role models, and approaches to writing that focus on content rather than compliance with ritualized forms of writing relating mainly to spelling and grammar only. In addition, many schools rely heavily on objective test formats that further restrict the opportunities for free writing. It is believed that this educational situation in schools has made many students disinterested in developing their latent writing skills. The development of Writing Clubs are seen as one way to help to address these problems. Accordingly, clubs will seek to motivate students to write by putting the writing process in a positive context. Club members will be encouraged and assisted in discussing their writing in a constructive forum, which will be in contrast to the usual types of evaluation that they receive in classrooms. Feedback will be provided by both peers and teachers leading ultimately to a self-assessment by students themselves. Clubs will also support activities that help to put value on students' writing including the publication of anthologies of student essays, contests, and advocacy for the publication of students' writing in newspapers and journals. Finally, the clubs will seek to provide an enriched environment that encourages interest writing such as access to recent novels, reading appreciation discussions with peers, and the opportunity to meet with established writers in Cambodian society. It is hoped that these expanded learning opportunities will make learning more interesting and attractive in keeping with the general philosophy of a Child Friendly School.

2. ACTIVITY OUTCOMES

2.1 Objectives

Based on the above discussion relating to problems in helping children to write, the Writing Club activity has the following objectives:

- Students have expanded opportunities to develop their writing skills in a constructive, non-punitive, and reinforcing environment.
- Students are motivated to write more frequently than they currently do.
- Teachers can use this module to help students organize structured activities that enables them to develop their writing skills.

2.2 Outputs

In order to achieve the above objectives, the following outputs will be a focus of program activities.

- To develop a mechanism that will enable students to strengthen their ability to write .
- To increase opportunities for reading appreciation among students.
- To help students to discuss writing and express opinions leading to improved self-knowledge.

3. MATERIALS AND FACILITIES

The material needs described below are notional only and will depend in large part upon the activities that students select to do.

- Documentary Resources (e.g., contemporary novels, writing guides, writing anthologies, etc.)
- Stationery, pens, journals for writing
- A club budget of \$150 to \$200 to facilitate selected activities (e.g., field trips, photocopying of students' writing, honorarium for guest speakers, etc.)
- Remuneration for teachers, if necessary

4. IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURE

4.1 Basic Organizational Principles

Setting up a Writing Club among students should be governed by several important principles. These are explained below:

Volunteerism: Participation in a Writing Club is not for everyone and it should be understood by all school facilitators that students should not be forced to participate in a club. Students may have other interests and these should be accommodated accordingly, in keeping with a child friendly school philosophy. For example, organizing a writing club may be done at the same time that other clubs are being formed. That is, there may be other teachers who are establishing clubs in other subjects such as science or history. Students should be allowed to make their own choices about what sort of subject matter they want to study in more depth and whether they have the time and interest to participate in a club.

Similarly, teachers should not be forced to organize Writing Clubs. The enthusiasm and interest of teachers in writing will be crucial to a club's success. Such enthusiasm would be difficult to ensure if teachers are forced to do the activity. Volunteer teachers may also have to spend some of their own time in planning activities with students, attending special meetings outside of school hours, and participating in field trips. The program may wish to consider some form of remuneration for teachers' time using a rate similar to that used for other activities like life skills programs (e.g., 3,000 riels/hr).

Target Grades: Participating in a Writing Club is an activity that should best be restricted to more mature students, at least initially. As schools gain more experience in setting up such clubs, teachers may experiment in organizing age-appropriate activities for younger students. As a first step, however, it is recommended that Writing Clubs initially target students in Grades 8 or 9 depending on the availability of a teacher who is interested in working with students.

Assessing Student Interest and the Use of Orientations: A student's decision to join a club should be based on an informed decision. In assessing the interest of students to join a club, teachers should first provide some introductory information about what the club is about. This may be done through a verbal explanation to a class or a written explanation that is posted in a public place or both. Some of the points mentioned in any introduction should include the following points:

- *Goal*: To provide positive and non-threatening opportunities to develop writing skills.
- *Activities*: field trips, journal writing, discussion groups about contemporary novels, meeting with contemporary novelists, writing contests, etc.
- *Evaluation*: There will be no formal evaluation or grading. Students are invited to do activities because they want to, not because they are forced to.
- *Participation*: Membership of the club is voluntary.
- *Meetings*: There will be regular meetings (perhaps once every 2 weeks) to discuss planned activities. These will occur after class or on days when schools are not in session.

Following this introduction, ask students if they might be interested in participating in joining a Writing Club by indicating their level of interest. In assessing student interest, use the Membership Form shown in Attachment 1. This form is useful because it will prevent students from feeling pressured to say yes or

no, especially when an expression of disinterest may be seen as disrespectful to the teacher. Give students about 10 or 15 minutes to discuss their decision among themselves before completing the form and returning it to the teacher.

Setting a Division of Labor: At the first meeting of the club, the responsible teacher may want to have all the members choose some key officers who will perform certain functions. The selection of officers may be done by voting or by acclamation. The positions are not fixed but may include (i) chairperson, (ii) vice chairperson, and (iii) treasurer. If there are many students in the club (e.g., 15 or more), it may be necessary to have one group leader for every 3 to 4 students as well. Suggested responsibilities for each position are shown in Attachment 2. These responsibilities should be shown to all club members and explained by the responsible teacher. During the early phases of the club, the responsible teacher may have to have a great deal of involvement in helping club officers to fulfill their functions. The teacher, however, should make a concerted effort to pass more and more responsibility over to students as they become more experienced in doing various tasks during the year.

Scheduling: One of the first things that a club should do is to make a schedule of what they propose to do over the term. A schedule form that would help a club match activities to the week of each month is shown in Attachment 3. Before making the schedule, the responsible teacher should try to review some possible activities and set one or two projects that the club will do during the term. Some examples are provided in a later section below. For example, a club may want to conduct a study about a local temple. Before visiting a temple, however, the teacher may want to provide some background on what things one should look at when visiting a temple. This may include dating its construction (by examining the style of letter inscriptions), mapping its layout, taking photographs of important sculptures, doing rubbings of inscriptions, and reading about the temple’s background beforehand. The responsible teacher may need to provide some explanation to students about how to do these things. Some useful reference documents are provided in Attachment 4 of this module. When the research is completed, the club may want to set up an exhibit in the library or a classroom as well as make a presentation to other students who are not club members. All of these activities should be written up in the schedule. An example is provided below:

Table 1: Sample Club Schedule (1st Term)

Activity	November				December				January			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1. <u>Meeting 1:</u> Finding a historical research project.	x											
2. <u>Meeting 2:</u> Preliminary research (learning about ancient Khmer letters)		x										
3. <u>Meeting 3:</u> Preliminary research (learning about the layout of temples, mapping, etc.)				x								
4. 1 st visit to a local ancient temple.				x								
5. 2 nd visit to a local ancient temple.					x							
6. <u>Meeting 4:</u> Make a plan for a set of exhibits and what it will look like. Set out tasks to be done and who will do them.						x						
7. Meet to set up exhibits in library							x	x				
8. Presentation to class									x			

Resourcing: For a club to work effectively, it will need resources. These resources may include facilities

such as a meeting place (e.g., the library or a free classroom), access to library books for research purposes, access to a computer lab for typing reports (in the case of lower secondary schools) or budgetary resources. Budgetary resources will be required for specific activities such as the following:

- Paper for note taking or writing a reports (for all groups)
- Poster paper for drawing maps/making exhibits/meetings
- Marker pens for exhibits
- Travel money for field trips
- Disposable camera for taking pictures
- Miscellaneous funds for special purposes
- Etc.

Budgetary provisions should be planned by the Local Cluster School Committee as part of the annual planning process that occurs at the beginning of each year. An illustrative budget is provided in Attachment 4.

4.2 Suggested Activities

1. Creative Writing Seminar:
 - Core capacity building exercise for students
 - 1-2 day long
 - Focuses on mechanics of writing
 - Requires outside resource person
2. Reading Appreciation Meetings
 - Students have opportunity to meet to discuss a book (the same book) to exchange views about it
 - Students have opportunity to meet to discuss each other's writing and exchange
 - Meeting space should be an aesthetically pleasant setting with refreshments
3. Guest Speakers
 - Invite a well-known writer from Phnom Penh to visit the club and give a short talk on his books or his latest books
 - Should be opportunities for students to ask questions
 - The talk should happen in an informal setting that encourages dialogue and interaction
4. Publishing Club Anthologies of Short Stories
 - At end of year or term, the best short stories written by each student during the year is put together in a book and photocopied/bound for them to keep and to put in the school library
 - Students choose their own stories that they wrote during the year and to be published to the teacher
5. Reflection Field Trips
 - Students travel to an interesting place nearby as a way of stimulating creative writing (e.g., ancient temple, water fall, beach, mountain, forest, etc)
 - Students write about how the experience made them feel
6. Student Journals
 - Students keep a journal about their life, interesting experiences, relationships, families, etc.
 - Club will provide booklets for them to keep their journals
7. Contacting Local Publications for Printing Students' Stories
 - Advocate with local newspapers (e.g., Kampong Cham) and magazines (e.g., Mum and Map) to print the stories that students write
 - Use computer labs for typing and submission of these stories
8. Writing Contest
 - Form a committee to judge short stories or writing pieces submitted by students from clubs across many schools
 - Provide awards

9. Introspection Meeting to Assess the Year's Activities

- May take the form of a field trip to reflect in a peaceful environment about what happened in the club during the year
- May take the form of a local meeting to do such reflection.
- Should lead to the development of a short assessment by the Club Leadership about how the activity could be improved next year.

10. School Newsletter

- The club develops a short publication for internal publication and circulation in the school
- Would require computer labs for it to work
- Newsletter provides a forum for club members to disseminate stories that they write during the year

ATTACHMENT 1: Statement of Interest

Name: _____ **Class:** _____ **Date:** _____

Introduction

Joining a Writing Club is an opportunity to do interesting activities that helps us to develop our powers of expression both in speech but particularly in writing. Here are some things you should know before you decide whether to join a Writing Club:

- *Goal:* To provide positive and non-threatening opportunities to develop writing skills.
- *Activities:* field trips, journal writing, discussion groups about contemporary novels, meeting with contemporary novelists, writing contests, etc.
- *Evaluation:* There will be no formal evaluation or grading. Students are invited to do activities because they want to, not because they are forced to.
- *Participation:* Membership of the club is voluntary.
- *Meetings:* There will be regular meetings (perhaps once every 2 weeks) to discuss planned activities. These will occur after class or on days when schools are not in session.

Questionnaire

State your level of interest in joining a Writing Club by checking one of the boxes below:

- I am not at all interested in joining a Writing Club.
- I might be interested in joining a Writing Club but am not sure that I would have the time to participate.
- I would be very interested in joining a Writing Club and am sure that I would have time to participate.

ATTACHMENT 2: Duties of Selected Club Officers

(1) Chairperson:

- Call meetings of the club.
- Coordinate the setting of an agenda for each meeting.
- Facilitate meetings.
- Ensure that meeting places are available by coordinating with the School Director.
- Liaise between the club and the School Director
- Monitor the implementation of term plans.
- Report problems to the responsible teacher when they occur.

(2) Vice Chairperson:

- Fulfill the functions of the Chairperson when the latter is not available.
- Assist in facilitating meetings
- Take meeting minutes

(3) Treasurer:

- Be responsible for any funds provided by the responsible teacher for various activities including purchasing things for exhibits, field trips, etc.
- Maintain a record of all funds received from the responsible teacher.
- Make purchases or payments as indicated by the responsible teacher.

(4) Group Leader

1. Provide leadership in a group.
2. Make reports on behalf of the group to the chairperson or responsible teacher.
3. Convey messages or information received from the chairperson or responsible teacher to other members of the group.

Responsible Teacher:

- Provide general guidance to the club in doing schedules, running meetings, choosing club officers so that eventually, club officers can do many of these things by themselves.
- Provide technical support in matters relating to writing (e.g., facilitate core training sessions, review students' writing, etc.)
- Represent the club to the Child Friendly Secondary School Committee during the budgeting process.
- Facilitate such activities as the planning and implementation of field trips.
- Facilitate communication between the club and the school administration for various purposes such as using the library for meetings, etc.
- Oversee the use of budgetary resources by the club

ATTACHMENT 3: Writing Club Schedule

1st Term:

Activity	November				December				January			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1.												
2.												
3.												
4.												
5.												
6.												
7.												
8.												
9.												
10.												
11.												
12.												
13.												
14.												
15.												

2nd Term:

Activity	February				March				May			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1.												
2.												
3.												
4.												
5.												
6.												
7.												
8.												
9.												
10.												
11.												
12.												
13.												
14.												
15.												

ATTACHMENT 4: Illustrative Budget for a Writing Club

Expenditure		Formula	Amount
1.	Poster Paper	1 kg x \$2/kg	\$2.00
2.	Marker Pens	2 boxes x \$2.50/bx	\$5.00
3.	Colored Paper	2 reams x \$4/ream	\$8.00
4.	Library History Exhibits	--	\$10.00
5.	<u>Field Trip #1:</u>		
	Lunch:	15 persons x \$1/pers	\$15.00
	Taxi:	\$25/day x 1 day	\$25.00
	Disposable Camera:	1 camera x \$8	<u>\$8.00</u>
			\$48.00
6.	<u>Field Trip #2:</u>		
	Lunch:	15 persons x \$1/pers	\$15.00
	Taxi:	\$25/day x 1 day	\$25.00
	Disposable Camera:	1 camera x \$8	<u>\$8.00</u>
			\$48.00
TOTAL			\$121.00