

English Writing Skills Seminar Report

PCSDC, CIDT and DEDI Center for Intercultural Dialogue and Translation, Maadi April 24-26, 2009

1. Introduction

The seminar was organized as a joint initiative of the Program for Civilization Studies and Dialogue of Cultures (PCSDC) at Cairo University, the Center for Intercultural Dialogue and Translation (CIDT), and the Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute (DEDI). It was aimed at university students and graduates in Egypt with the purpose of helping participants to better formulate texts in English in order to help them to better express their ideas and thoughts and consequently help them to play a role in bridging divides between cultures and societies.

The seminar was organized in response to questions from lectures at the PCSDC who believe there is a great need for Egyptian students who generally lack good academic English writing skills. CIDT has also experienced this with Egyptian interns who, in comparison with interns from Denmark, generally had more problems composing an academic English paper.

PCSDC wanted to hold the writing seminar in July but this was not possible for practical reasons. It was thus decided to hold the seminar from April 24-26 and treat it as a first experiment for which participants would not be charged.

2. Purpose

The three-day intensive seminar was open to university students and graduates who have an advanced level of English and want to improve their academic English writing skills.

3. Publicity

The following text was published in an Arab-West Report newsletter and sent to around 1500 contacts in Cairo. This newsletter was also distributed by the PCSDC at Cairo University.

*English Writing Skills Seminar
Center for Intercultural Dialogue and Translation, Maadi
April 24-26 2009*

This three-day intensive seminar is open to university students and graduates who have advanced knowledge of English and want to improve their western-style academic English Writing Skills.

Each workshop will consist of:

- Lecture followed by a brief question and answer period by the workshop instructor*
- Handout of relevant materials*
- Individual or collaborative work by the students on the subject of the workshop*
- Small group collaboration and discussion on the subject with a consistent instructor mentor*
- Two breaks of 15 minutes.*

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4. Respondents

Around 100 people responded to the announcement. Applicants mainly consisted of university students and young Egyptians working in the private sector from organizations such as NGOs and universities.

5. Selection procedure of participants

The selection process was based on the CVs and the letters of motivation written by the interested participants. The main selection criterion assessed were the level of English, the reasons for the students' interest in the seminar and the connection between their interests and CIDT's work. The need for academic English writing was also considered as part of the selection process.

Finally, 18 participants were chosen for the seminar. The number was limited by the number of available computers in the CIDT office. The participants included representatives from the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, The National Council for Human Rights, the Arab League and Tanta University.

6. Program

The program was structured to give participants educational seminars and then time in smaller groups to consolidate what they had learned in the seminars. At the start of the program they were told that at the end of program they should produce a small paper on a topic of their own choosing which fulfilled all of the academic criteria they had learnt throughout the program.

6.1 Seminar Schedule

Friday April 24 1:45 – 2:15 PM

Opening, explanation of workshop by Instructors

Friday April 24 2:30 - 6 PM

Workshop 1: Choosing and Researching a Topic

Jonas Nielsen

Assignment: Choosing a topic, researching and keeping track of sources

Saturday April 25 10 AM – 1:30 PM

Workshop 2: Paper Organization

Asger Johannsen

Assignment: Introduction and paper outline

Saturday April 25 1:30 – 2:30 PM

Lunch

Saturday April 25 2:30 – 6 PM

Workshop 3: Logical Arguments / The Philosophy of Writing

Jielis van Baalen

Assignment: Half of paper written

Sunday April 26 10 – 12:30 PM

Workshop 4: Balanced Writing / Minimizing Bias

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Clare Turner

Sunday April 26 12:30 – 1:30 PM
 Workshop 5: Writing Styles and References
 Kirsten Anderson
Assignment: Final Paper

Sunday April 26 1:30 – 2:30 PM
 Lunch

Sunday April 26 5:30 – 6 PM
 Certificate Ceremony

7. Student Participation during the seminar

Not all of the participants attended the complete seminar and some applicants failed to turn up at all. The participants who did not show up on the first day were contacted and the details of the seminar were re-confirmed, some had good reasons for their absence whilst others said they had not received the email asking them to confirm their place or could not find their way to the location of the seminar.

Another point of concern was the students' punctuality. The course was supposed to start at 10 am everyday but many of the participants did not arrive until 11am. This, in turn, affected the amount of time allocated for each session.

8. Instructors

Instructors and their backgrounds:

Jonas Nielsen

Mr. Nielsen is pursuing a Master's Degree in Arabic at the University in Copenhagen. He is an intern with CIDT studying human rights groups in Egypt. His Bachelor's thesis focused on similarities between Sayyid Qutb and American evangelists in their thoughts on statehood.

Asger Johannsen

Mr. Johannsen is pursuing a Master's Degree in Arabic at the University in Copenhagen. He is an intern with CIDT studying the Abu Fana land crisis in Egypt. His Bachelor's thesis focused on Iraqi refugees in Syria.

Drs. Jielis van Baalen

Mr. van Baalen is a lecturer of Theology and Philosophy at Windesheim University in the Netherlands. He has 30 years of teaching experience. His master's thesis focused on Muslim-Christian dialogue in the media in the Netherlands. He is soon to start work as the Director of CIDT.

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Clare Turner

Ms. Turner is the senior language editor for CIDT. She has extensive experience studying media bias from her work with CIDT for the last two years. She has previously worked as an English Teacher for the British Council in the Spanish Colony in Morocco. Her bachelor's degree was in International Relations and Arabic with a final paper on economic liberalization leading to political mobilization in certain states in the Middle East.

Kirsten Anderson

Ms. Anderson is a language editor for CIDT. She has previously volunteered as a writing coach and volunteered and worked as an English Teacher in the United States and Egypt. She has a bachelor's degree in Sociology, English and Latin. Her bachelor's final papers focused on educational inequality in the United States and Palestinian poetry.

The lectures given by the instructors have been kept in the CIDT office and could be used for future seminars.

9. Student Evaluations

9.1 Evaluation Form

An evaluation form was sent to the participants the day that the course finished. The form asked students for their opinions on the course and was anonymous. A copy of the evaluation form can be found in Appendix A.

9.2 Summary of student evaluations

The following information summarizes the information gathered from the evaluation forms.

1. The content of this seminar was valuable and well-organized.

Strongly agree	: 80%
Agree	: 20%
Disagree	: 0
Strongly disagree	: 0

2. The presentation of workshop instructors was well-prepared and responsive to my learning needs and interest.

Strongly agree	: 80%
Agree	: 20%
Disagree	: 0
Strongly disagree	: 0

3. Interacting with other participants made the workshop more valuable.

Strongly agree	: 100%
Agree	: 0
Disagree	: 0
Strongly disagree	: 0

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4. *Lectures on the subjects were appropriately balanced with collaborated work and group discussion.*

Strongly agree : 80%
 Agree : 20%
 Disagree : 0
 Strongly disagree : 0

5. *The handouts of this seminar were clear and useful.*

Strongly agree : 60%
 Agree : 20%
 Disagree : 20%
 Strongly disagree : 0

6. *Overall, my English writing skills are improved by participating in this seminar.*

Strongly agree : 60%
 Agree : 20%
 Disagree : 20%
 Strongly disagree : 0

7. *I would recommend this seminar to others.*

Strongly agree : 60%
 Agree : 40%
 Disagree : 0
 Strongly disagree : 0

Participants were also asked what elements of the course they found most beneficial to them. The following represents some of the responses received.

"The seminar effectively helped me in being able to write an English article directly without any need to write it first in Arabic and then translate, as far as I've been aware of English writing techniques. I benefited from all the presentations provided. It's really useful to know how to choose a topic, and why and how to convince your leaders that what you write deserves to be read. Many things I learnt, indeed: how to write a thorough comprehensive introduction, how to argue logically, how to organize your paper, how to minimize bias, to support you article with relevant references."

"The seminar was very useful to me in knowing the style of references and resources, and the paper organization."

"It gave me an insight to writing; I was introduced to a new dimension that I didn't notice before."

"The academic content."

"The material being taught by different instructors with a variety of accents is very beneficial."

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The editorial style presentation was very beneficial also."

Participants were also asked about what they believed could be improved in the seminar.

- *"To ask learners to tell about their expectations. It helps in exploring more what they need and then adjust the program to meet their needs.*
- *To tell learners the benefits they will get by attending the seminar. It could be done in the orientation session by the director of CIDT.*
- *To dedicate some time to teach the most common mistakes writers / researchers do with practical examples. (Even regarding grammar or in using vocabulary)."*

"I want more days in seminar to have more useful."

"Some of the handouts and the presenters could have been a bit clearer."

"Put the participants in several categories and deal with them according to this base, because many of the topics we discussed I think that most of the first day participants have already known how to do it in Arabic, I joined the course to improve my ENGLISH writing skills not to improve my writing skills and even if I know about most of the content of the course, I got used of many points and ideas that said in the course."

"The lectures room needs to be better prepared and equipped. The address of the center needs better clarification, probably a big sign in Midan Saweras facing Nadi el Maadi.

It would be very useful to add a whole lecture explaining the APA, MLA, and Chicago citation styles elaborately and giving the largest number of examples, because citation is a critical matter to all academic papers."

Finally, participants were asked if they had any other comments or suggestions.

- *Obligation is needed! All the people submitted to the program must sign a paper to ensure that they are free during the time of the seminar and they will attend OR they will fund the costs of the course (2500 E.P. for each one)!! Unless in cases of emergency.*
- *Try to target the most persons who in need to attend such seminars. You can target students who be nominated by professors in universities.*
- *The same program can be provided in Arabic as well. The same instructors with qualified person to translate into Arabic.*
- *The courses can be expanded to include: personal skills, communication skills, time management, leadership and etc.*
- *THE PLACE!! (The third floor) The place that you welcome in the learners for the first time should be well prepared. I am one of the people who care about the core of the things not the appearance, but not all the people are the same! Some people may link the importance of what will be learned with the appearance of the place where they will learn!!*
- *Again and again, we have to emphasis the importance of the course and the benefits the learners will get.*

"I felt that the workshop could have been more enjoyable, if it had covered more writing styles, but I really had a good time and I wish I could have done a better job."

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"Less time for practice, may be applying the steps of the writing skills could be done in shorter time, and may be telling the participants to choose a topic before joining could make it more useful, and bring participants with similar topics together and make them encouraged to continue."

"Instructors are more than perfect; their backgrounds and teaching techniques they use are very beneficial. They are very helpful and friendly, I wouldn't have been interested to finish this course if it hadn't been for the team's wonderful spirit and friendly attitude."

9.3 Student Papers

Eight students completed the task set at the start of the seminar to write a short academic paper on the subject of their own choice. Each student that completed the assignment received a certificate that can be viewed in Appendix B.

Outlines of the papers written by the course participants:

1. *Tolerance in Egyptian journalism*

by: Amr Gad, Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies

"Egyptian journalism passes by the most period that has many problems. These problems were appeared in the last years because many reasons. In the first, there are many new journals had established beside the national and party journals. The new type of journals is called private journals that have many ideas and topics that don't walk together with the minds and thoughts of national journals."

2. *Faith based conflict resolution of Muslim – Christian Conflict in Egypt*

by: Ayman Ramsis, Diakonia

"This research paper is meant to investigate the faith based conflict and potential peacemaking mechanisms between Christians and Muslims in Egypt. This way the objective remains three-fold 1) Examples of the modern history of the conflict between Christians and Muslims, and 2) Define the concepts of peacemaking in Islam and Christianity in order to 3) Identify potential peacemaking approaches and models that build on those concepts to promote peacemaking approach to Christian-Muslim Conflict resolution.

This paper has three main significant points of importance: a) Building on the history of the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Egypt and b) Faith-based conflict, needs faith-based conflict resolution and c) Develop a cultural-sensitive model to promote faith-based peacemaking to the Christian-Muslim conflict in Egypt.

The researcher is going to review reports, articles, and religious text (Bible and Qur'an) to define the concepts of peacemaking in both religions, and study previously used models of faith-based conflict resolution approaches to make use of previous learning."

3. *A Premature Bloom. China's Middle East Dilemma: An Overview.*

by: Buchi Liu, CIDT intern

"After twenty-years of unprecedented economic growth, China has successfully abandoned its self-isolation and ideological diplomacy, embracing the world and using pragmatism to guide its diplomacy. As China is rising as a major political power and economic giant in contemporary international politics, people might believe this far eastern country will soon become the next super power and stand right beside the United States, the only unchallenged super power since the late 1980s."

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4. *Peace building through education.*

by: Eman Samir Muhammad, Cairo University

"Peace is one of the most widely used and exchanged words worldwide, but could it be true that for each person it gives a different meaning? hence, we can safely deduce that "peace" has a different meaning and perception in different nations and parties.

The controversy continues as each group of people advocates peace in the light of their beliefs and interests, but "Peace" as an objective can be reached through many different and off the beaten track ways. In this paper, we are going to explore the different reasons of arriving to peace in a conflict oriented way.

One of the highly acclaimed means of making peace is through education, it's believed that teaching fighting parties more about the background of the other, promotes tolerance and understanding, but how far is that reasoning valid?

Two case studies that cover making peace through education from different sides will be studied in order to give more insight into the subject."

5. *Child Labor in Egypt. An overview of the current conditions and Egyptian and international efforts to combat Child Labor in Egypt*

by: Lamia Mahmoud, Cairo University

"In this paper I will briefly study the phenomenon of child labor in Egyptian society, because I believe through this I can explain causes and impacts of child labor on Egypt, and give suggestions about the methods through which the society can most effectively address this phenomenon and combat it.

And in order to get this task done, I am going to make use of a Human Rights Watch report on child agricultural labor, newspapers articles discussing child labor in Egypt and means through which it can be combated, Information retrieved from United States Department of Labor Bureau of International Labor Affairs website about the fields of work where child labor is highly concentrated in Egypt. Through the information gained I will argue for necessity of amending the Egyptian Child Law labor standards in order to limit child labor in Egypt in the future."

6. *Dialogue between cultures and religions. Challenges and revenues (a reading of Dr. Ali al-Samman's papers)*

by: Mona Taha, Tanta University

"Dialogue between cultures, the old new issue, is the main avenue for peace between nations, without dialogue, conflict will be unavoidable. But how can dialogue be achieved? What are the most challenges it meets? And who are the parts should gather their efforts to sustain it? The following pages will try to give reasonable answers to these questions and others by focusing on the points of view of Dr. Ali al-Samman, the head of Dialogue Committee and Islamic Relations at the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs."

7. *The Second Draft of the platform: The Prospects of Change in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Discourse*

by: Rabha Seif Allam, Cairo University

"In this short paper I will discuss the prospects of change in the second (final) draft of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's (MB) platform that will be published by the next month. The preliminary draft known as "the first reading" was issued in the autumn of 2007 and sent by the MB Supreme Guide to political experts and intellectuals, in order to obtain their different comments about it before the final draft was issued. But this preliminary draft has urged a large opposition among the Egyptian political actors and intellectuals, due to some controversial texts limiting the political rights of non Muslims and women, and

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recommending the establishment of a board of elected religious scholars to be consulted before laws are approved. Therefore, I intend in this paper to explore any potential change in the upcoming draft and its reasons, based on the academic opinion of political experts and different viewpoints of MB leaders published in newspapers. But also, I will use the matter of issuing the platform to test the process of producing discourse within the MB and its essential dynamics."

8. *Impunity in sectarian incidents in Egypt: Abu Fana case study*

by: Yara Sallam, Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights

"This paper is concerned with the atmosphere of impunity in Egypt that follows sectarian incidents, especially the ones between Muslims and Christians. There is no documentation on one single case that showed that the perpetrators of such incidents were punished by law, though there is one case of financial compensation to the victims of the Fayoum incident that happened in June 2008: The compensation came after six months of the incident, in mid-December 2008, was with equal contributions from both the governorate of Fayoum and the Fayoum archbishopric, though the "total compensation covers no more than one-fourth the value of the losses"."

Some of the participants' papers will be chosen to be published in Arab-West Report.

10. Recommendations for future seminars

1. Future seminars should be introduced as an *academic* English writing course in order to select participants with a sufficient knowledge of the English language.
2. Some of those who responded to the advert and wanted to attend did not receive the information about the seminar despite their earlier contact with the office. Participants should be obliged to send a confirmation note to ensure their place on the course.
3. The lecture room needs to be better prepared and equipped.
4. Participants should be given clear instructions on how to get to the seminar, a small map of the area between Ma'adi Metro station and the office could be supplied.
5. Commitment is important. Everyone who signs up to the program must sign a confirmation note ensuring that they are free for the entire seminar. This could possibly involve making participants pay a fee which is then returned to them when they complete the course.
6. Future seminars could be structured differently, for example one day a week over the course of a month. In that way participants would have more time to work on their articles and to assimilate the knowledge they have learned.
7. Passwords for the AWR database need to be tested in advance to ensure that they work properly.
8. A follow-up-course could be offered to students to give them a chance to ask any final questions and receive feedback on their work from instructors.

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Appendix A-Student evaluation form

Please take a minute to fill out this evaluation form. Your responses will be used to aid in the development of future seminars. Thank you.

Please express your level of agreement by ticking a box in the table below.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The content of this seminar was valuable and well-organized.				
2. The presentation of workshop instructors was well-prepared and responsive to my learning needs and interest.				
3. Interacting with other participants made the workshop more valuable.				
4. Lectures on the subjects were appropriately balanced with collaborated work and group discussion.				
5. The handouts of this seminar were clear and useful.				
6. Overall, my English writing skills are improved by participating in this seminar.				
7. I would recommend this seminar to others.				

8. What aspects of this seminar did you find most beneficial to you?

9. What would you suggest for improving this seminar?

10. Please share any other comments or suggestions.

Thanks again for your time and for your participation in our English Writing Skills Seminar!

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Appendix B: Certificate



This is to certify that

has completed the English Writing Skills Seminar

held from April 24th to April 26th 2009

Group Supervisor

Head of CIDT