



IIT Madras

BSc Degree

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English - 1 (Basic English)
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How to Write Bio-Notes?

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HOW TO WRITE BIO-NOTES?



Hello, welcome to this next session in writing module. We said yesterday that a good piece of writing primarily requires good contents. We read whatever we read for their contents. Similarly, we write whatever we write because we have something to say. Very few people, almost none or hardly anyone writes only to play with words. There may be people who do that, but they are definitely very few, and they have a very different purpose in writing.

But for most of us who write of business, who write for sciences, who write for social sciences or who create pieces of literature. We write to communicate. Therefore, it is important that we must have something to say, something to communicate. And that something must be clear to us, clearly known to us and we should convey that clearly.

Now, in this second session, we are going to look at how to write some simple, very common things like a bio-note or bio-notes. One is often when you apply for a job or when you are invited to give a talk before you appear at an interview. Many other places, before you visit another country, you are sometimes expected to write about yourself, and you are expected to tell your reader what kind of a person you are.

So, in addition to the curriculum vitae that you write which is detailed, which is a detailed account of all that one has done by way of their work, by way of their learning and by way of related things. In addition to curriculum vitae, bio-note is a short note. Sometimes you find that you are given only 50 words, very often a 100 words, and in 100 words, one has to write their entire biography. You have to write your entire biography. So, what can you write? What can you say in 100 words? That is where the challenge is.

And therefore, it is important that we should know what is such that I must write, what is such that makes me different from others, that makes me unique, that sets me apart from others, what I have done good/bad in different common not so common which usually others do not do? If I am a different person from the crowd, which is what I want the reader to believe, then I must describe those things that make me different.

They may be our failures, they may be our successes, but so long as we know about them and so long as we can write objectively about them, we will have created a good bio-note. So, a good bio-note is one which very briefly without dates, without particulars of time and place tell the reader what sort of a person the writer is, what sort of a person you are. We selected this topic today because we want you to believe that content is important and because here is a subject which you know best, nobody knows more about you than you yourself. The point is the question is how much of it can be said and in what manner?

So, in the rest of the session today, we are going to talk about writing a good bio-note primarily asking ourselves which part of my life, what out of my life I can tell the reader. Can I say everything that I know of? It will become a huge autobiography for which you neither have time, nor space. Neither the reader has time, nor space. So, within limited words, within 100 words, within 50 words, within 200 words, you have to write a bio-note which presents you as a person who is different from all else. Therefore, it requires a great precession and great and good control on language, on words. Let us begin. Let us see this.

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BIO-NOTE



Mission,

Vision Statement



Many people these days begin their bio-note or even their curriculum vitae with Mission statement, Vision statement. It is in fashion these days. In my opinion, it is not necessary for us to do that. For a young person, if you are a young person, you are still forming, you are still learning, you might not have a very set, a very hard fixed vision like that of an organization or that of an experienced agent individual, a person is still growing up, a person yet to sit down to a specified work for the rest of their life should be more flexible than that.

So, in my opinion, in my very personal opinion, and you need not agree with me if you do not feel like agreeing with me, it is not important for us, everybody to write a mission statement and a vision statement. Maybe your mission at this stage is to get into a good university, to get a good job, to get a good husband and wife, to have a good family, good car, good house, good holiday and there is no harm, these things are not shameful. This is why all of us work. These are the primary basic driving motivations of our life.

So, best is if you do not follow the fashion that itself will make you different. That itself will make you unique. But if you feel like, if you already know what you want to do for the next 40 years, 50 years, 30 years, 20 years, if that is very clear to you, then there is no harm saying that say that but do not say that in a cliché-ridden language. What is cliché? Those words which has often been repeated by everyone that has lost its meaning that does not have a concrete meaning.

Say, for example, if you say I want a great career in management. What does it mean? Everyone wants a great career in management. What is management? What is great? What is a career? Are there any definite definitions of these? Gandhiji had a great career in management. He managed the freedom struggle of an entire country, and he did it so wonderfully well. He was great because no one else before him had done anything like that.

From Lords Shrirama to Shrishankara, say he has been an unprecedented work in that sense it is great. But if he is just another, he got elected to become the Chief Minister of an Indian state; then we cannot call it a great career in management. Again, what is management? If you put resources to produce things beyond expected, beyond expectation, then you managed it well. Otherwise, you have not.

So, unless you are very clear unless your goals are very clearly defined to you, it is not necessary for us to say this is my vision statement, this is my mission statement. You just ignore the fashion. But if they are then, you write it in simple concrete words. Say that in the next five years I want to get a job which will give me 200000 rupees a month. That no harm about that. It is not harm, it is not bad; it is not unethical being ambitious in the right manner.

If you do not want to steal from somebody else, then to have the ambition to become a multi-billionaire is a Nobel ambition. If somebody does not produce wealth, how would the society survive? So, that is fine, but if you are that clear, then do not hesitate to say that, rather than say wage things like I want a great career in management.

Similarly, the difference between mission and vision statement is very razor-thin, fine, subtle. Let organizations do that, an individual need not. Individuals can have, you can say I want to excel in my career. Most people have not written 30 books on this subject; I want to write 31 books on this subject. Good enough, clear enough, everyone will understand that you will need more time, you will spend more time reading and writing than talking. So, if they want to hire you, they will hire you. But a lot of people make this mistake, under shear pressure of fashion they end up writing things which do not mean anything. Look at an example.

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Mission Statement

Jailee Country government is dedicated to delivering effective, efficient, respectful public service with integrity and accountability using both proven and innovative methods.

Vision Statement

To make Jailee Country the place of choice to live, work, grow and play.

Value Statements

We are responsible, respectful, accountable, effective, efficient public servants.

We promote integrity and openness in everything we do.



Wonderful words. Let us analyze these words. Some government is dedicated to delivering effective, efficient, respectful public service. Can you think of a government which does not want to do this? There can be no government which can afford saying that I do not want to do public service. And if you want to do public service, you better deliver them effectively. Now, what is the difference between effective and efficient? You cannot be effective unless you are efficient. And you cannot be called efficient unless you are effective.

So, this is what people call redundancy. You are packing it with unnecessary words. Sometimes politicians speak like that because they have to, that is their business. They say I will remove poverty from our earth, from the earth. No one will die for bread; everyone will have a home, everyone will have clothes, everyone will have water, everyone will have soda water. That is fine. That is their business.

But, for you and me, it is enough to say, we want to remove poverty. If you remove poverty, that means everyone is going to have housing, food, clothes. Only then will poverty disappear? So, similar things, redundancy is not considered a good feature of good writing. It may be alright for rhetoric, political rhetoric, but not in serious business or academic writing. There redundancy is not a virtue.

So, for example, you can hear, you need not say, efficient, effective, respectful, if it is effective, if it is efficient, people will automatically respect you. It will become, you do not have to say that. Similarly, with integrity and accountability, if you are accountable, then integrity is there, you cannot be stealing and go in public. Or you cannot go in public, and you can steal. So, there are lots of words used for the sake of words, mouthful. Big words, but they hardly mean anything.

Using both proven and innovative methods. Why cannot you say using old and new methods? Is there any harm in saying that rather than saying using proven and innovative methods? Not bad, but you are then talking only to some people who are already struggling with your words

like effective, efficient, respectful, and then you add two more words with uncertain meaning, proven, what is proven? Whereas it will prove in? In which laboratory?

Perhaps you are trying to say some of our methods will be old methods. We may not be cooking in the solar light under the sun. Possibly we will use conventional energy. Say that what harm is there, we will use old methods. We will also do some innovation. However, we will; you will use some new sources. We will give you a hot cup of tea through a solar heater. Wonderful. You are making the point very clearly, very inspiringly, I would say. A lot of people will like to know and follow your method.

The point here is if a mission statement must be made, then it must be made briefly, precisely just the word that required, accurate word. No other word. Only a particular button will fit a particular hole. It is not that you can put any button here or it is not that this hole can take any button that is what we mean by accuracy. Only a certain size of nut would fit in a certain size of the hole or a certain size of bolt. It is not that any nut can fit any bolt. Any plug cannot go into any hole. You cannot put out a round peg in a square hole; you cannot put a square peg in a round hole.

So, these things have to be decided very carefully, and if you must write them, then you must write them simple language. Why I say proven method? Why do I say innovative method? Say the old method new method. Similarly, vision statement. To make this government the place of choice to make this country the place of choice to live, work, play, grow. What is the meaning of the word live if we do not include work, play, grows, grow, sleep, rise, eat, drink? You do not have to; this is what we call padding unnecessary words. They serve, they become distractors rather than communicators.

So, if at all, you write a mission statement, vision statement, a value statement, then be very direct. See, what is it you want to achieve and say that in very clear, simple, easy to understand words. In the next five years, I want to become a middle-level manager. In the next five years, I want to become the head of the company. I want to do my work so differently that the company thinks I am fit enough to be its head.

What harm is there in saying that? You have used all the words that everyone knows. A lot of CVs, a lot of curriculum vitae, lot of bio-notes do not use this. Under wrong pressure from wrong fashions, they end up making mistakes of this kind where the statement is in verbose, where it has lots of words that are redundant, inaccurate that do not mean anything that they do not convey anything. Let us get out of them. Next.

How do we write? You have just about 150 words, how can you write about, again if you are an undergraduate student, you are about 16 or so, so all your 16 Yes. Can it be packed in 150 words? Perhaps not. Perhaps yes, but all we have to ask is like you budget over money. I have only 100 rupees, and I have to live for a week, then what is it we must buy? We have to buy water; we have to buy bread. But perhaps we cannot buy Pizza, we cannot perhaps buy a coke. So, we will ask questions about given a choice of what is more important and what is not so important. Everything is important in your life; that is why you are what you are.

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QUESTION

In about 150 words, write a note on important events in your life. You must be factual. Tell the reader how you are different.

Hints :

Name – basic address – early education – any notable events – college – favourite subjects – achievements - plans for the future



But some of these things are more important than some others. So, in your mind, make a list of things that are more important. For example, no matter how many words you have, your bio-note will definitely write your name—maybe 1 or 2 words by way of your address. You can say I am from Nepal; I am from Sikkim, I am from Vietnam, I am from Gabon. Maybe you can name your country; you can state or something because detailed address also follows somewhere else.

Maybe you will describe, you will take 25 words to describe your early childhood. Did you have a different kind of childhood? I know a colleague whose father worked as a cleaner in a public toilet, in a public washroom and that boy worked hard, became a medical doctor and became a very good surgeon, an orthopaedic surgeon. So, that boy can and that boy should, or that young man should describe his early childhood. What was there in that home where even with uneducated parents, there was something to motivate that child?

I know another teacher colleague of mine whose mother, a single woman, her father had been dead, ran a simple confectionery shop, biscuits and candies and that sort of thing, a Vietnamese English teacher. I am proud of being her colleague. And by the time she was 8, her mother started involving her in running the shop accounts. So she would every day at the end of the day after other children came from the school and went to play, this girl would run to her mother's shop and would sit down with her mother not only serving but also keeping accounts.

And like this she soon found that she was not only enjoying work helping her mother, her mother recognized her work, also rewarded her with candy or two now and then which she would share with her friends in the school the following day, she also learned the methods of the accounting, she also learned English and mathematics. So, that is the childhood worth describing.

Similarly, there is something in your childhood. God has created us all in his own wisdom. There is something in all our childhood which is unique. We must find that out. We may not

be equally good or bad. Possibly we failed maths, but there is no harm saying that none of us has excelled in every subject all the time, all through their life and if you have in spite of that failure reached somewhere, then that failure is worth mentioning.

A very famous inventor has said that every time I invent something, my invention is preceded by nine failures, but the tenth success would not come unless I failed nine times before. So, this is how all of us grow. There is hardly anyone among us who has not made a mistake. But what kind of mistake? That is worth writing. So, look into your past and see what is unique and describe that in simple ordinary sentences. Like notable events in college, what was the subject you enjoyed most, you had six subjects, half a dozen subjects, did you enjoy them all equally?

Perhaps not. In somethings, you did very well. You got a cup; you got a medal, you got a prize, in some other things you did not. Maybe you can find, you can describe why you did not excel in one, but you excelled in the other? Maybe the teacher was the reason, maybe the teacher's method was the reason. You can also talk about what you wish to achieve in the future. Do you want to become someone with a lot of money, you want to have many kinds of cars, houses, big holidays or you want to live a simple or cheer life with no tension, no stress, no travel, they are equally good. It is not that one is better than the other. Next.

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ACTIVITY



Read and compare the first draft and the final draft based on the following parameters:

	First Draft	Final Draft
No. Of words		
No. of sentences		
Content		



I am going to give you a bio-note, actually two drafts of the same bio-note. Look at them carefully and then fill in this box. But first, look at the bio-note.

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FIRST DRAFT



My name is Baagmati. It mean one with speech. I was born at a village in the hills of the Himalayas, but I do not know in which year. But I was never sent to school. Girls did not go to school in my village. "That is a waste of time", my mother said. Girls were however taught painting, singing, cooking and taking care of household. I have done these things quite well. I was married young. After three years of marriage, I went to Mumbai along with my husband. It was a long train journey, for three days and nights, we saw many towns and villages. In Mumbai, my husband worked as a security guard at the gate of a big building, I worked in the flat of a businessman. They were very kind to us.



They allowed us to live in their servants' quarters. I used to clean the flat and help my mistress in washing clothes, plates and in cooking. But after some years my husband died suddenly one day. No one said what disease he had. The businessman did not throw me out. They allowed me to live and work as usual. I had also learnt from their children how to read and write Hindi and English. So after the death of my husband I decided to write school final examination, and passed in the first attempt. Then I also joined college and passed plus two examination. With help from the same family, I have also acquired some computer skills. Now I want to become a graduate and start a computer Centre for girls at my village. I am sure God will help me.



Here is one—the First Draft. Take your time to read it carefully. Next, take your time to read it carefully, not just for the context also for the language. Now, here is the table; here is your evaluation sheet. Can you rewrite that First Draft from that writer? Perhaps you can try.

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FINAL DRAFT BIO – NOTE



My name is Baagmati. I was born at a village in the Himalayas. I was never sent to school, but I was taught arts and household work. After three years of marriage, I went to Mumbai with my husband by rail. It was a long and interesting journey. In Mumbai, I worked in the home of a businessman.



He gave us a place to live. I used to help his wife at home. But my husband soon died of some strange disease. Then I was confused and doubtful of my future, but I lived and worked as usual. From the businessman's children, I had learnt reading, writing and some computer skills. So, after some studies, I wrote and passed school final examination, and joined junior college for plus two class. I wish to learn more of computers, and after graduation, I wish to go back to my village and start a computer school for girls.



Here is the second draft, a Final Draft. Actually, it may have undergone 2 or 3, as I told you yesterday good writing is not a good piece of writing is not just mechanical stuff, you write, you rewrite, re-rewrite, you look at spelling, you look at words, you look at sentences, you add something, delete something else, and then you finally feel now it is alright. So, this is the Final Draft of the same First Draft that you saw earlier. Next.

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ANSWERS

	First Draft	Final Draft
No. Of words	278	155
No. of sentences	25	13



Now you see we have filled in this table. This is the difference between the two drafts. The first draft and the second draft, they had both said the same thing. They have both described young women from Nepal who comes to work in Mumbai has one kind of childhood, has another kind of youth, but there is something inner ambience, inner personality, inner surroundings which help her come out of those difficulties and the start of the career.

Once again, she is quite effectively; she has described that quite clearly, quite effectively, but what is the difference? The difference is the following. The first draft had 278 words whereas; the final has only 155, nearly as many as allowed. Earlier it was 25 sentences; it is only 13 sentences. Look at some differences of contents. Next.

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REDUNDANCIES AND INACCURACIES



1. Remove redundant words and phrases.
2. Use words accurately.



The second draft has done away with a lot of redundant words, redundant phrases and most words are used very accurately. Look at some.

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FIRST DRAFT	FINAL DRAFT
My name is Baagmati. It mean one with speech.	My name is Baagmati.
I was born at a village in the hills of the Himalayas, but I do not know in which year.	I was born at a village in the Himalayas.
But I was never sent to school. Girls did not go to school in my village. "That is a waste of time", my mother said. Girls were however taught painting, singing, cooking and taking care of household. I have done these things quite well. I was married young.	I was never sent to school, but I was taught arts and household work.
After three years of marriage, I went to Mumbai along with my husband.	After three years of marriage, I went to Mumbai with my husband by rail.
It was a long train journey, for three days and nights, we saw many towns and villages	It was a long and interesting journey.



So, the first draft, for example. She says my name is Baagmati. Actually, this had oversight; otherwise, there is no error of this kind anywhere in the writings. So, we can say that this is an oversight. She perhaps means to say it means one with speech. She could as well say My name is Baagmati. Or should could as well she could get still simpler. She could have said I am Baagmati rather than four words; she could have said that in 3 words, we could have saved 1. I am Baagmati rather than my name is Baagmati.

Moreover, why do you need to give the meaning of the name? It is a matter of chance that names can have some other meanings as well, but the primary function of a name is to identify a person or place or thing. If someplace is called Haven Lake, it does not mean it is actually heaven.

It is still a lake which has rather than get the name of the good lake, great lake; it is heaven lake. Beyond that otherwise, all of our names have some meanings, and they are just incidental rather than call ourselves x or y I call myself Shreesh, this institute calls itself Indian Institute of Technology. It could as well call itself by another name. It will still be the same thing.

So, we do not really have to do that. We save word that in my opinion, is redundant. Look at the first, look at the left-hand column, the second row, but I was never sent to school, girls did not go to school in my village. If you had more words, perhaps the second sentence would be alright. Otherwise, the first sentence is fine, and it could be said more simply. I was never sent to school, or I never went to school.

Then, what was my early education? Write two words. My early education gave me some arts and skill in household work. You are focused. Your reader will understand you better, your listener will understand you better. Otherwise, in the flood of redundant words, you might lose your reader, you might lose your listener. Go through this analysis in this table, and you will see how simple, how easy and how important it is to get rid of redundant words, inaccurate words. Next.

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FIRST DRAFT	FINAL DRAFT
In Mumbai, my husband worked as a security guard at the gate of a big building, I worked in the flat of a businessman.	In Mumbai, I worked in the home of a businessman.
They were very kind to us.	-
They allowed us to live in their servants' quarters.	He gave us a place to live
I used to clean the flat and help my mistress in washing clothes, plates and in cooking.	I used to help his wife at home.
But after some years my husband died suddenly one day. No one said what disease he had.	But my husband soon died of some strange disease.
The businessman did not throw me out. They allowed me to live and work as usual.	Then I was confused and doubtful of my future, but I lived and worked as usual.



FIRST DRAFT	FINAL DRAFT
I had also learnt from their children how to read and write Hindi and English.	From the businessman's children, I had learnt reading, writing and some computer skills.
So after the death of my husband I decided to write school final examination, and passed in the first attempt. Then I also joined college and passed plus two examination. With help from the same family, I have also acquired some computer skills.	So, after some studies, I wrote and passed school final examination, and joined junior college for plus two class.
Now I want to become a graduate and start a computer Centre for girls at my village.	I wish to learn more of computers, and after graduation, I wish to go back to my village and start a computer school for girls.
I am sure God will help me.	-



Same thing. Go through them. Again. Next.

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WHY I WILL BE THE BEST VICE- CHANCELLOR?



I have been privileged to study under great scholars who enabled me to aspire for the highest academic post.

I got first class first in my master degree, I have Ph.D and D.Litt degrees in my subject. I am a recipient of **Punjab Kesri** and other titles. I have given invited lectures at many universities, including some at NIT Khadakwasla in 2019. I was also asked to become a member of the Jury for Gyanpath Award Committee, but I declined the invitation.



Yet another example. Here, we have not given you the second draft. Here is a bio-note from a very senior person an academic from the university. She wants to, she is actually this is a part of her application, this note is a part of her application for the position of vice-chancellor at a university. Fine, it seems that person has, that candidate has had a wonderful career. She has taught courses, she has guided researches, she has held administrative positions, but the way she says them, I have been privileged to study under great scholars who enabled me to aspire for the highest academic post.

What is the highest academic post, President of India? He is the visitor of all central universities. Chancellor, the Governor of a state. These are vague words, and are those great teachers? We all know that Rama, Lord Rama studied under, Guru Vishamitra. Alexander studied under Aristotle. We all know that very clear. Socrates studied under Plato. Aristotle studied under Socrates; we know these things. Why cannot you name that, if you have studied under a Nobel Prize winner, if you have studied under someone who have another vice known as great, you could say that.

Similarly, your detailed curriculum vitae is already going to say that you have a PhD; you have a D.Litt. Why do you need to see all that here? I got a first-class first in my master degree. You could simply have said I topped my class. A simple sentence, you save words. The point once again is only long years in life do not make us great writer; we become a great writer, become a good writer when we revise, write, rewrite, ask ourselves what is more important than something else and how I can say that more clearly, more accurately and effectively. Do rewrite this and send your piece, send your work to us for comments. Go next.

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Being **chairman** of Admission committees, I have attracted and admitted more students in various courses of the university.. Hence our campus has 18000 students. I help maintain very conducive and congenial atmosphere on the Campus. I continue to hold many administrative positions. I am **chairman** of many committees I am committed to the service and progress of English studies in India. I am Professor Incharge of the University Gymkhana, and Chief Vigilance Officer and Dean of Students Affairs.

I am confident I can perform the duties of the Vice Chancellor of this university with ease and excellence and I can make it a world class university, and can make everyone very happy with my friendly attitude.



It extends to the following page; you can look at all that. Next.

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ACTIVITY

Make a list of redundancies and inaccuracies in this draft. Re-write a draft without them.



You can also make a list of redundancies, what phrases are redundant and what phrases are inaccurate. Come back. See, for instance, look at the Being chairman of admission committees, I have attracted and admitted more, you have already said being chairman of Admission committees, you do not have to say I have attracted and admitted. You could not have admitted them if they were not attracted. And you did not attract them without admitting that. So, these are what we call redundancy.

More students in the various course and naturally if you were the chairman of the admission committee of your university, then you got a variety of students in various departments. What are you trying to say? I continue to hold many administrative positions, why cannot you simply say I still hold many administrative, I still hold many administrative positions, or even

simpler than that I hold many, I have I also have some administrative positions. And then you still say I am chairman of many committees.

I am committed to the service and progress of English studies in India, you can say in addition to that you I have I still have academic, I am Professor In-charge of the university Gymkhana. All this could go in a box somewhere else. Here you can describe those events, those achievements which could not otherwise go in a table, go in a bullet form which will which have made you different.

The unusual decisions that you took, the unusual pressures that you have which stood the outstanding teachers under whom you studied the way you helped an ordinary student become good or great or extraordinary those things could have how as head of a committee how did you manage conflict your community all members were not agreed to any decision. How did you manage to convince them all and you took, in the end, a unanimous decision. Some of these stories would have made a great bio-note.

Not random listing of facts with redundant words. So, rewrite them removing redundancy is bringing accurate words and check with us. Once again, a good piece of writing does not come off mechanically you know you write, rewrite check content, ask yourself what can go better here, what can wait. Is this the best way to write this? Is this the best sentence, is this the best sentence, is this the best word. Does this sentence fit with the one that has gone before and lead to the next that is about to come.

Once we ask ourselves these question, in the beginning, they may take time, at the beginning writing this one-page note; this 200-word note may take you an entire one day or two days or even three days. But if we spend time in this manner on writing these things, then we are training ourselves into writing something very important, and we will then make no mistakes, we can also help others, and we can become accomplished users of the language. Good luck. Have a good afternoon.