Language experience

Language experience is a technique where a text is created through a teacher scribing the learner's words.

Purposes
There are a number of purposes that the teacher and the learner have for creating a text:

- as a first piece of reading for a new reader, using their own words for familiarity
- to create an example using the learner's own words of the use of a particular style, such as recount or narrative
- to develop word and pattern recognition
- to create an authentic text for a learner to practise a specific set of vocabulary, e.g. work, interest or family related
- to support a learner creating a text for a specific purpose, e.g. personal statement for a job application, item for a newsletter or magazine, letter or email
- at higher levels, it can be used to start learners writing essays and reports by helping them to put information about the topic into their own words, which the teacher then recreates into an academic script

Negotiation
It is important to remember that the text belongs to the learner, so encourage the learner to choose the topic. The following may be useful examples for a learner new to reading:

- the learner's choice of leisure activity
- a topic that is work or family related
- a recount of a recent experience

The teacher must negotiate how far the learner's words are adapted to increase readability or support any other purpose for the process.

This can be done individually but also collaboratively.

Methods
This text is then used and developed in some of the ways listed below, depending on the level of the learner and his aspirations. Traditionally this technique has been used with readers at E1 or E2 but the bullets below widen the scope of language experience to illustrate how teacher involvement in scribing learner writing can be used at higher levels and in collaborative writing.

- It can be cut up into sentences which learners can put into sequence.
- It can be cut up into words for learners to sequence
- Learners can take the text home for independent reading practice
- It can be written without punctuation for learners to correct
- Phonemes and blends can be identified for developing an awareness of phoneme/grapheme correspondence

- Rhyming words can be identified
- Words can be broken down to illustrate onset and rime:
  Onset and rime introduces the idea of word families. Onset is the start of the word and rime refers to an identical string of letters that follows the onset, but which do not always make the same sound, e.g.
  > hear   h (onset) ear (rime)
  > bear   b (onset) ear (rime)
- Learners can choose words for their own spelling practice
- Patterns of how plurals are formed can be analysed from singular and plural nouns used
- Verb tenses can be identified and analysed
- Learners can copy the text whether in handwriting or using a keyboard
- Words and/or phrases can be used to create new text

Issues relating to the creation of a language experience text with a learner:

The learner's own words
It is most important to remember that these are at the heart of language experience as a way to develop reading. The learner is starting from the familiar and from something they own. The technique shows that the teacher values the learner's use of language. It is said that 'a beginner reader is not a beginner thinker' – adult beginner readers are rarely beginner speakers either!

Differences between written and spoken language
Decisions need to be made about the inclusion of repetition, ellipsis, incomplete sentences, possible offensive or inappropriate language. This will depend on the circumstances of the creation of the text and the purpose.

> **See Suggestions and Ideas – Techniques - Collaborative Writing**

Useful websites
National Literacy Trust: Literacy Changes Lives
The Language Experience (Though this guidance focuses on using language experience with children it does have clear instructions and a range of developmental ideas that could be adapted for adults).
In Their Own Words - The Language Experience Approach: A Method to Reach Reluctant or Struggling Readers

Useful texts
Spiegel, M. and Sunderland, H. (2006) *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners.* Chapter 3. LLU+
Mace, J.(2002) *The Give and Take of Writing.* NIACE