

ENGLISH MATTERS

BULLETIN: FEBRUARY 2023 (02/2023)



**DIRECT ENGLISH
LANGUAGE TRAINING**

**DIRECT ENGLISH
INTERNATIONAL
LANGUAGE CENTRE**

**BULLETIN
FEBRUARY 2023**

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A CHAT WITH *Tunku Iskandar*

BLESSINGS OF FESTIVALS

When we think of famous travellers and explorers, who probably comes to mind first may be Marco Polo or Stanley Livingstone. Perhaps the name Ibn Battuta might not come to mind. Born in Morocco in the 14th century, he has been quoted to have said, "Travelling - it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller". Indeed he travelled very extensively and went all over the Middle East and as far as China and South East Asia (including the Malay archipelago) as well as parts of Europe.



**TUNKU DATO' SERI (DR)
ISKANDAR TUNKU ABDULLAH**

Group Executive Chairman, Melewar Group
Director, Melewar Learning Resources

Adventurous travellers such as Ibn Battuta came from all over the world to the Golden Chersonese (as the Malay Peninsula was known by the ancient Greeks) as explorers, traders and missionaries. These people brought with them influences that included a mélange of their languages, culture, heritage and religion.

We should feel indebted to these travellers because they have enriched our country, and when Tourism Malaysia adopted the tagline 'Malaysia Truly Asia' in 1999, it is a truism as no other country has Asia's three major races, Malay, Chinese, Indian, plus various other ethnic groups in such large numbers. This exciting diversity of cultures, festivals, traditions and customs has resulted with myriad experiences for both Malaysians and foreign visitors alike.

At almost any time of the year, there is a festival that is not only celebrated by specific religious or ethnic groups, but by most Malaysians as well. 2022 closed with Christmas which saw shopping malls, streets and buildings lit up with depictions of fir trees and Santa Clauses. This was quickly followed when 2023 began with New Year's Day as observed in the Gregorian calendar introduced by European missionaries and traders.

Just a few short weeks later, the start of the Lunar New Year of the Water Rabbit was celebrated by those of Chinese descent whose origins are traced to the 17th century with emigrants from Southern China who in Malaysia now form the world's largest group of overseas Chinese. On to early February, the Tamil community who originally came from South India to Malaya to work on the plantations and railways, celebrate Thaipusam with what is perhaps the world's biggest and most colourful of Hindu religious festival celebration - not in India but at Batu Caves, just outside the city of Kuala Lumpur, and that is now a major attraction for tourists from around the world.

March brings the beginning of the Muslim month of Ramadan which is marked by strict religious observance no different from the practices in the Middle Eastern countries which Arab traders brought to South East Asia, and this culminates with much joy and celebration in April with the Eid Ul-Fitri.

These are just some of the major festivals that Malaysians celebrate and many more are celebrated in the country, not least being the Gawai in Sarawak and Kaamatan in Sabah, both marking a bountiful rice harvest that celebrated with much gusto by all Malaysians in those regions in Borneo.

Festivals celebrate our glorious heritage, culture and traditions. They add structure to our social lives, and connect us with our families, friends and backgrounds and serve to bring happiness to our lives, and strengthen our sense of community. It was the Bengali poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore who said, "You are invited to the festival of this world and your life is blessed". We hope that people who visit our country are truly blessed!

Melewar Learning Resources (MLR) Monthly Meeting *and* Tunku Dato' Seri (Dr) Iskandar Tunku Abdullah's Birthday Celebration

Melewar Learning Resources (MLR) held their first monthly meeting for the year 2023 after Tunku Dato' Seri (Dr) Iskandar Tunku Abdullah's surprise birthday celebration.



MLR held their first monthly meeting for the year 2023 on 5th January 2023 at the Direct English Malaysia (DE) office. The meeting was attended by Tunku Dato' Seri (Dr) Iskandar, Professor Albert Madamba Ladores, Mr. Surendran A/L Dass and all the staff of Melewar Learning Resources.

Before the meeting started, the staffs of MLR and DEILC joined in to celebrate Tunku's birthday. Both the meeting and the birthday celebration went exceptionally well. It was a morning well spent for everyone that was present.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Tunku for being a great inspiration to all of us and wish him all the best in everything.



MY BLOG

Ways to Practice Your Writing



If I had to be frank, writing is one of the easier components of English to learn – and is widely supportive to developing competencies in the other components. Writing facilitates vocabulary development, grammar practice, and application of phrases. Of course, I may be biased – I always learn best writing things down, so the extent to which others find writing easier to learn will be on a case-by-case basis.

None the less, writing is very important to get down when it comes to learning English; and not just because most proficiency test have an unbalanced emphasis towards the component. Writing is going to come up in your everyday life – through emails, messages, reports, academics, and in creative activities. Thus, it's important to find ways to practice your writing outside of a classroom environment. Let's look at a few today:

1.Journaling

Now, journaling may seem like a bit of a hassle, but it's one of the most useful ways to practice your daily vocabulary. Chronicling your activities will employ common terms and phrases that will gradually become more familiar the more you employ them, while also pushing you to learn new vocabulary to express your opinions and experiences. Furthermore, journaling is a great way to get your thoughts out of your own head, and is quite therapeutic for a lot of people.

2.Letter writing

Letter writing (or email writing if you'd prefer) is a great way to improve your colloquial and professional English. Whether sending actual emails/letters or just generating templates or drafts, letter writing allows for a great way to practice paragraph linking sentences, grammar, and vocabulary. It has the benefit of improving common vocabulary usage for personal communication, and professional vocabulary for work or commercial purposes. It also allows you to practice how best to format a letter/email, primarily in how to write greetings and sign-offs:

- Dear Mr. XYZ
- To whom it may concern:
- Yours Faithfully,
- Yours Sincerely

How you start a letter and how you end a later is going to be based on the context and purpose of the letter. You're unlikely to be overly formal when writing a letter to your mother, but it's definitely not advised to sign off with "Lots of Love" when messaging your boss.

3.Reviews

Everybody has opinions, and what better way to express those opinions than through reviews! Whether you're writing about a specific restaurant, movie, TV show, or even a shop, a review can be a great way to practice descriptive and informative writing. It can help to develop skills in reasoning, and how you expand upon your points of concern or praise.

Reviews also have the wonderful utility of providing information to other people, and can be used as a reference for businesses in how to improve their services and product offerings.

4.Fanfiction

Finally, we have fanfiction. Now, I may lose some of you here – either because you know exactly what I'm talking about, or you have no idea.

Fanfiction – for those not in the know – are fictional stories written by fans of a piece of media. Whether it be based on books, such as Harry Potter, movies, like Iron man, or TV shows, for instance Supernatural, Fanfiction can be found for nearly every form of media. It's a way for fans of a work to expand upon the existing media, or use it to develop new stories within that fictional world.

Now, fanfiction hasn't exactly gotten the best reputation by mainstream media – it's typically seen as something done by teenagers or children, and not widely respected. However, that's a rather narrow view to have. A lot of adults write fanfiction, and many professionally published authors have started out writing fanfiction, and continue to do so till this day (a notable example being Neil Gaiman, author of Good Omens and American Gods, among other excellent works).

Fanfiction is an amazing way to improve your writing skills, as 1. It is something you are invested in as it relates to a piece of media you already enjoy, and 2. It's very low stakes. Nobody really cares if your work is bad, and most of the time you can find amazing constructive criticism if you chose to publish on fanfiction/archival sites. Of course, you don't need to ever publish your work, and writing fanfiction privately is a great way to practice narrative writing, punctuation, dialogue, and vocabulary. Furthermore, if you are interested in some of the sites that host fanfiction, you have an almost limitless source of media for reading practice.

I hope some of these suggestions will be helpful in motivating you to practice your writing. There are many other methods as well that you may be more comfortable with, but these are a few of the most notable! Happy sailing on the seas of literary production!

OLIVIA CROWTHER
NATIVE ENGLISH TEACHER,
SOUTH AFRICAN/BRITISH
NATIONAL

TRAINER'S THOUGHTS

A READING NOOK

As Dr Seuss wrote “The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go.” We are told time and time again how exercising improves our cardiovascular health, so we pick up jogging and cycling to keep our heart rates up. The very same logic applies to our cognitive health, a study published by the American academy of neurology in 2013 concluded that cognitive activities such as reading reduced the cognitive decline that comes as we age. Today, we have a vast variety of options to add reading onto our daily hobbies, whether it's an actual print or an eBook downloaded on one of our many devices. The younger generations argue a kindle would allow us to have multiple books on one device but the boomers such as myself heartily conclude there is nothing better than the feel of reading a printed book. Simply holding one brings back memories of a younger self. However, one can't deny that eBooks allow you to hold onto a single device carrying an entire library. We could argue the benefits and downsides of print vs digital to no end but the one thing to agree upon is reading a book takes you to a whole other world, so I urge you to find your personal reading nook, cosy up and pick up the book of your choice.



Trainer
Daljit Singh

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