Yes, we are in the USA and this is amazing! We had no idea that we would be here in 2014 but this is true. Six weeks to improve our English, to share our happiness, to learn with native speakers and so on. The first day was a discovery, the second was nice. Now we know a little bit more. We are teachers with passion to learn. We are optimistic, and we are here at FIU. We made sacrifices to be here. We left our children, family and everything in Brazil only to solve this riddle: Study English! What is this? We study hard to be better teachers, to make a difference. We learnt; we made some mistakes, of course, but we are learning and searching new ways to teach English to our students. We are lucky teachers. To be at FIU was a present that God gave to us and we are so thankful for this that we'll never forget the moments we stayed here. We were amateurs at FIU but we didn't flee. We traced a route from Brazil to the USA. In our hearts, this experience will last forever because the English Language is what feeds our dream to be here. We learnt a lot with our teachers. They are wonderful, spectacular, abundant in knowledge and friendliness. We had colleagues from everywhere and we learnt with them too. Our experience here was excellent, we were so happy to be panthers in the winter of 2014 at FIU. Thanks for everything.
Learning to write can be taught in the same way we learn how to cook when we mix the ingredients in order to get a good dish. For some people, the inspiration to write a story comes fluently. These kinds of people do not need a recipe to do well. On the other hand, writing can be a task that requires a lot of time, sweat and patience. For these people, I have a recipe that shows how to write an essay in a light way. Because writing is important to our communication, we should try to do our best to improve it. There are seven steps which you can follow in order to write with more confidence.

First, you have to choose a topic. Even if your professor assigned it, try to be specific about the topic. For example, if you have to write about the environment, try to be more specific and find out a topic inside environment. In this case, you can choose to write about the greenhouse effect, wildlife conservation or urban pollution. Imagine that your essay will be about is the greenhouse effect. You can talk about the causes or the effects of it, or you may write an analysis essay to show how people can avoid the Greenhouse in their daily routine. Then, you have to write the steps and explain them. A second tip is to identify your audience. For whom am I writing? Keep in mind who your reader is. The topic and the style chosen should focus on the expectations of your reader!

The second step is the brainstorming. This is the process by which you write down your ideas about the topic. Brainstorming is a technique borrowed from the publicity field, and it is used in advertisement creative process to hear what the customers want to say about their company’s products. In a similar manner, write down anything that comes to your mind about the topic, even the strangest ideas. Next, if you need specific information such as dates and names, you should gather from books, encyclopedias and the internet. My advice is to pay attention if you use the Internet as your main source. There are many links; some are trustworthy, while others are not.

Creating an outline is your next challenge. At this point, you have a chance to organize your ideas. Thus, reread the notes, cut, erase or complement them. First, try to organize the outline separating them by subjects. After that, write the words, phrases and combine the sentences. Last, if you want to use someone else’s quotation, you can do it, but do not plagiarize. You cannot use a writers’ quotation without giving him/her the credit. It is not an honest mistake.

Now it is time to write and proofread the first draft. First, try to write as a reader: naturally, explaining the details and giving examples to be clear.
At the same time, combine the words, write the sentences, and arrange them in the correct paragraphs. In this process, you will notice that when you write, it is quite possible to change words or a whole sentence. Keep on writing, but try to be focused; do not go to peripheral subjects. Next, the title can be chosen after you have written the essay. At the same time, you can also think more about the hook and its connection with the conclusion.

The next step is to get feedback from your peers. Similarly, you can compare this step to that when you mixed the ingredients, and you should wait to taste this mixture. It means that it is time for you to send the first draft to a peer who is going to look at it and give you feedback. At this moment, an important thing is to be open minded. The constructive criticism is about your essay, not about you. When we write, it is easy to make mistakes. Most of the time, we read and reread, but we do not detect the errors. Thus, it is helpful when another person reads your essay and gives suggestions to improve it. Your friend, who now is your editor, will be like a pinch of salt in your recipe. He or she will not modify your essay. However, he/she can help by telling you if something is missing or suggesting a new ingredient to improve your dish.

In the next step, you will revise the first draft to write the final version; you will not write a new essay. Get to work! First, read the feedback you received. If your editor found grammatical errors, fix them because you cannot change salt for sugar. Otherwise, the taste will be different from the recipe. You must pay attention to the spelling, punctuation, and the use of expressions. Besides these corrections, you can use the suggestions to add or subtract a sentence, a word or a whole paragraph. Likewise, you have the option to read your editor’s feedback, and do nothing. However, if this is your best option, I advise you to read again because if he or she had doubts, your readers could too! In fact, the feedback cannot be seen as a hindrance to your writing process. See it as an expert cook giving you the best hint!

In conclusion, if you like to write, go ahead and good luck. Conversely, if you do not like it, or have difficulty, try to follow the steps above. They can be a guide to your next essay because learning to write might require two essential things – namely, practice and patience. In the same way, you should use a recipe to cook if you are not an expert in the kitchen. Recipes or guides like this exist to share the information with everyone.
The ELI newsletter is a bi-weekly publication of the English Language Institute that updates students on upcoming events and important dates. It invites students to participate in its publication process. It also includes news, trivia, quotes and reading suggestions. You may e-mail any suggestion to Laura Lamour at: llama001@fiu.edu.

The ELI newsletter is produced by ELI instructor Laura Lamour.

Photo Gallery: Valentine’s Dance