TESTING WRITING SKILL

5.1 Writing as a Skill:

Writing is one of the four basic language skills. A person cannot be an expert of a language without having mastered the four basic language skills, i.e. comprehension, speaking, reading and writing. Writing can be defined as visual representation of speech. As Lado (1961:248) suggests, "writing a foreign language as the ability to use the language and its graphic representation productively in ordinary writing situations". A person can write his native language without being able to create anything beautiful. So we cannot use mere creative power as a proof that a student knows how to write a foreign language. By writing a language we mean, the ability to use structure, lexical items, their conventional representation in ordinary writing.

5.1.1 Purpose of Writing:

Writing is often regarded as the visual representation of speech. But this is true only to the extent that speech sounds can be represented by some marks on paper. It is a well known fact that speech and writing are used in different situations hence, they serve different social functions. There are not many situations where we have a free
choice between speech and writing. In most cases we are obliged to use only one of these two modes of communication.

The situation where writing becomes the only choice is when the receiver of the communication is not physically present and writing has certain specific features to meet the exigencies of the situation. In face to face communication through speech, the physical presence of the speaker and the hearer makes it possible to supplement speech with other non-verbal signals such as facial expressions, body movements, stress, pitch etc. The speaker also gets sufficient feedback from the hearer to repeat a sentence, if necessary to make the message clear.

Since these advantages are not available with writing, other devices have to be used in order to compensate for them. Some of the obvious devices are: punctuation marks, paragraphing, use of capital or bold letters, underlining, italicising, use of various types of sentence connectors e.g., therefore, however, in other words, in short, finally etc., use of lexical words in place of modal verbs e.g., 'possible' in place of 'may'; use of different word orders etc. It is therefore, apparent that in order to communicate through writing one has to learn these conventions besides acquiring the ability to write the letters of the alphabet and spell the
words. Furthermore, writing does not come under the everyday use of language. Except professional people like journalists, writers, teachers etc. others have very few occasions to resort to this mode of communication. Due to these reasons writing is regarded as most difficult language skill to acquire.

5.1.2. **The Process of Writing**

The process of writing can be divided into three stages: manipulation, structuring and communication, which roughly corresponds to recognition, structuring and interpretation of meaning in reading.

'Manipulation' consists of the psycho-motor ability to form the letters of the alphabet. This is the most rudimentary stage of writing. For second language learners it is less problematic. For example, Indian students whose mother tongue does not use the Roman alphabet, the task of learning to write the letters should be comparatively easy. All they need to learn is to form these new letters.

Second stage is 'structuring'. In this stage the learner is required to organise the letters into words, and the words into phrases and sentences. This will be comparatively easy if writing is preceded by intensive oral work.
In that case the learner has only to produce the words and patterns he has learnt orally.

If these two were the only aspects of writing, the skill of writing would have developed almost automatically with the development of the oral skill. Everyone who understands and speaks his mother tongue would have been able to write it by simply learning the script. But, it is not true. Writing involves more than just these two aspects. It can be easily seen from the fact that most people, though they can speak the language perfectly well and can even write a beautiful hand cannot express themselves coherently in writing.

Communication in writing is the ultimate goal. At this stage the writer is able to select the appropriate structures and vocabulary in the overall context of the passage, keeping in view the subject matter and the reader.

5.13 Analysis of Writing:

We can analyse some of the components of the skill of writing. Here we may say that a person who can express himself in written language can:

a) write the letters of the alphabet at a reasonable speed;

b) spell the word correctly;

c) recall appropriate words and put them in sentences;
d) use appropriate punctuation marks;

e) link sentences with appropriate sentence and sequence signals;

f) organise thoughts and ideas in logical sequences and in suitable paragraphs around topic sentences;

g) evaluate the significance of a word or a sentence in the overall context of the written passage;

h) use the form and register appropriately for the subject matter and the audience.

Various Urdu scholars have analysed the writing system of Urdu. Such as Khan (1974), Narang (1990), Jafar Hasan (1940) etc. But they have analysed Urdu script from the point of view of reforms and modernization. Beg (1995a) has made the structural analysis of the Urdu script from the teaching point of view. In his other study (1995b) he has looked at the Urdu script from the point of view of its standardization.

5.2 Elements of Urdu Writing System:

5.2.1 Graphemes:

Urdu has Indo-Aryan base, but it derives its orthographical system from the Perso-Arabic Sources. As Beg (1995b:228) is of the view, "Urdu Script is an extended form of the Arabic
whose source can be traced back to Aramic script prevalent in ancient Syria. Arabic script, after making certain modifications was first used to write the Persian language in Iran. Thereafter, with some more modifications and reforms it came to be used for the Urdu language in India. Urdu script acquired several changes during the last phase of its development in India.

Originally, Arabic had 29 letters including 'hamza'. But when this script was adopted for writing Persian, few new letters representing four consonantal sounds, such as /p/, /t/ /q/ and /q/ were added to it. These letters were called 'pe', 'Ke', 'Ze' and 'gaf' respectively. Thus the total number of Persian script was raised from 29 to 33. These forms have also become a part of the Urdu script. When the same script was used to write Urdu in India, four more letters, viz. te, dal, re and bari ye were added to it. All these newly devised letters represent three retroflex sounds /t/ /d/ and /g/ and the vowel /e/ respectively.

As Beg (1995:228) suggest, "today, Urdu script comprises 36 letters excluding 'hamza'. But to many scholars and textbook writers of Urdu, the number of Urdu letters is 37 as they consider 'hamza' as a graphemic unit or grapheme and not
merely an orthographic sign or diacritical mark representing vowel sequences in Urdu.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing Arabic letters</th>
<th>New letters devised for Persian</th>
<th>New letters devised for Urdu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ب be</td>
<td>ب pe</td>
<td>ب te</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ج he</td>
<td>ج چ e</td>
<td>ج چ e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ر re</td>
<td>ر ژ e</td>
<td>ر ژ e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>د dal</td>
<td>د ژ gaf</td>
<td>د ژ gaf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ك kaf</td>
<td>ك ژ bar'i ye</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grapheme is the smallest unit of writing. In other words, various letters which are used to write script is known as graphemes. Urdu has 36 graphemes. These graphemes are arranged according to their shapes and not according to the sounds they represent. In Devnagari script letters are arranged according to the sounds they represent. Beg (1995:232), in his structural study of Urdu script, has enumerated the following main features of Urdu script:

1. It is read and written from right to left.
2. It has 'nastaliq' (a fine round hand) style of writing.
3. Its letters are arranged according to the similarity of shapes and not according to the similarity of sounds.

4. Many of its letters are homophonous.

5. Majority of its letters change their shapes and almost get shortened when combined with other graphemes in initial, medial and final positions.

6. Its diacritical marks are maintained while writing primers and preparing textbooks for lower levels but are generally avoided in scholarly books and print media (Newspapers, journals etc.).

7. Urdu script, to a great extent, preserves the original spellings of Perso-Arabic borrowings which sometimes do not conform to the phonetic norms of the Urdu language.

Following is the list of 36 Urdu graphemes:

ا ب ت ث ج ح د ذ ر س ش س ص ض ض س غ ف ق ک س ل م ن و ه ل س
5.2.2 **Allographs**:

When the graphemes of any script are used to write, it may or may not appear assume different shapes at initial, medial and final positions of the word. These various connected shapes of the same grapheme are known as the "allographs".

In Urdu script, there are eleven graphemes which do not change their shapes in connected writing. These are alif, dāl, dāl, zal, re, ṭe, ze, ṭe, vao, to and zo.

Following is the list of the Urdu graphemes with their allographs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graphemes</th>
<th>Allographs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. / ب /</td>
<td>'be'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. / ب /</td>
<td>'pe'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. / ت /</td>
<td>'te'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. / ت /</td>
<td>'te'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. / ث /</td>
<td>'se'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. / ج /</td>
<td>'jeem'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. / ج /</td>
<td>'je'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. / ح /</td>
<td>'he'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. / خ /</td>
<td>'xe:'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. / س /</td>
<td>'seen'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Graphemes | Allographs
---|---
11. /  lệnh | 'sheen'
12. / 顶端 | 'swad'
13. / 顶端 | 'zwad'
14. / 顶端 | 'ain'
15. / 顶端 | 'Gain'
16. / 顶端 | 'fe'
17. / 顶端 | 'gaf'
18. / 顶端 | 'kaf'
19. / 顶端 | 'gaf'
20. / 顶端 | 'lam'
21. / 顶端 | 'mim'
22. / 顶端 | 'noon'
23. / 顶端 | 'he'
24. / 顶端 | 'ye'
25. / 顶端 | 'bari ye'
26. / 顶端 | 'hamza'

5.2.3 Diacritical Marks:

Diacritical marks play an important role in Urdu writing System. According to Beg (1995), There are 18 diacritical marks in Urdu orthography. These diacritical marks are classified under consonantal, vocalic, nasal, genetiv categories. Some vowels are represented by
diacritical marks and some by the combination of diacritical mark and semi-vowels. The letter 'alif' is also used to represent a vowel. All diacritical mark accompany some letters.

'Hamza' is an orthographic symbol which is used for vowel sequence.

These diacritical marks are commonly used at the lower or primary levels of the teaching of Urdu language. The primary textbook writers deliberately use these diacritical marks. But at higher levels or in scholarly writings or in newspapers, journals etc. these are not used at all. At this stage, readers are able to read the text or passage correctly through the context. It may be noted that all these diacritical marks are placed either over or under a letter. The sign of marks such as Zabar, pesh, ʿulṭapesh, khaṛa alif, mad and hamza are always placed over the letters whereas zer, ṇaṛi zer are placed under the letters.

Teaching these diacritical marks for second language learners is very essential because for them, these prove to be very problematic unless these are taught to them properly. They should be able to recognise and memorise them at the initial stage. Without learning them they cannot read the passage correctly.
Beg (1995:231) has categorized the Urdu diacritical marks as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Orthographical form</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diacritical marks</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>a) Vocalic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Zabar (/a/ or Schwa = /ə/)</td>
<td>ː as in 'das'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Zer (/i/)</td>
<td>ū as in 'dill'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pesh (/u/)</td>
<td>ū as in 'dum'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. mad (/ā/)</td>
<td>ū as in 'ām'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Khaṇzabār (/ā/)</td>
<td>ū as in 'musa'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Khaṇa zer (/ī/)</td>
<td>ū as in 'īd'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ulṭa Pesh (/ū/)</td>
<td>ū as in 'ūr'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Ulṭajāzm (/a/ and au/)</td>
<td>ū as in 'sair', 'taur'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. hamza (vowel sequence)</td>
<td>ū as in 'āo'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b) Consonantal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. tashdid (gemination)</td>
<td>ū as in 'abba'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. dochashmi 'he' (aspiration)</td>
<td>ū as in 'hath'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. jazm (consonant cluster)</td>
<td>ū as in 'dard'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. tanvin (representing /n/)</td>
<td>ū as in 'fauran'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
c) Nasals:

14. nun-e-ghunna
   (nasalisation) as in \( \text{میں} \)

15. Ulta gaus
   (representing nasatization medially) as in \( \text{sap} \)

D) Genetive:

16. Izafat-e-zer as in \( \text{اکب وطن} \)

17. izafat-e-hamsa as in \( \text{بندہ خدا} \)

E) Others:

18. dash as in \( \text{کوشن} \)

5.3 Phoneme-Grapheme correspondence in Urdu:

Urdu spellings show many complications because some of its phonemes correspond by more than one graphemes. In Urdu, there is no one-to-one relationship between speech and writing. This dual, triple, or even four in some cases, existence of the letters which represent the same phonemes.
create the problem of learning Urdu orthography. It is very essential for the second language learners to memorize these phonemes and various orthographical signs to be able to read and write Urdu orthography correctly. There are five phonemes of Urdu which are represented by more than one graphemes. These are listed below to show the clear picture of phonemes, grapheme correspondence e.g.

1. /a/ -
   - alif = ٌ
   - ain = ُ

2. /t/ -
   - te = ُ
   - toe = ٌ

3. /s/ -
   - sin = ٍ
   - swad = ٌ
Similarly wao (٩) is represented by two phonemes, /v/ and /o/ as in (وقت) /vaqt/ 'time' and (كوت) /kot/ 'coat' respectively. Another consonantal phoneme ye (٠) is represented by two phonemes /y/ as in (ءار) /yar/ 'friend' and /i/ as in (لاذر) /dadi/ 'grand mother'.

Vowels are also represented by different phonemes or diacritic marks. As Beg (1983:562) is of the view, "there are eight vowels phonemes in Urdu. Of these, three are short and five are long. Their contrasts are given below:

1. /a/ /dar/ 'door'
2. /a:/ /daːr/ 'gallow'
3. /i/ /khil/ 'bloom' (imp.)
4. /l:/ /khi:l/ 'parched grain'
5. /u/ /dʊr/ 'pearl'
6. /u:/ /dʊ:r/ 'far'
7. /e/ /khel/ 'game'
8. /ə/ /khol/ 'open' (imp.)

These vowels represented variously in Urdu orthography. They have a variety of orthographic correspondences in Urdu which involve letters and certain orthographical signs.

As we noted earlier that Urdu has 36 letters or phonemes. The letters like Vaːo (٩) and چوٹی یے (٩) always represent vowels as well as semi-vowels. Alif (١) and بڑی یے (٩) always represent vowels. Ain (٩) and hamza (٩) which are basically consonants in Arabic orthography, represent vowels in Urdu. Another consonant called hae hawwaz (٩) in Urdu represents vowel when it occurs as haemukhtafi.

Orthographical signs which represent vowels in Urdu are eight in number. But they cannot be used alone. As Beg (1983:583) suggests, "they do not have the existence of their own unless they are accompanied by the letters representing consonants, vowels and semi-vowels".
These signs can be grouped into two categories, namely, primary and secondary, orthographical signs.

Primary orthographical signs do not take the help of vowels except alif in some cases, to represent vowel sounds. They occur with letters which represent consonants and semi-vowels. They also occur with hamza and alif. These signs are called zabar ( ) zer ( )- and pesh ( ) and represent the /a/, /i/ and /u/ respectively eg.

1. ﺔ /mal/ rub (imp.)
2. ﺔ /mil/ meet (imp.)
3. ﺔ /mul/ wine

Secondary orthographical signs are used with the letters which represent vowels and semi-vowels to represent vowel sound. These signs are called khaṣa alif, khari-zer, ulta-pesh, mad and hamza. The diacritical marks which represent these sounds are ( '), ( ' ) ( ' ) ( ' ) and ( ' ) respectively eg.

1. ﻉ /da:va/ 'claim'
2. ﻤ /mi:l/ 'mile'
3. \( ā \) /duːr/ 'far'

4. \( ː \) /aːm/ 'mango'

5. \( ː \) /aːo/ 'come' (imp.)

Khara-alif occurs with choṭi-ye and it represents vowel /aː/ in the words such as /muːsaː/ 'moses' /aːlaː/ superior'. Khara-alif also occurs with the letter mim as in the words like /rahmaːn/ (propername).

Khari-zer always occurs with choṭi ye representing the long vowel /iː/ at medial position, as in the word /iːd/ festival'.

Ulta-pesh occurs with 'vao' and it represents long vowel /u/.

'Mad' always occurs with alif at the initial position eg /aːj/ 'today', /aːm/ 'mango'.

As Beg (1983:564) suggests, "hamza is a very peculiar orthographical sign. It is a consonant in Arabic. The traditionalist count it as an Urdu alphabet but actually it is an orthographical sign and not a letter in Urdu. It occurs with vao, choṭi ye and baṛi ye to represent the vowel sounds /o/, /iː/ and /e/ respectively".
5.4 Techniques for Testing Writing Skill:

5.4.1 Completion Technique:

This technique can be used to test punctuation, spelling, vocabulary etc., objectively. It consists of providing an incomplete piece of writing and asking the candidate to complete it. For example, to test punctuation we leave out some of the items of punctuation, to test spelling we leave out a letter or letters, to test vocabulary we leave out a word or words from the sentence. But one thing is important that while making such a type of test, the context must be defined, unambiguously, the element that is missing.

5.4.1.1 Formation of Words by Supplying the Missing Graphemes:

It is based on completion technique. It is used to test candidate's ability to write the language correctly. This technique is very important and useful. To test the completion of graphemes, we omit the problem letters and define the word by context. We can also give a list of test words to students with omitted letters to complete and ask to supply the missing letters from the words. Here we have to give sufficient clues to them so that they may recognise the words correctly. Actually, through this method, we test whether the student is able to draw the shapes of a particular letter.
Q. Read the following sentences and supply the missing letter or letters.

1. کلا ہود بہو سبہ ہخ + وہ + وہ + وہ + وہ + وہ + پہ -

2. اس نے ہخ + - کلا ہخ -

3. سخ کے باہم + ر + ف کنوا ہخ -

4. ہخ + م + ی + ن پر آگے ہخ -

5. جانے ہخ + ل + م کرنا اٹھاٹہ ہخ -

وگیا ہخ پیپ کے + ر + و + ہخ +?

In the above questions, students are asked to supply the missing letters.

Another procedure could be to give the list of words with omitted letters and ask the students to supply the missing letters of the words.

Q. Read the following words carefully and supply the missing letters.

1. ر + و + و + ت 'necessity'

2. ک + ر 'to talk about'

3. ل + م 'tyranny'
This technique is very effective and easy. Through this technique we can test entire range of graphemes.

5.4.1.2 Combination of Graphemes:

Testing combination of graphemes can also be done by completion technique. In Urdu, as we know that most of its letters assume different shapes at initial, medial and final positions of the words, while they are written with other graphemes in connected writing. So knowledge of these various shapes of different graphemes of Urdu is very important to the learner of Urdu. Without the knowledge of these different shapes of Urdu graphemes they may not be able to write Urdu correctly.

Completion technique is the best method for testing the learner's knowledge of the combination of graphemes. These
tests, measure the knowledge of various allographic shapes of the graphemes. In other words we can say that testing the knowledge of combination of graphemes means that whether, the learner is able to combine letters to form words.

In this technique we select different words which are to be constructed by students by combining various individual letters. The task of the students is to write them as they are used to be written in their connected form. This procedure can be illustrated by the following examples.

Following is given a list of words in which each letter is written separately. Combine these letters to form words as given in the example.

Example: ٠ + ١ + ٢ = م + ر + س 'morning'

1. ٠ + ١ + ٢ = ٣ 'to talk'
2. ٠ + ٢ + ٢ = ٤ 'work'
3. ٦ + ٢ + ٠ = ٤ 'pen'
4. ٦ + ٢ + ٢ = ٤ 'shirt'
5. ٢ + ١ + ٢ = ٤ 'watch'
6. ٢ + ٠ + ٢ = ٤ 'book'
7. ٢ + ٠ + ٠ = ٤ 'paper'
8. ٢ + ٠ + ٠ = ٤ 'guava'
9. ٠ + ٢ + ٠ = ٤ 'poor'
10. ٠ + ٢ + ٠ = ٤ 'path or way'
This test of combination of graphemes is very effective to test the entire range of graphemes and their connected forms.

5.4.1.3 Spelling:

Spelling is an important aspect of writing. It can also be tested effectively through completion technique. In testing spellings, our aim is to test that whether learner is able to supply the appropriate graphemes.

To test the spelling we omit the letters from the word and the meaning of the word is determined through the context. The missing letter is supplied according to the correct meaning in the context. This method can be illustrated by the following example.

Q. Read the following sentences carefully and supply the missing letters.

1. 

(what do you drink when you are thirsty?)

2. 

(one feels very thirsty in summer)

3. 

(what is the time by your watch?)
A variation of this test may be that we supply the words to students, but omit some letters from them and ask them to supply the missing letters. Here we have to give appropriate clues in order to understand the exact word eg.

Q. Read the following words carefully and supply the missing letters to them.

1. _ + ل + م 'pen'
2. ك + ست + 'shirt'
3. ب + ت + أ 'water'
4. د + س + ت 'inkpot'
5. ك + ت + ب 'book'

Another procedure would have been that we give a list of words to the students which begins with homophonous letters (the letter represented by more than one grapheme) and ask to supply the missing letter eg.

Select the appropriate letter given in the brackets in order to form the correct words.

1. (ن، ش، ط) _ + ف + ر
2. (ت، ن، ر) _ + ك + ر
3. (ش، ن، ط) _ + ل + م
4. (ت، ط) ا + و + س +

Another technique for testing the spelling is to construct multiple choice test. In which a particular word
is written in four types of spelling. Out of which only one is correct. The student is asked to tick the word with correct spelling.

Example:

Q. Tick the correct word from the following:

a) 

b) 

c) 

Q. Tick the correct word from the following:

a) 

b) 

c) 

5.4.1.4 Diacritical Marks:

Diacritical marks play an important role in Urdu orthography. As we have discussed at the beginning of this chapter, there are 18 diacritical marks in Urdu. The knowledge of these signs is very essential because various signs such as, Jamation, consonant clusters, tanveen (representing /n/), izafat etc are indicated by these diacritical marks. So, the knowledge of these signs is
very essential for the learner who is learning Urdu as a second language. Although these diacritical marks are not used at higher levels, such as, in standard books, daily newspapers, journals etc. But at the initial level, the knowledge of these signs is very important otherwise one cannot read the Urdu orthography correctly.

To test the knowledge of various diacritical marks, completion technique is very effective.

To test the knowledge of various diacritical marks, we give different words or sentences to the students without using diacritical marks and ask them to put the necessary signs on them. This can be illustrated by the following examples.

Q. Read the following sentences carefully and put the necessary diacritical marks on them.

1. میرے سالوں کے بعد ایک بار ایک دورے دوسرے پر بھی گئے ہوں؟
2. آج دوھے پنے پینے کا نہ تنها کام؟
3. ہمیں پانی لیں؟ خطرناک بہنارہ ہے?
4. نظر سنبھی ہونے اور پسندیدہ ہوئے؟
Q. Read the following words carefully and put necessary diacritical marks on them.

1. نشر دولت
2. خاک وطن
3. صبراً دل
4. بالرتب
5. حب الوطن
6. لوى عُل
7. نسبنا
8. عکاسی

Q. Put the zer, zabar and pesh on the following words.

1. رک
2. دول
3. در

Q. Put the jarnation appropriately on the following words.

A) (a) کتاب
   (b) کتا
   (c) کوا
B) (a) بل
   (b) بل
   (c) بی