

# Writing Activity

## Overview:

Learner Audience & Level: High-intermediate to advanced

UT students of Russian, 5th semester

Activity Type: Writing as a main skill (2-step product)

Activity Goals: To practice description in the format of an informal letter

Sub-skills needed: vocabulary (house, home, positioning in space), grammar (past tense, perfective aspect), informal register, personal letter format

## Activity:

- Pre-writing Activities

Students work in groups of 2-3 people. The assignment is to create a mind map of concepts related to an apartment or a house (furniture, rooms, appliances). Ask the students to use adjectives that would go with nouns (e.g.: spacious kitchen, large windows, wooden floors). Ask students to include words and phrases describing the positioning of objects with respect to each other (e.g.: to the right of, in the middle) - (10 min).

Note: A lot of examples of creative mind maps can be found here [[http://images.google.com/images?client=safari&rls=en&q=Mind+Map&oe=UTF-8&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=JfsKSpHyE5eqtqfqtKHFAg&sa=X&oi=image\\_result\\_group&resnum=4&ct=title](http://images.google.com/images?client=safari&rls=en&q=Mind+Map&oe=UTF-8&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=JfsKSpHyE5eqtqfqtKHFAg&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&resnum=4&ct=title)]. The teacher can print a couple of them to encourage students to be more creative with their mind maps.

The teacher asks students about the difference between formal and informal letters in Russian. At this level, students are expected to know something about it already. The discussion serves as a reminder of register in Russian. It can also include small punctuation differences between Russian and English letters, which students often overlook. - (10 min).

- During Writing Activity (30 min + at home)

Students are given assignment sheets. On the first page, there is a picture of an apartment complex with a small description of apartments available there. The picture and the description are both taken from Internet, which provides authenticity. The description has been shortened a little and contains only the most relevant and accessible information. On the second page, there is a plan of one of the apartments. The rooms are furnished.

A student assignment is to write a letter to a friend describing a new apartment that he/she has just acquired. The letter has to include the description of the building, the apartment and the way it has been furnished. Students can be asked to start with describing a building and its location in class and continue working on the description of the apartment at home.

The students turn in their drafts first. Although grammar is not the focal point of this activity, the major grammar errors are corrected using codes. For instance, 1 stands for number, 3 - for case, etc. The codes can be developed by the instructor and used throughout the semester. On a separate sheet, the instructor writes his/her feedback about the content and vocabulary used and gives some suggestions about how to improve it. The drafts are not graded.

- Post-writing/Re-writing Activities

After the students got their draft back, they rewrite it at home and turn the rewrites in the next class. Rewrites are assigned holistic grade for content, vocabulary and grammar.

## **Reflective Statement on Writing**

The pre-writing activity serves as a warm-up for the during-writing activity. The students activate the vocabulary that they will use for their writing. Warm-up activity is an important step that is sometimes missing in a foreign language classroom. Any kind of activity needs to be a set (!).

The during-writing activity incorporates the idea of giving students a real-life assignment. Writing letters is something that they need to be able to do. And once they know that they can write a letter to a friend in a foreign language, they might as well try to do it outside of a classroom. The ability to describe things is also a useful skill that can be used in a variety of situations.

The point of using codes for grammar errors is to make students reflect on the errors they made and engage them in editing instead of just giving them correct answers. As for the feedback, it is important to start it with a positive comment. That facilitates a student's self-esteem and increases motivation. Then the instructor can identify a few the main problems, but should not try to list all of them. It is a good practice to write the feedback on a separate sheet of paper instead of trying to squeeze your comments in between lines of on the margins. Students are more likely not to read small illegible writing.

## Сочинение (Composition/writing assignment)

Двукомнатная квартира в новом жилом комплексе.



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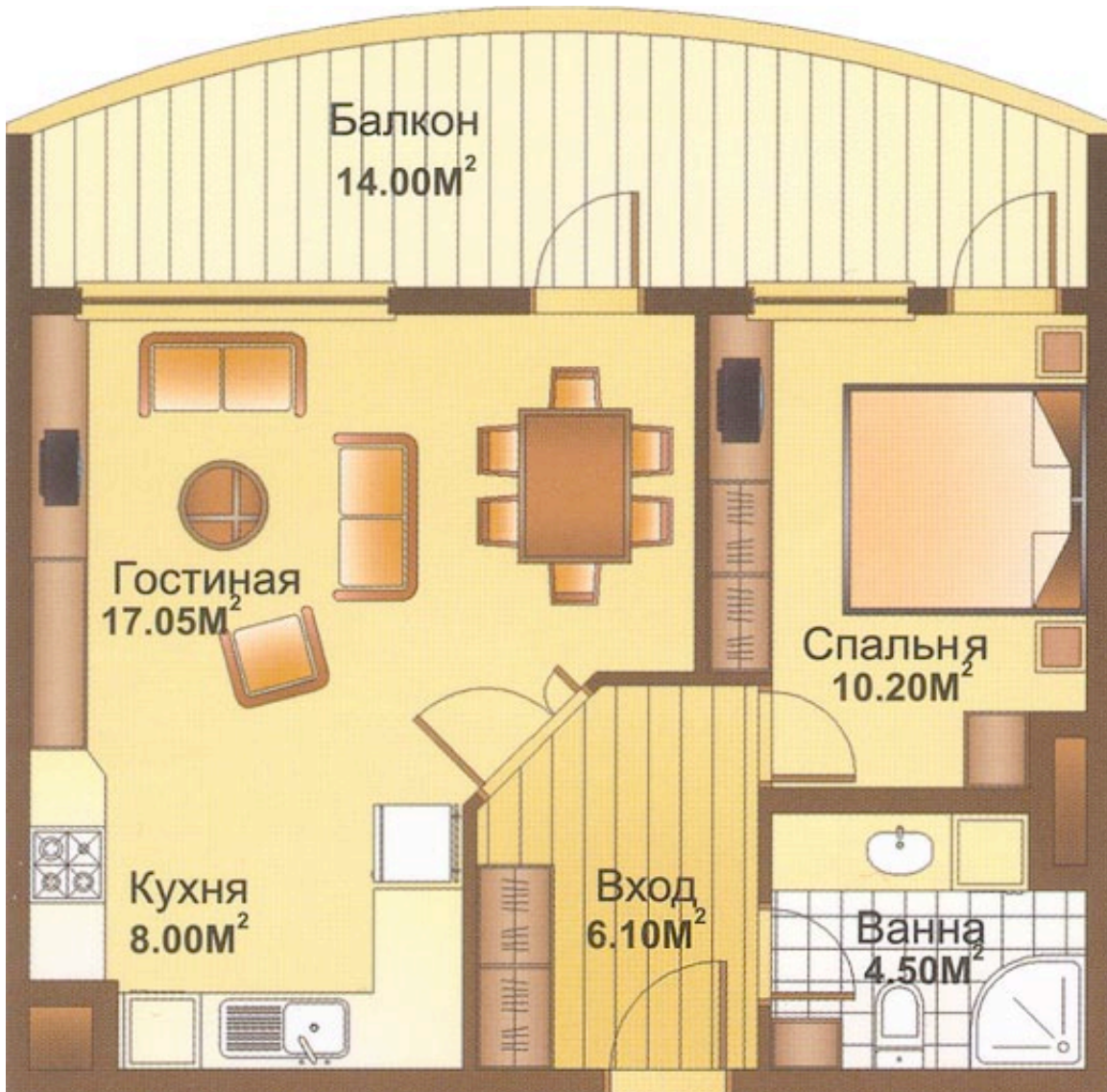
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В комплексе два подземных уровня авто парковки.

You have just acquired this two-room apartment in the new apartment complex. Write a letter to your friend describing the buiding, the apartment and the way you have furnished it. Be creative, tell you friend how happy or unhappy you are with your new place and why.



1+1 (46 м<sup>2</sup>)