

Teaching Task

In July 2023 I was part of a teaching team at the University of Monastir, Tunisia, North Africa (Southern Mediterranean). My task was to coach the writing in English of the technical publications of Ph.D. candidate students in the sciences. English was their third language, after Arabic in the city and French in the University. That year I had to make lesson plans and PowerPoint files immediately prior to the day of delivery. I had the students submit writing samples so that I could spot blemishes in their English. I also offered to review manuscripts destined for publication in the scientific journals to clean up any blemishes. (See <http://www.edholroyd.info/TripReports/2023Tunisia/TeachingTask.pdf>.)



For July 2024 I returned to the same task and classroom in Monastir. This time I had additional preparation. I took, for the second time, the 12-week course “Encountering the World of Islam” to better understand that culture (<https://encounteringmuslims.org/>). I participated in revising our textbook for writing in English. Then I was able to create the two weeks of PowerPoint lectures two months in advance. That let me spend more time evaluating the writing samples, prepared by the students during the final ten minutes of each class period. I returned their samples with my correction marks the next day.



The previous photos are of the two morning classes of science graduate students. I shared these classes with Greg, who coached them in speaking English, as if at a scientific conference.

This time I also transcribed their hand-written samples into my word processing files (sometimes with their errors, sometimes with my corrections) every day. For each of the fifty students I inserted a small photo of them beside the accumulation of their transcribed samples. Some students wrote much, others wrote little.

During the Summer and through the Winter I was able to offer clean-up suggestions for six manuscripts, sending the corrections and some explanations back to the students. During the Spring I created a PDF file “Cleanup.pdf” that listed all of the manuscript errors, classified and organized by type. For each error I copied the context of the error, highlighting the error in red. I then duplicated that context sample but with the corrections in green. I explained the nature of the correction in blue. I also described typical word processor tools that the students should use to reduce the need for peer corrections. That 10-page file is posted on my website at <http://www.edholroyd.info/Monastir/Cleanup.pdf> for anyone wanting to learn from those mistakes.

This year Greg and I had the additional task of coaching the English of **medical doctors** at the Faculty of Medicine within the university system. The starting time was supposed to be 11:45 and lasting for two hours, first for writing and then for speaking English. The doctors had other duties, and so their arrival times varied. Some were present for only the first day, some for the first week. Only two doctors from the first week were there at some time for all three weeks. Two more doctors were present for only the last two weeks. As it turned out, the English of most of these doctors was excellent. They did not really need the materials prepared for the science students. So the last week we gave them conversational speaking practice. Photos of some of them:



Unexpected Opportunity:

During the last week, Dr. Sana Nosbahi (left photo) took me to the sixth floor of the major hospital nearby to show me an empty room that she wanted to transform into a safe place to change the bandages of burned children. We also



visited the adjacent neonatal rooms. Then we met with the Chief of the Department of Pediatric Surgery and another doctor and I showed them a PowerPoint that I had hastily assembled about what the organization Project C.U.R.E. (www.projectcure.org) could provide to equip and modernize the facilities of the entire hospital. After an initial needs assessment visit, costing \$4K, each shipment of a 40-foot container costs about \$25K. It is packed tightly with \$300K to \$400K worth of donated medical equipment and supplies that are entirely free to the receiving hospitals and clinics. That value/cost ratio is very attractive. At the time of this writing Dr. Sana is in contact with the headquarters of Project C.U.R.E. to investigate the possibilities.



Photos of the hospital, vacant room, and neonatal room; beds for burned children.



This year at my request, the university moved an empty chest freezer into my classroom. I equipped it with components for my “Instant Snowstorm” demonstration, first performed in the laboratory of Nobel winner Dr. Irving Langmuir by his assistant Vincent J. Schaefer in Summer 1946. I learned how to do this directly from Dr. Schaefer in 1961 at the age of 16. I repeatedly made it snow in the classroom before the students, generating billions of sparkling snow crystals with each snow shower. I projected a greatly magnified image of a small freezer volume onto the classroom wall to be viewed by those who were not then gathered around the freezer. The following images were captured from various videos of the demonstration.



Examining the snow crystals.

Feeding the snow crystals.



Camera view of snow crystals. The vertical objects are a string and a twig that serve as camera focusing targets.



Camera view of snow crystals projected onto a cluttered classroom wall.

Instructions for this demonstration are at <http://www.edholroyd.info/snowstorm/>.

Daily Writing Sample Topics:

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|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Your science studies | 6. Tunisia’s marketable resources |
| 2. Your research project subject | 7. French protectorate to nation |
| 3. Report Introduction | 8. The angel visit to Mohammed |
| 4. Report Abstract | 9. Jasmine Revolution / Arab Spring |
| 5. A Weekend in Tunisia | 10. Course evaluation |

By the first four the students introduce themselves and their research. For those highlighted in blue they could write about their country and its history. Topic 8 is about the start of Islam. Topic 5 let the students brag about their country as a place to visit. I extracted from their recommendations into a 5-page document now posted at <http://www.edholroyd.info/Monastir/WeekendPromotions.pdf>.

Topic 6 **Resource** entries included:

Tunisia is a **tourism** destination for Europeans, having warm **beaches** in Winter. Locals use the beaches in Summer for cooling refreshment. Tunisia markets an abundance of the world’s best **olive oil**. It has other fruit and vegetable crops. **Tuna** has been a significant export and still is a major component of local cuisine. Tunisia has a major **phosphate** mine, useful for fertilizer and other products. It also exports **salt** for roadway snow melt in Europe.



Potential for solar energy is immense.



The response to topic 8, “The angel visit to Mohammed”, was a surprise. This is about the very start of the Islam faith and is a true story. The lecture for the day was about summarizing and paraphrasing. I suggested, “You know it in Arabic. Summarize it for me in English.” A great many of the students grumbled about the topic; they did not know that story. It is written in 5 locations in the Hadiths, Islam’s scriptures secondary to the Quran. I even posted on the screen those source details, enabling the students to look up the passages on the Internet. Even so, most students wrote very little of the story, a few got the major features correctly stated, a few were totally wrong. I was not evaluating on correctness of content but was instead watching for English blemishes in whatever they wrote. One student chose the option to write about something else and correctly told the story of the angel Gabriel’s visit to Mary the future mother of Jesus. This outcome appears to suggest that these students are mostly cultural Muslims, not really knowing their own Scriptures. Similarly, in the Western cultures are mostly cultural and nominal Christians, not knowing or following the Bible teachings leading to Jesus.

You can read the original versions of the story yourself. Search for these passages on the Internet and get the English version. Note that words in (parentheses) are not in the Arabic but were added for understanding.

Bukhari Volume 1, Book 1, Number 3;

Bukhari Volume 4, Book 55, Number 605;

Bukhari Volume 6, Book 60, Number 478;

Bukhari Volume 9, Book 87, Number 111;

Muslim Book 001, Number 0301

All were dictated by Aisha, a later wife of Mohammed. Khadija was his wife at the time of the angel visit.

Waraqa was a relative; note his qualifications. Some things to ponder: Note that the original name given for the angel by Waraqa (who did not see the angel) was Namus; someone later changed it to the Arabic version of Gabriel. While the real Gabriel in the Biblical books of Daniel and Luke was a gentle angel, proclaiming “Do not be afraid!”, the angel appearing to the Mohammed showed the opposite brutality, intentionally causing fear. There is another named angel in the Bible with such a character, with additional attributes of liar and killer. Note also the claim that the angel appeared to Moses, but the Bible has no record of that. (In Jude 9 the angels Michael and Satan (devil) dispute over the body of Moses, a story not present elsewhere in the Bible.) So should anyone trust the Quran teachings of the angel that appeared to Mohammed? They are likely a mix of truth and errors.

By Dr. Ed Holroyd
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