

Teaching Writing Skills



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Essential Principles for the Teaching of Writing

- 1. Language teaching prepares students for real-life interaction – writing tasks should reflect real-life/ plausible communication.**
- 2. L2 writing can have the same wide range of purposes as L1 writing.**
- 3. L2 writing should be taught systematically, not as a random thing used here and there only as a support task.**

Essential Principles for the Teaching of Writing

4. All students have **the ability to learn to write**. Teachers of writing believe all students can develop their writing skills by providing their students with **high-quality instruction** and **personalized support**.
5. Writing is a process. Teachers of writing guide students throughout **the writing process**, **offering meaningful feedback** that encourages revision and editing, which seeks to **strengthen their writing** rather than pointing out **errors**.
6. Writing is **a tool for thinking**. When students write, they discover things about themselves and the world that they may not have known prior to writing. As they write, **they make new discoveries, explore questions, and find meaning in the thoughts and ideas** they create for themselves and others.

Essential Principles for the Teaching of Writing

7. Writing follows **a developmental process**. The developmental process of writing follows discrete stages, where students progress in **age** and from one **phase** to the next. Each phase requires the acquisition of one set of skills, building on skills acquired at an earlier phase.

8. There are **many effective ways to teach students to write**. Teachers of writing should become **well versed in writing theories, research, and best practices**. They realize that ongoing professional development and collaboration with other teachers aids their knowledge about the teaching of writing.

Essential Principles for the Teaching of Writing

9. Writing should be **integrated into all curriculum areas**. Students require **many opportunities** to write in diverse academic settings, offering them the tools and practice necessary to write effectively for a variety of **purposes, audiences, and contexts**.

10. **Writing and reading are interrelated**—Reading different text styles often helps students improve their writing. Similarly, the act of writing assists students in becoming better readers.

11. Teachers of writing **should write themselves**—Through their own writing and personal reflection, writing teachers **understand the complexity of the writing process and are better able to support the needs of their students**.

Essential Principles for the Teaching of Writing

12. Recognize that writing is **challenging and takes time**. Students understand that the **writing process requires persistence** and the commitment to persevere as they explore ideas, topics, or a challenging task.

13. Realize **the connection between the writer and the reader**. Students must think about their **audience** and customize their writing to fit their **readers**. When writing, students should consider how much information their audience knows, if they will agree or disagree, and what the reader will do with the information.

14. Experience high-quality literature. When students realize the power of another's writing, they **understand how others use their words to convey information and ideas, persuade an audience, and evoke emotion**.

Essential Principles for the Teaching of Writing

- ▶ Convey their **thoughts and ideas freely**. Students have both the opportunity and responsibility of sharing their ideas in thoughtful and creative ways.
- ▶ **Receive meaningful, positive, and timely feedback** about their writing. Students' writing assignments require frequent individualized feedback from their writing teachers.
- ▶ Enjoy opportunities to **choose their writing topics**. While engaging in a variety of writing assignments and projects, students should **have as much choice as possible in selecting their own topics and all other aspects of their writing**.

Essential Principles for the Teaching of Writing

15. Compose writing using varied modalities and technologies. Students require support as they write use tools to write—paper, pen, word processing, and other digital technologies—and become independent in the modalities and technologies that best fit their needs.

Teaching Writing Skills

Principles of Teaching Writing in regard to Writing Instruction Methods

Students write better when:

- a) they take ownership of their own writing.**
- b) they are provided with prior knowledge or experience of a subject matter.**
- c) they are taught how to evaluate/revise their own story to make it better aligned to objectives.**
- d) they are given a focus or specific writing task.**
- e) they are allowed to work in small group activities to prepare them for a writing assignment.**
- f) they self- select their writing.**

Teaching Writing Skills

Principles of Teaching Writing in regard to Follow-up Teaching

Students write better when:

- g) they are provided with clear, honest and positive feedback, in accordance with clear goals, by their peers and teachers.
- h) they are taught how to evaluate their own writing based on specified objectives.

Principles of Teaching Writing in regard to Teaching-learning Contents

Students write better when:

- i) they are given a chance to explore a set of data in relation to what they will be writing about.

Teaching Writing Skills

- j) They are taught how to extend or elaborate on an idea/ sentence/ point.**
- k) They are taught how to edit a piece of writing based on specific criteria.**
- l) Students tend to write better when they prepare their work and back-up their data with research done through self-questioning to clarify all doubts they have before writing begins.**
- m) Children write better when they write about something that interests them.**

Writing tasks

Writing tasks in the foreign language classroom typically fall into **one of two possible categories**: **writing as support skill** and **writing as main skill**. Both are appropriate pedagogical tools, as long as both are included in the lesson plan. When designing a writing task, follow these simple steps:

1. Make sure that your assignment is appropriate for the learners' language level.
2. Select level-appropriate writing purpose.
3. Decide on writing as a support skill or as a main skill.
4. Identify sub-skills students need in order to complete the main task.
5. Design activity set that prepares sub-skills.
6. Guide students through pre-, during-, and post-writing activities.

Writing tasks

These points are important to consider in order to design more effective writing tasks that:

- 1. fulfill the pedagogical purposes of the assignment (e.g., do not say that the task practices narration when all it does is drill the past tense),**
- 2. reflect pedagogically sound practices (e.g., the process approach to writing, effective feedback, etc.),**
- 3. can be successfully completed by the students (i.e., the sub-skills that they need have been reviewed and/or learned),**
- 4. have a meaningful learning outcome (e.g., help students learn something they can actually use, either to support another skill area or to communicate in plausible/authentic L2 situations).**

Teaching writing

The writing skill has finally been recognized as an important skill for language learning.

The reasons for teaching writing to students of English as a foreign language include reinforcement, language development, learning style, and most importantly, writing as a skill in its own right”

Writing instruction has become a field of increasing interest at higher learning institutions in recent years. There have been numerous approaches to the teaching of writing in the history of language teaching and these have led to several paradigm shifts in the field.

The importance of writing

Clay (1983) claimed that writing as a skill is very paramount for many reasons.

The first reason is that writing involves much more than the transcription of speech.

The second reason for focusing on writing is that it is in attempting to communicate in the new mode that students most effectively discover and master the relationship between speech and written text.

The third reason is that writing is a surer way than reading into mastering the written code.

The importance of writing

Another importance for writing is that **writing is more than speech written down in another sense**. Although saying it first and then writing it down may be the way in which students first learn to write, they very quickly discover that the **two modes of communication are organized on different principles**.

Writing is thus potentially a powerful means of developing one's own understanding of the topic about which one is writing.

Approaches in Teaching Writing

There are different approaches to teaching writing in ESL/EFL. They are actually complementary (Badger & White 2000). According to Rimes (1983), there is no one adequate approach, as there are different teaching and learning styles. Silva (1990) categorises the teaching of writing into four types: **controlled composition**, **current traditional rhetoric**, the **process approach** and **English for academic purposes**. Other approaches are proposed, e.g. controlled-to free; free-writing; paragraph pattern; grammar syntax organisation and the communicative approach (Hyland, 2002; Ramies, 1983; Tribble, 1996; Williams, 2005).

Cohen (1990) and Brown (2001) classify these approaches as '**product and process**' approaches. Badger and White (2000) also include **the genre approach**, together with the previously mentioned approaches. However, these are the most common classifications.

Teaching Writing

Brown (2001: 336) states that writing is a thinking process, a writer produces a final written product based on their thinking after the writer goes through the thinking process. In addition, Brown quotes **Elbow** (1973: 14-16) as saying that writing should be thought of as an organic, developmental process . . . not as a way to transmit a message but as a way to grow and cook a message.

The teaching of writing in ESL/EFL has seen dramatic changes in the last 20 years that have led to paradigm shifts in the field. There have, over time, been numerous approaches to the teaching of writing. In recent years however, there has been emphasis and debate on the differences between **three major approaches** - the **product-based approach**, the **process-based approach** and the **genre-based approach**. Such debate very often generates conflicting views of teaching writing.

The Product Approach

A product approach is “a traditional approach in which students are encouraged to mimic **a model text**, is usually presented and analyzed at an early stage” (Gabrielatos, 2002: 5). For example, in a typical product approach-oriented classroom, students are supplied with a standard sample of text and they are expected to follow the standard to construct a new piece of writing.

Theoretical Underpinning

BEHAVIORISM: Learning is a mechanical process or habit formation.
The basic exercise technique is pattern practice.

The product approach focuses on writing tasks in which the learner imitates, copies and transforms teacher supplied models, it focuses on the steps involved in creating a piece of work. (Nunan, 1999)

The Product Approach

The product approach to writing usually involves **the presentation of a model text**, which is discussed and analyzed. According to this model text **learners construct a similar or a parallel text**.

This might seem **a mechanical task**; however, learners can discover the structure of the given discourse, its linguistic features and how its ideas are organized.

The Product Approach

During **the audio-lingualism era**, language classes downplayed the role of writing since writing was seen as only a **supporting skill**. ESL writing classes thus only focused on **sentence structures** as a support for the grammar class.

The product approach was used in order to **highlight form and syntax** and the emphasis was on **rhetorical drills** (Silva, 1990).

Students using the product approach are normally told to write an essay **imitating a given pattern**. Generally the focus of such writing is on the written product rather than on how the learner should approach the process of writing.

The product approach comprises of four stages (**Steele**, 2004).


Stage one: Students study model texts and then the features of the genre are highlighted. For example, if studying a formal letter, students' attention may be drawn to the importance of paragraphing and the language used to make **formal requests**. If a student reads a story, the focus may be on the techniques used to make the story interesting, and students focus on where and how the writer employs these techniques.

Stage two: This stage consists of controlled practice of the highlighted features, usually in **isolation**. So if students are studying a formal letter, they may be asked to practise the language used to make formal requests, for example, practising the 'I would be grateful if you would...' structure.

Stage three: This is the most important stage where the ideas are organized. Those who favor this approach believe that the organization of ideas is more important than the ideas themselves and as important as the control of language.

Stage four: This is the end product of the learning process. Students choose from the choice of comparable writing tasks. To show what they can be as fluent and competent users of the language, students individually use the skills, structures and vocabulary they have been taught to produce the product.

Strengths and weaknesses of the product approach

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Easy to use with large classes.• Easier to grade because emphasis is on form.• Useful approach when form is important.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limits Creativity

The Product Approach

Writing is viewed as “mainly concerned with the knowledge about **the structure of language**, and writing development is mainly the result of **the imitation of input**, in the form of texts provided by the teacher” (Badger and White, 2000: 154). It is therefore **teacher-centred**, as the teacher becomes the arbiter of the models used (see Brakus, 2003).

Proponents of the product approach argue that it enhances students’ writing proficiency. Badger and White (2000: 157), for example, state that writing involves linguistic knowledge of texts that learners can **learn partly through imitation**.

The Product Approach

The product approach, often referred to as “the current-traditional rhetoric”, however, suffers from a number of strong criticisms that have led teachers and researchers to reassess the nature of writing and the ways writing is taught.

Arndt (1987: 257-67) argues the importance of models used in such an approach not only **for imitation** but also **for exploration and analysis**. **Myles** (2002) further argues that, “if students are not exposed to native-like models of written texts, their errors in writing are more likely to persist”. **Pincas** (1982 cited in Badger and White, 2000: 157) focused on the appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax and cohesive devices.

The Product Approach

Prodromou (1995: 21) for example, argues that it devalues “the learners’ potential, both linguistic and personal.” The outcome of the re-assessment is the writing-as-process movement, which has led the field toward a paradigm shift, revolutionising the teaching of writing.

Product Writing:

Pincas (1982, cited in Badger & White, 2000) realizes learning as assisted imitation, and adopts many techniques (e.g. substitution tables), where learners respond to a stimulus provided by the teacher. **However**, her comment that, at the stage of free writing, students should feel as if they are **creating something of their own** suggests a view of **learners as being ready to show rather more initiative**.

In short, **product-based approaches** see writing as mainly **concerned with knowledge about the structure of language, and writing development** as mostly the result of the imitation of input, in the form of texts provided by the teacher.

The Process Approach

Since 1980's process approach has been used more than product (see Applebee, or Rogers, 2012) since it emphasizes **the composing process** rather than **the form**.

The process approaches focus on **how a text is written** instead of the **final outcome**. As noted in Hyland (2003), the process approaches have a major impact on understanding the nature of writing and the way writing is taught.

Research on writing processes has led to viewing writing as **complex and recursive** – not linear. The process approach, therefore, emphasises the importance of **a recursive procedure** of **prewriting, drafting, evaluating and revising**.

The Process Approach

The pre-writing activity would involve introducing techniques that help the students discover and engage a topic. Instead of turning in a finished product right away, students are asked for multiple **drafts** of a work.

After discussion and feedback from readers, the learners would revise the drafts.

Rewriting and revision are integral to writing, and editing is an on-going multi-level process. The multiple draft process thus consists of: **generating ideas** (pre-writing); writing a first draft with an emphasis on content (to discover meaning/ author's ideas); second and third (and possibly more) drafts to revise ideas and communication of those ideas.

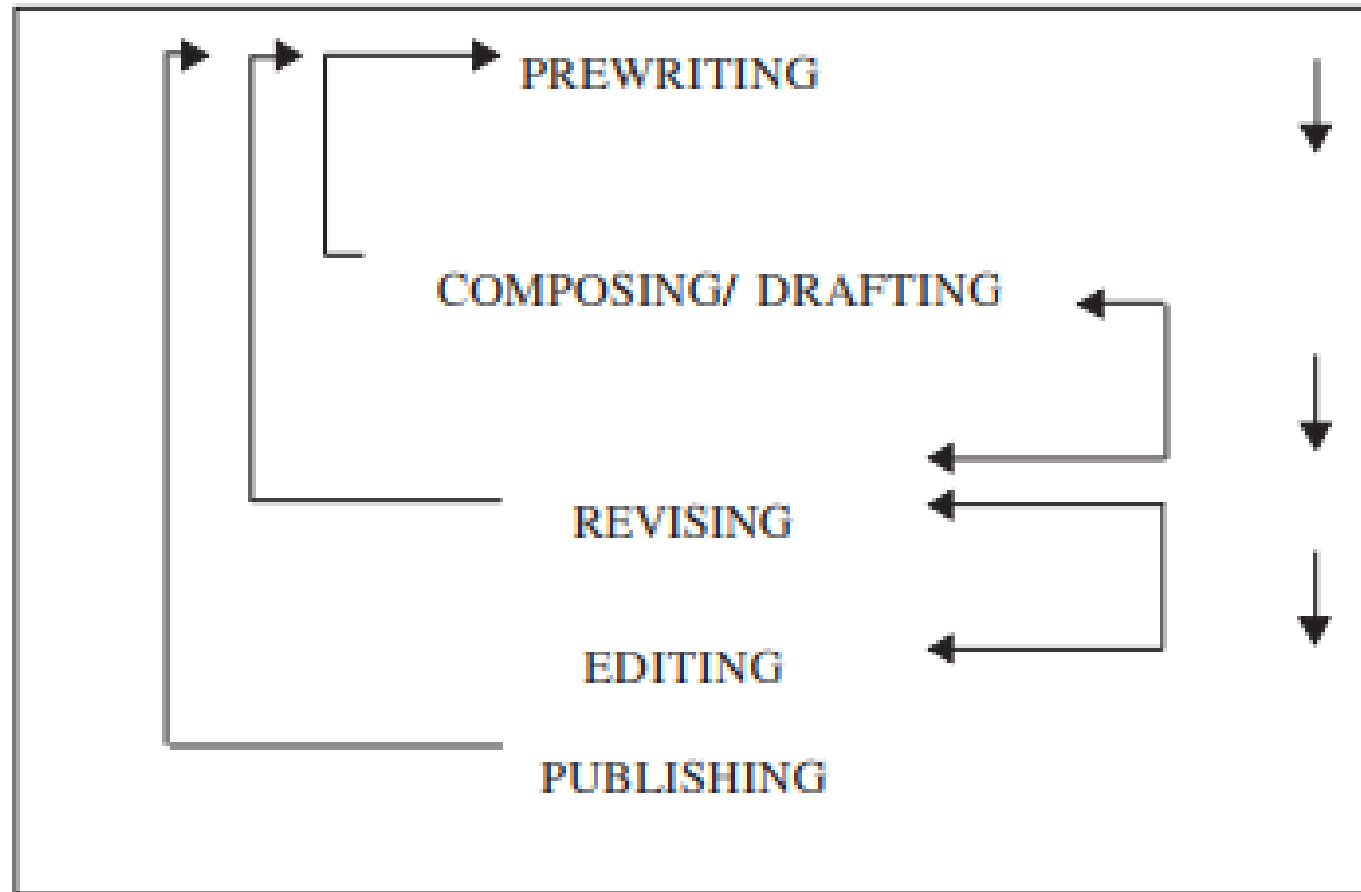
The Process Approach

In writing classrooms that follow such process model, the central elements are the writer, the content and the purpose, and multiple drafts.

The teacher in a process-approach classroom becomes the facilitator. In such classrooms, writing is essentially learnt, not taught. Providing input or stimulus for learners is perceived as unimportant, since the teacher's task is only to facilitate the exercise of writing skills and draw out the learners' potential. The process approach is thus learner-centred.

The Process Approach

The following is a diagram taken from [Tribble \(1996\)](#), illustrating the recursive and unpredictable process of writing.



The Process Approach

As a recursive model, the process approach focuses on **revision**, in response to **feedback** that is obtained from readers.

Feedback is seen as essential, functioning as **an input** that prompts the revision of texts. As mentioned by **Keh** (1990), “what pushes the writer through the writing process onto the eventual end-product is **reader feedback** on the various drafts.” Among the major kinds of feedback leading to revision are: **peer-feedback; feedback from conferences; and teachers’ comments** as feedback.

Process Approach

In the Process approach, learners are looked upon as central in learning, so that learners' **needs, expectations, goals, learning styles, skills and knowledge** are taken into consideration.

Through the writing process, learners need to make the most of their abilities such as knowledge and skills by utilizing the appropriate **help and cooperation of the teacher and the other learners**. It encourages learners to **feel free to convey their own thoughts** or feelings in written messages by providing them with plenty of time and opportunity to reconsider and revise their writing and at each step seek assistance from outside resources like the instructor.

Process Approach

Hence the process approach tends to focus more on **varied classroom activities** which promote the development of language use: brainstorming, group discussion and rewriting.

The writing process usually involves several steps. A typical sequence is comprised of **three steps**: prewriting, drafting, and, revising. Some sequences, however, use **four steps**, such as thinking, planning, writing, and editing, while others use **five steps**, prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and evaluating. In other words, each writer has a preferred way of approaching the writing process, from simpler to more complex **depending on the level of the learners, and the purpose of writing**.

Process Approach

These steps generally are implemented **in sequence**, but in process writing the writing process is **not necessarily a linear learning process**, rather more of **a recursive or spiraling process** as the learners move around these steps, sometimes **going forward and retracing their steps**.

For example, brainstorming, one skill that is important particularly for the prewriting step, can be exercised again and again at different stages **if the learner needs new ideas** later in the process. **Learners can achieve their writing goals through the process in different ways.**

Process Approach

The Process Approach Model comprises of **eight stages** (Steele, 2004):

Stage one (Brainstorming): This is generating ideas by brainstorming and discussion. Students could be discussing the qualities needed to do a certain job.

Brainstorming can be carried out as mind-mapping diagrams.

Process Approach

Stage two (Planning/Structuring): Students exchange ideas into note form and judge quality and usefulness of the ideas.

Stage three (Mind mapping): Students organize ideas into a mind map, spidergram, or linear form. This stage helps to make the hierarchical relationship of ideas which helps students with the structure of their texts.

Stage four (Writing the first draft): Students write the first draft. This is done in the class frequently in pairs or groups.

Process Approach

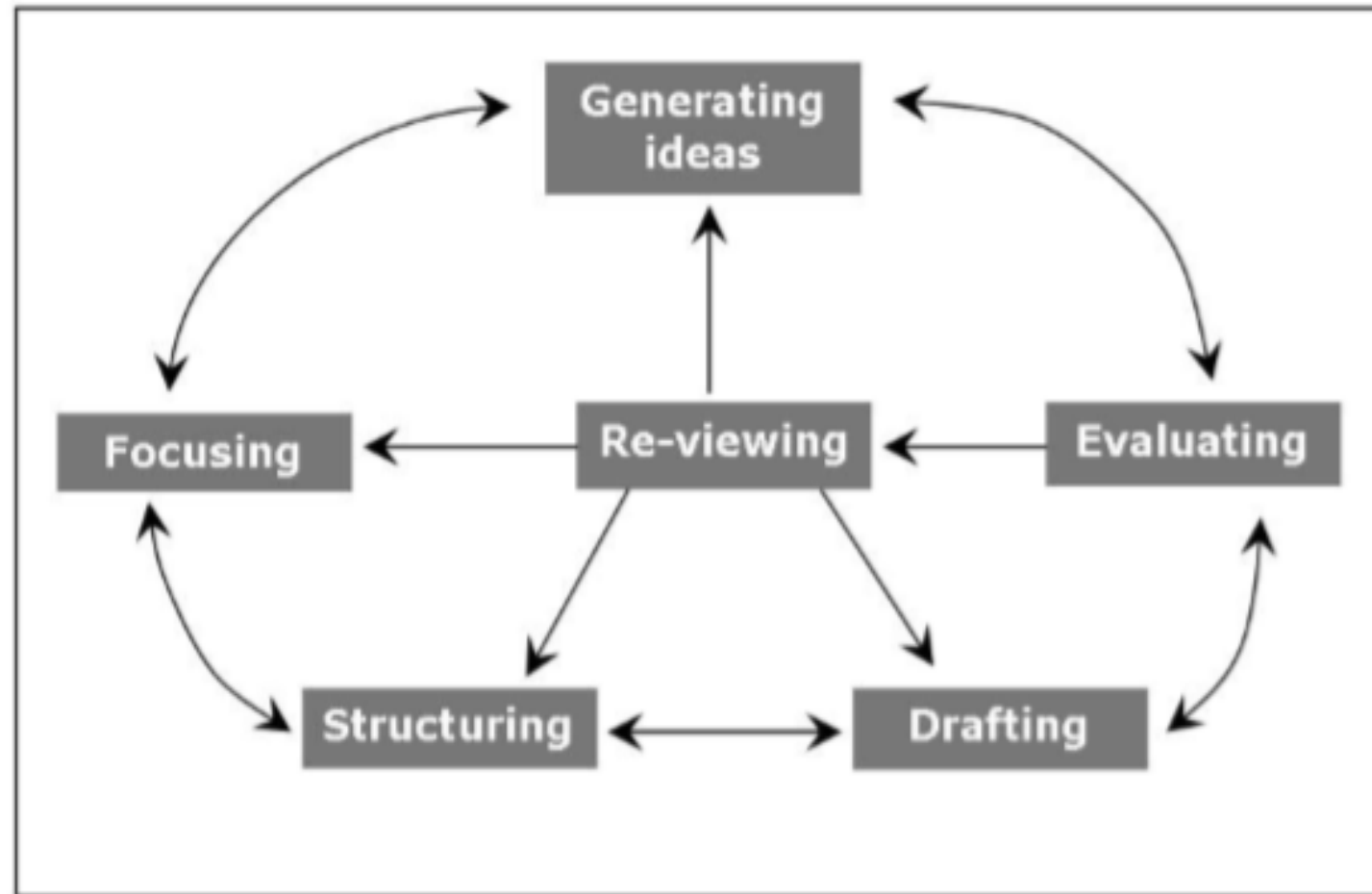
Stage five (Peer feedback): Drafts are exchanged, so that students become the readers of each others work. By responding as readers students develop awareness of the fact that a writer is producing something to be read by someone else and thus **they can improve their own drafts.**

Stage six (Editing): Drafts are returned and improvements are made based upon **peer feedback.**

Stage seven (Final draft): A final draft is written.

Stage eight (Evaluation and teachers' feedback): Students' writings are evaluated and teachers provide a feedback on it.

White and Arndt's diagram (1991: 43) offers teachers a framework which tries to capture the recursive, not linear, nature of writing. The following diagram shows the cyclical nature and the interrelationship of the stages:



Process Writing

The 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s witnessed a highly influential trend in L1 composition pedagogy and research.

Raimes (1985) and Zamel (1982) were among the strongest voices calling for process writing. Zamel (1982) claims that **the composing processes of L1 writers can be suitable to ESL writers, but teacher-guided revision is the main focus of instruction in ESL classes.** Process approaches, as they now are generally labeled, emphasized the individual **writer as a creator of original ideas.** It was believed that written discourse encoded these ideas, helping as a vehicle for exploring one, conveying one's thoughts, and claiming one's individual voice, or authorial persona, as a writer.

Process-oriented writing pedagogies focused particular **attention on procedures for solving problems, discovering ideas, expressing them in writing, and revising emergent texts**—typically, in isolation from any cultural, educational, or sociopolitical contexts in which writing might take place.

Process Writing

Zamel (1982) also points out that writing is a process of discovering and making meaning and that the writing process is **recursive, nonlinear, and convoluted**.

In recent years, however, the process approach has come under serious scrutiny. The approach has a “somewhat monolithic view of writing” (Badger and White 2000).

Writing is seen as involving the same process regardless of the target audience and the content of the text. The process approach seems to narrowly focus on the skills and processes of writing in the classroom itself and as a result fails to take into account the social and cultural aspects that have an impact on different kinds of writing (Atkinson, 2003).

Process Writing

The product approach to writing usually involves the presentation of a model text, which is discussed and analyzed. According to this model text learners construct a similar or a parallel text. This might seem a mechanical task; however, learners can discover the structure of the given discourse, its linguistic features and how its ideas are organized.

The process approach to writing in contrast focuses on the development of language use: brainstorming, group discussion, rewriting.

The Process Approach

Johns (1995), for instance, strongly expresses her view against “The Process Movement”:

This movement’s emphasis on developing students as authors when they are not yet ready to be second language writers, in developing student voice while ignoring issues of register and careful argumentation, and in promoting the author’s purposes while minimising understandings of role, audience and community have put our diverse students at a distinct disadvantage...

(Johns, 1995)

As a result, opponents of the process approach are beginning to gather under a new banner – “**the genre approach**” (or genre-based approach).

The Genre Approach

As noted by **Badger and White** (2000:155), there are similarities between the product approach and the genre approach, which, in some ways, can be seen as **an extension of the product approach**. Like the product approach, the genre approach views writing as predominantly linguistic. The genre approach, however, places a greater emphasis on **the social context** in which writing is produced.

At the heart of the approach therefore is the view that writing pedagogies should “**offer students explicit and systematic explanations of the ways language functions in social contexts**” (Hyland, 2003).

The Genre Approach

Swales (1990), describes **genre** as “a class of communicative events.” He further explains that the members of the communicative events “share some set of communicative purposes which are recognised by the expert members....”

A range of methods is employed in a classroom using the genre approach. For instance, **Paltridge** (2001) proposes a framework that involves investigating the texts and contexts of students’ target situations, encouraging reflection on writing practices, exploiting texts from different types of genre and creating mixed genre portfolios.

The Genre Approach

The underpinning theory of such a pedagogical approach, according to **Vygotsky** (1978), as reported in Hyland (2003), is an “emphasis on the interactive collaboration between teacher and student, with the teacher taking an authoritative role to ‘scaffold’ or support learners as they move towards their potential level of performance.”

In the **scaffolding activity**, students are provided with models, and are asked to discuss and analyse their language and structure. The scaffolding element gradually lightens as the learners independently produce a text parallel to the model.

The **role of the teachers** thus moves from explicit instructor to **facilitator** and eventually the learners gain autonomy.

Genre Approach

Rothery's (1985) suggestion for a genre-based approach to teaching writing includes the following steps:

1. **introducing a genre**: modeling a genre by reading to the whole class,
2. **focusing on a genre**: modeling a genre explicitly by naming its stages,
3. **jointly negotiating a genre**: teacher and class jointly composing the genre under focus,
 1. **researching**: selecting material; assessing information before writing,
 2. **independent construction**: students individually construct the genre.

Genre Approach

Hayland (2004) sees the advantages of a genre based writing instruction that can be summarized as follows:

Explicit. Makes clear what is to be learned to facilitate the acquisition of writing skills

Systematic. Provides a coherent framework for focusing on both language and contexts

Needs-based. Ensures that course objectives and content are derived from students needs

Supportive. Gives teacher a central role in scaffolding student learning and creativity

Empowering. Provides access to the patterns and possibilities of variation in valued texts

Critical. Provides the resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses

Consciousness raising. Increases teacher awareness of texts and confidently advise students on their writing.

(Hayland 2004: 10-11)

The Genre Approach

Like the other approaches, the genre approach has been criticised by its opponents. **Caudery** (1998: 11-13), for example, notes that by attempting explicit teaching of a particular genre, teachers are in actual fact not helping the learners.

The approach may not require students to express their own ideas or may be too dependent on the teacher finding suitable materials as models. It could thus become counter-productive.

A comparison of the product and process approaches is given below: (Steele, 2004: 1)

Process approach

- **text as a resource for comparison;**
- **ideas as starting point, necessitating more than one draft;**
- **focus on purpose, theme, text type ...;**
- **the reader (audience) is emphasized;**
- **collaborative with other peers;**
- **emphasis on creativity.**

Product approach

- ♠ **imitate a model text;**
- ♠ **organization of ideas more important than ideas themselves;**
- ♠ **one draft;**
- ♠ **features highlighted including controlled practice of those features;**
- ♠ **individual;**
- ♠ **emphasis on end product.**

The following table upholds a comparative study of genre and process approach: (Hyland, 2003: 24)

Attribute	Process	Genre
Main Idea	Writing is a thinking process Concerned with the act of writing	Writing is a social activity Concerned with the final product
Teaching Focus	Emphasis on creative writer How to produce and link ideas	Emphasis on reader expectations and product How to express social purposes effectively
Advantages	Makes processes of writing transparent Provides basis for teaching	Makes textual conventions transparent Contextualizes writing for audience and purpose
Disadvantages	Assumes L1 and L2 writing similar Overlooks L2 language difficulties Insufficient attention to product Assumes all writing uses same processes	Requires rhetorical understanding of texts Can result in prescriptive teaching of texts Can lead to over attention to written products Undervalue skills needed to produce texts

Compare the 3 approaches of teaching writing skills

Attribute	Product Approach	Process Approach	Genre Approach
Main Idea			
Teaching Focus			
Advantages			
Disadvantages			

Writing Assessment

There are several steps we, as instructors, can take to make writing the real focus of our feedback and assessment:

Connect the feedback to the purpose of the task. Do assign a grade for accuracy because it plays an important role in comprehensible communication, but also assign a grade for global content: clear statement of purpose, sufficient details, effective connection between ideas, for example. Students are smart, and if your grades only pertain to grammatical and lexical accuracy, in their next essay they will only focus on those features. This turns your "writing" assignment into a mere linguistic exercise.

Writing Assessment

Teachers should act as collaborators in the writing process. Your objective should be to help students learn how to write well. Giving a simple grade to a written assignment means that you judge that assignment. Giving it feedback and letting students revise their written work will make your assignment be truly about writing.

Focus on content first, then on accuracy. This sequence will help your students view writing as genuine interpersonal communication between the author and reader(s). Research has found that when feedback focuses on content first, the final written work is better both in content and accuracy (Semke, 1984).

Writing Assessment

Facilitative comments maintain students' integrity and help keep them motivated. Instead of writing a comment like "Don't use the subjunctive here", ask them a question: What does the subjunctive form suggest here? Sometimes, students intentionally flout linguistic norms for a creative, meaningful purpose (i.e., humor). Find out before you mark it wrong. Negative statements will shut down your students, while clarification questions will help them express an idea more effectively.

Self-correction increases accuracy, linguistic gains, and productivity. Make a few marks on the paper, then pose questions and offer facilitative comments. This process "forces" learners to resolve questions they still have and come up with the solution themselves (with peer or instructor guidance as necessary).

Writing Assessment

Types of Scoring

Writing can be assessed in different modes, for example analytic scoring, holistic scoring, and primary trait scoring. If evaluating the same piece of writing, each mode of scoring should result in similar "scores," but each focuses on a different facet of L2 writing.

Analytic Scoring

In this mode, **students' writing** is evaluated based on detailed grades for **elements of writing** such as **vocabulary, grammar, composition, or mechanics**. Results are based on multiple sub-grades (e.g., 4 out of 5 on vocabulary, plus 3 out of 5 on grammar plus 4 out of 5 on content, etc.)

Writing Assessment

Holistic Scoring

Holistic scoring results in a more **general description** for categories, but includes the different elements of writing implicitly or explicitly. The result is usually a global grade, such as A, B, C, D, E.

Primary Trait Scoring

If the class or the assignment focuses on a particular aspect of writing, or a specific linguistic form, or the use of a certain semantic group, primary trait scoring allows the instructor and the students to focus their feedback, revisions and attention very specifically.

Writing Assessment

Which of these is the appropriate form of evaluation depends on the **purpose of the writing task**.

For example, the **first draft** could be evaluated holistically, a **second and subsequent draft** using primary trait scoring and the **final draft** analytically.

Each mode of scoring will give the instructor and students slightly different information about the writing process and students' level of development. It is highly recommended, though, with the goal of **improving writing** instead of just assigning a grade, that the criteria for evaluation be shared with the students *as soon as the writing task is assigned*.

Writing Assessment

Portfolio Assessment

A somewhat newer approach of evaluation is the writing portfolio. This approach underscores writing as a process, a meaningful communicative act, and a skill worthy of emphasis in the foreign language curriculum.

Some characteristics important to any type of portfolio assignment are:

- 1. Repeated submissions over time:** students submit one or two writing samples each week, each month, or as the course allows.
- 2. Student selection of "representative sampling":** students have latitude in which draft or assignment they submit, within teacher-established guidelines.

Writing Assessment

Portfolio Assessment

3. Feedback from multiple sources: Students may be asked to include feedback from a variety of sources, such as self-editing checklists, peer-editing comments, and/or comments from the instructor.

4. Focus on process, growth, active analysis: Asking students to revise a written assignment helps them develop their writing skills and engages them in active analysis of their writing. Over the course of the semester, by comparing their very first and last assignments, they become cognizant of the progress they have made.

Writing Assessment

Portfolio Assessment

5. Meaningful, motivating and long-term learning: When students re-examine and compare their different writing assignments, they realize that the writing task is part of a long-term learning process rather than a single evaluative event. The noticeable progress they make and the recognition of their work by the instructor and peers can be highly motivating for most students.

Good Luck!

