



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
National and Kapodistrian
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ELT Methods and Practices

Unit 8: Dealing with Writing Skills

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Differences in written and oral language (1/2)

Speaking:

- Impermanent.
- Immediate (unplanned).
- Variation / Casual.
- Low lexical density.
- High Paralinguistics.
- Communal activity.
- Universal.

Writing:

- Permanent.
- Delayed (planned).
- Conventional / Stylized.
- High lexical density.
- Low Paralinguistics.
- Solitary Activity.
- Learned.



Differences in written and oral language (2/2)

Speaking:

- Simple sentences.
- Voiced.
- Pronounce.
- Feedback .
- Pause / Intonation.

Writing:

- Complex sentences.
- Thought / Read.
- Spell.
- No feedback.
- Punctuation.



Writing: The Neglected Skill in EFL

- “My classes are too large.”
- “I don’t have enough time for writing.”
- “What can beginners write about?”
- “I’m not a good writer. How can I teach writing?”



Why is writing important?

Writing is a:

- form of output; thinking made evident; “thinking with a pencil”.
- means of building fluency.
- way of developing accuracy (in grammar, vocabulary, etc.).
- premier way in which children think and express their ideas.
- way children express creativity, uniqueness, and indicate what they want.
- critical skill for academic or professional success.



What knowledge does a writer need in order to write

- A teacher in a language classroom asks her students to write an article on the effects of toxic waste on our environment. What kinds of knowledge would the students need to have/employ in order to perform this task successfully?



Four kinds of knowledge that we need in order to write (1/2)

- **Knowledge of language:**
 - Spelling, Punctuation. Grammatical structures, Lexis, Cohesion and coherence (how to connect clauses within and between sentences and how to order information in our sentences and texts), Discourse types (each discourse type e.g. narrative, argument etc. has its own special features)
- **Knowledge of topic**, i.e. knowing what we are writing about.



Four kinds of knowledge that we need in order to write (2/2)

- **Knowledge of audience** i.e. knowledge of who we are writing to. The more one knows about one's audience the easier the writing is; both the topic and the intended readers will influence the kind of writing we do.
- **Stored writing plans:** Background knowledge (schemata) e.g. **formal schemata:** formal, organisational structures of different types of text and **content schemata:** background knowledge of the content being written about.



The importance of audience

“Students mature as writers by understanding how to write for different audiences, contexts, and purposes.” (NWP & Nagin, 2003, p. 26)



The writing prompt

- The writing prompt should clearly state the **topic, genre, communicative purpose, target audience** of the writing task, as well as the **features of the output expected** of the students.



Activity B1.1

ACTIVITY B1.1

A student magazine is running a contest and has invited readers to write about a place they recently visited during an educational school trip. The text below, sent by a student for last month's issue, may help you. Write a description of a place in Greece that you visited as a class and explain why you liked it (about 80 words).


APRIL ISSUE | 2015

Active Students

UNFORGETTABLE PLACES THAT WE VISITED AS A CLASS

Last month's issue

WINNER



THE SPECTACULAR SCIENCE MUSEUM

What a wonderful time we all had in London last year, on a trip organised by our teachers and parents. The one place we visited that I like best was the Science Museum.

Science is not my favourite subject in school but I loved this museum which has famous historic collections, amazing galleries and great exhibitions. In their catalogue they say that they have over 300,000 objects in their care. Their strongest point is the history of western science, technology and medicine since 1700. Medical objects from all periods and cultures are also an important part of their possessions.

[1]



Activity 1

ACTIVITY 1

Imagine that you are to give a talk, at a parents and teachers association meeting, about why they should campaign against gender-stereotyped toys. Write the text (about 350 words) for your brief talk, inspired by the article below.

FAMILY AFFAIRS | 32

Why does gender-stereotyped marketing matter?

- ✦ Kids should decide for themselves what they think is fun. Why put these limits on play?
- ✦ Play matters. Children need a wide range of play to develop different skills.
- ✦ Marketing matters. Directing consumers in this way is restricting children's play.
- ✦ The real world has moved on. These gender stereotypes are tired and out of date.



Play matters
Play is crucial to how children develop and learn about the world. In education it's recognised that children need access to a range of toys and play experiences. Toys focused on action, construction and technology hone spatial skills, foster problem solving and encourage children to be active. Toys focused on role play, and small-scale theatre, allow them to practise social skills. Arts & crafts are good for fine motor skills and perseverance. However, many stores divide toys into separate boys' and girls' sections. Action construction and technology toys are predominantly marketed to boys while social role play and arts and crafts toys are predominantly marketed to girls. Both boys and girls miss out this way.

Stereotypes matter
Children don't pop out of their mother's womb with expectations about their future careers, or beliefs about what their work is worth, but the stereotypes we see in toy marketing connect with the inequalities we see in adult life. As a matter of fact, research shows that, by late primary age, children already have very clear ideas about the jobs that are suitable for boys and girls; ideas that are very hard to shake later on. Themes of glamour and beauty in toys and playthings directed at even the youngest girls tips over into a worrying emphasis on outward appearance. Stereotyped attitudes about boys are equally harmful. The constant assumption reinforced in toy advertising and packaging that boys are inevitably rough, dirty, rowdy, interested only in action and violence tells calmer, more sensitive or more creative boys that they're getting this whole 'boy' thing a bit wrong, and feeds low expectations of boys that undermine their performance at school.

[2]



Example: KPG B2 May 2008

- Imagine you are a member of a team preparing a **tourist leaflet** for English-speaking visitors to Arachova. Write the text (150 words in addition to the short introductory paragraph below), **mentioning things worth seeing and doing** in your town such as monuments, entertainment, eating, shopping, walking tours, museums, around the town, etc.



The product approach to writing (1/4)

- The product approach dominated the teaching of writing in ELT until the 1980s.
- It involves working on writing at sentence level, filling in missing connectors (nevertheless, however), for example, or using 'model' texts which the students copy.
- Normally each model text contains lots of examples of a specific type of language the teacher wants the students to focus on, e.g. the past simple.



The product approach to writing (2/4)

- The students read the model text, and do exercises which focus on the language in the model text (e.g. the past simple).
- Finally, the students might be asked to transform a text which is in the present simple into the past simple. The model text will help them do this.



The product approach to writing (3/4)

- Writing is viewed as a means for consolidating grammar and vocabulary and for assessing student progress. **Writing to learn the language.**



The product approach to writing (4/4)

- It is regulated at the end of a coursebook unit and is usually assigned for homework. The main emphasis is on the end product (i.e. student's written work) which is assessed in terms of grammatical accuracy and correct use of vocabulary. Whether ideas have been communicated clearly, coherently, and effectively and whether the final product reflect the characteristics of the genre was not normally a concern.



The product approach

- The focus is obviously on **grammatical accuracy**. This reflects the preoccupation of ELT methodology at the time—the Audiolingual Method was in fashion



Introducing the process approach

- The cognitivist Process Approach researchers (e.g. Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hairston, 1982; Zamel, 1983) tried to find out how real writers composed in real situations
- The Product Approach had given students the impression that the composing process was linear. Students planned first, then wrote
- However, the cognitivists found out that real writers didn't write like this at all.



What do real writers do? (1/2)

- ‘[Writing] is messy, recursive, convoluted, and uneven. Writers write, plan, revise, anticipate, and review throughout the writing process, moving back and forth among the different operations involved in writing without any apparent plan.’ (Hairston, 1982: 85)
- Good writers plan **throughout** the writing process, changing things many times if necessary, and writing multiple drafts.



The nature of writing (1/2)

- Research has shown that “writing is recursive, that it does not proceed linearly but instead cycles and recycles through subprocesses that can be described this way:
 - Planning (generating ideas, setting goals, and organizing)
 - Translating (turning plans into written language)
 - Reviewing (evaluating, revising, editing) ”

(NWP & Nagin, 2003, p. 25)



The nature of writing (2/2)

- “Even for an experienced writer, the cycling occurs in no fixed order. Writers may create and change their goals as they move through these phases, depending on their topic, rhetorical purpose, and audience.” (NWP & Nagin, 2003, p. 25)



What do real writers do? (2/2)

- Good writers may rehearse or discuss what they want to write before they actually do it
- Good writers read their writing carefully, trying to imagine how clear their ideas are to a reader. If something isn't clear, they change it
- The motto of the process approach is: **Writing is rewriting.**



The process approach emphasizes:

- The importance of writing multiple drafts.
- The importance of revision.
- The importance of planning throughout.
- The importance of making your writing reader-friendly.
- The importance of writing in different styles for different audiences.

The cognitivists tried to get students to go through all of these stages when they wrote.



Stages in the process of writing (1/2)

- Gathering information.
- Generating ideas (making notes of the ideas you feel are relevant to the topic; the ideas you generate will be limited by the audience you have in mind).
- Goal setting (deciding what you want to do with all the material you have generated, deciding on the main messages you want to send).
- Organising (grouping the ideas you have generated and deciding on the order you want to present them, it will also involve thinking about the links between different sets of ideas).

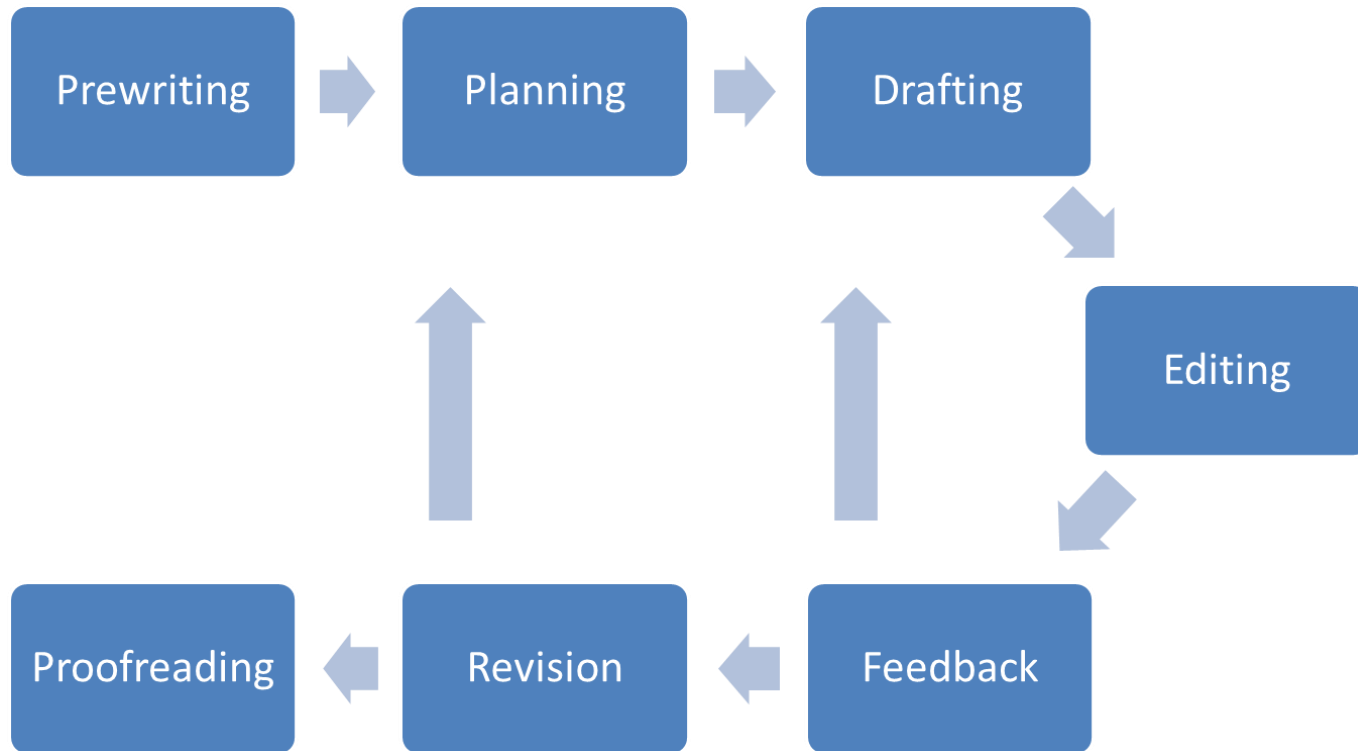


Stages in the process of writing (2/2)

- Making a first draft.
- Reading you work and redrafting.
- Editing (this may occur in brief episodes interrupting other parts of the process; there are four kinds of editing we do: editing for standard language conventions, editing for accuracy of meaning, editing for reader understanding, editing for reader acceptance).
- Final version.



Flowchart of the Writing Process (1/2)



[3] (Hyland, 2008, p. 100)



Flowchart of the Writing Process (2/2)

- Writers have goals and plan extensively.
- Writing is constantly revised, often even before any text has been produced.
- Planning, drafting, revising, and editing are recursive and potentially simultaneous.
- Plans and text are constantly evaluated by the writer in a feedback loop (Hyland, 2008, p. 100).



Why process writing? (1/2)

- Process writing makes students aware that writing is often a process of discovery in which ideas are generated and not just transcribed.
- Students become aware that writing by its nature is a process, so that even simple messages are the result of a writing process that includes choosing vocabulary considering audience, and judging format.



Why process writing? (2/2)

- Writing seen as a communicative and purposeful activity.
- Teaches students to plan and research.
- Student collaboration is developed.
- Feedback given.



Some drawbacks (1/2)

- Takes too much time.
- Loss of student focus/interest.
- Not suited to some personalities.
- Students need to be taught (peer-editing/planning /stages).
- Restricts spontaneity and range of writing activities.



Some drawbacks (2/2)

One of the disadvantages of getting students to concentrate on the process of writing is that it takes time, using the process approach needs a considerable amount of interaction between teacher and students and between students themselves. Teacher needs time to help students brainstorm ideas, draft a piece of writing, review, edit, perhaps changing the focus, generating more ideas, re-drafting, re-editing and so on. When process approach is handled appropriately it stretches across the whole curriculum.



Genre approach to writing (1/2)

What is a genre?

- 'Genre is a term for grouping texts together, representing how writers typically use language to respond to recurring situations'. (Hyland, 2004: 4).
- According to Swales (1990), genres are characterized by their 'communicative purposes' as well as by their patterns of 'structure, style, content and intended audience' (p.58).



Genre approach to writing (2/2)

- In the arena of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), then, genre 'refers to a class of communicative events, such as, for example, a seminar presentation, a university lecture, or an academic essay' (Paltridge, 2001: 2).



Teaching writing using the genre approach (1/2)

Ivanič (2004) summarizes the genre approach as follows:

“The key point in this theoretical tradition is that texts vary linguistically according to their purpose and context. As a result, it is possible to specify linguistic features of particular text-types.... [...]

Good writing is not just correct writing, but writing which is linguistically appropriate to the purpose it is serving.” (pp.232-3).



Teaching writing using the genre approach (2/2)

So teachers need to systematically analyze what the genre of writing they're trying to teach looks like. This analysis may consist of looking at how writers typically use organization, grammar, or vocabulary when writing in the genre, as well as getting learners to understand the writers' purposes.



Genre based approach

One of the strengths of the genre approach, then, is that it 'tells' students what different genres in English look like.



Genre based approach to writing

- In a genre approach to writing students study texts in the genre they are going to be writing before they embark on their own writing. If we want students to write business letters of various kinds we let them look at typical models of such letters before starting to compose their own. A genre approach for writing is very appropriate for students who study English for specific purposes.
- Asking students to imitate a given style could be seen as extremely prescriptive.



Teaching activities using the genre approach: Suggestions (1/2)

- Comparing texts with omissions, changes, or different structures.
- Identifying different and similar sample texts as particular genres.
- Reorganizing or rewriting scrambled or unfinished paragraphs.
- Completing gapped sentences or an entire cloze from formatting clues.



Teaching activities using the genre approach: Suggestions (2/2)

- Substituting a feature (e.g., tense, modality, voice, topic sentence).
- Using skeletal texts to predict language forms and meaning.
- Collecting examples of a language feature, perhaps with a concordancer.
- Working in groups to correct errors, circle particular features, match one feature with another, etc.



Problems with writing tasks in textbooks (1/2)

- They are mainly accuracy-based.
- They are designed to practise a certain target structures.
- There is insufficient preparation before the writing stage.
- There is no sense of audience.
- There is no sense of authenticity.



Problems with writing tasks in textbooks (2/2)

- Students are given ideas to express rather than being invited to invent their own .
- There is no opportunity for creative writing, particular for expressing unusual or original ideas.
- Many of them are test-oriented.



Writing activities should:

- Allow learners experience success in writing.
- Help develop learners' writing skills.
- Help them understand that writing has a purpose - to communicate thoughts and ideas.
- Stimulate and encourage 'creative' writing.



Motivating students to write (1/3)

- Provide a clear purpose or a reason to write.
- The topic for writing should be:
 - Familiar,
 - Meaningful,
 - Relevant to students, life and interests.



Motivating students to write (2/3)

- Leave students enough room for creativity and imagination.
- Prepare students well before writing.
- Encourage collaborative group writing as well as individual writing.
- Provide opportunities for students to share their writings.



Motivating students to write (3/3)

- Provide constructive and positive feedback.
- Treat students' errors strategically.
- Give students a sense of achievement from time to time.



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End of Unit

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Notes

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