
Approaches to Teaching of Writing Skills

All writing, even the most routine, is viewed as being creative and demanding of “conscious intellectual effort, which usually has to be sustained over a considerable amount of time” (White & Arndt, 1995: 3).

Dr. Shabana Thayniath

Assistant Professor, Department of English,
Muffakham Jah College of Engineering & Technology.
Hyderabad., Telangana India.

Writing has become a field of increasing interest. There have been a number of approaches to teaching of writing in the history of language teaching. In this paper, an attempt has been made to discuss the writing methodology and techniques used in the teaching of writing.

Researchers and theorists have been making steady progress in improving our understanding of cognitive and social processes involved in writing. Before the 1960s, writing was a neglected skill in English and it was argued that language is “primarily what is spoken and what is written, only secondary” (Brooks and Richards, 1964:49).

Keywords: *Product Approach ,Process Approach ,writing ,techniques*

Process and Product Approaches in the Teaching of Writing

Researchers and theorists have been making steady progress in improving our understanding of cognitive and social processes involved in writing. Before the 1960s, writing was a neglected skill in English and it was argued that language is “primarily what is spoken and what is written, only secondary” (Brooks and Richards, 1964:49).

There was a constant struggle to come to terms with the complex nature of writing and scholars react to views favorable or adverse, give modifications to new line of thought from time to time. The research in writing has evolved for fifty years, researchers giving different theories and discussing about writing. Prominent among them were writing as product versus writing as process and writing as a cognitive process versus writing as a process of socialization. In the beginning, writing was seen as a controlled language and practice of grammar structures to focus on audience content (free writing approach) and reflective activity. Emphasis has shifted to meaningful interaction, active learning by learner participation through various writing tasks.

In writing, difference is made between product and process for any product of writing like report writing, paragraphs, essays, letters, memos, notices, etc. A number of underlying processes are involved like brainstorming ideas, gathering information, drafting, revising. The following section shows the different ways in which writing is taught.

The product View of Teaching Writing

Throughout the history of language teaching, linguists, teachers and experts have stressed the different devices of writing and this has led to the birth of a number of approaches to writing such as product and process approach.

“The product approach” is based on behaviorism. Its teaching pattern shows the “stimulus-response” process. In this approach, students are encouraged to mimic a model text which is usually presented and analyzed at an early stage. Till the 1970s this approach viewed writing as an extension of grammar (Hyland 2003).

Writing is considered in terms of written text. The product approach to writing has been rooted in Behaviorist Theory:

“The learner is not allowed to ‘create’ in the target language at all...The use of language is the manipulation of fixed patterns;...these patterns are learned by imitation; and...not until they have been learned can originality occur...” (Pincas 1962: 185-6)

Focus is on syntactic and grammatical forms, with accuracy bearing the foremost. Learners were taught more, error was prevented and accuracy was expected to arise from a student’s practice with structures (Reid, 2007). End-product construction was the desired outcome of this approach with learning being achieved as a result of teacher and textual input.

Pincas (1982a) sees “writing as being primarily about linguistic knowledge, with attention focused on the appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax and cohesive devices”. (Pincas1982b)

Nunan refers to Raimes when he puts product approaches to writing in context as:

Until the mid-1970s, writing was seen as a subservient skill, whose function was to support the development of oral language. Pedagogy was therefore dominated by form-focused techniques that were in line with the audio-lingual ideology of drill and practice (Raimes, cited in Nunan, 1999: 271).

As pointed out by Nunan (1999: 154), “...product-based approaches see writing as mainly concerned with knowledge about the structure of language.

Badger and White (2000: 153) give four stages of product approaches:

-) Familiarization - where students are presented an exemplar and they pick out grammar or lexical points.
-) Controlled writing- where the students practice using the grammar and vocabulary which is the focus of the lesson. Substitution drills are used at this stage.
-) Guided writing - where students practice writing longer pieces, like the paragraph, using the target grammar and vocabulary. At this stage, form, usage and meaning are still very teacher controlled.
-) Free writing – the focus is on form and usage where the teacher allows the students to write with a lot of freedom.

The familiarization stage aims to make learners aware of certain features of a particular text. In the controlled and guided writing sections, the learners practice the skills with increasing freedom until they are ready for the free writing section, when they use the writing skill as part of a genuine activity such as a letter, story or essay.

As Badger and White (2000: 157) point out, product approaches can be praised for providing “linguistic knowledge about texts” and “understand[ing] that imitation is one way in which people learn.”

Process approach

Process approaches to writing tend to focus more on the varied classroom activities which promote the development of language use: brainstorming, group discussion, re-writing. Such an approach can have many different stages, though a typical sequence of activities would be:

-) Learners generate ideas by brainstorming and discussion.
-) Learners extend ideas into note form and judge quality and usefulness of ideas.
-) Learners organize ideas into a mind map, spider web, or linear form. This stage helps to make the hierarchical relationship of ideas more obvious, which helps students with the structure of their texts.
-) Learners write the first draft. This is done in class and frequently in pairs or groups.
-) Learners then can, with classmates or the teacher, get suggestions about how to express themselves in correct and complete English sentences.

The correction here is mainly at the language level, such as spelling, grammar and pattern.

Some academics (e.g., Tribble, 1996 and Raimes, 1993) view the process approach to be a reaction against the product approach to writing. Process approach places importance on meaning rather than attention to form. The focus of the process approach is on the learner as a writer, who brings in his/her own individuality and writing resources.

Writing is seen as unpredictable and highly individualistic (White and Arndt, 1995). All writing, even the most routine, is viewed as being creative and demanding of “conscious intellectual effort, which usually has to be sustained over a considerable amount of time” (White & Arndt, 1995: 3).

Process writing involves the generating and processing of ideas as well as the planning of writing. The development of students’ meta-cognitive awareness is key to process writing and teachers aim to nurture the students’ ability to reflect on strategies they use to write (Hyland, 2003).

A process approach focuses on the cognitive processes in writing rather than on the product. In the process approach, there is a shift from language-focused activities to learner-centered tasks in which learners take larger control over what they write and how they write and also evaluate their own writing.

Richards points to the shift in roles for the teacher from evaluator to facilitator. He provides a very useful list of instructional activities appropriate to each phase of writing: rehearsing, prewriting, drafting and revising.

The contrast of product and process approach	
Imitates model text	Text as a resource for comparison
Organization of ideas more important than ideas themselves	Ideas as starting point
One draft	More than one draft
Features highlighted including controlled practice of those features	More global, focus on purpose, theme, text type, i.e., reader is emphasized
Individual	Collaborative
Emphasis on end product	Emphasis on creative process

It can be said that there is not necessarily any “right” or “best” way to teach writing skills, nor a perfect and appropriate teaching approach. “The product approach” and “the process approach” come from different theories and emphasize on different aspects of writing. The optimum approach in any situation will depend on the type of student, the text type being studied, the writing skills being taught and many other factors.

It was argued that effective teaching of writing instruction would focus not on the completed essay but in helping the student through these various stages to achieve this aim. Communicative research was to become “writing workshops where students share their work with one another and where the teacher intervened from time to time as the essay developed through several drafts.” The emphasis was on process rather than product and writers in all these various stages also focus on word choices, paragraph development, punctuation and sentences formed.

Raimes (1991) states that, “the attention to the writer as language learner and creator of texts has led to a process approach”. In an effort to find out what goes on beyond the act of writing and what is involved in writing and what writers actually do as they write, the focus is put on the process skills such as planning, revising, composing and redrafting a text. Therefore, this approach gave the learners time and opportunity for selection of topics, generating ideas, writing drafts and revisions and taking feedback.

Feedback is seen as essential to the multiple draft process, as it is “what pushes the writer through the various drafts and into the eventual end product” (Keh, 1990: 294).

Feedback is continuous, ongoing and interactive. It comes not only from the teacher but there are also peers’ feedback, parents’ feedback, friends’ feedback, as well as innovative methods such as audio taped (Hyland, 1990; Boswood and Dwyar, 1995), videotaped (for self evaluation) and computer based feedback. Rather than depending on one technique of feedback, the teacher can adopt a range of feedback types which stand a greater chance of success than relying on a single technique. Therefore, with the process approach, writing becomes meaningful, natural and easy.

The teacher should know how the writer writes, why the writer writes the steps and the reasons behind writing should be understood by the teacher. The reason of the failure of teaching writing is it is taught looking at the product. In order to help learners become competent writers, it is necessary to teach writing as a process of discovery. The process approach of writing is to help writers generate ideas and therefore aims at teaching writing as a means of discovery and learning. The writer discovers forms as he writes.

The process approach encourages the writer to write multiple drafts, develop ideas, organize ideas and plan on breaking the task into small manageable units. Therefore, the teacher must encourage the learners to write, give writing assignments to get the views of the learners, guide them in. The teacher can provide rich and diverse array of writing experiences, organizing and composing the task. The learners should be able to identify and comment on some significant features of their own writing process. Though writing is found to be tedious for the learner, this approach helps the learner.

Hillocks (1984) says that the teacher’s role in the process model is to facilitate the writing process rather than to provide direct instructions. The teacher here is the facilitator, a teacher who is specially trained to teach writing. Training is required because the teacher has to understand the basic assumptions underlying the process view of teaching.

The role of teacher in a process approach to writing is to guide students to use and develop their own thinking in prewriting (brainstorming ideas, gathering points), writing (drafting), rewriting (revising, editing) (Hyland, 2003).

Each stage makes the composition better with new ideas revised and added, whereby the text and content can be improved. Editing can be done of sentence structure, use of better vocabulary, punctuations.

The advantage of the process approach is that it aspires learners to acquire the skills of learning to think. The process approach is based on the cognitive model imposed by Flower and Hayes. Flowers and Hayes see writing as a non-Linear expository and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning (Zamel 1983, P. 165 Hyland 2003, P. 11). The communicative method looks at writing as a problem activity that is dynamic and solved through thinking process. This interaction between thinking and writing helps for intellectual growth and the development of writing skills of the learners.

Stages in the process approach

Writing involves many complex mental operations; writers believe that breaking into small manageable parts helps to achieve better result. Graves (1994) identified five stages of the writing process: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing publishing/sharing. The writing process does not take place in a linear manner; rather writing involves reusing cycles.

Although there are many different process approaches to writing, there are some core features. The writers go through different stages during writing like generating ideas, organizing ideas, gathering data to produce a piece of writing, but a typical model identifies three stages - prewriting, composing/drafting, revising/editing (Tribble, 1996: 36). Writing is a cyclical process, where composing text writing moves forwards and backwards back to prewriting activities after doing editing or revising.

Humes (1983) also shares the same opinion of the stages of writing. The process of writing does not move in a straight line in time from conception to completion. All planning is not done before words are put on paper, all

the words are not on paper before writers review and revise. Writers move back and forth among these sub-processes.

Hyland (2003) defines process as the process which students write following a model specified by the instructor. Emphasis shifts from the native of the final product, to the process used to create the final product. He also opines “the process approach to writing teaching emphasizes the writer as an independent producer of texts, it goes further to address the issue of what teachers should do to help learners perform a writing task” (P.10).

Process model of Writing Instruction

Selection of topic: by teacher/students

Prewriting: Note taking, brainstorming, collecting ideas, outlining, etc.

Composing: Putting ideas on the paper

Response to draft: from teacher/peers to style, organizing ideas

Revising: Re-organizing, style, adjusting, refining ideas

Proof reading and editing: checking and correct form, layout, evidence etc.

Evaluation: Teacher evaluation, progress

Publishing: By presentation, notice board, etc.

Follow-up tasks: to address weaknesses

(Hyland, 2004, Second Language writing, Cambridge: CUP, P.11)

Process Approaches are premised on the notion that writing is an interactive process as shown in the above figure – stages of writing can happen at different stages of the process writing. The main stages of the writing process are the prewriting, writing and revising which are discussed below.

Prewriting techniques: In this stage, the most important thing is the flow of ideas. The teacher in this technique generates ideas, encourages free flow of ideas and helps the student discover both what they want to say and how to communicate on paper. The teacher has to plan to help students write the writing task in a well established activity in the prewriting phase of the class work. There is a lot of emphasis in prewriting. The teacher plays an important role in selecting the activities, as the main goal of prewriting activities is to help the student develop a plan for producing an essay to help them with the process of elaboration. The predominant form of activities in the prewriting stage consist of a class discussion of a topic before students begin to write free writing activities, designed to stimulate thought ideas and brainstorming, in association with outlining or clustering (Williams 1989) .

Clustering is a method of prewriting that allows the student to explore many ideas as they occur that is relevant to the topic. This technique is relevant to understand the relationship among the parts of a broad topic and for developing sub-topics. Clustering is an open-ended non-linear form of sorting ideas. According to Williams, classroom discussion appears to be the most popular at the elementary level, whereas a combination of classroom discussion and clustering is favored at the high school and college levels.

The writing process is an act of creation. Often, the prewriting stage provides the raw material that will be given shape by the writing process. In this stage, students gather ideas, brainstorm, set goals and select an appropriate tone for a given audience. Prewriting is a thinking process which students use again and again during writing.

According to Ferris & Hedge Cock (1997), in the prewriting stages, tasks can be classified into two major components: unstructured prewriting tasks and structured prewriting tasks.

In the unstructured prewriting tasks, we have

Free writing – jotting down ideas in rough sentences or phrases

Brainstorming – in group or individual and writing the points

Tickoo (2003, P.77-78) suggests three kinds of prewriting activities - brain storming, free writing and looping and clustering. All these learning and teaching tools are designed to help and enhance the learners' creativity and fluency. The teacher uses creative unstructured activities to help students develop their existing knowledge in novel ways and their strategies can help for better writing.

Structured prewriting tasks tend to be more systematic and are aimed at helping the students focus and preparing them to undertake planning. Structured prewriting tasks guide and prepare students. They help to gather relevant information, develop new strategies for writing and relate new knowledge to existing knowledge.

As such, the prewriting stage plays an important role in the classroom. Sufficient time must be allotted for the prewriting task in the classroom such as:

- The students can be asked to consider the target reader and write what the reader wants to know
- Gather ideas through activities like brainstorming, interviewing and questioning
- The Students can be guided to organize their ideas before they start writing
- The students can be provided a creative and interesting task to suit their needs
- Making sure the writing tasks are purposeful and provide inputs of both language and content wherever required.

(Lee& Lee 1997:78)

The Composing/drafting Stage

The writing process is an ongoing cycle in every writing classroom. Students are engaged in prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. This process is not a linear step by step sequence but rather a recursive process. Drafting is the central stage of the writing process. The steps of drafting, revising and editing go together and as writing starts, all the three interact with each other and they form a balance, for drafting to take place.

According to Maki and Schilling, writing an initial first/test draft will give the writer a chance to pull together the fragments of preliminary writing. It is also a process to select the most suitable words for the expression, "the process of drafting is the process of discovering both what you mean to say and how to say it best to your reader" (48).

Writing is a cyclic process in which writing may return to editing or revising and drafting. The students first try to identify the topic, then gather the ideas and then plan the writing process by translating their thoughts and ideas into word and by reviewing their work through revising and editing.

The process of drafting helps the writing to link between ideas, gather new ideas, refine ideas; they may even change their ideas over a point of view or argument. Drafting helps to start the writer with whatever part of projected whole comes most easily and the writer can do a different piece or part of writing later.

Writing is an act of discovering ideas and thoughts. The teachers should help students understand that writing often consists of drafting, re-drafting and revision and provide them the environment, help with guidance and support, so as to enable them to improve their writing through such a process. For instance, students must be provided sufficient time to write the draft or the other technique can be to ask students to make use of ideas generated in the prewriting stage and write a draft quickly, concentrating on developing the content. Besides this, peer evaluation where students exchange their drafts and give suggestions to each other often works to improve their writing. Therefore, it is noted that a fundamental principle of process approach is that writing is an interactive process.

The traditional method of writing does not have the steps of prewriting of 'one shot' writing. This does not allow flexibility to change their ideas; once written, it cannot be changed and the writer may lose confidence in it. It is also difficult to compose a polished fine piece of writing in one attempt. The writer has to keep the demand of language like syntactic, semantic and pragmatic lexical and discursive which is possible with only with prewriting/drafting.

Rewriting Stage

There is a distinction made between skilled and unskilled writer in the re-writing stage. Unskilled writers are less selective and less productive. Unskilled writers tend to correct only surface errors of grammar and punctuation or change their choice of words (Faigley and White, 1981). Unskilled writers assume that what they write makes sense and there is no need to add or explain in detail or arrange the essay better. In the rewriting stage, a skilled writer deal with meta-cognition, like performing critical thinking, talking or writing topic; they use appropriate language and details to make their work interesting and impressive. They check for grammar punctuation and revise and delete if some part is not required. Therefore, skilled writers polish their work. More proficient writers do edit their papers, says Chenoweth (1987) but also spend considerable time and effort working on the whole content to see how it reads and is understood by the readers whereas unskilled writers fail to polish their work and so fail to understand the problems that the reader may experience in understanding their text.

Murray (1978) and Perl (1980) quoted in Chenoweth (1987) note that writing and re-writing is a process of discovering. Writers start the process of writing and they do not know exactly what they want to say. They write preliminary drafts, they find what it is they want to do. They write a first draft, edit and then rewrite the text to express their ideas adequately. This is a natural and inevitable part of the writing process. This way, the final piece of writing has improvement with better content and organization.

In the writing process, the writer moves back and from prewriting to outlying drafting to present a final polished piece of composition. The writing process has stages like pre-writing, drafting and revision. The first stage pre-writing starts with mind mapping, free writing and brainstorming move to drafting and then the third stage revision but in reality, the stages are merged and intertwined and they may overlap and run into each other. Therefore, the writers move in a cyclic process to present a finished piece of writing.

The Process – Product view of teaching Writing

Before proceeding with this section, the meaning of words ‘process’ and ‘product’ need to be clarified. Process writing focuses on the process through which writers are able to produce a piece of cohesive and coherent written discourse. Process is the means by which we reach a product. Product is the end result of our labor and has about it an air of finality and completeness.

Writing is a matter of discovering or inventing the thought to be expressed in the text. As it is a matter of expressing it, is a matter of expressing it in an appropriate and convincing way (Flower & Hayes 1980 a). Writing is a complex interaction of the process-product approach. Research in second language writing, be it Raimes (199:91), Flower and Hayes (1981) or Hyland (2003), have observed that neither the process nor the product view alone provides a complete picture of the complexity of writing. Both the approaches process and product are interrelated and interwoven and they are not separated and opposed to the ultimate aim of both process and product approaches which are the learner’s mastery of the writing skill.

Steele (204 P.1) presents the differences between Process and Product approaches to writing:

Process writing	Product writing
Text as a resource for comparison	Imitate Model Text
Ideas as starting point important	Organization of ideas are more
More than are draft	ideas themselves
More global, focused and purpose, theme, text type i.e., Reader is emphasized features	one draft features highlighted including controlled to practice of those
Collaborative	Individual
Emphasis as creative process	Emphasis on end product

Arndt (1987:257) describing the relation between process and product approach writes, “When we talk about the teaching of writing what do you refer to? The composition or the composing?The text or the activity?Or both? What is our answer if we askourselves that which aspect we should be concentrating on? Indeed the very fact that the term writing can refer to both the finished products and the processes underlying their production.”

Over the last two decades or so, the change of emphasis in writing research from product to process has centered attention in the composing activities through which initial ideas and meaning evolve into written texts. Yet it may be ill-advised and perhaps even impossible to divorce the processes and products from each of them either in teaching or research.

This shows that both the process product and process approaches complement each other. Gardner and Johnson (1997) argue, writing is a fluid process created by writers as they work, which involves skills in drafting, revising and planning as well as knowledge of language organization context and audiences. So, the process and product approach are complementary to each other. The two approaches have strengths and weaknesses, but we must try to use it to develop the learner’s skill of writing.

Raimes (1983:5) writes, “There is no one way to teach writing but many ways.” This idea is also supported by Prabhu (1990) and Richards (2001). Therefore, there is no one best method of teaching language and writing in particular and each method has its erits and demerits.

Bibliography

- J Applebee, A.N. 1984. Writing and Reasoning. *Review of Educational Research* 54/4:577-600.
- J Badger,R.andWhite,G 2000. A process genre approach to teaching writing.*ELT Journal* 54/2 :153-160
- J Bailey, E.P.1984, *Writing Clearly: A Contemporary Approach*. Ohio: Charles E.Merill
- J Breen, M. 1989. Process syllabus for language Classroom. *ELT Document* 118
- J Byrne, D. 1979. *Teaching Writing Skills*. London: Longman House.
- J Carroll, J.A. and Wilson, E. 1983. *Acts of Teaching: How to Teach Writing*. England: Teacher Ideal Press.
- J Crowley, S and Redman. 1975. *Why Teach Writing? College Composition and Communication* 26/3:279-281.
- J Grabe, W. and Kaplan, R.B. 1996. *Theory andPractice of Writing–An Applied Linguistic Perspective*. London: Longman
- J Lorch, S. 1981. *Basic Writing. A Practical Approach*. Cambridge: Winthrop Publishers.
- J Raimes, A. 1983. *Techniques inTeaching Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- J Sharon, C. and Freedman, G. 1975 .Why Teach Writing .*College Composition and Communication* 26/31 279-281
- J Tribble, C. 1996 *Writing*. Oxford. Oxford: University Press.
- J White, R.T. 1987 .*Writing Advanced*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- J Williams, J .O.1989, *Prewriting to Teach Writing*. California Wordsworth Publishing Company.