

Writing Process and the EFL Writing

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1. Introduction

For many students, writing is a difficult skill to acquire in their native language, let alone in a foreign one. In setting realistic, attainable writing goals, teachers need to bear in mind that written communication consists not only of strict grammatical accuracy but also of comprehensibility and originality.

Effective writing seems like a mysterious accomplishment to many people. To most students writing has always seemed impossible. Some may even hate to write. A lot of students do! One of the reasons may be that so many teachers and students have always sought out the nature of good writing in the finished work, in essays and short stories, of famous authors. They usually analyze profound moral essays or well-written prose and find basic elements of good writing. They classify how great writers organized, shaped, selected, and envisioned their material. They try to follow the most successful and traditional models: narration, exposition, argumentation, description, and so on. But when students try to use such models for their own work, they cannot but feel frustrated and helpless. Teachers sometimes reinforce the negative feelings by focusing on student errors. Students have no way to see the false starts, the thrown-away words and paragraphs, or the agony and frustration the writer felt each time staring at the ceiling or the blank page. Nor can they feel how a writer finally discovered what it was he wanted to say.

This article seeks to investigate the methods successful writers go through, to find out certain phases that recur, and to introduce important steps most writers are likely to follow with special reference to the writing process so that both teachers and the above-intermediate level students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) can realize the importance of writing process. The major contents of this paper include the following: non-

cognitive processes in the beginning, levels of skill in composing process, major steps in writing and a process/product evaluation.

2. The Writing Process

Of the four language skills, writing may truly be considered the most sophisticated. In listening and in reading, students receive a message formulated by another; their role is receptive even though they may be actively interpreting and analyzing what they are hearing or reading. In speaking, students are engaged in communicating their own ideas and feelings, but with approximations and explanations. Communication through the written word, on the other hand, possesses a certain degree of finality and demands real proficiency from the writer if it is to be effective.

The student learning a foreign language follows a series of steps in developing the writing skill. The mechanics such as vocabulary, spelling, and grammar must be mastered before the student can aspire to precision of expression, fluency, and style. At the early levels, communication consists of messages and short paragraphs. Later, the student writes longer papers. Tests should consequently be so structured that they measure the various aspects of student progress toward the acquisition of this fourth skill.

2. 1. Preliminary Measures in Writing

The kind of mental activity required for grammatical analysis is not the same as that required for composing a sentence. Often the preoccupation with the skills of grammatical analysis rather than with the skills of composing is thought to be a subtle, yet crucial factor in the decline of writing ability. Then are there certain skills, certain mental processes underlying the act of writing, which if practiced will lead toward competency in writing?

Three composing activities include combining kernel sentences, recasting faulty sentences and making sentences based on rhetorical models.

Sentence combining activities are mostly focused on rearranging the given elements, not on creating new ones. Therefore, it is considered a low level activity. The particular composing skill requires the learner to deal with only one aspect of composing process, namely, the manipulation of re-

relationships inside the sentence. It takes little thought to recognize that the composing process involves much more than the mastery of those relationships such as coordination, subordination, embedment, deletion and so on. Sentence-combining activities have grown out of transformational grammar, which analyzes a complicated sentence as a series of short kernel sentences made up into a single unit.

Practice in sentence-combining develops skill in seeing relationships among the various elements of the sentence. In order to understand the mental activity in sentence-combining, one should understand the word, "relationship." Usually the sentence-combining activities are fragmentary in terms of writing. But they are useful for the below-intermediate level students.

Activities in recasting faulty sentences take the following steps: first, finding the mistake in the sentence; second, reconstructing mentally the existential situation; third, recasting the sentence, making its form reflect the situation. The third step is primarily concerned with style, in its best sense, an actual reflection of reality.

Revising a sentence requires not only more mental operations but also more complex operations, because sometimes students have to introduce grammatical or rhetorical relationships not in the original. Even the lexical entries can be viewed in terms of etymological, historical, objective, specific and pragmatic (Norrick, 1982: 245). Since a great deal of overlap and boundary fuzziness can be expected, special care must be taken. The important thing is that students should keep the sense of the original intact. Therefore, recasting faulty sentences can be said to be at a higher level of skill than combining sentences.

Making sentences based on rhetorical models requires three steps: first, the teacher presents the model; second, the teacher identifies the key rhetorical elements in the model; third, students compose original sentences based on the key elements.

As Frank J. D'Angelo says, "a conceptual theory of rhetoric is the search for specific intellectual processes in which written communication comes into being. The study of conceptual rhetoric is the study of the nature of human intellectual capacities. Moreover, rhetorical patterns could not be produced in speech or in writing unless they are based on underlying mental processes" (D'Angelo, 1975: 26).

In addition, the use of non-cognitive processes should be taken into account. In other words, teachers should realize what goes on in classrooms. Most of what goes on in any classroom is emotional and affective, rather than cognitive. This noncognitive component of the classroom experience deeply affects every student, either enhancing or inhibiting his growth and performance. Accidental putdowns may inhibit the student's ability to express himself in writing.

Carefully structured humanistic processes that reduce anxiety, promote affiliation, and supply opportunities for success do produce attitude changes resulting in improvement in writing performance. Relieving the students of their first-day anxiety in class is crucial to the success of the whole semester instruction. In order to reduce the first-day anxiety, it is necessary for a teacher to provide them with an opportunity to share their immediate concern. The teacher opens the session which reflects students' worries about the course. The session takes care of all the negative aspects of the course. In the next session the teacher divides the students into a small group of four or five and lets them introduce themselves for about ten minutes. By then the anxiety level goes down and certainly affiliation has begun. Then follows the first writing assignment on "What I Want to Learn in the Course." Later at the end of the semester the students will write on "What I Have Achieved."

Success requires response from readers. Therefore, writing for a reading public is an important feature for the course. From each assignment good essays are selected and read aloud in class. The teacher asks about the strong points of the selected essay. Only the strong points are discussed. Three times in the semester every student revises, and duplicates for distribution his/her most satisfying writing achievement. Each student takes home the other's work, and writes a one-page critique of the essay, indicating the strong points, and the specific successes, of that particular essay as the critic sees it. The writer's revised essay and the critic's feedback receive no grade.

Early in the semester each student has two minutes to tell his/her own strengths from personal experiences to strong points in essays. Usually the key sentence is suggested. "One of my strong points is ..." In the middle of the semester, each student listens to the teacher's or the group's assessment of his/her strengths. Strong points in essays translate into successes in

writing. The desired behavior will increase in frequency, eventually forcing out the undesired behavior, although the reason behind it is hard to measure and explain.

The suggested processes are used throughout the course—more often during the early part of the semester in order to achieve impetus as rapidly as possible. Sometimes the processes themselves become writing assignments, and students describe their experiences in detail. Growth and development take place within the experience of the process.

2.2. Major Steps in Writing

Effective writing seems like an inexplicable accomplishment to many people. To most students writing has always seemed unacceptable. By comparison to the masterpieces of English prose, their clumsy essays read like failures, lacking all grace and virtue.

Because students are individuals, the writing process is not always identical for each student. When one investigates the methods successful writers go through, one finds that certain phases seem to recur. Some important steps most writers are likely to follow are described and discussed as follows: The steps include perceiving the subject, recognizing the audience, discovering the form, writing a first draft, rewriting, editing and doing the final checkup.

To see the subject clearly is the first step. All writers should know about their subject; They need to learn how to know about it, how to look, how to investigate, how to see relationships. Perception is possible through a sensory act. All intellectual and emotional experience begins in the senses, in seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting. One discovers them in the process of looking at specific details and bringing together seemingly unrelated parts. However, one should not be overwhelmed by too many details. Focusing and selecting should become automatic for every writer.

Perception is then the source of one's ideas. One begins to combine and compare, to differentiate, to see relationships and patterns in working through facts, and details; in listening to others' opinions; and in personal observation. It can be fairly said that a well-written paper is the result of an intense perceptive process that may take as much training and development as the actual writing of sentences and paragraphs. Students should be

trained to perceive the subject more clearly and fully.

Writing is almost always a private act. But the product is a public performance. As in all social actions, convention and custom influence the people involved. The shaping of one's ideas, the voice one speaks in, the level of one's vocabulary, the formality of one's sentences, even one's grammar and punctuation may be influenced by the type of audience one is trying to reach.

Recognition of the audience and its needs should occur almost simultaneously with perception of the subject. Good writers will not change their ideas to please a particular audience, but they should often be willing to change selection of evidence, organization of details, tone and level of vocabulary in order to communicate their ideas as effectively as possible. The identification of one's audience is necessary. One should think about the following: Who are his readers? Why are they reading? What do they expect from the writer? The use of the right voice in writing should also be taken into account.

Actually every voice has its limitations. A colloquial voice may be successful for light entertainment. But it is not appropriate for discussing more serious material. An informal voice may be considered a solid bridge between colloquial and formal. There are locutions that are appropriate to a particular kind of written communication, to a particular reader, and to a particular purpose. Levels of diction will take care of these particular forms of expression (Friend, 1971: 95). The use of informal and colloquial language contrasts to that of formal vocabulary.

<u>Formal</u>	<u>Colloquial</u>	<u>Informal</u>
discuss	yakk	talk
I would estimate	My guess is	I would guess
youth	kids	children

When the writer knows his audience, he needs to know what it expects and needs.

No writing is ever totally spontaneous. Even though the best writing often sounds spontaneous, some sort of form or organization always disciplines content. Usually most forms such as essays or narrative are open-structured, allowing enormous freedom for exploring and developing a sub-

ject. Often patterns are flexible other than introductions, bodies and conclusions. Organizing, shaping, forming have been the great difficulties to professional writers as well as students. Finding form in a subject is a process of ordering chaos. That is why it is hard work.

The shape or organization of a paper may be determined by the writer's special perception of the subject or by the limitations and biases of a particular audience. Form may be consciously organized with a Roman numeral outline, or it may evolve gradually from the writing itself.

The first draft is the stage where one gets down his perceptions, follows his hunches, sees the subject intensely in his mind as he writes, often ignoring his notes and an outline. One should remember that the first draft will be only a sketch of the writer's ideas, of the facts and details of perception, and that much of it will be almost inevitably badly written.

When one makes writing a habit, it becomes easier and non-threatening. When one writes about anything that comes into his head regularly, it becomes a type of warm-up writing.

Also one should write fast. The more words one gets on the page, the more words themselves seem to activate the imagination. Words call up words. Images call up images. During the first draft, intensive and fast writing focuses one's mind on the subject.

One rewrites until the shape of the subject begins to find its wholeness. Like painters and sculptors, writers work from rough sketches that only gradually take on shape and substance. Therefore, good writing is often a rewritten product of the original draft.

The real work of writing begins when one rephrases, crosses out, and begins again, testing each new sentence against the old. In either case one's focus is on the subject.

Since language is inseparable from being human, the writer needs at least a fundamental understanding of some of the ways words affect him and his reader. Sometimes the feeling we have about words become so strong that they actually replace the original denotative meanings. We should remember that words may evoke the positive or negative feeling. There are also words which are said to be connotatively neutral.

After drafting and rewriting, much remains to be done. Editing is a slow, line-by-line examination. For some, this step may partially overlap the re-writing phase. For others, it seems most successful as a final act. Often the

best policy is to lay the work aside and later, the writer returns to the paper with a critical eye.

As an editor one brings to his manuscript the attitude of a craftsman. Every word should be precise; every superfluous word should be eliminated. Sentence structures must be grammatically acceptable. Paragraphs should have a sense of unity. At the same time the title should be considered as carefully as the conclusion.

When one tries to edit too soon in the writing process, one may edit out fine ideas before they reach their most developed form. Therefore, an understanding of the process is very valuable to one's writing. Naturally editing should constitute the final phase. Editing will not in itself make for good writing, but good writing is not just possible without elaborate editing.

Many necessary aspects of writing involve the mechanics of effective expression: sentence structure, sentence variety, paragraphing, logical order, accurate documentation. However, such qualities should not be too emphasized early in the learning process.

Often an editorial checklist will help students to watch out for the important but wrong use of words, phrases, illogical development of sentences, etc. Editing should be done with care.

2.3. A Process/Product Evaluation

Most program evaluations are product-oriented. That is, they focus on what a program produces, chiefly in terms of student learning, but sometimes also in terms of changes that the program brings about in teachers' and students' attitudes, students' self-concepts, related intellectual skills, and the like (Long, 1984: 409).

Thus, according to Long, most product evaluations set out to answer one or both of the following questions:

1. Does program X work?
2. Does program X work better than program Y?

Like most program evaluations, most writing evaluations are also product-oriented. Although product evaluation is essential, it has weaknesses. Product evaluations cannot distinguish among the many possible explana-

tions for the results they obtain. It is because they focus on the product of writing while ignoring the process by which that product came about.

Then what is the process evaluation like? According to Long, process evaluation is the systematic observation of classroom behavior with reference to the theory of (second) language development which underlies the writing being evaluated (Long, 1984: 415).

In the EFL writing class, language is both the vehicle and the object of instruction. When the language is both the vehicle and the object, such linguistic and psycholinguistic phenomena as modeling, error, correction, input, conversation, simplicity, saliency, and frequency, for instance, are meaningful.

Whether EFL students are engaging in full-class compositions, small group compositions, or individual or paired compositions (Disick, 1975: 181), they should be encouraged to know the meaning of the process as well as the product.

Students will hesitate to write freely and creatively if they are heavily penalized for grammar and spelling errors. Also, if they receive low grades, they will not enjoy writing. On the other hand, teachers do need to establish minimal standards of accuracy and comprehensibility for compositions. One way of resolving this dilemma is to pass all compositions that satisfy the basic requirements of the assignment and are comprehensible. All writing mistakes are underlined or marked using an agreed abbreviation system. This will encourage self-correction. On the whole, the cumulative checking is desirable together with individual conferences.

3. Conclusion

Martha Duffy, in an article introducing a wave of writing reform that is sweeping through schools, colleges and businesses all over the U. S., indicated "in the age of talk shows, tape recorders, telephonitis and declining educational standards, the clearly written word is swiftly becoming a lost art" (*Time* May 19, 1980). When it comes to the EFL writing, the issue becomes more serious with an ever-increasing emphasis on *la parole*.

However, if we proceed from the premise that writing is a form of communication, we can assume that the essence of that communication will be unique only in so far as student background, personality, and attitudes are

reflected. Variations and modifications in the treatment of topics should be permissible in the writing process. Otherwise, the written communication will become fundamentally deceitful, the student bored, and the teacher intellectually threatening.

An expanding vocabulary and increasing competence in mechanics and orthographic conventions can be expected at the completion of the writing course. To this end it is essential that students own and freely use a good desk dictionary.

Only the mastery of mechanical and grammatical correctness will not suffice the requirements of a good writing. The EFL writing should have a "dimension of depth" whose term was introduced in 1976 (Stevick, 1976: 110). The idea of a "dimension of depth" came into being by using evidence from studies of human memory. When the student jots down what he has memorized on the paper, he is not conveying information, hence not communicating and not using language. It should be noted that words and sentences that remain on the surface, evaporate almost immediately. Students should go a little deeper. They must relate at least a part of the meaning and structure to meanings and structures that are already in their long-term memory, and on this basis, they must produce an appropriate response on the paper.

An increase in "communicativeness" enhances retention and improves pedagogical effectiveness to the extent that it increases the average "depth" of the experience, but only to that extent (Stevick, 1976: 44).

The following are suggested for the betterment of EFL writing:

First, the study of literature and the teaching of writing are closely related. English departments should, at least, be more aware of their dual responsibility to teach composition and promote literary study.

Second, extensive reading is compulsory in writing. As Iser indicated, "we look forward, we look back, we decide, we change our decisions, we form expectations, we are shocked by their nonfulfillment, we question, we muse, we accept, we reject" (*CC and C*, 1978: 29) when we are engaged in reading. Likewise, we undergo a similar process when we write. This dynamic process of re-creation should be taken into account.

Third, composition teachers are specialists. Therefore, any English teacher cannot teach writing. Often literature specialists have the potential to be the best qualified teachers of composition. But accepting the model of

literature as communicative act is not enough to teach writing. Whoever is available at the last minute should not fill the job of teaching composition.

Fourth, various teaching methods of English composition are available (Choi, 1977: 33-55; 1979: 25). But often methods and real writing are two different things. Teachers themselves should re-experience the pangs of composition. Through this humbling experience both teachers and students can realize the true meaning of process/product in EFL writing.

Writing involves such an intricate and unexplored mixture of mental, physical, and social components that we should seek help in understanding it from the widest possible range of disciplines. Composition should be moved into a central place in intellectual inquiry both for its application to the learning of other disciplines and for its dependence on them.

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ABSTRACT

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Effective writing seems like a mysterious accomplishment to many people. To most students writing has always seemed impossible. One of the reasons may be that teachers and students have always sought out the nature of good writing in the finished work, in essays of great writers. This paper seeks to investigate the methods successful writers go through, to introduce important steps most writers are likely to follow with special reference to the writing process so that both teachers and students in EFL classes can realize the importance of writing process. Four suggestions are made. First, for the betterment of the EFL writing, teachers have dual responsibilities of teaching composition and promoting literary study. Second, extensive reading is compulsory in writing. Third, any English teacher cannot teach writing. Composition teachers should be specialists in that field. Fourth, teachers themselves should re-experience the pangs of composition. Through this humbling experience both teachers and students can realize the true meaning of process/product in the EFL writing.

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