

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS

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DOI: **10.5958/2249-7137.2023.00040.X**

ABSTRACT

Writing has always been a forgotten area of foreign language teaching and is most likely the least favored skill among students. Recently, however, it has become an essential element of the communicative dyad, which includes the oral expression of social interaction and information exchange. When interpreting writing from a practical perspective, the focus is on demonstrating that there must be a connection between actual needs and learning, both in terms of language and in terms of the task at hand. A systematic comprehension of writing not only ensures successful writing outcomes, but also leads to the acquisition of a second language abilities: informed choices of grammar and lexical structures; a logical model for the development of ideas; proper choice of register and style; and in general a better approach to writing tasks and contextualization. This article seeks to discuss writing as a productive skill, suggesting six different approaches that successfully integrate both the linguistic dimension and the task-related knowledge that students must gain in order to successfully express themselves in writing.

KEYWORDS: *written communication, productive skills, task-related skills, approaches to writing.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of English as a comprehensive means of communication has become increasingly important in today's social, political, commercial, and professional contexts. With the development of information technology in various spheres of society, English has become the language of a global citizen. In schools of Uzbekistan, English has long been taught as a major subject, but it has often been observed that students still lag behind in acquiring comprehensive productive skills, especially writing. Traditionally neglected in foreign language teaching practices, writing is probably the least popular skill among students. Recently, however, it has become an important element of the communicative dyad, which also includes speaking, that is, the oral manifestation of social interaction and information exchange. Being able to write to communicate is a complex skill: it goes beyond mechanically copying letters and words or even forming simple sentences. It requires students to create a written product by actively and critically using the language they are learning, applying sophisticated cognitive skills, analyzing information and creating original work. Moreover, the communicative event is often characterized by interaction with an audience that is usually absent.

2. Writing as a Productive Skill

Developing writing as a productive language skill has always been a complex and challenging task. The actual writing process implies teaching students how to write cohesively, how to use appropriate grammatical and lexical structures, how to use appropriate spelling, and how to choose the correct linguistic register. Regardless of the level, good writing involves discovery, planning, idea development, creativity, and revision. To master writing, students must learn a variety of methods to help them understand and approach writing tasks to successfully solve them. As with all processes, teaching writing requires a systematic approach to motivate students to express themselves in writing and to inform them of the steps involved in writing effectively.

There are various theories that justify a methodical approach to teaching writing. Walter (2004) proposes simulated writing as a technique based primarily based on teacher demonstration, involving revision, addition, questioning, and clarification of purpose. The same author presents collaborative writing as a technique that allows students to become more engaged in the writing process while practicing language patterns and acquiring functional writing strategies.

The transition from the "controlled" to "guided" to "free" approach is a three-phase technique presented by Olstein in 2001. As with Walter's approach, this method emphasizes the importance of modeling (in controlled and guided phases), which later forms the basis for free writing, a phase in which students are required to create finished texts (paragraphs, compositions, essays) in response to various stimuli (tasks). Registration is also an important element to be taught along with language skills. Turbill, Barton, and Brock (2015) emphasize the importance of developing students' skills with different types of texts. They argue that it is important for students to identify common features of texts (type, social purpose, structure, linguistic elements) before being introduced to different writing strategies based on these elements.

3. The Practice of Teaching Writing

Most students need to write paragraphs, essays, argumentative essays,

coursework and exam reports. The use of a wide range of writing techniques

should help students better understand the mechanisms of writing. A gradual approach to writing should guide students down a path that begins with simple paragraphs that focus on the idea of coherence to more complex pieces such as lengthy arguments based on personal opinion and requiring critical thinking skills.

In terms of more practical procedures, teaching writing as a productive skill

includes the following steps:

1. Providing a model of the target writing product;
2. Working on the model, focusing on meaning and form, helping students analyze the text to discover language, organizational patterns, and register features;
3. Practicing on a similar task, mimicking form and language (spelling, structure, vocabulary, formatting);
4. Getting a response to a new task that involves personalization of both content and form.

In addition, there are some important communicative aspects to consider when teaching writing:

-The task - it must be contextualized and formulated to answer the following questions: who?, what?, to whom?, why?

-Audience - this is an important element of communicative competence that dictates the way we adapt our speech according to status, gender, and age of the recipients. If we do not adjust vocabulary, grammar, tone, registration, and style for the audience, the communication may be inappropriate and may even be misguided.

-purpose - has direct relevance to the purpose of the letter (providing information, invitation, requesting information, making a complaint, expressing an opinion) and entails conventions of style and register.

The purpose of writing correlates with the linguistic functions (to tell, to describe, to explain, to inform, to argue, to persuade) and determines the choice of vocabulary and grammar.

Regardless of the general approach taken, it is natural to conclude that learning to write is a systematic process that involves gradual steps to produce a final product.

4. Six Approaches to Developing Writing Skills

As discussed, writing as a productive skill is a complex mechanism that must be broken down into its most essential elements so that it can be understood, taught, and re-learned. The following diagram shows what authors should take into account when writing a piece of work:

WRITING as a **productive** skill

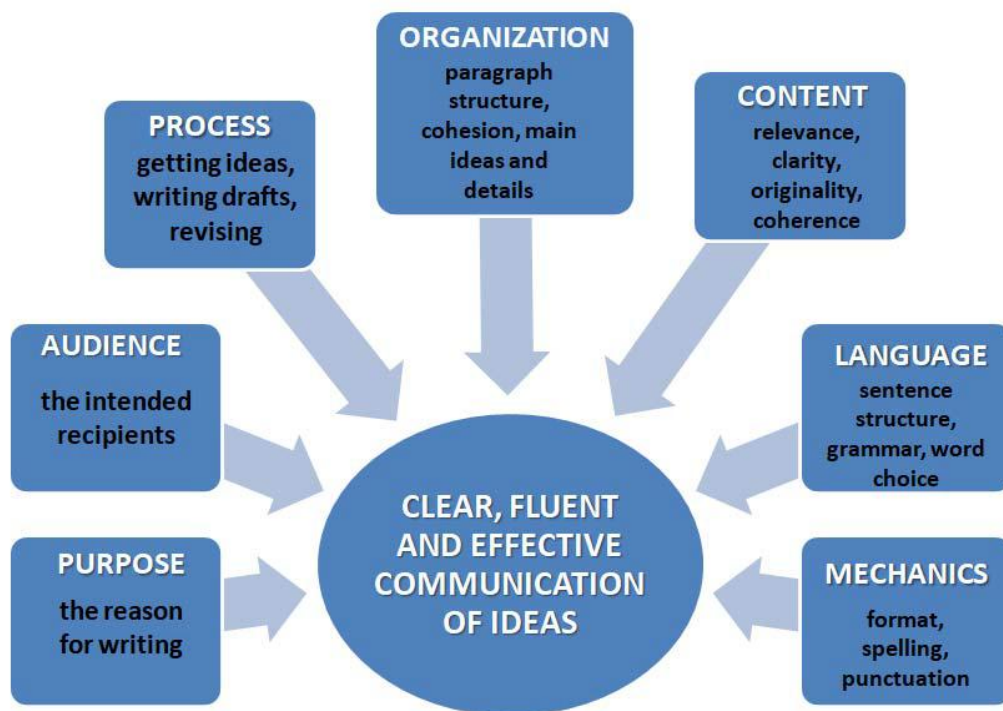


Figure 1: Elements of writing

Regardless of the many theories that substantiate writing as a productive skill, there is no answer to the question of how to teach writing. There are as many answers as there are teachers, students, and teaching and learning styles. However, it is important to understand the what, why, and how of writing in order to choose the most appropriate techniques and the most appropriate approach.

4.1. The Controlled to Free Approach

This approach was first introduced by Raimes (1983) and is based on the auditory-language approach that dominated second language learning in the 1950s and early 1960s. It is a sequential approach to writing that involves copying, manipulating, or altering texts. Students first practice with words and sentences, then move on to paragraphs and longer compositions. They are required to grammatically manipulate a given input, such as changing sentences (statements to questions or questions to affirmations, negatives to affirmations), converting tenses (present to past, present to future) and voice (active to passive) or number (singular to plural). This approach focuses on grammar, syntax, and mechanics and emphasizes accuracy rather than fluency. It is not based on creativity, but rather on imitation, modeling, and adaptation of pre-existing patterns of content and format.

4.2. The Free Writing Approach

Byrne states that "many students write poorly because they do not write enough" (Byrne, 1988, p. 22). Given this caveat, the free-writing approach focuses on quantity rather than quality. It is based on the principle that any given topic can produce a huge number of texts, which should flow freely, abundantly, and with minimal error correction. According to Scrivener (2005), this kind of writing may contain a lot of unnecessary material, but the valuable ideas that are generated in the process may later prove useful for the actual writing assignment.

4.3. The Paragraph-Pattern Approach

This approach emphasizes the importance of organization. It is based on the principle that communication is constructed and organized differently in different cultures and according to different contexts. Because this approach focuses on organizational patterns, students work with paragraphs that they copy, analyze, and simulate. Exercises may include rearranging scrambled sentences (in a paragraph), mixed paragraphs (in a longer composition), identifying general and specific information, writing an appropriate topic sentence for a paragraph, writing supporting details for a main idea, or defining a main idea that encompasses an enumeration of details.

4.4. The Grammar-Syntax Approach

Introduced by Raimes in 1983, this approach involves simultaneously considering the following elements: grammar, syntax, and organization. Based on the premise that successful writing stems from an effective combination of individual language skills, the grammar-syntax approach is designed around writing assignments that require students to pay attention to organization while focusing on grammatical accuracy. Clear organization stems from the effective use of more than appropriate vocabulary; it requires a conscious knowledge of verb and tense structure, linking devices, and even sentence structure to create a coherent paragraph. In preparing students for the task, all of the elements mentioned should either be learned for the first time or addressed as separate elements and only after incorporation into a larger written product. More importantly,

this approach links the purpose of writing to the linguistic tools needed to convey the relevant message (Chavez, Espinosa & Tapia, 2011).

4.5. The Communicative Approach

The communicative methodology also links two important elements in the aforementioned diagram: purpose and audience. In addition, this approach lends authenticity to the writing assignment and its outcome, as students are encouraged to act like writers in real-life contexts and to ask themselves several important questions that will guide their writing: why am I writing this? (purpose) Who will read this? (audience). Although traditionally the audience for students' writing is only the teacher, this approach shifts the focus away from the (somewhat) sterile purpose of learning, broadening the readership to fit a more authentic communicative purpose. The formulation of the assignment is where the larger audience is, and thus students are offered a contextualized purpose for their writing that helps them choose the most appropriate language, content, and level of formality. This approach—with its emphasis on mind and audience—illustrates Byrne's (1988) belief that writing assignments should be as authentic as possible and that contextualizing real life motivates students to write better.

4.6. The Process Approach

The process approach reallocates writing resources to the process rather than the product itself (Harmer, 2001). It is a comprehensive approach that successfully combines "why," "who," and "how" questions in writing while systematizing content. It is a sophisticated methodology that incorporates various stages of inquiry and effectively combines pre-writing comprehension skills (reading, listening) with oral (discussion, debate) and subsequent written responses (Golkova and Gubackova, 2014). Broader and abstract topics are explored in detail, with an emphasis on language (vocabulary and grammar), and research is encouraged to expand content and generate ideas. The main advantage of this approach is that it promotes creativity, allows students to work at their own pace and gives them the opportunity to review their work and improve it in the process. According to White and Arndt (1991), "the purpose of this approach is to develop the skills by which writers develop their own solutions to the problems they pose, by which they form a coherent message from source material, and by which they work to create an acceptable and appropriate form for having expressed it" (p. 5).

5. CONCLUSION

Building on the premise that effective writing requires writing skills and language skills, this article is based on the idea that written expression involves understanding specific elements related to the task (cause, audience, process), while language is perceived as a means of communication. Consequently, the theoretical approaches discussed in this article are supported by the belief that effective writing skills develop only at the intersection of task-related skills and language-related skills. Task-related skills relate to task performance, format, and appropriate use of register and style. Proper task performance involves adequate

organization that indicates a logical and consistent flow of ideas. In other words, task performance requires writers to clearly state their purpose, tailor their message to the target audience by choosing the right language, tone, and style, disclosing relevant ideas, and choosing the appropriate text type depending on the communicative context. Language skills indicate students' level of language proficiency: the use of lexical structures appropriate to the task at hand; knowledge of grammar and syntax appropriate for the purposes of communication register

and style adapted to the audience; appropriate cohesive devices that provide coherence to the text; accuracy in spelling; and the use of important punctuation marks to convey the message unambiguously. Developing writing skills is a long-term investment. It's far from simple in terms of translating language into written form; writing is a thought process, requiring conscious intellectual effort over a considerable period of time. This article has discussed theoretical approaches to developing writing skills in order to offer both students and teachers of English the opportunity to clarify and deepen their theoretical understanding of writing as a productive skill, while providing a favorable foundation for their future journeys into the complex realm of written expression.

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