


Do you sometimes wonder what people mean when they talk about ‘process writing’? This lesson looks at a **process** approach to writing and shows how it differs from a very strictly **product** approach. It describes a procedure for process writing and gives some teaching ideas. Before you complete this lesson, it may be useful to have looked at *Writing 1: A product approach and features of written language*.

Task 1 – A process quiz



What are your beliefs about how we structure and manage writing lessons? Take this short quiz to find out. Write ‘yes’ or ‘no’ next to each statement, then check your ideas with the answer key below. 

Statements	Yes/No?
1. Students should learn to write correct sentences and build them up into a text.	
2. In writing classes, there is a strong emphasis on correct grammar.	
3. In writing classes, you should focus on what the student produces at the end of the lesson.	
4. Classroom writing is by its nature ‘inauthentic’ and it is impossible to make it real.	
5. Writing in the classroom takes a lot of time and is often a waste of time.	
6. Students have to work alone on writing activities.	
7. Teachers should mark all the grammar mistakes that students make.	
8. All written language can be considered formal language.	

Task 1 Feedback

- If you answered all these questions with **'yes'**, then your view of developing writing skills is strongly product-orientated, and it might be interesting for you to explore the different approach outlined in this lesson.
- If you had a lot of **'no'** answers, then you probably already have some awareness of a process approach, but it might be useful for you to look at the ideas in this lesson and see if you can develop techniques further.

Key Skill

A central idea in process writing is to move away from the view that written texts are a collection of grammatically correct sentences. Process writing is connected with the different sub skills that first language writers of English use when they write.

Task 2 – Some alternatives



Numbers 1 to 8 repeat the descriptions of a product approach to writing in task 1. Letters a to h describe some alternatives to this view that are usually associated with the process approach. Match the alternatives to the descriptions.

Descriptions of a product approach	Process approach
1. Students should learn to write correct sentences and build them up into a text.	
2. In writing classes, there is a strong emphasis on correct grammar.	
3. In writing classes, you should focus on what the student produces at the end of the lesson.	
4. Classroom writing is by its nature 'inauthentic' and it is impossible to make it real.	
5. Writing in the classroom takes a lot of time and is often a waste of time.	
6. Students have to work alone on writing activities.	
7. Teachers should mark all the grammar mistakes that students make.	
8. All written language can be considered formal language.	

Alternatives associated with the process approach

- a. In class, students can write a letter or e-mail message to an organisation or publication that exists and send the letter or message.
- b. Teachers' feedback should refer to the ideas expressed in a text and the way in which they are organised.
- c. When students brainstorm and plan written work, they also get useful speaking practice.
- d. It helps students to look at an example model text of what they are writing so they can understand how this works as a whole.
- e. Teachers should expose students to a range of different written genres because they will be writing using different registers.
- f. From the outset, teachers should encourage students to think of a piece of writing as a piece of communication that gets a message across.
- g. A lot of writing activities such as brainstorming, planning and revising can be done in pairs or small groups.
- h. An important part of writing lessons is to get students to understand that the writing process is made up of many sub skills that can help them to create texts.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

The process approach means that students begin to see writing as a communication tool. This means it is important to think about *why* the text is being written and *who* is likely to read it. It also shows that the writing of a text is not a one-off event, but a process made up of several steps.

Task 3 – A procedure for process writing



Letters a to h show typical stages or steps in a process writing lesson. Place these in a logical order.

Stages in a Process Writing Lesson	Order
a. Students get feedback from their peers or from the teacher on what they have written.	
b. Students reformulate some of the language in the text.	
c. The teacher asks students to talk about the purpose of the text they will write.	
d. Students brainstorm ideas and/or, if necessary, do some research on the topic of the text.	
e. Students write a first draft of the text.	
f. Students write a final draft of the text.	
g. Students reconsider some of the ideas in the text and revise their organisation.	
h. Students think about and discuss how their ideas can most effectively be organised.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

The procedure outlined in task 3 could take place over an extended period of time rather than in the course of one individual lesson. For example, students might do brainstorming and discussion of the purpose and organisation of the text in class and then write the first draft as homework. The revising and reformulating might take place two or three days after that.

Task 4 – Individual tasks



Numbers 1 to 8 repeat the steps in a process writing lesson, but this time they are in the correct order. Letters a to h provide examples of a classroom activities. Match the activities to the steps. 

Steps in a process writing lesson	Activities
1. Students brainstorm ideas and/or, if necessary, do some research on the topic of the text.	
2. The teacher asks students to talk about the purpose of the text they will write.	
3. Students think about and discuss how their ideas can be organised.	
4. Students write a first draft of the text.	
5. Students get feedback from their peers, or from the teacher, on what they have written.	
6. Students reconsider some of the ideas in the text and revise their organisation.	
7. Students reformulate some of the language in the text.	
8. Students write a final draft of the text.	

Classroom activities

- a. In pairs or small groups, students look at their notes and discuss how they can be organised into paragraphs.
- b. Students decide whether they need to cut or add information to their text and review the paragraphing.
- c. If the topic of the text voices a personal opinion, students should write alone. However, if the topic is not personal, students could write in pairs or small groups.
- d. Students look at the teacher’s language feedback and change the grammar and vocabulary if necessary.
- e. The teacher encourages the students to use mind maps and provides articles that might be of use.
- f. This can be word processed for the sake of final presentation.
- g. The teacher asks the students to discuss and note down who will read the text and what the reader will need to do as a result of reading the text.
- h. One pair should exchange their draft with another pair. The teacher can monitor and make suggestions.

Thinking about your teaching ...

Try doing some writing lessons that follow a process approach to developing writing skills. As you work through these lessons, note students' reactions to different parts of the process. Where do they have strengths? Where do they have weaknesses? Why do you think this is the case?

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

The one step that students (and teachers) tend to forget about in this process is the second one where students should think of the audience of the text and the outcome (if there is one). Try and make this a standard feature of any writing lesson that you do.

Want to find out more ... ?

Pages 300 to 312 of *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* by Tricia Hedge (Oxford University Press 2000) contain extra reading on process writing.

Pages 325 - 326 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007) discuss the differences between a product and a process approach.

Related TaskBook lessons...

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook series, relating to writing lessons:

- **Unit 3 g) Writing 1: a product approach and features of written language**
(a useful precursor to this lesson)

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

- 1) d
- 2) f
- 3) h
- 4) a
- 5) c
- 6) g
- 7) b
- 8) e

Task 4 – Feedback

- 1) e
- 2) g
- 3) a
- 4) c
- 5) h
- 6) b
- 7) d
- 8) f

Task 3 – Feedback

- 1) d
- 2) c
- 3) h
- 4) e
- 5) a
- 6) g
- 7) b
- 8) f