

# Approaches to Teaching of Writing

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present the approaches to teaching of writing. This study reveals a structured approach to teaching writing in English. It involves pre-writing, organizing, writing, evaluating, revising, and sharing stages. This approach is highly beneficial for teaching writing skills by providing specific guidelines to students that they need to follow in each stage. In this paper, I first briefly discuss the power-s approach to teaching writing in English, and then, I present how this approach can be practically implemented in the EFL writing classroom in the Thai context.

**Keywords:** Approaches; Teaching of Writing

## Introduction

Writing in a new language is a real challenge for students. In order to overcome this difficulty, it is essential to motivate students while writing. Though they may know how to form a composition, they experience difficulty in the meaning making process. When the only and final product, instead of multi-drafts, is evaluated by the teacher, they feel demotivated to see the corrections and usually do not understand why their sentences do not make sense. Thus, they should be given a chance to revise what they have written with formative feedback provided by the teacher in the writing process.

ESL writing research has a relatively short history. In its short biography, several approaches have been adopted. During the reign of audiolingual method in language classrooms in 1960, writing instruction was characterized by the notion that students needed to produce accurate pieces of writing. According to this behaviorist view, phonological awareness was of primary importance for L2 learners. Writing was a kind of practice to produce well-formed sentences, and it used to be regarded as a grammatical exercise in which meaning making seemed to be neglected. Inevitably, the focus was on the finished product. The underlying view in this traditional approach to writing was that students\* writing skills would improve as a result of seeing corrections on the final product. This product-oriented view of writing instruction failed to give students formative feedback while giving summative feedback. The need for keeping record of the spoken word goes back to some of the earliest Indus

civilization 5,500 years ago (Harmer, 2004:1), using the forms of pre-historic communication such as drawings, pictograms, and signs, later followed by the origin of script.

According to Halliday (in Nunan, 1999:275) describing the need for writing as a result of changes in societies, people could no more count on the spoken word but needed a permanent record that would be available for repetitive view. Generally speaking, the basic practical reasons for writing suggested by Raimes (1983), besides those literary ones, which are not included as they are not the subject of the thesis, are to keep records, communicate with the second part (i.e. readers), express ideas, or explore subjects. The list of basic reasons broadened by Lindsay and Knight (2006:85) adds up two more motives – entertaining and examining. Academically speaking, the indispensable reason for learning writing, which makes writing “a valuable part of language learning,” is its close relationship to thinking, holds Raimes (1983:3), with Lindsay and Knight (2006) supporting that it helps students to learn: to practise and reinforce the language, to memorize, and record the language. Writing also gives opportunity to go beyond what has been learnt as learners have to take risks when writing, as Raimes (1983) suggests, and Harmer (2004) similarly encourages writers not to feel stressed by mistake-making as it is an important and inevitable part of their learning. To sum these ideas up, while producing a piece of written work, its author has to answer questions regarding the purpose of writing and audience, see to sentence structures and vocabulary selection, content relevance and clarity, grammar and organization of the text, and deal with the whole process of getting ideas and expressing them in a clear and fluent way. These all are more than convincing reasons giving teaching writing a great value as a significant part in the whole language-learning process.

### **1. Types of written communication**

Types of writing, in principle, can bear a plentiful amount of forms, such as a note to somebody, instructions how to do something, all kinds and types of letters and emails, postcards, shopping and to-do lists, diaries, memos, notes, various forms, etc. One may ask why there are so many types of texts. As Nunan suggests, all of them are needful for each of them is written on different purpose and conveys different kind of information (1999). The types as such, hand in hand with different levels of formality and function, are their own telltale signs. Therefore, each different feature makes each type of the text characteristic; both the content and the form matter as both carry information from the writer to the reader.

Some specific types of written communication will be presented in a broader detail in chapter 2 Written Genres at Secondary School as they form (a) the subject matter of teaching writing in English at secondary schools and (b) the content of requirements for the written part of the school leaving examination (maturita).

### **2. Approaches to teaching writing**

Writing, unlike other skills, cannot be left to itself or just naturally picked up, it has to be

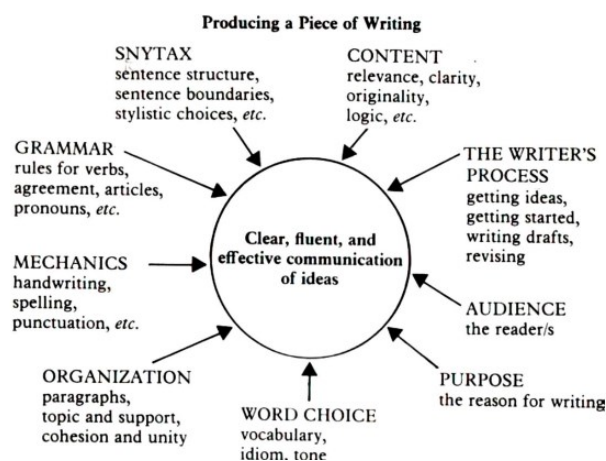
consciously taught and learnt by doing, practising, improving. Every learner has different writing needs depending on their language stage and the purpose of their writing. In order to decide on the most suitable way to handle the writing task, the teacher should consider which approach to choose for their writing lesson. The first part of this section will introduce the most known approaches used in past fifty years. In the second part, these will be described and explored in more detail.

## 2.1 Classification according to selected authors

In the course of two decades (between 1983 and 2001), four prominent methodologists Raimes, Byrne, Tribble and Harmer invented and introduced key approaches to teaching writing. Some serve as foundations of others, some present new ideas and throw light on the issue from a different point of view.

### 2.1.1 Approaches by Ann Raimes

Raimes (1983:11) introduces six approaches used for teaching writing. She asserts that they overlap and their principles can be used in free combinations, and advises that the teacher should not stick to one particular approach only but use them in an eclectic way – drawing from everything that is available. According to her, teaching writing should not be limited to one approach only as there are many possible and creative ways. In her view, when producing a piece of writing, the writer has to deal with various features influencing their writing outcome, as shown in the diagram in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Features participating at production of a piece of writing. (Raimes, 1938)

The stress on particular features brought about development of the following approaches:

- Controlled-to-Free Approach;
- Free-Writing Approach;
- Paragraph-Pattern Approach;
- Grammar-Syntax-Organization Approach;
- Communicative Approach;
- Process Approach.

### 2.1.2 Approaches by Byrne

Byrne's (1988:21-23) division of approaches to teaching writing distinguishes four focuses on particular problem areas of the writing process. The contents of his four approaches are identical with four of Raimes' approaches. Although Byrne presents also an eclectic "state of art" compiling all focuses influenced by recent communicative methodology which looks similar to Raimes' Communicative Approach, he does not take account of Process Approach. Approaches according to Byrne are:

- Focus on Accuracy;
- Focus on Fluency;
- Focus on Text;
- Focus on Purpose.

### 2.1.3 Approaches by Christopher Tribble

Tribble (1996:37) founds his division of approaches on Raimes' three principal ways of assessing the task focus on the form, focus on the writer and focus on the reader. However, he does not follow her division of approaches into six categories but suggests only three. Two of his approaches are same or mostly similar to Raimes' ones. However, he offers a new point of view in his third, Genre Approach. The approaches according to Tribble are:

- Text-based Approach;
- Process Approach;
- Genre Approach.

### 2.1.4 Approaches by Jeremy Harmer

Harmer (2001:257-261) introduces four approaches, advising that the teacher should consciously decide which focus is the best for the students and their current development. Alike Raimes (1983) and Tribble (1996), he describes Process Approach and contrasts it against product-based focus of teaching writing. Similarly to Tribble, he uses Genre Approach; however, unlike any other author, he distinguishes two new categories of writing. Approaches according to Harmer (ibid.) are:

- Process Approach;
- Genre Approach;
- Creative Writing;
- Cooperative Writing.

The following division in Table 1 shows approaches introduced by the four selected authors in the course of two decades. The same colour shows overlapping approaches whose principal attitudes and methods are either same or mostly very similar. The approaches in the bold print are analyzed further on.

**Table 1.** Classification of approaches to teaching writing according to their authors.

Raimes (1983)	Byrne (1988)	Tribble (1996)	Harmer (2001)
Controlled-to-Free Approach	Focus on Accuracy	Text-Based Approach	Process Approach
Free-Writing Approach	Focus on Fluency	Process Approach	Genre Approach
Paragraph-Pattern Approach	Focus on Text	Genre Approach	Creative Writing
Syntax Organization Approach	Focus on Purpose		Cooperative Writing
Communicative Approach			
Process Approach			

### 3. Controlled-to-Free Approach

This approach, introduced by Raimes (1983:6-7), is based on audio-lingual approach popular mainly in 50's and 60's. It works on a sequential way of work with a text. Students are first given exercises that focus on single sentences and only after having practised this level, they copy, manipulate or change paragraphs. The material is chosen and provided by the teacher and students work on strictly prescribed operations. Since the focus is on a controlled way of modelling, students usually do not produce many mistakes, which makes the teacher's work of correcting quick and easy. Areas that are stressed in this approach are grammar, syntax, mechanics, and accuracy.

Besides Raimes, Byrne (1988:21-22) and Tribble (1996:37) introduce the same principles but under different titles. Byrne's Focus on Accuracy stresses control over making mistakes, aiming at eliminating them from the written work by using step-by-step activities. Students do not use own ideas; they work on exercises in which they combine, manipulate and model. This approach gradually reduces amount of control and allows more freedom at later stages. Tribble's traditional Text-based Approach is similarly focused on form and uses authoritative texts for imitating, modelling and adapting, with errors as foes that need to be eliminated.

### 4. Free-Writing Approach

Unlike controlled methods, the free-writing approach introduced by Raimes (1983:7) emphasizes fluency and content (i.e. focus on audience, ideas and originality) rather than form and accuracy. Students write on given topics or topics of their interest, which helps them feel engaged in the writing process and therefore motivated for work. A type of a free-writing activity is a 'quick write'<sup>3</sup> in which students practice their writing skills and creativity on a topic of their own. Such exercise takes five to ten minutes and requires no correction, just a reader (student colleague) to read it and comment on ideas. According to Scrivener (2005:198), who also mentions basic rules of this activity, such kind of writing will certainly contain a lot of waste, but, at the same time, some valuable ideas that the writer can subsequently use in his real writing assignment.

Having the same principles in mind, this approach is reflected in Byrne's (1988:22) Focus on Fluency, emphasizing the same key factors as getting ideas on the paper, feeling actual writing, expressing own thoughts and the like. He (Byrne) argues that "many students write badly because they do not write enough," which subsequently makes them incapable of writing. He suggests that writing about something personal, like keeping a diary, could help.

### **5. Paragraph-Pattern Approach**

Raimes' (1983:7-8) stress of this approach lies on organization; the aim is to learn how English features are organized in a piece of writing. In activities that are based on this approach students work with paragraphs – they copy them, analyse or imitate model ones. Exercises can include putting scrambled sentences in right order, identifying general and specific information, inventing a suitable topic sentence for the paragraph, and the like.

Adhering to the same principles, Byrne (1988:22-23) describes this approach as Focus on Text which is concerned with the paragraph work, its organizing and constructing, and in which students work on a higher level than single sentences.

### **6. Grammar-Syntax-Organization Approach**

This unique approach, introduced by Raimes (1983:8) only, emphasizes simultaneous concern on more features at the same time, e.g. when writing a set of instructions how to prepare a dish, the writer focuses on three aspects (i.e. grammar, syntax and organization), all at once. Besides that, this approach gives the writer an essential aspect of writing – a specific purpose for their effort. Chavez: 2011 adds that this approach links one more important aspect to the form and message – the purpose.

### **7. Communicative Approach**

Similarly to the previous approach, the communicative methodology puts stress on purpose and, additionally, on audience, explains Raimes (1983:8-9). The latter feature plays an important role as the reader (in terms of lesson it would be the teacher, classmates, or alternatively somebody outside the class) gives an authentic feedback or response to the writer in the form of questions, exchanging letters, emails or messages, all that without any correction of the text. This approach mirrors Byrne's Focus on Purpose, according to which the two factors – having reason and audience – should never be neglected in teaching and practicing writing as they motivate students to write.

### **8. Creative Approach**

According to Harmer (2001:259) creative writing employs imaginative tasks such as writing poetry, stories and plays. Gaffield-Vile (as cited in Harmer, 2001:259) sees the creative approach to writing as "journey of self-discovery" that promotes effective learning. It is not off the subject that students who are engaged in such writing activity, in Harmer's opinion, strive harder, than if assigned a more conventional task, as they can build their writing on their own experiences and feelings, which makes a powerful motivation for them to manage the task better. Even more, achievement in creating own text brings about the writer's pride and desire to satisfy the



reader. To support this product pride, it is desirable to provide real audience – not only reading by the teacher but by colleague students, displaying the work on notice boards, publishing in school/class magazine, posting on web, etc.

One of the drawbacks of this approach is that students often find it difficult and even painful to come up with own ideas and/or express them with right words; having nothing to say can therefore be de-motivating or frustrating. On the other hand, it is the irreplaceable role of the teacher to encourage students and “build up creative writing bit by bit, starting with phrases and sentences before expecting whole compositions,” argues Harmer (2001:260). The teacher can use variety of methods and techniques that support and develop writing skills in a creative way. Such source of inspiration for creative writing class can be found in *Methods and Techniques*, which are explored later in chapter 4. Since creative writing evokes working with own ideas, in contrary to prescribed product-based writing, it is obvious that process based approach to writing can be of a great contribution to all writers that need at least a little help with their writing mission.

### **9. Cooperative Approach**

Apparently, this alternative to individual writing draws its great advantage from cooperation with others. As Harmer (2001:260) points out, the group research or generation of ideas is much richer than if students work individually. What motivates students for active participation is common work on the whole writing assignment: gathering ideas, discussion and even peer evaluation. Group work is then crowned with group pride of group accomplishment. Cooperative approach works well with genre-based as well as process writing, or as the case may be, with all approaches as it ‘only’ alters the pattern of interaction of the assigned writing task from individual to group work. And, not only is this way of writing advantageous and easier for students, it also brings about a great relief for the teacher who can give more detailed feedback to writing assignments for they seemingly deal with less pieces of group work than of individual work.

### **10. Process Approach**

Unlike other approaches, Raimes (1983:10), along with Tribble (1996) and Harmer (2001), points out that the process approach emphasis is not on product but on the process as such. The writer has to ask questions of the purpose for their writing and who the audience is, and adds questions of how to manage to convey appropriate message in an appropriate way.

Whatever beneficial for students<sup>4</sup> this approach appears as it involves various stages of research, discussion, language study, cooperation and interaction; in Harmer’s (2001) words it also has its disadvantages. In addition to Tribble (1996:41), who objects that teachers of process writing face the problem of availability of suitable textbooks/material and second, struggle with difficulty whether this approach is reflecting their students’ needs (and thus applicable in their writing classes), Harmer points out that this approach is time-consuming for common classroom

time allowance and, obviously, not suitable for certain kinds of activities (e.g. games, composing on the spot, etc.) (2001:258).

On the other hand, the process approach proves its indisputable advantages as well. To start with, White and Arndt (1991:5) see a process-focused approach as an ‘enabling’ one and give reason for doing so:

As we see it, the goal of this approach is to nurture the skills with which writers work out their own solutions to the problems they set themselves, with which they shape their raw material into a coherent message, and with which they work towards an acceptable and appropriate form for expressing it.

What is important in their eyes is to engage students in and excite them about the creative process of originating their texts, concurrently altering and elucidating their writing process –how they operate when the text is being created. The difference of great importance, in comparison to other approaches, is to understand that “writing is re-writing [and] that revision – seeing with new eyes – has a central role [...] and is not merely a boring error checking exercise,” argue White and Arndt and follow that evaluation is not the responsibility and concern of the teacher at the final stage only but of the writer at all stages of the process. Their assumptions about writing led them to introduce a visualization of their perception of writing process which is displayed in Figure 2 and which shows how dynamic and recursive the process of writing is.

The process approach leads the writer into “discovering new ideas” (Raimes, 1983:10) and new abilities, with the main aim to “arrive at the best product possible” (White & Arndt, 1991:5). It encompasses following six processes (stages) which are briefly introduced here and which also propose methods, techniques and activities<sup>5</sup> that White and Arndt recommend in their book *Process Writing* (1991).

### **10.1 Generating ideas**

Getting started is one of the most difficult parts of writing Byrne (1988), Raimes (1983), White and Arndt (1991:17-43) all agree, and therefore appeal how significantly important it is to help students with generating ideas. The most common techniques that support this process stage according to White and Arndt are brainstorming, asking questions, making notes, using visuals, role-playing and simulating.

### **10.2 Focusing**

Having gone through a generating stage, the writer now sets their focus on a central idea they intend to convey, as if answering the reader’s question ‘What is the writer trying to tell me?’ White and Arndt (1991:44-77) argue that the expression of the main idea is closely connected to (a) the writer’s purpose for writing the particular piece of text, (b) taking into account the reader, and (c) the form the text is going to take.



### 10.3 Structuring

“Conveying a message through writing is essentially a matter of selecting information – both factual and linguistic – and arranging, or more precisely, structuring it” state White and Arndt in the opening sentence of this process stage (1991:78). However, they discourage teachers and students from misunderstanding that once they have used a rigid structuring pattern Introduction – Paragraph 1 – Paragraph 2 – Paragraph 3 – Conclusion, they have to hold on to it at all costs. Rather, they suggest a more helpful approach to structuring – in the form of questions that the writer answers. If willing to be effective, the writer should adopt skills of grouping ideas and sequencing them.

### 10.4 Drafting

Once the writer has gone through the previous ‘pre-writing’ stages,<sup>6</sup> they can now embark on writing a first draft which is more reader-based and therefore of more significant concern for the writer, for after having considered the best way of selecting and organizing ideas, the writer now starts thinking about how to attract and keep the reader’s attention. What White and Arndt (1991:100) hold as fundamental of this process stage are revision and rewriting. They support this core opinion by claiming: “We would advocate running through the ‘write-revise rewrite’ cycle at least once [...], twice through the cycle is recommended.”

Practice shows that even more than three drafts, when publishing an important text, are a norm. Fortunately enough, nowadays writers can use labour-saving word processor which makes their re-writing much more congenial and easier.

### 10.5 Evaluating

White and Arndt (1991:116-135) object that it is commonly, and wrongly at the same time, assumed that the task of students is to write and the task of teachers to evaluate. On the contrary, writers have to learn to accept responsibility for their writing and become their own critics, able to sensibly assess their product and make appropriate improvements. Evaluating can take the form of written or spoken instructions/feedback and can be done by the teacher, the student reader, groups of students or class.

### 10.6 Re-viewing

Once the writer has gone through all previous process stages, the writing has come to the point of almost final version. What now remains is to look at the text once again with “a new pair of eyes,” as White and Arndt advise (1991:136). They instruct the writer to check the content, connections, divisions, and impact of their writing. The teacher is advised to keep in mind the following two objectives: to improve critical viewing and provide students with linguistic tools (help) for writing.

## Knowledge from the Study

There are many reasons that a person or student should learn to master the craft of writing in some form or genre. Of course, the average person knows how to write if they have a

k-12 education but here it is meant excelling at writing beyond introductory basics. As such, in this post, we will look at the following benefits of learning to write

- Makes you a better reader and listener
- Enhances communication skills
- Develops thinking skills

### **1. Improved Reading and Listening Skills**

There seems to be an interesting feedback loop between reading and writing. Avid readers are often good writers and avid writers are often good readers. Reading allows you to observe how others write and communicate. This, in turn, can inspire your own writing. It's similar to how children copy the behavior of the people around them. When you write it is natural to bring with you the styles you have experienced through reading.

Writing also improves listening skills, however, this happens through the process of listening to others through reading. By reading we have to assess and evaluate the arguments of the author. This can only happen through listening to the author through reading his work.

### **2. Communication Skills**

Writing, regardless of genre, involves finding an audience and sharing your own ideas in a way that is clear to them. As such, writing naturally enhances communication skills. This is because of the need to identify the purpose or reason you are writing as well as how you will share your message.

When writing is unclear it is often because the writer has targeted the wrong audience or has an unclear purpose for writing. A common reason research articles are rejected is that the editor is convinced that the article is not appropriate for the journal's audience. Therefore, it is critical that an author knows their audience.

### **3. Thinking Skills**

In relation to communication skills is thinking skills. Writing involves taking information in one medium, the thoughts in your head, and placing them in another medium, words on paper. Whenever content moves from one medium to another there is a loss in meaning. This is why for many people, their writing makes sense to them but to no one else.

Therefore, a great deal of thought must be placed into writing with clarity. You have to structure the thesis/purpose statement, main ideas, and supporting details. Not to mention that you will often need references and need to adhere to some form of formatting. All this must be juggled while delivering content that is critically stimulating.

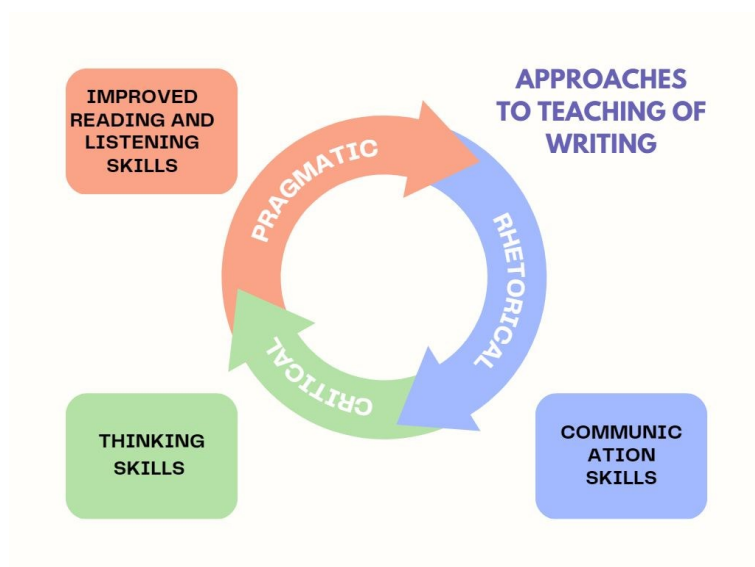


Figure 2. Knowledge from the Study

## Conclusion

Most teachers probably agree that the emphasis of the study of language has tended to concentrate on spoken language rather than the written one, due to the negligence of written production in language teaching.

"The study of language in the twentieth century has tended to concentrate on spoken language, many linguists from de Saussure through to Chomsky, for what seemed like good reasons at the time, neglected the written mode in favour of the spoken. This, however, contributed to the fact that writing was for a long time a neglected area in language teaching"

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