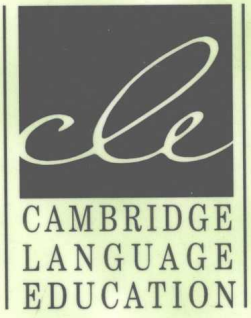
KEN HYLAND

SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING



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Series Editor's Preface

Learning how to write in a second language is one of the most challenging aspects of second language learning. Perhaps this is not surprising in view of the fact that even for those who speak English as a first language, the ability to write effectively is something that requires extensive and specialized instruction and which has consequently spawned a vast freshman composition industry in American colleges and universities. Within the field of second and foreign language teaching, the teaching of writing has come to assume a much more central position than it occupied twenty or thirty years ago. This is perhaps the result of two factors.

On the one hand, command of good writing skills is increasingly seen as vital to equip learners for success in the twenty-first century. The ability to communicate ideas and information effectively through the global digital network is crucially dependent on good writing skills. Writing has been identified as one of the essential process skills in a world that is more than ever driven by text and numerical data. A further strengthening of the status of writing within applied linguistics has come from the expanded knowledge base on the nature of written texts and writing processes that has been developed by scholars in such fields as composition studies, second language writing, genre theory, and contrastive rhetoric. As a result there is an active interest today in new theoretical approaches to the study of written texts as well as approaches to the teaching of second language writing that incorporate current theory and research findings.

This book is therefore quite timely. It provides a comprehensive and extremely readable overview of the field of second language writing, examining how theories of writing and the teaching of writing have evolved, the nature of good writing, the nature of texts and genres and how they reflect their use in particular discourse communities, the relationship between writing in the first and second language, how a curriculum can be developed for a writing course, the development of instructional materials for a writing class, the uses of the computer in writing instruction, and approaches to feedback and assessment. The book also examines approaches to research on second language writing and shows how teachers can investigate their

students' writing problems and explore their own practices in the teaching of writing.

The book reflects Professor Hyland's dual role as a leading researcher in the field of second language writing and an experienced teacher of second language writing. Theory and research are hence used throughout to illuminate some of the pedagogical issues and decisions that are involved in teaching second language writing. The insights presented both through the text as well as through the tasks readers are invited to carry out will provide an invaluable source of ideas and principles to inform teachers' and student teachers' classroom decision making.

Preface

Writing is among the most important skills that second language students need to develop, and the ability to teach writing is central to the expertise of a well-trained language teacher. But while interest in second language writing and approaches to teaching it have increased dramatically over the last decade, teachers are often left to their own resources in the classroom as much of the relevant theory and research fails to reach them. This book addresses this problem by providing a synthesis of theory, research, and practice to help teachers of *language* become teachers of *writing*.

This book is written for practicing teachers and teachers in training who have little or no experience teaching writing to students from non–English-speaking backgrounds. More specifically, it attempts to meet the needs of those who are or will be teaching students who speak English as a second or foreign language in colleges, universities, workplaces, language institutes, and senior secondary schools. Those who teach children or teach basic literacy skills to adults will also find much of value. The book pulls together the theory and practice of teaching writing to present an accessible and practical introduction to the subject without assuming any prior theoretical knowledge or teaching experience.

This text is founded on the premise that an effective teacher is one who can make informed choices about the methods, materials, and procedures to use in the classroom based on a clear understanding of the current attitudes and practices in his or her profession. A strong teacher is a reflective teacher, and reflection requires the knowledge to relate classroom activities to relevant research and theory. The book's practical approach toward second language writing attempts to provide a basis for this kind of reflection and understanding. In the text the reader will find a clear stance toward teaching writing which emphasizes the view that writing involves composing skills and knowledge about texts, contexts, and readers. It helps to develop the idea that writers need realistic strategies for drafting and revising, but they also must have a clear understanding of genre to structure their writing experiences according to the demands and constraints of particular contexts. I incorporate this emphasis on strategy, language, and context throughout the book.

The book also recognizes that teachers work in a range of situations – in schools, colleges, universities, corporate training divisions, and language institutes – and with students of different motivations, proficiencies, language backgrounds, and needs. They also work in contexts where English is taught as a Second Language (*ESL*) or as a Foreign Language (*EFL*), a distinction based on the language spoken by the community in which English is being studied. An ESL situation exists when the local community is largely English speaking, such as Australia, the United States, or the United Kingdom, while EFL contexts are those in which English is not the host language. Like most polarizations, however, this distinction obscures more complicated realities. For instance, ESL contexts can be further distinguished between learners who are migrants and who may therefore need occupational and survival writing skills, and those who plan to return to their own countries once they complete their courses. EFL contexts may include those where an indigenized variety has emerged (Singapore, India) or where colonization has afforded English a prominent role in local life (Hong Kong, Philippines), and those where English is rarely encountered (Korea, Japan).

These differences will have an impact on the kind of language students need and their motivation to acquire it, the cultural and linguistic homogeneity of the students, and the resources available to teachers. There are, however, sufficient similarities between these diverse types of context to focus on issues that concern all those who teach writing to non-native English speakers. In recognition of these similarities I shall use the acronym *L2* as a generic form to refer to all users of English from non–English-speaking backgrounds and *ESL* as shorthand for all contexts in which such students are learning English. (Likewise, I use *L1* to refer to those for whom English is their primary language.) The text also treats these students and contexts as similar by systematically setting out the key issues of classroom teaching in both contexts, addressing topics such as assessing needs, designing syllabuses, writing materials, developing tasks, using technology, giving feedback, and evaluating writing. In this way I hope to provide teachers with the resources to plan, implement, and evaluate a program of writing instruction for any teaching situation in which they may find themselves.

The book provides opportunities for you to engage with the ideas presented. *Reflection tasks* occur regularly through the chapters, encouraging readers to think about their own views on a topic and their potential needs as writing teachers. Each chapter concludes with a series of *Discussion questions and activities* which ask readers to consider ideas, examples of lesson plans, questionnaires, tasks or materials and so on, or to devise those of their own.

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Contents

Series Editor's Preface xiii
Preface xv
Acknowledgments xvii

1 Writing and teaching writing 1

Guiding concepts in L2 writing teaching 2
Focus on language structures 3
Focus on text functions 6
Focus on creative expression 8
Focus on the writing process 10
Focus on content 14
Focus on genre 18
Toward a synthesis: Process, purpose, and context 22
Summary and conclusion 27
Discussion questions and activities 28

2 Second language writers 31

Potential L1 and L2 writer differences 32
Cultural schemata and writing 37
Expectations about teaching and learning 40
Teaching and learning styles 42
Cultural differences in written texts 45
Summary and conclusion 50
Discussion questions and activities 51
Appendix 2.1 Perceptual learning style preference questionnaire 53

3 Syllabus design and lesson planning 54

Elements of a writing syllabus 55
Analyzing student needs 58

Analyzing the learning context 64
Setting course goals and objectives 67
Developing the syllabus 70
Sample approaches to syllabus organization 73
Planning units of work 76
Planning lessons 79
Summary and conclusion 81
Discussion questions and activities 82
Appendix 3.1 Lesson plan for a writing class 84

4 Texts and materials in the writing class 85

The roles of materials in the writing class 86
Materials and authenticity 92
Selecting and assessing textbooks 95
Modifying writing textbooks 98
Designing materials for the writing class 100
Selecting and locating texts 104
Finding and selecting language and practice materials 107
Summary and conclusion 109
Discussion questions and activities 110

5 Tasks in the L2 writing class 112

Types of writing tasks 113
Task components 116
Graphological tasks 120
Language scaffolding 122
Language scaffolding tasks 124
Composing tasks 130
Sequencing writing tasks: The teaching-writing cycle 136
Summary and conclusion 139
Discussion questions and activities 141

6 New technologies in writing instruction 143

Computers, writing, and language learning 144
Word processing and writing teaching 146
Online writing 150
Internet resources for writing 158
CALL resources for writing 162
Corpora and concordancing 167
Summary and conclusion 172

Discussion questions and activities 172
Appendix 6.1 Some useful websites for writing teachers 174

7 Responding to student writing 177

Teacher written feedback 178
Teacher-student conferencing 192
Peer feedback 198
Summary and conclusion 207
Discussion questions and activities 208
Appendix 7.1 A rubric for the first draft of a university expository essay assignment 210
Appendix 7.2 A peer response sheet 211

8 Assessing student writing 212

Purposes of assessment 213
Validity and reliability issues 215
Designing assessment tasks 220
Approaches to scoring 226
Reducing assessment anxiety 232
Portfolio assessments 233
Summary and conclusion 239
Discussion questions and activities 240
Appendix 8.1 Holistic marking scheme 241
Appendix 8.2 An analytic scoring rubric 243

9 Researching writing and writers 245

Some preliminaries and key steps 246
Generating research: Formulating and focusing a question 247
Designing research 249
Collecting data 252
Analyzing writing data 264
Reporting research 270
Summary and conclusion 272
Discussion questions and activities 272
Appendix 9.1 Some topics and issues in writing research 275

References 277
Index 295

1 *Writing and teaching writing*

Aims: This chapter will explore some of the ways that writing is viewed and the implications this has for teaching. It outlines the kinds of knowledge and skills involved in writing and develops some general principles for L2 writing teaching through a critical analysis of the main classroom orientations.

As EFL/ESL writing teachers, our main activities involve conceptualizing, planning, and delivering courses. At first sight, this seems to be mainly an application of practical professional knowledge, gained through hands-on classroom experience. To some extent this is true of course, for like any craft, teaching improves with practice. But there is more to it than this. Experience can only be a part of the picture, as our classroom decisions are always informed by our theories and beliefs about what writing is and how people learn to write. Everything we do in the classroom, the methods and materials we adopt, the teaching styles we assume, the tasks we assign, are guided by both practical and theoretical knowledge, and our decisions can be more effective if that knowledge is explicit. A familiarity with what is known about writing, and about teaching writing, can therefore help us to reflect on our assumptions and enable us to approach current teaching methods with an informed and critical eye.

This chapter provides an overview of how different conceptions of writing and learning influence teaching practices in L2 classrooms. For clarity I will present these conceptions under different headings, but it would be wrong to understand them as core dichotomies. The approaches discussed represent available options which can be translated into classroom practices in many different ways and combinations. Together they offer a picture of current L2 writing instruction.

Reflection 1.1
Spend a few minutes to reflect on your own experiences as a writing teacher. (a) What are the most important things you want students to learn from your classes? (b) What kinds of activities do you use? (c) Do you think an understanding of different ideas about writing and teaching could help you to become a better teacher? (d) Why?

Guiding concepts in L2 writing teaching

A number of theories supporting teachers' efforts to understand L2 writing and learning have developed since EFL/ESL writing first emerged as a distinctive area of scholarship in the 1980s. In most cases each has been enthusiastically taken up, translated into appropriate methodologies, and put to work in classrooms. Yet each also has typically been seen as another piece in the jigsaw, an additional perspective to illuminate what learners need to learn and what teachers need to provide for effective writing instruction. So, while often treated as historically evolving movements (e.g., Raimes, 1991), it would be wrong to see each theory growing out of and replacing the last. They are more accurately seen as complementary and overlapping perspectives, representing potentially compatible means of understanding the complex reality of writing. It is helpful therefore to understand these theories as curriculum options, each organizing L2 writing teaching around a different focus:

- language structures
- text functions
- themes or topics
- creative expression
- composing processes
- content
- genre and contexts of writing

Few teachers adopt and strictly follow just one of these orientations in their classrooms. Instead, they tend to adopt an eclectic range of methods that represent several perspectives, accommodating their practices to the constraints of their teaching situations and their beliefs about how students learn to write. But although the "pure" application of a particular theory is quite rare, it is common for one to predominate in how teachers conceptualize their work and organize what they do in their classrooms (Cumming, 2003).

Teachers therefore tend to recognize and draw on a number of approaches but typically show a preference for one of them. So, even though they rarely constitute distinct classroom approaches, it is helpful to examine each conception separately to discover more clearly what each tells us about writing and how it can support our teaching.

Reflection 1.2

Which of the curriculum orientations previously listed are you most familiar with? Can you identify one that best fits your own experience of teaching or learning to write in a second language? Might some orientations be more appropriate for some teaching-learning situations than others?

Focus on language structures

One way to look at writing is to see it as marks on a page or a screen, a coherent arrangement of words, clauses, and sentences, structured according to a system of rules. Conceptualizing L2 writing in this way directs attention to writing as a product and encourages a focus on formal text units or grammatical features of texts. In this view, learning to write in a foreign or second language mainly involves linguistic knowledge and the vocabulary choices, syntactic patterns, and cohesive devices that comprise the essential building blocks of texts.

This orientation was born from the marriage of structural linguistics and the behaviorist learning theories of second language teaching that were dominant in the 1960s (Silva, 1990). Essentially, writing is seen as a product constructed from the writer's command of grammatical and lexical knowledge, and writing development is considered to be the result of imitating and manipulating models provided by the teacher. For many who adopt this view, writing is regarded as an extension of grammar – a means of reinforcing language patterns through habit formation and testing learners' ability to produce well-formed sentences. For others, writing is an intricate structure that can only be learned by developing the ability to manipulate lexis and grammar.

An emphasis on language structure as a basis for writing teaching is typically a four-stage process:

1. ***Familiarization***: Learners are taught certain grammar and vocabulary, usually through a text.

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