

**Writing**  
*A teacher's*  
**for**  
*guide to*  
**Study**  
*developing*  
**Purposes**  
*individual*  
*writing skills*

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Arthur Brookes

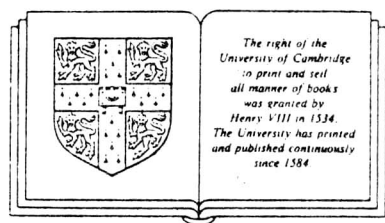
Peter Grundy

Cambridge University Press

# Writing for Study Purposes

A teacher's guide to developing  
individual writing skills

*Arthur Brookes*  
*Peter Grundy*



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## **The authors**

At present we work in the University of Durham but have at one time or another taught in a number of other institutions both in Britain and overseas. In Durham itself an important part of our teaching has been to provide language input classes for overseas students. As these students (many of whom are working towards a Ph.D. by research) advance in work in their chosen fields, they become increasingly concerned about their difficulties in fully conveying their intended meaning in written English.

We were faced with a choice of conventional teaching of English for Academic Purposes at this level, or of setting writing firmly within a communicative approach using humanistic methodology. We found that it was, in fact, very helpful for all our serious learners when we employed largely humanistic, learner-centred methodology and avoided a concentration on matching up to a notional ideal product. It is these ideas which we hope to share in this book. Because we have found them helpful, we hope others may find them equally useful in both general language teaching and specialist EAP work. Although our own experience has been with overseas students working in a British university – and many of the examples in our text are drawn from this context – we believe that our ideas and the approach we offer will have wider currency. The final section offers some suggestions.

Arthur Brookes  
Peter Grundy

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## Preface

Some books on teaching grow out of the personal experience of their authors. Others tend to be a selection of the ideas that are currently being talked about and published. This book is of the first kind. The ideas in it have been tried out in different situations in Britain and Europe with a good deal of success. However, most ideas books for teachers need to be modified in different circumstances, and this is always easier to do when the original context of the work is known. This is why we are starting with a description of the work we do in our own institution.

We are colleagues working in a small British university. Part of our time is spent in teaching writing courses to students on in-session courses who are studying subjects other than English, mostly at the post-graduate level. The kind of writing that our students are typically asked to produce includes laboratory reports, essays, dissertations and doctoral theses.

Both of us have taught English at a variety of levels to native speaker, ESL and EFL learners. Generally we have favoured humanistic methodology in our teaching. What we have come to realize is that this kind of methodology is less often applied to writing, especially in support writing classes of the kind we teach. Having taken the risk ourselves and tried it out, we soon became convinced that it could play a major role in such classes.

There were two things about our particular circumstances that made it especially applicable. The first is that our classes typically consisted of students doing different subjects. It was difficult to find an academic topic to write about that would equally suit students doing business studies, theology, and applied physics. The second is that our students come from very different parts of the world with different linguistic backgrounds and different capabilities. Ours are real mixed background, mixed interest, and mixed ability classes! So we were driven to use these differences as a resource and to capitalize on students' interest in themselves and each other.

Another equally important constraint is that, in term time, students have just two hours per week for a writing class on top of all their other academic commitments. And even then attendance tends to be erratic as other unforeseen academic commitments arise. This means that each session has to be more or less self-contained and cannot involve students



## Preface

in writing long, complete, separate assignments for the English class. So we had to find smaller, meaningful tasks that were very often part of a lesson that had an oral as well as a written element. Our enrolment for each class is rarely more than 25, but there are always too many students for us to contemplate working with individuals on their theses or assignments.

This gave us the idea of focusing on aspects of the process of writing, and devising with the co-operation of the students a syllabus for a nine or ten session unit. Such a syllabus typically focuses on what the particular group of students decides is most important at the time, and may well consist of nine or ten relatively separate ideas. One of those ideas, included (after negotiation), in our last course, was 'comparison'. In the session on ways of comparing, we first asked each student to fill in a questionnaire about their last eating experience (see exercise 27, *Comparison – similarity and difference*). Then the students paired up and each pair wrote a paragraph comparing and contrasting their eating experiences. This is the paragraph one pair actually wrote:

*When you eat in company you are likely to enjoy the better meal eaten more slowly. We illustrate this with Agnieszka and Raimundo's most recent eating experience which is quite similar but also different. Both meals were well balanced, in two parts and eaten at the same time. But that is all the similarity between us. Agnieszka's meal was in the restaurant with friends eaten slowly and with hot and cold courses. But Raimundo's was a snack alone eaten quickly in the laboratory.*

Each paragraph was then read aloud. In the discussion which followed, the students were interested to discover:

- how comparison and contrast go hand in hand;
- how many different examples of the language of comparison had been used and how varied they were;
- how even the simplest things (such as a sandwich lunch) may be compared with a high degree of subtlety;
- how it is the writer who decides just what is worth comparing and how it should be done.

The discussion then turned to the kind of contexts outside the language classroom in which students need to make comparisons in writing. Some members of the class confessed to having been slipshod in the past, and several commented on how what they had learned in the language classroom would help them in their next piece of academic writing.

There are a number of things to notice about this particular lesson. The first is that on this occasion the raising of the students' consciousness was felt to be more important than a great deal of connected writing in the

English class. The discussion time at the end of the lesson was an essential follow-up because it enabled the students to see the relationship between what they had enjoyed doing in class and how they would need to write in their specialist subject.

Though we usually keep to this kind of methodology, we are open to using other methods from time to time. For instance, in a recent session one of us used three techniques in a two-hour session. First, having earlier been asked to deal with abstracts, he used a variation of exercise 18 (*How does an abstract differ from a summary?*). Then he used a reformulation of a page from a thesis of one of the students in the group, and finally he took a page from the work of another student, photocopied it for the class and noted the possible improvements that could be made and the reasons for them. About fifteen per cent of the class found the reformulation most helpful, about fifteen per cent the annotated page, and about seventy per cent preferred the exercise on abstracts and summaries.

In our institution over a period of several years we have come to know well the sorts of problems faced by our students as they struggle with academic writing and this has resulted in the particular set of focuses that we have provided for the exercises. However, each institution will differ and there is no reason why the list of focuses should not be extended to cover other points as well. Furthermore, there is too much material in the second half of this book to be used on any one writing course. We, therefore, select from the material after discussion with each separate group of students, and we would expect others to do the same.

It is clear that the bulk of extended writing is done in the students' main subject areas and our task is to service and improve that writing. This means that each exercise does not so much relate to the next exercise as to the body of writing being done elsewhere. So one lesson need not logically lead to the next. So how does any one exercise fit into the total work of a particular student in an institution?

Let us take someone who is finding difficulty with the many sophisticated ways of comparing two things – whether these are two economic strategies for dealing with inflation or two different types of peas that botanists are testing for growing in dry conditions. Rather than provide long lists of possible ways of showing degrees of similarity and dissimilarity, we as teachers may try something like the exercise described earlier in this preface. That might be step one, the consciousness-raising step if you like. Where appropriate, we can certainly go beyond the kind of discussion we had with our class about ways of relating our work on comparisons to the main subject. For example, pairs could be asked to underline the comparing expressions in their paragraphs and then attach these to the wall. The first range of expressions will come from the displayed phrases. One possible development is as follows. These expres-

## *Preface*

sions can be discussed, especially in the light of the uses that students may find for them in their subjects. So far all the language has come from the students' combined experience and knowledge which is greater than that of any individual student while being more manageable and relevant than a complete list of all the possible expressions. There is still one more absolutely crucial stage. Students are encouraged to look at the literature in their subject to see what other expressions are used to show comparison. Another phase may well be to share these findings with others in a reporting-back session in the next lesson. Other possibilities are for students to go through their own past assignments to see how they have dealt with such comparisons in them and how they might have done it more efficiently. It is, of course, also part of the work of any language specialist working in a support context to see that reference works about language are available and their correct use made known – so that, for instance, reference can be made to a good EFL dictionary to check in which ways a particular expression is likely to be used.

If you are working on other types of courses in British institutions, whether these are pre-sessional, subject specific, or general English courses, you may well choose to modify the approach to include more detailed follow-up work, different focuses, some further continuous writing tasks where these are not catered for elsewhere as they are in our institution, or guidance in such study-skill activities as making notes of different kinds from books and articles.

If you are working outside Britain, it is worth noting that the exercises were originally designed for students in British institutions. This does not mean that they will not work elsewhere. We have already piloted many of them successfully overseas. You may, however, have to adapt exercises in some of these ways:

- Where the teaching style is normally fairly formal the exercises need to be introduced gradually starting with the ones you are happiest with.
- Some of the exercises refer to circumstances of daily life in Britain, such as British food, weather, or holidays; all of these can be easily replaced where appropriate by similar local topics.
- Where the conditions in a particular classroom make movement difficult it is possible, in some exercises, to change the suggested group size and to make the act of fixing pieces of writing to the wall and subsequent reading more formalized. For example, one of the class can put material up and read the results out to the class – not an ideal solution but still a possible one.

## *Conclusion*

We hope it has been a help that we have shared with you the personal motivation for the approach taken in this book with some indication of

its general adaptability to a wide variety of different institutions. It would complete our own continuing evaluation and development of this approach if you would share with us the successes and difficulties you find as you apply these ideas in your own circumstances.

Arthur Brookes

Peter Grundy

*School of English, University of Durham*

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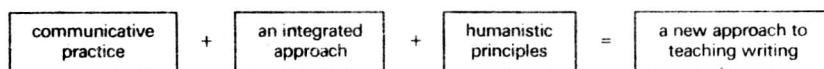
## PART 1 THE APPROACH

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### Introduction

#### 1 Teaching writing communicatively

We believe that an approach to the teaching of writing that combines communicative practice, an integrated approach and humanistic principles is both overdue and not so difficult to accomplish as previously thought. Put diagrammatically, what is required looks something like this:



Although we have not yet carefully defined what is meant by communicative practice, an integrated approach or humanistic principles, we suspect that there is a general sympathy for these ideas. To what extent, then, have they impinged on the teaching of writing?

Many teachers feel that writing has been the poor relation in the language teaching developments of the last ten years. Any widely travelled teacher-trainer will have been struck by the number of teachers who acknowledge the very real importance of writing, but despair of finding interesting ways of teaching it. Many teachers feel they are on top of communicative approaches to listening, speaking and, to a considerable extent, reading too, but that the key to teaching writing communicatively eludes them. This book attempts to meet that need.

It also recognizes a second difficulty in teaching writing, which stems from the fact that the writing process involves making choices between several possible ways of making a point. For non-native speaker teachers in particular, this can be a real problem since an awareness of the possible options and of the criteria for choosing between them is not always present. For this reason, the writing exercises we suggest are designed to place the non-native speaker teacher on an equal footing with his or her native speaker counterpart.

## *Communicative practice*

We exemplify some of the features of good communicative practice in relation to teaching spoken language under the six sub-headings below. We focus on teaching spoken language at this stage because it will be most familiar to our readers.

*Having something meaningful to say:* A classroom is not communicative just because the learners are talking to each other. They could be acting out a model dialogue, for example, or rehearsing a role play. Indeed, this sort of artificial, imitative work is all too often styled as communicative. It is central to the communicative approach that learners exchange meanings and express opinions that are their own. This is to be contrasted with the use of the term meaningful to refer to working with a vocabulary of supposed relevance, usually built around taxis, hotels, airports and shopping. In a genuinely communicative classroom, learners use meaningful talk to represent the way they think and feel and to relate their knowledge and experience of the world to others.

*Reaching an audience:* As well as having something worth saying, learners also need to be able to get this message across to someone else. This calls for opportunities to practise trying to make oneself fully understood by other learners.

*Working in small groups:* This is particularly important because it allows each learner to speak more often than when the class works as a whole. The size of a group also determines the type of communicative activity that can take place (e.g., pairs are needed for a dialogue, small groups for a discussion, etc.).

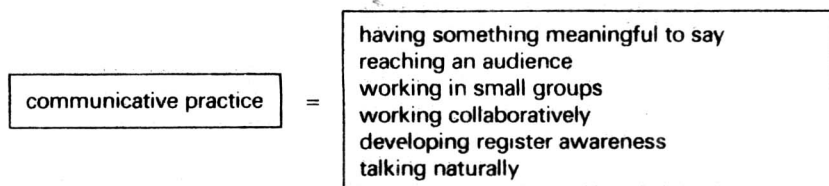
*Working collaboratively:* Wherever there is a two-way communication, there will be collaborative interaction. In a language learning context, this implies the opportunity for self-monitoring, self-repair, and peer correction.

*Developing register awareness:* When we talk, we do not only convey literal meanings. The difference between 'Got the time, mate?' and 'Excuse me, you haven't by any chance got the time, have you?' is not one of literal meaning. In each case, the speakers reveal something about themselves and the relationships they think they have with their hearers. Such differences in register enable us to capture relationships of power and distance in the language we use. To communicate appropriately, learners too must be able to encode the perceived distance and any power inequalities between themselves and their interlocutors.

*Talking naturally:* A natural conversation is not one whose final form is known at the outset. Learners will be organizing their thoughts as they talk. Talking is a process.

## Part 1 *The approach*

Thus the 'communicative practice' box in the previous diagram might now be more explicitly defined:

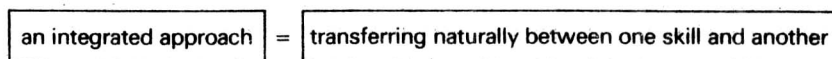


It is noticeable that many of these central communicative practices apply not only to teaching spoken language but also to teaching writing. You cannot write without having something meaningful to convey, without knowing and reaching an audience, without being aware of appropriate register and variety, for example. Furthermore, a writing classroom set up for collaborative group work will provide a readership (fellow-students) and an opportunity for rewriting so as to enable the accurate expression of the intended meaning. And although a written text will ultimately achieve a final form, working on the process of achieving this final product involves organizing one's thoughts as one writes.

### *An integrated approach*

Following an integrated approach does not mean working on the same text in each of the four modes in turn as in audio-lingualism. Nor does it mean merely working with a textbook that affords space to each skill. It means recognizing that in the real world we are rarely exercising only one skill at a time. If, for example, we take a telephone message, we are listening, speaking, writing the message down and reading it back in an integrated display of multi-skill competence. The purpose of an integrated approach in the classroom is to enable learners to transfer naturally between one mode and another, so that they do not end up like student A who passes the written exam but cannot ask for a sandwich, or student B who talks fluently but whose reading and writing skills are so limited that written messages have to be read aloud in order to be understood. These all too common symptoms show that teaching each skill separately very often results in unbalanced second language performance.

Thus our integrated approach box too might be more explicitly defined:



If we had a pound for every occasion students on our EAP writing courses

complained of their very real difficulties in incorporating what they had heard or read into their writing, we would have taken early retirement long ago. This must be the strongest argument for a multi-skill approach to the teaching of writing. Sometimes we will want the skills to be sequenced, as in extracting information from a text before writing about it, and sometimes simultaneous, as in listening and note taking.

Similarly, there will be occasions when we would expect group or even whole class discussion to be an integral part of the writing class. So if an hour's discussion led to only a single sentence of writing, one would not necessarily think it was time wasted. This will be the exception, of course, if it serves to remind us that to ask individuals to attempt a writing task in isolation assumes that they know what to do, and can write effectively and accurately already. In that sense, writing demands an integrated approach just as much as the other skills do.

### *humanistic principles*

In this section we will not be discussing any of the particular methodologies to which the humanistic label has been attached (the silent way, suggestopedia and so on). Rather, we will be trying to establish some of the general principles of humanistic teaching which follow from seeing the person at the centre of things, and from always thinking first of the learner and second of what is to be learnt. It will, of course, be a far from exhaustive description.

The learner's freedom to express himself or herself is clearly a central humanistic principle. This involves a number of sub-principles, among them:

Seeing the learner as the main resource both of meanings (things to talk about) and language (ways of talking).

Recognizing that the learner should be free from authority, prescription, overt correction and, according to some in the humanistic movement, the imposition of language models.

Understanding the vital need to create a context in which the learner's self-expression is encouraged and respected.

A person-related approach recognizes the learner as an individual with intelligence, feelings, experiences, knowledge and information, in short, as a person with a biography – and seizes on this biography as a vital resource in the learning process. It sees learning a language as a total experience and as a personal discovery with implications for commitment of time and energy, as well as for self-image, sense of cultural belonging, and lifestyle generally. It emphasizes the affective nature of exposure to a further language and culture, and recognizes that differences in learning styles are inevitable and exciting.

The humanistic principles box might also be more explicitly defined:



## Part 1 The approach

humanistic principles

=

promoting freedom to express self  
recognizing the learner as resource  
ensuring learner freedom from authority  
valuing self-expression as intelligent  
recognizing centrality of personal discovery  
respecting individual learning styles

One obvious contribution of a broadly humanistic methodology to the teaching of writing is that it solves the problem of what to write about. If the information that is to be reorganized into an effective text is provided by the learner, the problem of what to write about largely disappears.

For this reason, the subject-matter of the writing exercises in Part 2 of this book is essentially learner biography, or that which learners wish to relate. In fact, we very often suggest tabulating elements from the biographies of several learners, and not necessarily in linguistic form either, to serve as the material to be written about. One frustrating element of some language-learning experiences is that one never gets to express oneself – we believe that an important part of learner motivation lies in freeing this pent-up desire.

A second contribution of a humanistic methodology to the teaching of writing lies in its recognition of the inappropriacy of offering learners models of language for them to imitate. There are good reasons for believing that a process-related approach to teaching writing is preferable to a model-offering or product-related one anyway – as we shall argue in detail in the next chapter. This is a view very strongly confirmed by humanistic principles.

### *The writing classroom*

Although many of the ideas we have discussed so far in this introduction will be taken up subsequently, it may be helpful at this stage to give a diagrammatic characterization of what should be going on in the writing class as we see it. The diagram opposite builds on what has already been discussed in relation to communicative practice, an integrated approach and humanistic principles.

## **2 Writing as a deficit skill**

It is not possible to learn what no one knows, and it is not necessary to learn what everyone knows. Thus teaching is about helping one group of people to do what another group can already do. This is a very simple point which is all too frequently lost sight of. But its implication is clear. Classroom time should be spent on those elements of a task that are