15 Considerations for Teaching Second Language Writing

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KEY QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to know how to write?
- What is the role of writing in the second/foreign language curriculum?
- What do English as a second or foreign language teachers need to know about writing to design and teach a writing course?

EXPERIENCE

Elizabeth teaches a writing course in an intensive English program designed to prepare students to enter an American university. Her 16 students come from 11 different countries and are interested in different disciplines, from business to mathematics to the social sciences. As class begins, Elizabeth divides the class into groups of four and gives each group a set of writing assignments from different university courses: one from an undergraduate business course, one from U.S. history, one from environmental science, and one from psychology. Elizabeth reminds the class of the concepts of audience, purpose, and genre and asks the groups to identify each in the set of tasks. The groups quickly get to work; after about five minutes, Elizabeth asks them to report on the similarities and differences among the tasks. She writes their responses on the board and then asks the class to list the verbs used in the assignments (e.g., *discuss, compare, analyze*) and then gives students a handout listing several of such verbs. Students discuss the handout with partners to make sure they understand all the verbs. Then Elizabeth presents the instructions for a writing assignment that students will be working on over the next several weeks. In introducing the assignment, she highlights the verbs in the instructions and then proceeds to go over the details of the assignment.

An observer in this class wanting to learn about teaching writing might notice several features about it. First, it is very much a collaborative class. The teacher controls the pace of the class and directs the activities, but during most of the class the students are interacting with each other. Second, students are using reading as a first step to inform their future writing. In this instance, they are analyzing writing prompts, though in another class they may be reading about and discussing a particular topic that they will be writing about. Third, they are learning that the expectations of readers in different disciplines will be different and that they cannot necessarily transfer everything they know about writing in one subject area to writing in another. Finally, this class involves a consideration of global issues in writing, such as the need to think about one's audience and purpose in writing when deciding how to organize an essay, as well as local issues, such as being able to use specific verb forms appropriately. Even in a very short observation, it is clear that learning to write in a second language (L2) is a complicated endeavor that involves a multiplicity of concerns.

WHAT IS SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING?

Writing has always had a place in the second/foreign language curriculum, but in the twenty-first century the ability to write in an L2 may be even more important than ever. Globalization and technological advances such as the rise of the Internet have made written communication across languages and cultures not only possible but essential in business, education, and many other fields. More and more people are seeing the need to learn to write in a language that is not their mother tongue, whether their purpose is to transact business, interact on social-networking sites, or pursue academic degrees. Thus, whereas writing was once seen as a skill that was primarily taught to reinforce other language skills such as listening, reading, and grammar, in many settings writing has moved to a more central place in the curriculum (Reid, 2001). As a result, many teachers will find themselves needing to teach writing and may not feel well prepared to do so effectively. The purpose of this chapter is to present some of the most important concepts in teaching writing and provide guidance on planning and delivering an effective writing curriculum.

To teach writing effectively, we first need to understand the nature of L2 writing ability. We can look at this ability from two perspectives: as a cognitive ability (i.e., a set of skills and knowledge that reside within an individual) and as a sociocultural phenomenon (i.e., as a means of communication within a particular setting aimed at achieving specific goals). Both of these perspectives are important in the teaching of writing.

From a cognitive perspective, second language writing can be seen as some combination of writing ability (perhaps learned in one's first language [L1]) and L2 proficiency. Even in one's native language, composing a text is a highly complex task that involves the consideration of many factors at the same time. Writers have to keep in mind their overall message, the major points and subpoints to be included, how these points will be organized, and a representation of the likely readers: what they already know or believe about the topic, what sorts of information they will find persuasive, and how they might react. Writers need to be able to plan their writing, monitor and revise what they have already written, and keep focused on the process until they are satisfied with the end product. When an L2 is added to the mix, the picture becomes even more complex because writers need to focus some of their attention on finding the appropriate language to express their ideas clearly and accurately as well. It seems reasonable, and indeed research has shown it to be true, that students who have learned to write in their L1 can transfer these skills to a second language; however, a certain level of language proficiency is required before such transfer can occur. For students at every level of proficiency, a writing course provides opportunities to learn and practice new language forms and structures and thus contributes to language learning. For students with lower language proficiency, this focus on language may need to be emphasized, while for advanced students, more emphasis can be placed on the composition process. In short, both writing ability and language proficiency are important factors in L2 writing ability, and both need to be included in a writing curriculum.

From the sociocultural perspective, writing is seen as part of a socially and culturally situated set of literacy practices shared by a particular community. From this perspective, the process of learning to write is the process of becoming a member of a *discourse community,* a group of people (e.g., biologists, politicians, or even fans of a particular musical genre) who share values and assumptions about using language and also have certain ways of using language (oral or written) for particular purposes. In academic writing, for example, there are different conventions for publishing articles in different disciplines, and certain linguistic or stylistic choices, such as the use of the passive voice, may be considered good writing in one discourse community or discipline but not in another.

Learning to write means learning to participate in one or more discourse communities, whether this means participating in an online social network, writing medical laboratory reports, or writing academic papers. From this perspective, focusing simply on improving language proficiency or studying strategies for composing and revising does not necessarily lead to good writing unless considerations of the broader context in which writing will be used are also taken into account. In addition, a crucial insight from the sociocultural perspective is that written texts do not exist in isolation; rather, the texts that writers produce are shaped by and responsive to other preexisting texts. This notion is important when we consider the role of reading in the writing classroom, discussed later in the chapter.

These two perspectives together provide a useful framework for the consideration of writing instruction. The cognitive perspective helps us remember that individual students need to acquire

knowledge and skills—about language and about the process of writing—while the sociocultural perspective reminds us that writing is always done for a purpose, is directed at a specific audience, and is part of a broader set of literacy practices that is shaped by a particular culture and setting.

The cognitive and sociocultural perspectives can also help us understand the difference between speaking and writing, an important distinction for language teachers. From a purely mechanical perspective, the act of writing takes longer than the act of speaking and leaves a physical trace that can be referred to at a later date. Oral communication, at least without the help of technology, typically requires that both participants (speaker and listener) be present at the same time in the same place and allows the use of nonverbal and contextual clues for shared meaning; furthermore, speakers get continuous feedback from their listeners about whether they are being understood and can clarify and repair mistakes if necessary. In writing, these contextual cues and immediate feedback are absent, and thus a writer must choose words more carefully to avoid misunderstandings. The cognitive challenge of speaking is contributing to an ongoing discourse without time to plan out what to say; the cognitive challenge of writing is anticipating and taking into account the existing knowledge, goals, and interests of one's likely readers and tailoring one's choice of words and sentence structures to that audience.

The fundamental differences between speaking and writing in the cognitive domain are responsible to a great degree for differences in the sociocultural domain. First, writing is used for different purposes and functions than speaking; because it can be planned and leaves a permanent record, it tends to be used for functions where precision and accuracy are important, such as contracts. Written language tends to be more formal, use more complex structures, and be more carefully planned than spoken language, which tends to be characterized by shorter sentences or fragments, pauses, and repetitions and repairs. Correctness is more highly valued in writing than in speaking; thus errors that might be permissible in speaking are often more stigmatized in writing. (See McCarthy & O'Keeffe, this volume.)

In summary, writing is not simply speaking in another modality. While the same basic building blocks of vocabulary and grammar are essential to both, writing is frequently used for different purposes; it thus requires different linguistic structures and functions than speaking and calls for a somewhat different set of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Writing teachers must have an understanding of both perspectives to plan and deliver instruction that addresses the writing needs of their students, whether these students are not literate in their L1 or are transferring advanced L1 writing skills to their L2.

CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS

Up to this point we have considered the nature of writing ability, its relationship to speaking, and the distinction between language ability and writing ability. In this section, I discuss several areas of research and best practices that teachers should be aware of to teach writing effectively. First, teachers should understand why their students want or need to write, and how certain student characteristics (e.g., L1 literacy) affect their ability to write in an L2. Next, teachers need to be familiar with research on the writing process, that is, how experienced writers go about creating written texts and how to support this process in novice writers. Finally, I discuss two issues that contribute to a growing appreciation of best practices in writing instruction: (1) connections between reading and writing; and (2) the role of grammar and error correction in writing.

Student background and needs

The goals of a writing curriculum must start with the needs of the students. As Leki, Cumming, and Silva (2008) state:

> Curricula for writing are also circumscribed by the purposes for which people are learning. These purposes reflect the status in a society of the language being learned, the functions and values of literacy in that language, as well as the characteristics, intentions, and status of the learners and of the institutions in which they study. (p. 76)

One important factor is the age and educational background of the writers. Children need writing for school and are learning writing skills along with other cognitive skills, whereas adult learners come equipped with many of these cognitive skills but may not actually need writing for their jobs; furthermore, while many adult L2 learners have good or excellent writing skills in their L1, others may not have had much formal schooling and may not be literate in their L1. Such students may need to be taught the basics of writing, starting from practicing how to hold a pencil and learning the alphabet. Another difference that impacts how writing is taught is the difference between L2 learners and foreign language learners. L2 learners either need English for school or work, whereas foreign language learners may be studying English for a variety of reasons: for personal enrichment, as a requirement for school, for further study, or for career reasons.

In the North American context, one distinction that is frequently discussed is the difference between "eye" learners (typically, those who have learned English through formal education and thus primarily through reading and grammar instruction) and "ear" learners (those who have learned English informally through oral interactions; Reid, 1998a). Many ear learners emigrated from their home countries as children and speak a language other than English at home; such learners are sometimes referred to as "Generation 1.5" (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999). Research suggests that many of these U.S.-educated multilingual writers graduate from high school without the academic reading and writing skills needed for success in higher education (see Doolan & Miller, 2012, for a review and discussion of error patterns made by these writers). Although the eye/ear distinction may be an oversimplification, it is clear that the needs of students with different educational and language learning backgrounds will be quite diverse: "eye" learners have strengths in formal vocabulary and explicit knowledge of grammar, but may lack the fluency and naturalness of ear learners. Teachers will have to adjust their lessons to accommodate the needs of these different learner types.

In addition to considering the background of students and their development as writers in L1 and L2, it is important to distinguish between learners who need to write for academic reasons and those who need to write for professional or career reasons. Much of the pedagogy of second language writing draws on the literature in first language composition (see Matsuda, 2003b, for a historical overview of second language writing instruction, particularly in the North American context). Much of this literature assumes that students are writing for academic purposes; this may not always be the case, however, particularly in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts. Increasingly, writing is used in the workplace, and students need to learn the appropriate genres and discourse conventions for different areas of work, such as resumes, business letters, emails, and website content.

To summarize, the variety of English language learners throughout the world, their linguistic and educational backgrounds, and their different writing needs make it impossible to prescribe a single approach to the teaching of writing because so much depends on the particulars of the local context. However, there are some general principles of writing that are of value to teachers in all contexts, and it is to these principles we now turn. Specifically, teachers should be aware of research in such areas as what proficient writers do when they write, what distinguishes good writers from weaker writers, and what the specific writing problems of English as a second language (ESL) learners are likely to be. Research (Peñuelas, 2008; Sasaki, 2000; Weigle, 2005) has shown that, for expert writers in particular, writing is not a linear process but involves going back and forth among planning, writing, rereading, and revising. Furthermore, compared to novice writers, expert writers spend more time planning and revising their writing and editing their writing for content and organization than they do making small surface changes to their texts. Expert writers are able to hold in mind numerous considerations simultaneously and have a greater understanding of their own limitations, a greater understanding of the needs and expectations of their audiences, and more highly developed schemata for different genres than novice writers. All this does not mean that writing is less effortful for experts than for novices, however: Expert writers are more likely to set greater challenges for themselves and to use a strategy of "knowledge transforming" (using writing to create new knowledge) rather than "knowledge telling" (expressing what they already know) in writing (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987, pp. 9–10).

Comparing L1 and L2 writers, Silva's (1993) extensive review of the literature concludes that L2 writing is "more constrained, more difficult,

and less effective" (p. 668) than L1 writing, although the general processes are similar. L2 writers in the studies that Silva reviewed tended to be similar to less experienced native speaking writers in focusing prematurely on sentence-level errors rather than global issues of rhetorical organization and were less likely to engage in knowledge-transforming rather than knowledge-telling strategies (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Learning to write in a second language is further complicated by the fact that genres differ across languages and cultures, so writers may not be able to transfer their rhetorical knowledge from their first language to English.

The implication of this research for teaching writing is that L2 writers need more of everything: more practice writing, more opportunities to develop effective writing strategies, more familiarity with genres, more practice with vocabulary and grammar, and more feedback. Writing teachers need to be aware that their students will not become experts over the course of a few weeks or months and need to develop realistic expectations regarding what can be accomplished in a single term.

It is well known that language proficiency, as it relates to writing, develops slowly over a number of years and depends on extensive exposure to different texts in different genres. Certain elements of grammar, for example, appear to be resistant to explicit instruction and acquired late, such as the use of relative clauses and the English article system (R. Ellis, 2005). However, other aspects of writing seem to be independent of language proficiency and amenable to instruction with more immediate results. For example, Roca de Larios, Murphy, and Marin (2002) suggest that several writing strategies can be effectively taught within a relatively short time frame, including problem-solving strategies; goal setting and organization; having a sense of audience; and planning, monitoring, and evaluating performance.

The process approach

Research on the writing process has led to what is now the dominant paradigm in writing instruction, the process approach. Historical overviews of writing instruction that have led to the preeminence of process approaches can be found in numerous sources (e.g., Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004; Matsuda, 2003b; Raimes, 1991). Although there are many variations on process approaches, they all have certain features in common. Specifically, instead of producing several different single-draft essays that are turned in for a grade, often with a primary focus on linguistic accuracy, students produce more than one draft of each piece of writing for feedback and evaluation, and emphasis is placed on supporting students through the various stages of writing, including pre-writing (e.g., brainstorming or outlining), drafting, giving and receiving feedback, and revising (see Table 1). How a process approach is implemented in practice is discussed in the next section

Reading and writing connections

Another important theoretical consideration for writing instruction is the connection between reading and writing, skills that scholars now consider complementary elements of literacy rather than separate, discrete skills. This connection between reading and writing is one that has received a great deal of emphasis in recent years (see Belcher & Hirvela, 2001; Carson & Leki, 1993; Hirvela, 2004). There is a growing recognition that reading and writing are intimately connected and that one cannot easily be taught without the other. In fact, problems with student writing can often be traced to problems with reading (Hirvela, 2004); for this reason, the writing teacher must also be prepared to teach certain aspects of reading.

Hirvela (2004) provides a convincing rationale for including reading as an integral component of the writing classroom, primarily through three main areas of reading-writing connections:

Reader response theory. This approach emphasizes the reader's active participation in understanding a text and ways to develop effective reading strategies. For example, instead of asking students simply to discuss their understanding of a particular text, teachers can ask them to reflect on the strategies they use for reading, what problems they encountered, and how they dealt with those problems. In this way students are encouraged to see themselves as active meaning-makers. Reflecting on reading processes can lead to an understanding of composition processes as complementary activities to reading.

Writing to read. This approach involves using writing as a way of interpreting and understanding

Table 1. Phases of the Writing Process

Phase	Definition	Examples of Teaching and Learning Activities
Pre-writing	Structured activities to provide motivation, content, fluency, language practice	Structured language practice, readings, films, discussions, brainstorming, webbing, outlining
Writing	First draft	Focus on content, getting ideas on paper
Response	Reaction of a reader or listener	Peer review, partners or small groups, teacher conferences, written feedback
Revising	Reseeing or rethinking content; second draft	Reorganizing, adding details, adding support for arguments
Editing	Refinement and attention to writing conventions, including grammar and vocabulary; third draft	Checklists, grammar logs, exercises, proofreading practice
Post-writing	What students and teachers do with finished pieces	Display, share online, compile class writing into a booklet
Evaluating	How teachers and/or students assess student writing	Rubrics, conferences, self-evaluation, portfolios

Adapted from California State University, Stanislaus (n.d.).

a text. Examples of writing-to-read activities include writing about a topic in preparation for reading about it and response activities such as journals and response papers. Writing about what they read helps students create a deeper understanding of texts, which will in turn help them in their further writing.

Reading to write. This approach involves using reading as a source of input in creating a written text. In reading to write, students explicitly and actively search for knowledge about writing; this knowledge can be rhetorical (what kinds of organizational patterns are common in this type of writing?), linguistic (what words, phrases, or sentence structures are useful?), or stylistic (how formal/informal is this kind of writing?).

Attribution of sources and plagiarism

In academic writing in particular, an emphasis on reading as part of writing naturally brings up the issue of appropriate attribution of sources and the specter of plagiarism. Students are frequently told to "use your own words" and are warned about the seriousness of plagiarism and its consequences, but teachers are often frustrated because their students seem to have a difficult time knowing when and how to paraphrase. In fact, the issue of appropriate source use in writing is a much more complicated issue than it first appears to be. There are both cognitive and cultural factors involved, and writing teachers need to understand what these issues are so they can help their students learn to incorporate source materials into their writing appropriately. Students with limited proficiency have limited linguistic resources and may need to rely more heavily on scaffolding (both lexical and grammatical) from source materials because they may not know how to express an idea in a different way. Research suggests that many students have difficulty with sentence simplification and paraphrasing without changing the author's original intent; furthermore, some students consider copying a legitimate strategy for composing (Shi, 2004). Similar cultural issues regarding the use of source text language have been noted by Pennycook (1996), who was among the first to point out that the idea that individuals "own" ideas and words is a peculiarly Western notion that may not be prevalent in other cultures. Commenting on the lack of fit between instructor and student perceptions, Starfield (2007) noted:

> whereas lecturers view the issue as being about the correct referencing of sources, for students plagiarism is linked to their developing identities as writers and their relative lack of

authority vis-à-vis the authority of academic texts and is part of a complex process of learning to write according to unfamiliar norms and conventions in a language that is often not their primary language. (p. 880)

The notion of intertextuality (Bakhtin, 1981; Fairclough, 1992; Starfield, 2007) is frequently invoked to explain students' difficulty with avoiding plagiarism. What is meant by *intertextuality* is that all writing uses words and phrases that are preexisting and combined in new ways, referring to and building on what has come before. Writers constantly draw on and refer to other existing texts in their own writing through a set of conventions that are often implicit and known only to people within a certain discourse community. Beginning writers without extensive experience and without the same history of working with and understanding the important vocabulary and texts in a particular discourse community may have difficulties understanding how to follow their instructors' guidance about using their own words and paraphrasing.

Given these complexities, it is clear that simply teaching students to paraphrase and summarize is only part of the solution to helping them learn acceptable citation practices. Students need to be made aware of the possibilities for censure and be taught strategies for paraphrasing and citing sources; however, these strategies may not be entirely successful given the complexity of issues surrounding textual borrowing (Currie, 1998; Starfield, 2007). Learning to identify and avoid inappropriate textual borrowing is clearly an important part of the writing classroom and teachers should avoid framing it as a moral issue.

The role of grammar and error correction in writing

The last theoretical issue is the role of grammar and the effectiveness of error correction in the writing classroom. Beginning writing teachers tend to take it as a given that one of their main roles is to point out and correct student errors in writing so that students can learn to avoid such errors. At the same time, teachers often become frustrated both by the amount of time that error correction takes and its seeming ineffectiveness. Indeed, the research evidence concerning the effectiveness of error correction is inconclusive (e.g., see Ferris, 2003, for arguments in support of error correction; and see Truscott, 1996, 1999, for arguments against correcting grammar in the writing classroom). Whether grammar instruction is effective in the second language writing classroom, particularly for advanced learners, is similarly a matter of some controversy because it is difficult to draw a straight line between instruction and future performance (e.g., see Ferris, 2003; Frodesen & Holten, 2003). Given the many other issues that writing teachers need to deal with in their classes, asking whether to spend time on error correction is probably less appropriate than asking how to prioritize dealing with grammar instruction and errors along with other equally or more important considerations. (See also Frodesen, this volume.) This issue is revisited later in this chapter.

CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

In this part of the chapter, I discuss the fundamentals of designing a writing course. Specifically, I discuss objectives and assessment, lesson planning, designing writing tasks, and responding to student writing.

A good place to begin is with Leki, Cumming, and Silva's (2008) statement that a writing curriculum "involves the organization of learning activities for students to develop abilities to produce (a) meaningful, accurate written texts (b) by composing effectively and (c) engaging in the discourse appropriate to specific social contexts and purposes" (p. 72). In other words, there are three main considerations in designing a writing curriculum: the written product, the writing process, and tailoring writing to a specific audience and purpose. Effective teaching involves a balance among these concerns. Focusing too much on accurate texts divorces writing from its communicative function and turns the writing class into a grammar class; on the other hand, focusing exclusively on the writing process with little or no attention to accuracy and precision can result in written products that are inappropriate or that do not communicate clearly. Finally, focusing on process or product without a consideration of the communicative situations in which writing is actually used can lead to lack of motivation because students will not see the relevance of what is being taught in class.

Kroll (2001) notes that the list of tasks that any writing teacher must accomplish is somewhat predictable: designing/implementing a syllabus, planning individual class sessions, providing opportunities for writing, and responding to that writing. The novice teacher often finds it difficult to know how to put this list into practice; the following suggestions may provide some guidance.

The syllabus provides a road map for both students and teachers and also helps to clarify expectations and class policies. Designing a syllabus provides an opportunity to think through the overall goals of the writing course and the major learning activities that serve those goals. For this reason, a critical step in creating a syllabus is articulating learning outcomes or course objectives. As far as possible, learning outcomes should be written in the form of observable behaviors and products so that it is easier to determine whether these objectives have been met by the end of the course. For example, a vague learning outcome such as "Students will improve their writing in this course" is less useful than the following outcome statements (taken from a low-intermediate writing course in an academically oriented intensive English program at a U.S. university):

- Produce organized paragraphs (7 sentence minimum) with topic sentences, supporting details, and concluding sentences through a process of drafting and revision
- Use the language of narration, exemplification, process, comparison/contrast, or description
- Demonstrate coherence using repetition of keywords, pronouns, synonyms, and signal words

Note that these outcomes specify both the product and the process of writing, along with indications of the type of language needed to complete the writing tasks. Students have a clear idea of what is expected of them, and teachers can readily ascertain whether students have achieved these outcomes. Written learning outcomes are also useful in designing scoring rubrics, or written criteria for evaluating the writing, tailored to specific assignments. For example, a rubric for paragraphs based on the outcome statements could include points for content and organization, such as the presence of an effective topic sentence, details that support the main idea, and an appropriate conclusion; it could also include issues of language (such as the use of cohesive devices and the appropriate use of the discourse mode). Finally, the rubric could include a consideration of whether students have successfully incorporated feedback from peers or the teacher in improving their writing. (See the Appendix for an example of a writing rubric used in a low-intermediate composition course in an intensive English program.)

A useful way to begin formulating objectives is to write down in as detailed a fashion as possible what you hope students will know and be able to do by the end of the course and how students will demonstrate their knowledge and skills through observable behaviors or products. Elsewhere (Weigle, 2007) I have suggested an exercise that may help teachers to articulate learning outcomes:

> Imagine the best piece of writing that could come from one of your students, and write an imaginary endnote to a student saying what you like about it. As you do so, you will articulate in words what you are hoping to see in student writing, whether it is precise use of language, vivid details, or a strong thesis with good support. Each of these descriptions can be used to create learning outcomes. (p. 197)

For a writing course, it is useful to think of three components of objectives: (1) a description of the performance itself, or what the student is expected to write (e.g., essays, descriptive paragraphs, or business memoranda); (2) the conditions under which the writing will be done (e.g., at home or in class, and with or without feedback between drafts); and (3) the level of performance that will be deemed acceptable, that is, the criteria for evaluation in terms of such considerations as organization, use of vocabulary, or sentence types (adapted from Mager, 1975, as cited in Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004).

Specifying objectives in this way goes hand in hand with articulating the major assignments for the course and determining how they will be evaluated. For example, in a 14-week term a teacher might assign three or four major papers, depending on the level of student proficiency. The first step in filling out the details of the syllabus, then, is to set deadlines for these major assignments at appropriate intervals during the term.

Outcomes written in this way have the added advantage of helping teachers discern what aspects of writing they need to focus on in their teaching. For example, one learning outcome in an adult ESL

setting might be "students will write short informational notes of request to a teacher, landlord, or other community member." Teachers wanting students to meet this outcome will need to make sure students know appropriate basic vocabulary, routine greetings and closings, question formation, writing conventions such as indentation and paragraphing, and politeness strategies. Thinking through these learning points will help teachers determine what activities to focus on in any given lesson.

Lesson planning

Once the major assignments for the course are determined, planning must be done on two levels: in terms of the writing cycle for each major assignment and in terms of the individual lesson. In terms of the writing cycle, there are three phases that need to be considered: pre-writing, writing, and revising/editing. The pre-writing phase includes setting up the assignment; providing input for students to work with in the form of texts, visuals, videos, or other content; introducing and practicing specific points of grammar or vocabulary that are important for completing the assignment; and various activities for brainstorming and idea generation. The writing phase must include time for drafting in class (where appropriate), feedback from peers and/or the teacher, ample time for incubation and rewriting, and continued work on troublesome areas as they come up. Finally, a polished draft must be submitted; teachers need to consider how much time to devote to grading and evaluating, and what other means of dissemination might be appropriate for sharing student work. Specific suggestions for each of these phases are given shortly; first, however, I discuss some general principles of lesson planning.

Most experienced teachers will confirm that a written lesson plan is essential for every class period. A written lesson plan can be as simple as a few notes or quite formal, with each step written out in detail. (See Purgason, this volume, for an extended discussion of lesson planning.) However, as Ferris and Hedgcock (2004) noted, "whatever form a lesson plan takes, it should be readable, convenient to refer to in class when needed, and usable as a future record of what took place" (p. 99). Ferris and Hedgcock divide the typical writing lesson into five phases: activation of prior learning, preview/warm-up, lesson core (instruction, procedures, and participation), closure, and follow-up/reflection. These components are important no matter what phase of the writing process is being focused on in any given lesson. In planning out a lesson, teachers should be mindful of maintaining a balance between teacher-centered and student-centered activities, providing enough time for students to practice and apply concepts, and leaving time at the end to make sure that students understand whatever homework is assigned.

Turning now to a discussion of the types of activities that are appropriate for writing classes, we can divide them into the stages of the writing process: pre-writing, writing, feedback, and revising/editing.

Pre-writing activities

Anyone who has ever stared for hours at a blank sheet of paper or computer screen recognizes that one of the greatest challenges in writing is getting started. Writing teachers need to have a variety of strategies to help students get over their initial anxiety, begin planning out their ideas, and start writing. Pre-writing activities can be targeted toward linguistic development, fluency, idea generation, building up knowledge about a topic, or a combination of all of these. For example, activities such as freewriting (writing for a set period of time without stopping), generating lists of ideas or thoughts associated with a topic, and making a mind map of related concepts are appropriate at all levels of proficiency and experience. Additional pre-writing activities may include targeted lessons on specific aspects of writing, including strategies for using dictionaries or other reference materials in writing, and identifying and analyzing rhetorical structures of texts, such as the activity described in the opening experience section of this chapter. Detailed suggestions for activities for pre-writing activities can be found in Ferris and Hedgcock (2004) and Williams (2005). Such activities serve to help students find a way into the writing topic and to discover for themselves strategies that they find useful and can apply to writing assignments in the future.

In academic settings in particular, it is very common to incorporate readings as a starting place for writing. A substantial amount of pre-writing time will thus be dedicated to encountering written texts

of various types. As noted earlier, writing teachers need to think carefully about how they will use readings in their courses; it is not enough simply to ask students to read a passage and then write about it. Some questions teachers may want to ask themselves about readings include:

- What will students do with the reading in their writing? Will they be responding to the reading, using materials from the reading to support an argument, or completing some other writing task?
- What challenges might this reading pose to students? Will the vocabulary, concepts, or background knowledge be an issue? How will I deal with these challenges?
- How can I exploit this reading to teach something about writing? For example, are there organizational patterns that I can call students' attention to? Depending on the level of the student and the stage within the writing process where students will encounter the text, the reading can be used to highlight citation practices, language forms and structures, or organizational patterns, for example; see Hyland (2004c) for specific suggestions for additional activities.

Writing tasks

To help students develop a wide range of writing skills, they should be asked to respond to a variety of tasks, some graded and some not, some impromptu and some planned, in a variety of genres (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004; A. M. Johns, 1997; S. McKay, 1994). Williams (2005) notes that the nature of writing tasks will depend in part on learners' proficiency and provides a wealth of suggestions for students at different proficiency levels. Activities appropriate for students with lower proficiencies include picture description tasks; giving advice or instructions; and collaborative activities such as dictoglosses, in which students take notes on a short text that is read aloud and then try to reconstruct the text. For students with higher proficiencies, especially in academic contexts, several task types typical of authentic academic writing include summaries, proposals, reading responses, case studies, and annotated bibliographies. For many of these activities, students can be asked to either gather or generate information (from their own personal experience, surveys, observations, or interviews) or to summarize, analyze, or critique information from preexisting sources.

Writing tasks need to be structured carefully to elicit the best writing from students. Reid and Kroll (1995) point out that classroom writing differs from all other writing in the sense that it is not voluntary, the topics are usually assigned, and the writing is evaluated. Even if the assignment specifies an audience and a purpose, students know that their real audience is the teacher and the real purpose is to demonstrate their writing ability. In this sense, a writing assignment is a form of assessment, and teachers thus need to design their writing prompts with as much care as they would for any other assessment. Reid and Kroll provide useful suggestions for designing appropriate tasks. In particular, they note that the content should be accessible to all students and allow for multiple approaches to responding to the prompt, the instructions should be written in clear and unambiguous language, and the task should include the criteria on which the writing will be judged.

For major assignments, where students will go through a process of drafting and revision, some useful guidelines are as follows:

- Make sure that the scope of the task is feasible within the time allotted.
- Structure the task to reduce the possibility of plagiarism.
- Provide appropriate scaffolding of the task.
- Specify the topic, genre, and purpose.
- Provide the scoring criteria at the beginning.
- Specify intermediate deadlines for assignments.

One issue that teachers need to confront in lesson planning is how much class time to devote to actual writing. How much writing is done in the classroom (as opposed to between class meetings at home) depends in great measure on the context; for example, the availability of computers and the time available for out-of-class work are obvious factors that affect this. One argument in favor of devoting substantial time in class to writing is that it reinforces the fact that writing takes a lot of practice and that one cannot be a good writer without writing a lot; another advantage of devoting time to writing in class is that the teacher can be available for one-on-one help while others are working. On the other hand, there are often so many other things to do

during the class period itself that many teachers feel they cannot sacrifice class time for writing. Students who are paying for instruction may also feel somewhat slighted if they perceive that the teacher has not prepared instruction for a class period. In this case, teachers will need to communicate their rationale for devoting class time to writing.

Feedback, revision, and editing

In a process approach to teaching writing, once students have a working draft of a paper, they need to receive feedback (the third phase in Table 1) and then revise and edit their paper (for global and local issues, respectively) on the basis of this feedback (the fourth and fifth phases). While there is general agreement among students, teachers, and scholars that good feedback is essential to revision, there is less consensus on how feedback should be given, when, by whom, and what sort of feedback is most useful. Since providing feedback to students is potentially one of the most important yet difficult and time-consuming activities that writing teachers engage in, it is important for teachers to know what experience and research have shown to be the most useful ways to provide feedback to students.

Most resources for writing teachers (e.g., Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004; Williams, 2005) recommend commenting primarily on content before commenting on language issues, despite it being a natural tendency for language teachers to focus on sentence-level accuracy. There are several reasons for this recommendation. As noted earlier, inexperienced writers tend to revise at the sentence level more than at higher levels of organization and often need to be explicitly taught to revise on the rhetorical level. In addition, a premature focus on language may stifle students' processes of idea generation. Furthermore, there is little point in making detailed language comments if the overall content and organization are going to be revised. On the other hand, if language errors impede communication to the extent that it is impossible to discern the meaning, clearly these errors need to be addressed right away.

Based on this notion of content first, a common practice in writing courses is to require three drafts of a paper with two cycles of feedback and revision: the first focusing primarily on global issues of content and organization, and the second (assuming adequate improvements from the first round) on language issues. One or both of these feedback cycles frequently involve peer feedback instead of or in addition to instructor feedback. Peer feedback has the obvious benefit of reducing the teacher's grading workload, but it has other benefits as well. Some of the benefits of using peer response include (adapted from Williams, 2005):

- Students have an authentic audience to write for other than their teacher and can try different writing approaches.
- The process of reading others' work develops critical reading skills that can transfer to students' own writing, in addition to improving other L2 skills.
- Peers may focus on issues that teachers do not have time to comment on or choose not to address.

On the other hand, teachers should be aware of potential drawbacks to the use of peer feedback. Research on peer feedback in L2 classroom has revealed two main issues: (1) students do not always give good feedback; and (2) students frequently resist or disregard peer feedback activities as not useful. Both of these issues can be dealt with by sufficient preparation on the part of the teacher, including rationalizing the procedure, modeling the process, and providing materials such as checklists or peer-response guides that target only certain features for students to fill out while responding to their classmates' writing. Additional guidelines for implementing peer review successfully in the second language writing classroom can be found in Ferris (2003) and Liu and Hansen (2002).

Turning to the specifics of providing feedback, another issue is whether to provide oral comments, written comments, or both. Written feedback, in the form of endnotes or marginal comments, can reinforce the strengths of a paper or indicate areas where improvement is needed. However, written comments can be very time-consuming and are often open to misunderstandings and different interpretations. An alternative is individual conferencing with students during office hours so that teacher and student can discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the paper. However, this may not be possible in some settings, if there are no office hours, or if students are unavailable outside class. Fortunately, new technologies have opened up new possibilities for feedback in the form of podcasts or other digitally recorded means. The advantages of recording comments are several. First, it is often faster and easier for teachers to express their comments orally than in writing. Second, attending to comments provides additional practice in listening comprehension. Students can listen to recorded comments and relisten as often as they need to, unlike in face-to-face conferences. Third, and perhaps most important, the oral-aural channel preserves cues to meaning and intention, such as vocal inflection and pitch, which can help students interpret the comments in a positive light. These options are summarized in Table 2.

Williams (2005) provides a comprehensive list of good practices for giving feedback to student writers. Some of these suggestions involve making explicit to students the goals and process of feedback: explaining feedback procedures, modeling the process to students, and demonstrating to students how to incorporate feedback into their writing. In terms of the actual feedback process, Williams recommends reading the whole text through before making comments, being as clear as possible (avoiding indirectness because students often misinterpret it), and offering concrete suggestions that students can act on. Consistency is important, as is balancing critique with praise. An important part of the feedback process is making students accountable for using feedback; worksheets or checklists that students need to fill out when turning in later drafts can be a useful tool for accountability.

As discussed earlier, one important issue in teaching writing is how to deal with errors in student writing, given that it is virtually impossible to deal with every issue. Many scholars suggest prioritizing errors that interfere with comprehension, errors that are stigmatized, errors that are a current focus of instruction, and errors that occur frequently. Another important distinction to make is whether students can self-correct the errors or need to be taught the correct form directly. In the former case, an indirect approach is usually advised. Many teachers use coding sheets containing symbols and abbreviations to indicate types of errors that students can correct themselves (for example, *WF* for "word form" or *T* for "tense"). However, while this may be an intuitively appealing practice, it has not been shown to be effective (Truscott, 1996); furthermore, such coding systems can be difficult to implement consistently and may overwhelm both teachers and students with their complexity (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004).

If self-correction is not an option, and particularly when several students are having difficulties with complex structures, it is generally more effective to conduct a grammar mini-lesson in class, consisting ideally of text analysis/discovery activities, a brief deductive explanation of the grammar point in question, and practice and application activities (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004; Williams, 2005). However teachers may choose to deal with errors, it is important that they be consistent, explain their systems clearly, and be explicit about

Table 2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Types of Teacher Feedback on Writing

Type of Feedback	Advantages	Disadvantages
Written comments	Endnotes and margin comments can reinforce strengths of a paper or indicate where improvement is needed.	Writing is time-consuming; written comments are open to misinterpretation.
Individual conferences	These provide an opportunity to clarify and negotiate meaning through discussion; they may be less time-consuming than providing clear written feedback.	Teachers and/or students may not be available outside class; students may not be willing to attend office hours; students may not be willing to admit when they do not understand the teacher's comments.
Recorded oral feedback	May be faster than providing written feedback; provides opportunities for listening comprehension; students can listen to comments multiple times; nonverbal information (inflections and tone of voice) can promote a positive interpretation of comments.	Technology may not be available; some teachers or students may be uncomfortable with recording equipment.

how they want students to respond to feedback on errors; see Ferris (2011) for a thorough discussion of responding to errors.

FUTURE TRENDS

Numerous changes in writing instruction have been brought about by the rapid expansion of technology over the past 20 years. Writing increasingly involves keyboarding, a skill that can be taken for granted in some contexts but may need to be taught in others. Social media networks such as Facebook and online discussion boards, blogs, and wikis can be exploited in the writing classroom, providing opportunities for genuine interaction with an audience that goes well beyond the teacher and fellow students. (See Sokolik, this volume, for an expanded discussion of the role of technology in second language teaching.) Warschauer (2007) discusses three main technological issues with regard to writing instruction: synchronous (real-time) communication, such as chats and instant messaging; asynchronous communication formats, such as emails or web-based bulletin boards; and hypermedia authoring, such as designing webpages. Warschauer notes that, for many second language writers, electronic media provide more access to authentic communication along with expanded opportunities to understand and use a wider range of language functions and structures than does face-to-face interaction. Electronic media can thus be a tremendous asset to writing courses. However, teachers must be trained to use these new technologies to exploit their advantages in the classroom.

In addition to these new media for writing, an important development that has been brought about by the revolution in information technology is the availability of large language corpora, which can be a useful tool for teachers and students to investigate the uses of specific linguistic items. For example, Cortes (2007) and Lee and Swales (2006) describe courses for international graduate students that use corpora as teaching tools for raising awareness about the genres that these students will need to master in their professional lives. (See also McCarthy & O'Keeffe, this volume.) Charles (2007) outlines procedures for using controlled corpus searches to improve students' awareness of and control over specific linguistic choices to fulfill particular rhetorical functions. For example, online concordances such as the *Virtual Language Centre* (n.d.) can be used to investigate the difference between words like *interested* and *interesting* by providing many examples of how these words are used in authentic texts. Again, this is an area where teacher education is needed so that writing teachers are aware of the possibilities and limitations of using corpus tools for teaching.

Finally, improvements in natural language processing have led to the introduction of automated systems for scoring and providing feedback on writing, a trend with potential to save time and resources but one that is controversial among writing teachers (see Weigle, 2010, for an overview of automated scoring for ESL writing). Proponents of automated assessment (e.g., Shermis, Burstein, Higgins, & Zechner, 2010) point out the increased speed and reliability of using computers to score writing compared to human raters. Ideally, computers could take over some of the more arduous and time-consuming aspects of providing feedback to students, such as identifying grammatical errors, leaving teachers with more time to attend to higher-order concerns such as content development and rhetorical organization. Self-access programs can allow students to submit samples of their writing for automatic feedback without the potential loss of face involved in giving their writing to another person for evaluation, and such feedback can be immediate, allowing the student more opportunities to practice. Indeed, a recent article reports that in at least one institution this is indeed the case: students find turning in multiple drafts to their teachers "corrective, even punitive" and much prefer to revise using e-rater (Jaschik, 2011).

On the other hand, many writing teachers are strongly opposed to the use of automated essay feedback programs because they contradict the very nature of writing, which is a form of communication (e.g., see Cheville, 2004; Herrington & Moran, 2001). Computers obviously cannot read; they can only count things. Thus students writing to a computer are not writing with an audience in mind. Consequently, aspects of writing that can be judged only by getting a sense of a text in its entirety, such as the persuasiveness of an argument or a sense of authorial voice, cannot be judged by a computer. Another objection to automated scoring systems is that they reinforce the notion that errors can be defined objectively instead of contextually. For example, nonstandard linguistic forms such as double negatives, while often inappropriate in academic writing, are perfectly acceptable in some less formal genres.

A similar development with regard to computers and writing is the increasing use of automated software for detecting plagiarism or textual borrowing, such as Turnitin (Turnitin, 2010). While proponents of such software programs note their success in reducing the incidence of wholesale borrowing of source text materials in student writing, some scholars caution against the uncritical use of such programs by educators. Howard (2007), for example, argues that the use of antiplagiarism software frames complicated issues of textual borrowing solely in terms of individual student ethics rather than engaging teachers and students in pedagogies that help students learn to use textual material appropriately in their own writing, as all successful writers do.

Whatever the objections, it is not likely that technological advances such as automated scoring and plagiarism detection will go away; it is up to teachers, then, to educate themselves as to the most appropriate uses of such technology and to guard against misuses.

CONCLUSION

As the world becomes more interconnected, writing is the skill that may ultimately be the most critical, and the need for skilled writing teachers will only increase. It is clear from this brief overview that writing is a complex ability involving consideration of a wide range of issues and subskills, and that teachers need to develop expertise in many different areas to become effective at teaching writing. Writing is perhaps the most challenging and time-consuming skill to teach because of its complexity, but it is also one of the most rewarding.

SUMMARY

- Writing is a complex activity that involves both language ability and composing ability.
- Writing teachers need to consider both the cognitive (individual) aspects of writing and the sociocultural (contextual) aspects of writing.
- Writing teachers need to understand the role of other language skills, particularly reading and grammar, in the writing process.
- Writing teachers need to focus on the process of writing as well as on the product, both in instruction and in responding to student writing.
- New technologies are already impacting the role of writing in society and the teaching of writing; teachers must be able to understand and evaluate these tools to make the most effective use of them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to understand writing from both a cognitive and a sociocultural perspective?
2. What is the relationship between second language proficiency and writing ability?
3. Do you use elements of a process approach in your own writing? How can thinking about your own process be helpful in teaching writing to your students?
4. What are some of the ways in which reading and writing are connected, and what does a writing teacher need to know about reading to teach writing effectively?
5. What are some of the benefits and drawbacks to peer review in a second language writing class?
6. Why is it problematic to correct or point out every grammatical error in a piece of writing?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Look at Table 1 on p. 227.
   a. Design a lesson plan for a writing class that applies the steps of the writing process presented in the table. Be sure to designate the students' proficiency level, assignment deadlines, and so on.
   b. Prepare a scoring rubric that you would give to students to make your grading criteria clear to students at the beginning of the assignment. Refer to the sample rubric in the Appendix for ideas.
2. Work with an ESL/EFL student for two to four sessions on writing. Ask the student to bring samples of his or her writing to work on together. Decide on a strategy for suggesting improvements on both the

rhetorical level (content and organization) and on the sentence level (grammar and vocabulary).

3. If you are working in an academic context, interview several teachers from different content areas about writing in their field and teaching ESL students. Some questions you might ask include:
   a. What types of writing assignments do you give your students?
   b. Are there specific features of writing in your field that students need to know about that they might not learn in a typical English writing class?
   c. To what extent do you grade writing on content, organization, and language? What is most important? Why? Least important? Why?
   d. If you have had non-native speakers of English in your class, are there specific strengths or weaknesses that such students tend to display?
4. If you are currently teaching a writing class, imagine the best possible essay that could come from one of your students. Write an endnote to the student describing the areas in which the student has succeeded, such as the content, the paragraph development, or the use of vocabulary. Using your endnote, draft learning outcomes for your course.

FURTHER READING

Ferris, D. R., & Hedgcock, J. S. (2004). *Teaching ESL composition: Purpose, process, and practice* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

This is a comprehensive book that provides practical guidance for teaching composition. It is particularly appropriate for teaching in North American contexts at the university level.

Hirvela, A. (2004). *Connecting reading and writing in second language writing instruction.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

This volume provides a theoretical rationale and practical advice for incorporating reading into the writing classroom.

Leki, I., Cumming, A., & Silva, T. (2008). A *synthesis of research on second language writing.* London, UK: Routledge.

This volume is particularly useful for anyone interested in research and its implications for teaching writing, particularly in the ESL context.

Williams, J. (2005). *Teaching writing in second and foreign language classrooms.* Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.

This volume addresses writing issues for both second and foreign language classes. It is fairly short and accessible to teachers in training and practicing teachers.

APPENDIX: SAMPLE SCORING RUBRIC FOR OUT-OF-CLASS PARAGRAPHS, LOW-INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

Scoring rubric (100 points total)

		Rough Draft	Final Draft	Final Grade
Content, organization, and clarity	**(50 points)**			
• Paragraph includes specific content points.		__/10	__/10	
• Paragraph includes a topic sentence (a sentence that tells the main idea).		__/10	__/10	
• All the sentences relate to the main idea and are in logical order.		__/10	__/10	
• Ideas are explained clearly.		__/10	__/10	
• Paragraph gives enough information and includes specific examples.		__/10	__/10	
Grammar, mechanics, and format	**(50 points)**			
Sentence structure • Complete sentences (subject and verb) Problem: _____ no verb _____ no subject		__/10	__/10	
• Correct use of capital letters and periods (.) to divide sentences Problem: _____ run on _____ comma splice		__/10	__/10	
Other grammar for the level/assignment • Correct word order		__/5	__/5	
• Correct word forms: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, plurals, pronouns (subject, object, possessive)		__/5	__/5	
• Correct use of verbs Problem: __ verb tense __ incorrect use of *be* = *am, is, are* ___verb form ___ subject-verb agreement		__/10	__/10	
Format • Indents the first line of the paragraph and uses correct format for other lines		__/5	__/5	
Spelling and mechanics Problem: ___ spelling ___ punctuation ___ capital letters		__/5	__/5	
Final grade	**(100 points)**	__/100	__/100	**__/100**

Note: Points obtained on the rough and final drafts are averaged to arrive at the final grade. If the final draft is not turned in on time, 10 points are subtracted.