
Second Language Writing Teaching: Theory and Practice

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Outline

- The nature of writing
 - Theory on writing teaching
 - Product
 - Process
 - Context
 - Tasks and activities for L2 writing
 - Responding to L2 writing
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What is writing?

Writing is not an end in and of itself but rather a means of learning about content and/or culture.

What is writing?

Language is a tool for building and shaping our thoughts rather than simply a means for conveying them, writing is also **a way of communication**, where language is used to learn new concepts and express ideas.

A theoretical overview of writing teaching

- Product
 - Process
 - Context
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Product-oriented view

- Focus on writing products
 - Examine texts through their formal surface elements or their discourse structure
 - Influenced by Structuralism and the Transformational Grammar of Chomsky
 - Writing is seen as an autonomous mechanism which **depends neither on particular writers or readers**, but setting out ideas using **correct forms**.
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Product-oriented view

- In many schools writing is principally conducted to **demonstrate a knowledge of decontextualised facts** with little awareness of a reader beyond the teacher.
 - **Factual display and clear exposition** are the main criteria of good writing.
 - Goal of writing instruction: explicitness and accuracy
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Product-oriented view

- Writing – an extension of grammar
 - Activities: guided composition, prescribe the ‘correct’ essay structures in classrooms
 - Teacher feedback- focus on correction
 - Criterion for good writing: syntactic complexity and grammatical accuracy
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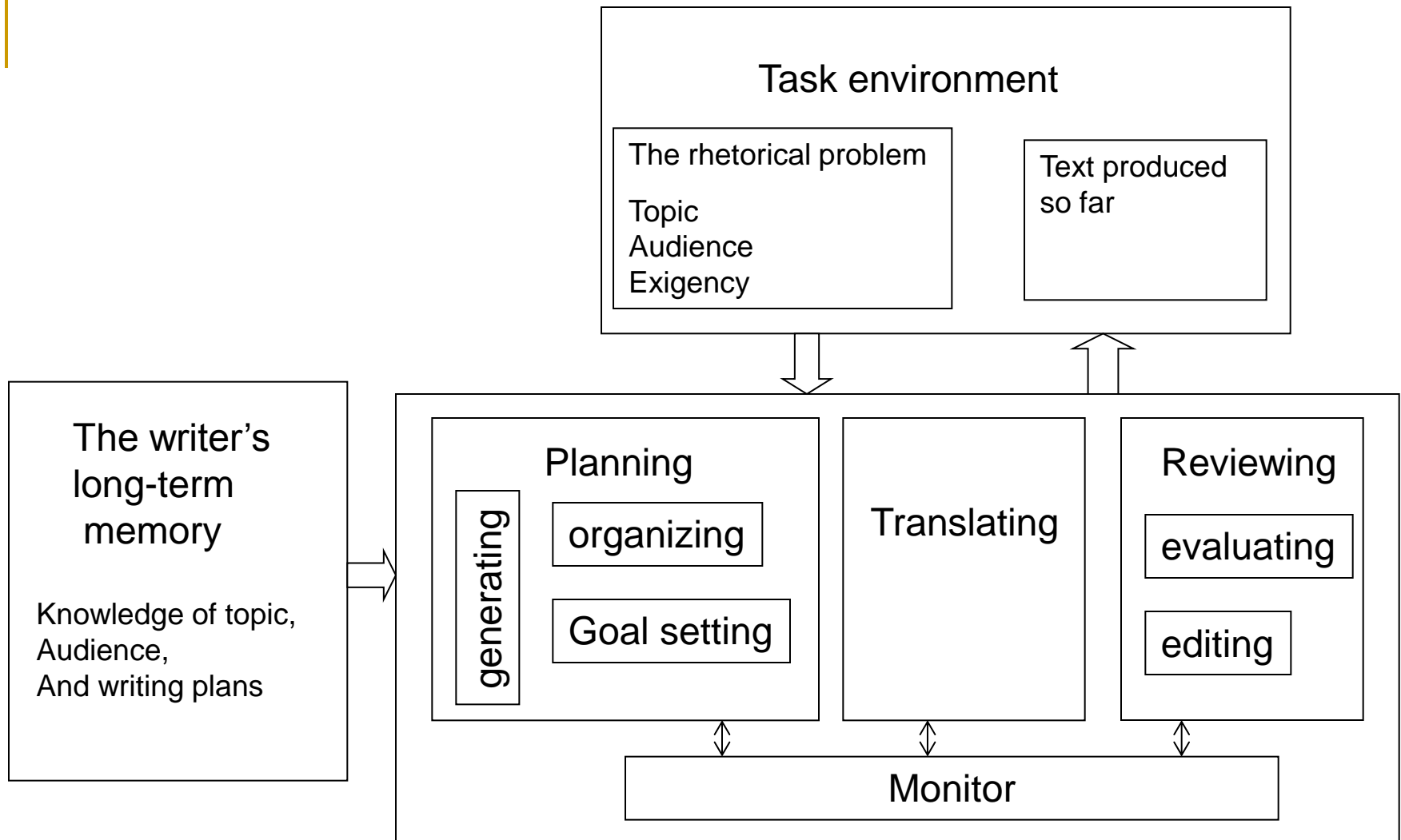
Process-oriented view

Writing is viewed as a cognitive process

- Writing is non-linear, exploratory and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning.
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The Flower and Hayes writing process model

- Composing processes are interactive, intermingling, and potentially simultaneous
 - Composing is a goal-directed activity
 - Expert writers compose differently than novice writers
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Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987)

- They argue that the writing process of a young student and that of a mature skilled writer cannot be the same.
 - Focus more on describing **why** and **how skilled** and **less-skilled** writers compose differently
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A knowledge-telling model

- Novice writers **plan less** often than experts, **revise less** often and less extensively, and are primarily concerned with generating content from their **internal** resources.
 - Novice writers' main goal is **simply to tell what they can remember based** on the assignments, the topic, or the genre.
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A knowledge-transforming model

- Skilled writers use the writing task to analyse problems and set goals.
- There is continuous interaction between developing knowledge and the text.
- Knowledge transforming thus involves **actively reworking thoughts** so that in the process not only text, but also **ideas**, may be changed.

Research on composing processes

Writing is not simply to put ideas into words, but a complex cognitive process (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes & Flower, 1980, 1983; Hayes, 1996) in which L2 writers shift their attention between **content** (what do I want to say?) and **rhetorical** (how do I say it?) concerns as well as making efforts to resolve discrepancies between the two concerns (Cumming, 1990).

The crucial distinction is made not between L1 and L2 writers, but between **experienced and inexperienced writers.**

Like their L1 counterparts, **the experienced L2 writers tend to plan and revise more, and attend to multiple aspects of their writing (e.g., language and idea) than less experienced ones** (e.g., Boshier, 1998; Connor & Kramer, 1995; Cumming, 1989; Cumming et al., 1989; Raimes, 1985, 1987; Sasaki, 2000; Uzawa, 1996; Whalen & Mènard, 1995; Zamel, 1982, 1983).

Writing expertise is observed to
be **transferable** across
languages (Arndt, 1987; Cumming, 1989;
Cumming et al., 1989; Jones & Tetroe, 1987;
Raimes, 1987; Whalen & Mènard, 1995; Zamel,
1983).

Context-oriented view

Writing as situated act

- Give greater emphasis to the actual performance of writing in a **particular context**.
 - Writing is influenced both by the **personal attitudes and social experiences** that the writer brings to writing and the impact of particular political and institutional context in which it takes place.
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Reading and Writing

- Reading and writing are reciprocal activities; the outcome of a reading activity can serve as input for writing, and writing can lead a student to further reading resources. (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, p. 297)
- ... one of the best ways to improve writing is to improve reading, and vice versa; and in the writing classroom, a lesson about writing is a lesson about reading, and vice versa. (Hirvela, 2004, p. 11-12).

Writing activities

Tasks and activities for L2 writing

- Writing for learning
 - Reinforcement writing
 - Preparation writing
 - Writing for writing
 - Writing on an assigned topic
 - Writing on a theme
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Writing activities

- Guided composition
 - Model
 - Dictogloss
 - Jigsaw
 - Poems
 - Continue writing a text
 - Connecting writing tasks with readings
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Guided composition

- Give students a model essay or paragraph
 - Analyze the model text together
 - Indicate the phrases or sentence structures you would like students to use in their writing
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Continue writing a text

- Give students part of the story and ask them to continue the text. You could ask students to use the words you supply.
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First lines, last lines

- Students could be given either the first line (or opening paragraphs) of or the last line (or closing paragraphs) of possible stories.
 - Students then work in pair or group discuss and write down their stories.
 - Students read their stories to the class when they finish their stories.
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First lines, last lines (an example)

1st line: When she looked out of the window she saw a red car parked across the street.

Last line: He told himself that he would never go to the cinema by himself again.

Dictogloss

- Students re-create a text or story that the teacher reads to them.



Jigsaw activities

- Pictures or passages
 - A special form of information gap in which each member of a group is given some specific information and the goal is to pool all information to achieve some objective.
 - Work in pairs in the class for idea generation or draft
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Writing poems

- Poetry writing may allow students to express themselves in a way that no other genres does.
 - Poetry writing could allow students to play with new vocabulary in a way that other genres do not.
 - Pre-established patterns are often necessary
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Model poems

- Learn to write poems as we do in Chinese
 - Emulate our elders by writing the same theme or using the same poetic forms.
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Connecting writing tasks with readings

- Rewrite a story from another perspective
 - Summary/Commentary
 - Imitate the writing rhetoric techniques
 - Create an ending
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Writing practice on the Necklace

At the end of the piece, the story is not really over. In fact, the writer chooses to finish the Necklace at the precise moment of truth, when Mathilde found out that she had worked for many years for nothing. However, we are not given her reaction to this startling information. How would she react? What would happen? Now write an ending to The ~~Necklace~~. (大学思辨英语教程：写作1-记叙文)

Writing a Summary

Read this summary of the first part of “A Day’s Wait”.

A nine-year-old boy was sick with the flu. The doctor told his father that he had a temperature of 102 degrees. The doctor left medicine for the boy. He told his father that the boy would be all right if his temperature did not go over 104 degrees. The boy seemed very upset. He told the father not to stay.

Read each of the questions that follow. Continue the summary of “A Day’s Wait” by writing answers to the questions.

1. While the father was away, what did the boy refuse to do?

2. Did he think his temperature was 102° Fahrenheit or 102° Celsius?

3. What had he been waiting all day for?

4. What caused the boy’s misunderstanding?

5. Did the boy understand his mistake, or not?

6. How did the boy behave the next day?

Rewrite the Story

Rewrite the story from the boy's point of view in about 300 words. Try to detect the boy's mental activities. Here is the beginning.

I got a headache in an early morning. I heard the doctor tell my father that I had a temperature of 102 degrees. I began to worry because....

(大学思辨英语教程：写作1-记叙文)

What a writing teacher needs to do

- Instruct or prompt writing strategies or rhetoric
 - Attending to students' process of writing
 - Nurture students' writing habits
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Writing strategies/rhetoric

- Description (e.g., spatial order)
- Narration (e.g., chronological order)
- Process
- Comparison and contrast
- Classification
- Definition

(relate to students' L1 writing)

The process of writing

- The role of L1 writing competence and strategies
 - Stages in the process of writing
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L1/L2 writing and writing strategies

- L1 writing ability provides the foundation for L2 writing.
 - Writing strategies could be transferred from L1 to L2.
 - Planning
 - Reviewing
 - Revising
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Writing process

- Invention
 - Collection
 - Organization
 - Drafting
 - Revising
 - Proofreading
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Nurture students' writing habit

■ Reading and Thinking

- If you write, you read differently

(David Olson, Professor of University of Toronto).

- Read between lines, read critically
- Take notes

■ Thinking: write an outline

Content for writing instruction

- Writing skills
 - Topic sentence
 - Outlining
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- One challenge in L2 writing is lack of appropriate vocabulary to express his or her ideas.
 - Teachers could provide some relevant vocabulary for the assigned topic.
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The tasks of the teacher in writing

- Considering the goals of the writer
 - Demonstrating
 - Motivating and provoking
 - Supporting
 - Responding
 - Evaluating
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Responding to L2 writing

Feedback on writing

Teachers of L2 writers can and should learn to treat student errors effectively. (Ferris, 2011, p. 71)

Responding to student errors

- *Which errors* should be corrected?
 - *When* should error feedback be provided?
 - *How* should teachers give error feedback?
 - How can teachers help students to *process and utilize* error feedback effectively?
 - How can EFL writing teachers *use their time wisely* and avoid burnout in giving error feedback?
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Choosing which errors to mark

- Comprehensive versus selective error correction
 - Focus on patterns of error
 - Identify their purposes for marking
 - Depend on the stage of writing
 - Treatable (e.g., verb tense and form, subject-verb agreement, article usage, plural and possessive noun endings, sentence fragment) vs untreatable errors (word choice)
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■ Errors versus style

- When it comes to the specific issue of feedback on language in students' texts, teachers' energies are usually better spent on more explicit issues about which rules can be taught and learned and student progress can be observed.

Options for corrective feedback

- Direct vs indirect feedback
 - Error location vs error labeling
 - Textual corrections vs endnotes
 - Alternatives to written error correction: conferences
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- Set **realistic** goals for error feedback
 - Feedback as a **means** to encourage **gradual** but **consistent improvement** in accuracy over time, acquisition and application of linguistic knowledge, and development of effective self-editing strategies
 - Make most of your feedback **indirect**, focused on error location rather than labeling, and verbal (not tied to codes or symbols)
 - As time goes on, mark fewer errors and require the students to **take increasing responsibility** for their own progress.
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Beyond error correction: reading

- Reading for writers
 - Reading gives students ideas and content to write about, models rhetorical strategies and genre specifications, and provides extensive input for acquisition of vocabulary and syntax occurring within authentic discourse.
 - Reading provides examples of conventions particular to writing itself such as paragraphing, capitalization, and punctuation usage.
 - Do extensive reading
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