



Academic writing: tools and starting points to develop writing skills

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Three approaches in recent years have tended to characterize work on the development of students' writing skills

Product or text approaches

Process approaches

Genre approaches

Product and text approach

Based on a starting point that writing is mainly about linguistic knowledge.

Focussed primarily on appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax, cohesive devices.

Practice is generally in 4 stages –

Familiarisation

Controlled writing

Guided writing

Free writing

(Pinkas, 1982b)

Text and product based approaches- some criticisms

- Language and linguistic knowledge without social context
- No considered account of the writing process

Process approaches

Developed as a reaction to the short-comings of product and text-based approaches and their over-emphasis on linguistic forms.

Process writing emphasises

Stages of writing and writing process

Individual voice and individual expression

Process Writing

- . . . writing activities which move learners from the generation of ideas and the collection of data through to the 'publication' of a finished text.

Tribble(1996: 37)

- Much more emphasis on writing skills such as planning and drafting than on linguistic knowledge.

Process writing in practice

- Usually 4 stages
 - pre-writing
 - Composing/drafting
 - Revising and re-writing
 - Editing
- These stages can be a cyclical process

Process approaches – some criticisms

- Monolithic in its approach. Little consideration for types of text.
- Over-emphasis on individual voice. Little accounting for voice inside a context or community.
- Favours students who have good access to education

“The process writing teacher, waiting while the child struggles for control and ownership . . . actually favours white, middle-class students. (Cope and Kalantzis 1993: 57).”

This complaint can also apply to the predicament of non-traditional and international students

Genre approaches

- Similar to text approaches in that linguistic knowledge is very important.
- However, social context is also very important.
- Text types defined and organised by communicative and rhetorical purpose

Swales defines genre .. “ as a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. “(1990: 58)

Genre approaches

Focuses on other features:

- Relationship between writer and audience
- Register and organisational form

Genre approaches in practice

- Good **models** provided
- Texts defined by purpose, audience, writer, context
- Salient linguistic and organisational features identified
- Students write with reference to the model and the salient features

Genre approaches

- General movement from what is implicit knowledge and understanding to explicit understanding.
- Writing in the academic context becomes more accessible for the non-traditional student.

Genre approaches - criticisms

- No accounting for voice – where is the writer's voice?
- Little emphasis on the process and *experience* of writing
- Arguably more focus on texts than on the contexts in which the texts were constructed

How do you see your role as university teachers in helping your students write?

References

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