Introduction

All of us who are practising teachers will be aware that the skill of writing well in a second language is important and needs separate and special attention. Writing is, of course, not easy, but it is less difficult than many students and their teachers imagine. The 100 or so activities that follow this introduction give you the opportunity to try for yourselves those that you think will best suit you and your students.

However, you will understand the purpose of these activities better and, furthermore, be able to adapt them and even invent new activities of your own by taking a step back from the classroom and looking at the nature of writing itself and what others have thought about it. A discussion of this topic comes next in the Introduction and is followed by suggestions as to how it is possible to apply these writing principles in the classroom. The last part of the Introduction gives you advice about how to put the activities into practice.

1 The nature of writing

The study of language in the twentieth century has tended to concentrate on spoken language. Written language was thought by some to be spoken language put into written form. Many linguists from de Saussure through to Chomsky, for what seemed like good reasons at the time, neglected the written mode in favour of the spoken. This, however, contributed to the fact that writing was for a long time a neglected area in language teaching. Furthermore, the assumption that writing is putting the spoken language into written form is only true for activities like taking down dictation or transcribing a tape.

Differences between writing and speaking

There are many differences, big and small, between writing and speaking.

a Writing is more 'attended to' than speech, i.e. we are more conscious of what we are doing and tend to attach more importance to

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correctness of every kind, knowing that our reader can return to our writing but we cannot, and that we cannot easily rectify mis-understandings on the part of the reader.

b Writing has text-types of its own, different from those of speech; an example that comes readily to mind is that the way we arrange what we have to say in telephone or face-to-face conversations is different from the arrangement of material in letters or e-mail messages.

c Writing can make use of visual devices in a way which speech cannot, as in the following advertisement for underwear for large men:

H U R R Y ! ! !
while stocks last
Why not order our
X – tra large
Y – fronts
Z – ebra patterned

Together with the chosen script, such visual devices can be compared with the different effects and meanings in spoken English produced by, for instance, different stress and intonation patterns. When we write, not all of us use script consistently, correctly, and effectively!

d Writing-systems may assist groups of people to communicate, as in the case of Chinese where the different 'dialects' are mutually unin-telligible in spoken form but share a common written form; the position is reversed in the case of Hindi and Urdu where the different written forms make it difficult for the speakers of those rather simi-lar spoken languages to communicate in writing. The script used in different writing-systems is of great importance. It takes many years of careful study to master the classic Chinese writing-system. Even simple alphabetic-systems such as that used for English have many features and potentialities that need to be consciously learnt.

e The spelling-systems of almost all languages that use alphabetic writing-systems are based to some extent on how the word is spoken, but only partly so: we can often trace not only the history of words including from which language they have been borrowed, but also their relation to each other in spite of differences in pronunciation – examples taken from English are *anxious*, *anxiety*; *receipt*, *reception*; and the grammatical endings of *loved*, *kissed*, and *hated*.

f Because, as we noted above, writing is more attended to than speech, we set higher and higher standards for ourselves as we get better at it;

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so while listening, speaking and reading all feel easier as we become more proficient, the better we get at writing the easier it is to please others, but the harder to please ourselves.

g Up to now, there have been more varieties of acceptable spoken than written English used internationally. Written English has so far been more uniform, except for relatively minor issues such as the differences between British and American spelling. Individual writers are, of course, expected to be consistent in their use of one or the other. However, it is not yet fully clear what the effect of the widespread use of English for e-mail and on the Internet will eventually be.

The purpose of writing

If we ask ourselves why we write at all, the answer may well be to get information to someone we can't presently talk to. Thus writing allows us to transcend time (when we leave a note for someone to pick up later) or space (when we send a letter through the post). A second answer might be (especially when we think of the needs of society as a whole) to solve the problem of volume, of having to store more than the human brain can remember. A less likely, but nevertheless important, third reason for writing might be to filter and shape our experience. Below we elaborate briefly on each of these reasons and ask you to think of them in relation to your students.

Transcending the here and now

When someone in Japan and someone in Europe want to communicate, their working hours overlap barely if at all, so that even the telephone will be less useful than letters, faxes and e-mail messages. Or a headteacher busy in the office and needing to communicate with a member of staff may send a message in the form of a written note. In each of these cases, writing transcends space. But it can also transcend time. So our desk drawers, filing cabinets and computer hard disks are full of previously recorded written information that we think we may need at some time in the future.

> **Task**
>
> Focus on an individual learner in your class. Think of two or three real-world needs that your learner might have to communicate in writing with people not present in the here and now.

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The problem of volume

From the beginning of history, man has found it useful to be able to
store information reliably, first using specially trained 'memorisers'
from within the community, and then moving on to developing
writing-systems. This is especially true of modern industrialised society
where the sheer volume of information means that there is too much
to recall. The written form is the most convenient for this purpose,
because though we now have facilities for storing spoken material, it
is much harder to access or to skim through than written material.
Thus at school, writing is a skill we must learn in order to become full
and useful members of society. This is, of course, also true in our own
personal lives. For instance, most of us keep an address book with the
names, addresses and telephone numbers of people we may wish to
contact at some time in the future, as we cannot remember them all.
And the increasingly large amount of information stored on computer
is itself almost always inputted and accessed as written text.

Task

Think of the very last class you taught. Almost inevitably, your
students will have written down something you or they wanted to
keep for subsequent use which they knew they would not other-
wise be able to recall. Spend a moment thinking about how this
was done, and how and when it will be referred to in the future.

Filtering and shaping experience

You cannot write without filtering information: as we write, we think
about what to write and how to represent our experience. Indeed, we
may well find that writing helps us to come to terms with our
experience and understand it better. When we edit what we have
written, our writing itself goes through a further filter. The result is
that our writing provides our readers with a condensed, economical,
carefully considered version of what we might say to them which is
very different from spoken forms. In a sense, we have clarified what
we think by forcing ourselves to write it down.

As well as filtering, we compose. That is, we consider how to
present what we want to communicate – with what purpose, for
which reader(s), and in what order. For instance, if someone sends us
a present, we must decide whether to thank them in writing or not,
and if in writing, whether to write a brief message on a card or a
slightly longer letter on writing paper.

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Task

Think of the very last writing task you gave your students. To what extent did you explicitly set aside time for the students to decide how to compose the text, even if it was very brief and designed to be read only by their partners?

The uses to which writing is put in the real world

We have found it helpful, as we are sure you will, when devising writing tasks for the classroom, to discover first the real-world writing our students do outside the English classroom in both their first and second language. This can then be used to extend the range and relevance of their classroom writing tasks. Before you read the list that follows, try the following task.

Task

Make a list of the different uses to which you have put your writing skills in the past week in both your first and second language. When you have done this, compare your list with the list produced by a class of native-speaker second-year University students training to be teachers which you will find on the next page.

On the next page is a list of real-world writing purposes drawn up by twenty second-year English native-speaker University students training to be teachers. The students were asked to list all the different uses to which they had put their writing skills during the previous week. The 62-item list is divided into two columns. The first column lists uses mentioned by two or more students, the number of students being indicated in parenthesis after each item. The second column lists single mentions.

You may well be surprised at the length and variety of the list. Note that it contains a range of categories, including functional writing (reports), place where the writing occurs (the blackboard), private writing (love letters), public writing (notices), lengthy writing (seminar papers), shorter pieces (greetings cards), copying or dictation (recipes), writing that everyone does in literate societies (writing down an address), writing that only some people ever do (applying for an overdraft), highly specialised writing (writing a horoscope), creative writing (songs), and intellectually demanding writing (doing crosswords).

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Making a shopping list (10)	Writing up lecture notes
Writing a formal letter (10)	Writing a seminar paper
Making notes in a diary (10)	Writing speech in cartoons
Writing letters to friends (9)	Taking a phone message
Writing an essay (9)	Writing notices
Writing greetings cards (8)	Writing a personal column
Making notes for the family (7)	Writing for children
Taking lecture notes (7)	Writing a song
Signing a cheque (2)	Writing a newsletter
Writing a cv to accompany an	Writing down an address
application (2)	Writing down a proverb
Writing a telegram (2)	Writing a postcard
Doing the crossword (2)	Writing out a prescription
Writing a job application (2)	Writing a letter to a tutor
Making pre-presentation notes (2)	Writing a cryptic message
Writing an advertisement (7)	Designing a questionnaire
Writing poetry (7)	Entering accounts in a ledger
Filling in forms (7)	Subtitling
Completing official documents (7)	Making this list
Journalism (6)	Writing a timetable
Writing a recipe down (5)	Making a summary
Writing an invitation (4)	Making workcards
Prose writing (4)	Copying a knitting pattern
Report writing (4)	Writing revision notes
Writing a love letter (3)	Making a poster
Doing an examination (3)	Writing a comprehension
Writing labels (3)	Doing a spelling test
Writing instructions for others (3)	Writing a horoscope
Writing school absence notes (3)	Writing on the blackboard
Making notes for an essay (2)	Writing a complaint
Writing graffiti on a wall (2)	Writing a computer program
	Applying for an overdraft

The items in the list are also interesting for two other reasons: they show how brief our writing typically is and how integrated with daily routine. Although there are a number of extended writing types in this list (letters, reports, academic assignments, essays, publishable materials), these are far less common and are usually written for special work- or study-related purposes. Overwhelmingly, the kind of writing we do day in day out is brief, informal and integrated with everyday living rather than separated from it. Classroom writing should surely reflect some of this variety. Before looking further at this

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question let us turn our attention to the writing process, including its
relationship to longer pieces of writing.

The writing process

If we can analyse the different elements that are involved in a longer
piece of writing, and can help learners to work through them, become
conscious of them, and use this knowledge positively in their own
writing, then such writing will have a lot of the stress taken out of it.
Tackling one by one the elements which determine what we write
down is what process writing is about.

   Before reading on, we invite you to perform a simple task connected
with process writing. But first, it may help you to think of an analogy
in which you compare a piece of writing to a tennis match where the
players concentrate on serving, returning from the base-line, net-play,
volleying, lobbing, drop-shots and match strategy. Writing, like
playing tennis, is an activity made up of several processes, such as
thinking what to write and the order to put it in.

Task

Close your book and jot down what you see as the process
elements that together make up writing. Do not look at the list
below until you have done this.

If you had trouble making up a list, don't worry. You will not be
alone! It takes time to get used to analysing the writing process in this
way. In any case you may be interested in the following list:

List jotted down by an experienced teacher of writing

– deciding what to say
– thinking about starting
– thinking who we are writing for
– thinking about our aim in writing this particular piece
– thinking about the way it should be set out on the page
– deciding on the order in which we put our ideas
– deciding on paragraphing and sub-headings
– giving it a title
– making sure we have the script right (the right font if word-
   processing)
– deciding where to put capitals, underlining, italics, quotation marks
   and other punctuation

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- spelling
- choosing words to convey meaning
- finding the best word, most suited to the context
- writing a grammatical sentence
- writing a fluent sentence that reads well
- reading what we have written to see if it reads well
- reading what we have written with another reader in mind
- deleting, adding or changing the text to suit the reader
- proof-reading for small mechanical mistakes, e.g. spelling
- making sufficient interesting points
- illustrating our points to add interest and help understanding
- referring to the ideas of others

Such lists remind us of the many processes that are involved in writing. And if you have difficulty remembering all of them, it's likely that your students will have a much more limited, conscious awareness of process elements. In fact, if you do ask your students about their own writing, they are most likely to speak about deciding what to write and how to get started, while some may go on to talk about details of spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. Those with more experience occasionally mention paragraphing and organisation.

Before moving on to the next section, it may be worthwhile looking at process writing in a wider context. The first thing to be said is that the valuable research done on first language (L1) writing by investigators such as Flower and Hayes in the early 1980s forms a useful basis for researchers into second language (L2) writing. It is generally agreed that there is an important core of similarities between L1 and L2 writing as well as some significant differences. One important line of research into L1 writing explicated in Flower and Hayes (1981) is the cognitive process theory. Researchers into process writing owe much to these ideas. In this book, we assume that there is enough overlap between L1 and L2 writing to make such ideas about process writing useful.

Secondly, it has been assumed that knowing about the processes that go on in a writer's mind provides a useful foundation for teaching. This is, at first, no more than an assumption, but as more and more practitioners (ourselves included) have been able to observe the merits of such an approach and as researchers start to make it their business to measure its effectiveness, so we are able to place more reliance on it. As Silva says:

> The teacher's role is to help students develop viable strategies for getting started (finding topics, generating ideas and information, focusing, and planning structure and procedure), for drafting

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> (encouraging multiple drafts), for revising (adding, deleting, mod-
> ifying, and rearranging ideas) and for editing (attending to vocab-
> ulary, sentence structure, grammar and mechanics). (1990:15)

The most noticeable omission is 'evaluating' which may, of course, be implied in 'revising'.

Thirdly, we have to take into account the fact that in addition to the process approaches, there are other ways of teaching writing, particularly the 'interactive' and the 'social constructionist' approaches. (Johns 1990:25) The interactive view sees the text as being created by writer and reader together. The social constructionist view envisages a discourse community such as a group of those knowledgeable about chemistry writing for each other. While we find the process approach the most useful base to work from, our emphasis on the importance of the reader owes something to the interactive approach. Furthermore, while social constructionist views have chiefly influenced the teaching of English for Special Purposes, they are also a reminder that writing takes place in a community and is not just an individual act.

Finally, a number of writers have stressed the recursive, non-linear nature of writing, as is made clear in the following quotation:

> Planning is not a unitary stage but a distinctive thinking process
> which writers use over and over during composition. (Zamel
> 1983)

Let us sum up these points. Much valuable work has been done in the last 20 or 30 years on L1 writing. The work on process writing particularly from the early 1980s has been used by L2 researchers and is proving useful for developing teaching programmes. Though more emphasis has recently been laid on the social nature of writing, this is not so much a threat to process approaches as an enrichment.

There is no agreed list of writing processes among researchers and even less agreement about exactly what the writing curriculum should consist of. However, we have extracted a common core for use in describing the activities in this book. These are the three pre-writing processes, planning, targeting and organising, and the four in-writing processes, drafting, evaluating, editing and rewriting.

In preparation for the next section of the Introduction on the implications for teaching and as a reminder of much that we have already touched on, this is how Grabe and Kaplan see the process approach in practice:

The process approach encourages:
– self-discovery and authorial 'voice';
– meaningful writing on topics of importance (or at least of interest) to
  the writer;

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– the need to plan out writing as a goal-oriented, contextualised activity;
– invention and pre-writing tasks, and multiple drafting with feedback between drafts;
– a variety of feedback options from real audiences, whether from peers, small groups, and/or the teacher, through conferencing, or through other formative evaluation;
– free writing and journal writing as alternative means of generating writing and developing written expression, overcoming writer's block;
– content information and personal expression as more important than final grammar and usage;
– the idea that writing is multiply-recursive rather than linear as a process – tasks are repeated alternatively as often as necessary;
– students' awareness of the writing process and of notions such as audience, voice, plans. (1996:87)

In this section, we have mentioned the work of several researchers. If you want to follow up recent research in the field, you will find William Grabe and Robert Kaplan's book *Theory and Practice of Writing* (from which we have just quoted) extremely useful. We also referred to the work of Tony Silva and Ann Johns, which you will find in a very useful collection of articles *Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom* edited by Barbara Kroll.

2 Implications for the teaching of writing

Approaches to the teaching of writing

For many years the teaching of writing was neglected as a result of concentration on the aural/oral approach. This was partly the influence of the linguists mentioned on page 1 who treated spoken language as of primary and written language as of secondary importance, and partly the results of theories of learning which set great store by oral repetition. Of course, it is also true that there was a specific demand for courses in spoken rather than written English both for business and from those who found that better and cheaper travel facilities allowed them to study in or go on holiday to English-speaking countries. Their first necessity was to have enough spoken language to survive in that situation. However, while no one would deny the importance of spoken language, this is no reason to neglect the equally important written mode.

One aspect of the theories of learning mentioned above was the development of several methodologies, of which the Direct method

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