**Approaches to teaching writing**

There are several ways to approach writing in the classroom. It should be said at the beginning that there is not necessarily any 'right' or 'best' way to teach writing skills.

The best practice in any situation will depend on the type of student, the text type being studied, the school system and many other factors. Thus, this article cannot prescribe a system for the teaching of writing that is optimal for all teaching situations. Rather, I hope to describe and contrast two popular, yet very different, approaches and examine how both can be used in the classroom.

**A product approach**

This is a traditional approach, in which students are encouraged to mimic a model text, which is usually presented and analyzed at an early stage. A model for such an approach is outlined below:

Stage 1

**Model texts** are read, and then features of the genre are highlighted. For example, if studying a formal letter, students' attention may be drawn to the importance of paragraphing and the language used to make formal requests. If studying a story, the focus may be on the techniques used to make the story interesting, and students focus on where and how the writer employs these techniques.

Stage 2

This consists of **controlled practice** of the highlighted features, usually in isolation. So if students are studying a formal letter, they may be asked to practice the language used to make formal requests, practicing the 'I would be grateful if you would…' structure.

Stage 3

**Organization of ideas**. This stage is very important. Those who favour this approach believe that the organization of ideas is more important than the ideas themselves and as important as the control of language.

Stage 4

The **end result of the learning process**. Students choose from a choice of comparable writing tasks. Individually, they use the skills, structures and vocabulary they have been taught to produce the product; to show what they can do as fluent and competent users of the language.

**A process approach**

Process approaches to writing tend to focus more on the varied classroom activities which promote the development of language use: brainstorming, group discussion, re-writing. Such an approach can have any number of stages, though a typical sequence of activities could proceed as follows:

Stage 1

**Generating ideas** by brainstorming and discussion: Students could be discussing qualities needed to do a certain job, or giving reasons as to why people take drugs or gamble. The teacher remains in the background during this phase, only providing language support if required, so as not inhibiting students in the production of ideas.

Stage 2

Students **extend ideas** into note form, and judge quality and usefulness of ideas.

Stage 3

Students **organize ideas** into a mind map, spider gram, or linear form. This stage helps to make the (hierarchical) relationship of ideas more immediately obvious, which helps students with the structure of their texts.

Stage 4

Students **write the first draft**. This is done in class and frequently in pairs or groups.

Stage 5

**Drafts are exchanged**, so that students become the readers of each other's work. By responding as readers, students develop an awareness of the fact that a writer is producing something to be read by someone else, and thus can improve their own drafts.

Stage 6

Drafts are returned and **improvements are made** based upon peer feedback.

Stage 7

A **final draft is written**.

Stage 8

Students **once again exchange and read each other's work** and perhaps even write a response or reply.

**A summary of the differences**

Process-driven approaches show some similarities with task-based learning, in that students are given considerable freedom within the task. They are not curbed by pre-emptive teaching of lexical or grammatical items. However, process approaches do not repudiate all interest in the product, (i.e. the final draft). The aim is to achieve the best product possible. What differentiates a process-focused approach from a product-centered one is that the outcome of the writing, the product, is not preconceived.

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| --- | --- |
| **Process writing** | **Product writing** |
| * text as a resource for comparison * ideas as starting point * more than one draft * more global, focus on purpose, theme, text type, i.e., reader is emphasised * collaborative * emphasis on creative process | * imitate model text * organisation of ideas more important than ideas themselves * one draft * features highlighted including controlled practice of those features * individual * emphasis on end product |

**Which approach to use?**

The approach that you decide to use will depend on you, ***the teacher***, and on ***the students***, and the ***genre of the text***. Certain genres lend themselves more favorably to one approach than the other. Formal letters, for example, or postcards, in which the features are very fixed, would be perhaps more suited to a product-driven approach, in which focus on the layout, style, organization and grammar could greatly help students in dealing with this type of writing task.

Other genres, such as discursive essays and narrative, may lend themselves to process-driven approaches, which focus on students' ideas. Discursive activities are suited to brainstorming and discussing ideas in groups, and the collaborative writing and exchanging of texts help the students to direct their writing to their reader, therefore making a more successful text.

***Finding a starting point***

It is important to start any writing activity from the student’s needs and interests. An informal chat is the best way to discover what writing tasks students want to be able to complete. Tutors can then help students to prioritise those tasks that they want to tackle first and to decide what they can leave till a later date. (To get started you could gather some samples of real life writing tasks such as: letter to school, holiday postcard, an application form, and telephone messages.)

**The Language Experience Approach**

The Language Experience approach can also be used as a starting point with beginning and improving writers, for writing practice and for developing writing skills. The language experience approach uses a student’s own language and grammar to create reading and writing materials. In simple terms, you write down a piece text that they dictate to you, for example, a short note. (See the 'teaching reading' section for more details.)

**What is the difference between strategy, technique, method and approach in terms of teaching?**

**Strategy**

Strategy usually requires some sort of planning. A plan of action designed to achieve an overall aim.

**Approach, Method, Technique According To Richards and Rogers**

**Approach** refers to theories about the nature of language and language learning that serves as the source of practices and principles in LT.

Theory of language: how the language is presented

Theory of learning + theory of teaching: a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of L. T. and learning.

An approach is axiomatic. It describes the nature of the subject matter to be taught

**Method** is an overall plan for presenting language material, based on the selected approach; the way of teaching. It is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material, no part of which contradicts, and all of which is based upon, the selected approach. An approach is axiomatic, a method is procedural

Within one approach, there can be many methods

Methodology in language teaching has been characterized in a variety of ways; methodology is that which links theory and practice. Theory statements would include theories of what language is and how language is learned or, more specifically, theories of second language acquisition (SLA). Such theories are linked to various design features of language instruction. These design features might include stated objectives, syllabus specifications, types of activities, roles of teachers, learners, materials, and so forth. Design features in turn are linked to actual teaching and learning practices as observed in the environments where language teaching and learning take place.

**Technique** is a particular stratagem or procedure used to accomplish a particular objective. It is implementation – that which actually takes place in a classroom. It is a particular trick, stratagem, or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective. Techniques must be consistent with a method, and therefore in harmony with an approach as well.”

**Three views on ELT:**

a) **Structural** (constructivist) views language as a structural system that consists of related elements that work as codes of meaning. This is the most traditional view

b) **Functional:** Language is a vehicle for function, as a means for the expression of functional meaning

c) **Interactional** sees Language as a tool for interpersonal and social interactions between individuals

(Richards and Rodgers, 1999, p. 15)”