Four Approaches to the Teaching of Writing

*This is a summary of approaches to writing pedagogy which are widely practised in Anglo-American and some European contexts. A single teacher might make use of more than one approach, and different approaches might suit different groups of learners.*

*Summary:*

*Pragmatic Approaches: skills

Rhetorical Approaches: genres/argumentation/academic discourse

Critical/Cultural Approaches: reading and interpretation

Expressive Approaches: experience and creativity*

Pragmatic Approaches
- writing seen as a cognitive and procedural skill
- strong emphasis on grammar, text structure and spelling
- high value placed on correctness and formal language
- relatively small range of genres used and practised
- lots of practical and hands-on activities with written language
- use of exemplary models to illustrate good writing
- use of exercises to build up competence through repetition and imitation
- provision of vocabulary and writing prompts
- learner is skill ‘apprentice’ before he/she can use language
creatively
- focuses on the language needed to succeed in school, so little recognition of the social languages of learners’ backgrounds

Rhetorical Approaches
- based on genres, argument or types of academic writing
- writing seen as social practice in rhetorical situations
- strong emphasis on rhetorical moves and techniques, on conventional ways of organizing texts, and on useful vocabulary and sentence patterns
- high value placed on effective communication
- wide range of genres used, but may depend on the level of instruction
- strong emphasis on situation, purpose and audience
- uses samples rather than single models and encourages students to read for
language features which they can use in their own work
- uses some exercises, but mostly real-life texts and multiple drafts
- emphasis on imitation leading to independent activity
- learner is a rhetorical agent learning to use language in new situations
- focuses on target language, but varies widely on whether
learners’ own background languages are recognised

Critical/Cultural Approaches
- often strongly related to study of literature or media texts
- writing seen as interpretative or aesthetic activity
- strong emphasis on making links between reading and writing
- high value placed on thematic considerations and arguments
- tends to be a limited range of genres traditionally suited to critical interpretation such as essays, but can also be portfolios
- tends to focus more on the meaning of a text rather than writing processes
- learner is an interpreter and critic, especially concerned with issues of power, but also is expected to give evidence
- places a high value on classroom discussions, during which students’ own background experiences can be highly valued, but these are often less apparent in student writing
- strong emphasis on aesthetic and/or political education through texts

Expressive Approaches
- also often called ‘experiential’ or ‘first person’ approaches
- writing seen as an expressive resource, especially for personal growth
- strong emphasis on experience, imagination and creativity
- high value placed on ‘creative writing’ such as poetry and narrative
- often uses visual material such as photographs and paintings
- can be a wide range of genres, but generally there is less emphasis on rhetorical and informational writing
- little use of exercises but strong use of literary examples for inspiration
- learner is an enquirer and researcher
- places high value on group work, multiple drafts and peer ‘conferencing’
- teacher will respond to meaning before correctness and is strongly involved in the initial invention of ideas for students to work on
- students’ own background languages and experiences are often highly valued and encouraged in written work