

Process Approach to Writing
— Case Study of Writing Workshop
at Fresno State Univ. —

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I. Introduction

Traditional writing instruction has for a long time been concerned with the quality of students' writing as a final product in such aspects as grammatical accuracy and conformity to conventional rhetorical organization.¹⁾ From this perspective, the writing process has been viewed as "a single linear sequence of generating ideas, designing an outline, drafting the paper and writing the final draft by making some cosmetic revisions on the previous draft."²⁾

However, the actual writing process is more complex. Writing is a process that involves the discovery of meaning as one writes.³⁾ Considering the actual process that writers go through in creating a piece of writing, traditional teaching methods are ineffective.

Therefore, in the last few years, a paradigm shift has occurred in writing pedagogy from a product-centered to a process-centered approach. This summer, I had a chance of observing a writing class (English 2 / Writing Workshop) which put emphasis on a process-centered approach at Fresno State University in California where our students have studied.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the process-centered approach to writing, and to describe how such a class is conducted in the U. S. I'd like to share what I have learned at the Writing Workshop. Some suggestions will be made for innovations in writing programs at the college level.

II. A Process-centered Approach

A process-centered approach to writing focuses on meaning by freeing students from traditional classroom constraints. Research reviewed by Zamel⁴⁾ shows that in classrooms in which risk taking is encouraged, trust is established, choice and authority are shared, and writing is viewed as a meaning-making event in which students change as writers, adopt positive attitudes toward written work, and demonstrate real growth in writing performance.

In a process approach, the teacher does not lecture on the process theory of composition.⁵⁾ This is not only useless to the students but may even be harmful because “they may get the mistaken impression that there is a fixed process of writing which must be followed in all cases.”⁶⁾ Instead, “students should find, through successful writing experiences, a process of writing which is comfortable and effective for each individual.”⁷⁾

Most researchers in this area attempt to define stages or elements in the process of writing. Murray (1978)⁸⁾ explains that prewriting, writing, and rewriting are the term most often used. Murray (1980) illustrates the process of discovering of meaning as one writes as follows :

1st Draft	2nd Draft	3rd Draft	4th Draft	Final Draft
CLARIFICATION				
EXPLORATION				
Rehearsing Drafting Revising	Rehearsing Drafting Revising	Rehearsing Drafting Revising	Rehearsing Drafting Revising	Rehearsing Drafting Revising

the process of discovering of meaning

A central point of the process approach is continual drafting and revisions.⁹⁾

Flower and Hayes,¹⁰⁾ however, caution that these stages are not linear steps. They propose a hierarchial structure for their process model. In it

they emphasize writing as a thinking process, mention sub-processes, and show how these interact in the total process.

Feedback from the teacher and from peers plays an important role. The teacher can point out unclear ideas and inadequately supported points, and changes in organization can be suggested. Linguistic errors may disappear in subsequent drafts as content changes and so should not be the focus at this stage unless they seriously hamper communication."¹¹⁾ In class, students can be directed to ask questions about parts of the writing which they find especially interesting or hard to understand.

Regular Practice and Focus on the Content

In addition to assumptions about the nature of writing itself, there are two additional assumptions about the teaching of writing. The first is that writing is best taught by having students write as much as possible. Lectures on grammar or techniques of writing at least for advanced students, should be kept to a minimum so that as much time as possible can be used for students to write and discuss their writing with classmates.¹²⁾ Corder (1977)¹³⁾ talks about the effectiveness of learning by doing. He describes learning tasks in which the ability to use the language is achieved through using the language. By having students learn to write by writing, the writing becomes both the end and the means.

One way to provide regular practice is to keep a journal. The purpose of the journal is "to give students whose experience with English has been mostly passive absorption of knowledge about the language, a chance to use it and even to experiment with it."¹⁴⁾ Students could write whatever they'd like to tell or ask their friends without worrying about making mistakes. Keeping a journal helps instill writing discipline by providing an impetus to writing regularly.¹⁵⁾

Teachers evaluate the journals mainly for effort, thoughtfulness and the correct number of entries. Perhaps because of the emphasis on content, the journals may be the most genuine communication aspect of the course.¹⁶⁾ The research¹⁷⁾ shows that more positive comments than corrections help the students to have confidence in their ability to write. It is

reported that at the end of the term, they can write much faster and with more ease.¹⁸⁷

Another assumption about the teaching of writing is that students should be encouraged to keep separate the times when they are working with creating meaning and the times when they are thinking about how best to present their meaning to their readers. Perhaps it is possible for experienced writers to both think of what they want to write and to look critically at their writings as they are producing it, but “inexperienced writers can do both things more efficiently if they do them at different times.”¹⁹ This especially means that “concern with grammatical accuracy must be postponed until ideas are developed.”²⁰ If we do, it will make for student ‘put downs’.

Students Models

Shaughnessy (1977)²¹ suggests using student compositions as models. This can be done by saving the best student compositions and then possibly polishing them a bit. Using students writing as a model gives students an example from someone similar to them in ability, background, and interests. This helps overcome the “yawning chasm”²² (Freedman: 1983) that too often exists between the model students are to learn from and their own compositions. When teachers use their own or students’ compositions as models for students, it should be done in such a way that students learn from the models but do not copy the ideas in them.

Using Reading in the Writing Process

Reading helps students write in English. At the simplest level, reading can give the students ideas and provide them with sources of information, and also ideas to enliven their writing and often subjects to write about. In a more subtle way, “analytical reading can increase their awareness of how others’ writing affects them and thus make more sensitive to how their own writing will affect their readers.”²³ Thus analytical reading can lead students to solutions for such problems at every stage of the writing

process: prewriting, writing a draft, revising.

III. English 2 (Writing Workshop)

The following is the outline of a Writing Workshop at Fresno State University.

1. Course

Writing Workshop was an three-week intensive course in written English. It offers the students help improving basic skills and producing clear and effective prose. A process-approach to writing was used. Dr. Corrinne Hales, a professor of the English Department, who is very kind and supportive, conducted the class. It lasted for three weeks from July 11 to August 29.

2. Subjects

Thirty-one Japanese students in our college, 15 freshmen, 8 sophomores and 8 juniors, were enrolled in this course for the summer term. Most of them are majors in English language or literature. Only three students are in Japanese literature. All of the students except one were for the first time to receive education in the U.S.

3. Course Objectives

- 1) Students will do some writing in class each day, and move from sentences and paragraphs to complete essays.
- 2) Students will study the process approach to good essay writing and students will concentrate on prewriting, composing, and revising.
- 3) Through the experience of writing a number of compositions, students will gain confidence in expressing themselves in English.

4. Activities

The teacher will bring in stories, poems, essays, and other pieces of writing, which students will read aloud and discuss. Students will have occasional guests to interview and write about, and they will be asked to read and respond to each other's writing in workshop fashion. The teacher will collect the students' work each day and return it to them the next day. Some days there will be additional homework assignments. At the end of the first and second weeks, students will choose one piece to revise and polish over the weekend. Toward the end of the third week (the end of the course), students will choose their favorite piece of writing and make it as perfect as they can for the final assignment.

5. Course Requirements

Students will be required to write several short assignment during the term. Also, they will be asked to find a book they really want to read, and choose according to their English reading ability as well as their interest. Writing a short summary of their reading will be offered at the end of class. Students will be required to keep a daily journal. Students' final grades will be based on the teacher's assignment of several things.

- 1) Final writing exams
- 2) Reading summaries
- 3) Daily assignment
- 4) Journals
- 5) Class participation/Conversation
- 6) Effort
- 7) Improvement (Because students are at several different levels of English skills, their work will not be compared with each other, but the individual progress each of them has made will be studied.)

7. Overview of the Class

Nonfiction prose types of essay writing include narration, description, exposition, and argumentation. Each type has certain uses and thus lends itself to certain types. In this course, students studied mainly description and narration.

At first, paragraphs consisting of a topic sentence, followed by several supporting sentences about that same topic were introduced. In the description type, which portrays in words a person, place, or subject, or object or a combination of persons, places, or objects, students learned mainly about a person and a place. They reported on any one of the three young people (Jason, Jodi and Danny) they had interviewed in class. They also described a person whom they really didn't like by explaining what he or she looked like and why they hated him or her.

Next, students looked at the picture "Room at Arles" by Van Gogh, and wrote about what they saw in the picture, who they think lives in this room, how this room made them feel. They also wrote sentences that described a room that they knew very well. The teacher made the students aware that their readers would be unfamiliar with the room. They included an explanation of the room, what the room means to them—How they felt about the room in their writing.

They also wrote a short prose piece that clearly described one of their important childhood memories. They described the event in as much detail as they could, and explained why it was so significant to them. Sometimes they watched the movie "Pretty in Pink" and discussed the story, and described the main character, or their impression of the story.

In the narration, a story-telling technique which recounts an event, or a series of events, usually in chronological order, was introduced. The teacher stressed that a narrative story can either factual (it really happened), or fictional (the writer or speaker created it in his or her imagination). The students wrote a short English version (re-telling) of a story they know—maybe one they heard as a child. Sometimes, they divided into groups of five or six people. Each group made a story or retold in English one they knew. This could be a children's story or an adult story. They discussed it among themselves and one person of the group wrote down the story on paper.

The next day, students took the rough draft they wrote in class the day before as a group, and revised it by themselves. They made any changes they liked—in the length, the paragraphs, the grammar, the word choices, the content—anything to make the story better than it was.

In the final exam, there were two writing assignments. One was that they looked back at all of their writing for this class for three weeks, and completed their favorite piece of their own writing by spending time at home revising, expanding, polishing it to be their best work in English. They checked their spelling, their sentence structure, their paragraph organization. If they weren't sure about a grammatical construction or some other usage problem, they looked through a book or a magazine until they found a similar sentence to use as a model.

The other assignment was the writing assignment of "their future" in class. Students thought about it for a few minutes, and then wrote a three-paragraph essay that described their goal or dream in life, explaining why they had this dream (when they got the idea), and also how they planned to go about accomplishing their goal. They used plenty of specific details and examples to support general statements. They used any dictionary they liked, and asked any questions they had during the exam.

About individual reading assignment, there was no examination because the reading speed of the students was different and the teacher expected them to get pleasure from their reading, as well as improving their language skills. Then at the end of the course, students were requested to write a short summary of their reading so far. Students wrote one or two paragraphs in their own English words about they had read.

Often, the teacher gave reading assignments to the students. One essay was "Tomoko on her Television Career". Students thought about all the things Tomoko said about women, career, marriage, etc. For example, How was her experience different or similar to them? About what do they agree with her? or About what did they disagree with her? Did they have strong feelings about anything she said? They chose one specific issue in the essay (one that they had strong feelings about) and wrote a response of their own.

In the journal assignment, students wrote four days a week from Monday to Thursday. The teacher collected the journals each Friday, read them, and handed them on Mondays. They picked up the subject to a television program they watched that day, a newspaper or magazine article they read that day, a particular event that happened to them that day, or a book and so on.

To our surprise, at first the teacher did not correct grammatical errors in their writing. She responded to the contents of their writing, especially the ideas and experiences related, expressing their agreement or disagreement, sharing similar experiences expressing surprise, or even confusion and so on. Sometimes the teacher introduced examples of student journal entries. It helped them give clues to writing journals. Every week, students were willing to get back their journals because warm comments, encouragement, and suggestion, were written in the notebook. Thus communication between the teacher and students were well developed and it motivated them to write in English.

8. Students Writing

In a three-week intensive course of writing workshop, most students showed a great improvement in their writings. The following are the revised students' writings. Each writing has encouragement or suggestion from the teacher.

- 1) Student Essay #1 (Description/Person)
- 2) Student Essay #2 (Exposition)
- 3) Student Essay #3 (Description/Subject)
- 4) Student Essay #4 (Description/Subject)
- 5) Student Journal Entry #5

- 1) Student Essay #1 (Description/Person)

The Person Whom I Don't Like Most

The seminar teacher at college, I don't like him very much. He is

about forty and has two children, they are a five-year-old girl and a two-year-old boy. Until I selected the seminar of him, I liked him so much because his way of teaching was very good and he made me like English grammar. But at seminar time, he changed a lot.

I think probably he has no desire to teach us (members of the seminar). The seminar class has to be one and half hours. But he is always in class for only a half hour. He hardly ever teaches anything.

He often invites some students of seminar for going for sail every Sunday. If a student tells him that she is too busy to go, he loses his temper and never answers the student's questions. Can you believe it? He is so selfish.

He often invites us to his house too. If you go to his house, you have to wash the dishes and clean the room and take care of his children. If the child wets his pants, you have to change his pants. He treats us students like housewives. He exercises his authority over us as a teacher. We can't oppose him. If I do so, he will give me an "F" and I will fail the exam. I don't think I want to be a teacher like him. (H. B. — a junior)

(Comment)

Excellent! This guy sounds like some teachers I've known. They abuse a position of authority when they behave like this. Your writing makes his character and your feelings very clear. It sounds like he takes advantage of his positions as a teacher. I think your statement comparing his treatment of students to "housewives" is especially effective.

2) Student Essay # 2 (Exposition)

About "Who Cares For Our Elders?"

I read the article of "Who cares for our elders?" According to this article, the family bears the brunt of government neglect. It is a consequence of government inaction to the aged problem. In America, nursing house care is costly and of poor quality. So the family must live a hard life. Therefore they want the government to pay higher taxes to support

it. And the government must emphasize the aged problem.

In Japan the problem is very important. If we live with the elderly, we must make one or two choices. One is to send the elderly to a home for the aged and the other is for their family to take care of them. It is difficult to say which choice is better because they have merits and demerits. For example, if the elderly are sent to a home for the aged, their family need a lot of money to pay for their care, but the elderly form deep relationships with people of the same generation. On the contrary, if their family take care of them, one member must always attend to them. However, it produces a relationship of mutual trust between members of the family.

Now I live apart from grandfather and grandmother. So the problem of the elderly is not a real one for me. But it is problem that we must face in the future. Then I think we take care of them by ourselves as much as we can. Now we are young, but we will get old some time. Therefore we must tackle the problem seriously, and moreover we must deal with it suitably according to each case. (M. K. — a sophomore)

(Comment)

Excellent! This is a very intelligent revision. I am excited to see you discussing such a complex issue in English and you are doing a terrific job of it. This is an example of using English ESL real language (not simply as a subject to study). You are really saying something important here, and you are saying it with grace and care

3) Student Essay #3 (Description/Subject)

My Dream

I'm twenty years old now. So after five years pass, it'll be the third year since I graduated from college and I'll be twenty-five years old. I'll work at the place of work which chose by myself at that time. I haven't decided a particular occupation which I want to take yet. But I would like to work at a place where I can use English because I'm studying English

at college. But I think I must study English hard in order to realize my dream.

Then, how will be getting along after ten years? I think I'll probably marry someone and bring up my baby. That man whom I want to marry is a sympathetic and reliable guy. I want to have three children and spend my life happy with my family. And if my husband approves of my working and I can coexist with work and housework. I want to have a carrer because I want to try my ability in society and want to develop my special talent. But after all, before everything I wish for my family a happy life.

Finally, I would like to write about my special dream for my old age. My long-cherished dream is to set up my shop, for example, coffee shop, cafe shop and fancy goods shop, with my husband. A coffee shop which I went into once was run by an old man and wife, and the atmosphere of the shop was happy by their harmoniousness. I can't forget the comfortable feeling of the shop and I have wanted to set up a shop with an atmosphere of friendliness like their shop by that time. When I get older, I want to live with husband happily. (F. N. — a junior)

(Comment)

Excellent! This is a lovely essay about your future. I am certain you will have a good life. I can imagine visiting Japan someday and going to your coffee shop when we are both old. Your English is getting better and better. It is beginning to sound more relaxed and natural as you write and speak. This exam shows completely and a nice style. Your English improves quickly when you use it often.

4) Student Essay #4 (Description/Subject)

My Future

When I was a little child, I had many dreams. For example, I wanted to be a kindergarten teacher in elementary school and a nurse in junior high school. And I was so simple-minded that I wanted to be a woman

policeman when I watched a TV program about the police. But I found my goal when I entered college and began to think about my future seriously. It is to become an English teacher.

There are two reasons for being an English teacher. One is that I like to come in contact with many people. So I want to choose an occupation that is related to many people. The teacher can make many student acquaintances. The other is that I met a great English teacher in high school. He was always thinking about each individual student. I had great respect for him. When I didn't succeed in the entrance examination of the college I wanted most to enter, he encouraged me. He was a great teacher.

It is very difficult for me to become a teacher. I can't understand English well, but I am making efforts to accomplish many. goal. For example, I take an English qualifying examination and now, going abroad to study is useful for me. I think of course studying is very important to be a teacher, but human relations are more important. Many people's touch may cause various troubles. Then I must deal with these suitably. So I belong to a club now and I want to make many acquaintances and have various experiences. About carrying this out, a difficult situation is going on now. Therefore I'll do my best to achieve my goal and make the most of American life here. I hope I will become a teacher like you. (M. K. — a junior)

(Comment)

Excellent! This is a great dream and I'm certain you will be able to accomplish it. Your English improves every day. This essay shows the results of much hard work and practice. It is lovely. You only need to keep practicing — using your English — to get better and better. I think your interest in music will help to make you a great teacher too. Your personality seems especially suited to teaching — don't you think so?

5) Student Journal Entry

Junly 7

(Comment)

Do you have
medicine?
Fresno air
is bad for
asthma. I
have asthma
and my doctor
says this
place makes
it worse.

I went to the Student Health Center with a teacher. Because I had an attack of asthma because of yesterday's jogging. I've been an asthma patient since I was 9 years old. When I was a junior high school and high school student, I seldom had asthma attacks because I took part in club activities, but now that I am in junior college, I have it frequently and I especially had it often since I came to California — I had it three times in less than three weeks.

As I thought, it is on account of American eating. American food and Mexican food do not agree me. And the trouble is that I didn't bring my asthma medicine to California. I have difficulty when I have an attack and I make a nuisance of myself for everyone, so I decided to go to the Student Health Center.

(Comment)

This is
too bad.
You get very
tired when
your asthma
is bad. This
isn't good
for you.

When I went there at first, I noticed that there's no peculiar, disagreeable smell. When we enter a Japanese hospital, we have a smell of injections and medicine. When I was a child, I disliked this smell and was wracked with fear. But the Health Center has no smell and is a calm place, I felt that this building was not a hospital, but a hotel.

And also the doctor was a very kind man. He asked me, "Can you speak English?" I answered "A little", and he spoke very slowly. The doctor said, "Just walk, and you don't jog and if you really don't eat American food, you need to eat many fruits and vegetables."

Anyway my blood pressure is average and my health is good. Really everyone of the hospital workers is very kind, so I think I wouldn't mind entering

such a good hospital. I need to recuperate. I don't want to have a bitter experience. By the way, the wine of Fresno State Univ.'s factory is very delicious! (S. S. — a freshman)

(Comment)

Yes. Be careful. You don't want to end up in a hospital over night. Did they give you any medicine? Would anything like Primatene Mist help you? You can buy it at a drugstore. Take care of yourself.

9. Students' Response

After a three-week intensive course, I gave a questionnaire to the Japanese students who had taken the Writing Workshop. Here are the students' comments.

About the question of the difference between the Japanese way of teaching and the American way of teaching in college, as follows:

(Japanese way of teaching)

- will put emphasis on memorization and grammar.
- will overemphasize grammatical correctness.
- will limit the topic or content.
- will be concerned with form.
- will have few opportunities for students to actually write.

(American way of teaching — process approach to writing)

- will give a chance of writing freely.
- will place importance on paragraph-writing.
- will provide the enjoyment of writing.
- will encourage the students to think in English.
- will put emphasis on the content rather than on form.
- will give confidence in writing because their compositions are not corrected at the first stage.
- Keeping a journal provided an impetus to write regularly.

About the question of "What made you change after you have learned process approach to writing?", here are the students' answers.

- Students did not feel pain in writing English, and came to like writing it.
- They could write fast and with ease.
- They found that English sentences could be made the basic words or vocabularies.
- They learned paragraph writing or essay writing.
- The desire to write in English has greatly increased.
- They could think in English.
- They gained confidence in writing English.
- They learned writing as joy.
- They learned that the content was more important than on the form as they write.
- Expressing ideas in English became a happy experience.

IV. Summary

In this paper, I have introduced the process-centered approach to writing and described the English writing class at Fresno State University.

The process-centered approach is different from traditional writing instruction which has for a long time been concerned with the quality of students' writing as a final product in such aspects as grammatical accuracy and conformity to conventional rhetorical organization. It puts emphasis on content rather than form. Students write as much as they can without worrying about the form of what they write down.

A central point of the process-approach is continual drafting and revision. Teachers could spend their time more profitably in responding to the important aspects of content and organization in writing, rather than in providing elaborate corrective feedback.²⁴⁾ When the writing is to be turned in or made public in some way, grammatical and mechanical errors may be corrected in the final draft.

The three-week intensive writing workshop of Japanese college students shows that their writing has improved greatly. Especially keeping

a journal helped instill writing discipline by providing an impetus to write regularly. Most students expressed that they could write English fast and with ease. They also reported that they learned how to write essays. It is a remarkable fact that the process-approach to writing gave encouragement for students to write and it provided them a confidence in English writing.

V. Implications for the Teaching of ESL Writing

The main goal of any kind of writing is effective communication. To become a good writer, students must learn to use intelligently the many tools and techniques of language and composition. Mastering these will be enable students to present their thoughts clearly, logically, and convincingly.

However, these hallmarks of effective writing—ideas that are fresh, thoughts that are developed, relationship that are explored—do not simply flow from a pen.²⁵⁾ They are the products of the insights gained from the writing process, a process that helps students discover, explore, and refine what they think and why. Therefore, the learners of the composing process must be given opportunities to develop ideas and engage in interaction with potential readers.²⁶⁾ This view accords well with current L1 surveys of research on the teaching of writing. (Loger & Applebee, 1986; Petrosky & Bartholomae, 1986)

In order to help students improve writing, lectures on grammar or techniques of writing should be kept to be a minimum so that as much time as possible can be used for students to write and discuss their writing with classmates. Students can learn how to write by writing. Raimes also demonstrates that “Since writing cannot really be taught, students learn most of doing more themselves—writing and discussing their work with each other and with the teacher.”²⁷⁾

On the other hand, it is a fact that many ESL teachers still do not view process approaches as applicable to or appropriate for students whose English is limited: “Teachers may be inclined to retreat from English writing as an instructional activity and to focus instead on spelling,

vocabulary and grammar."²⁸⁾ Consequently, the writing anxiety of students will increase and lead to their belief that teachers expect perfect papers. But as Shaughnessy (1977)²⁹⁾ and numerous other writing theorists have pointed out, it is in the context of creating, sharing, and valuing meaningful content, in the context of encouraging exploration and risk taking, that product concerns can effectively be addressed.

Therefore teachers should draw attention to and help them understand their problems and show them how to revise their texts effectively. In this way, students learn that writing is most essentially a process of communication. I hope this paper will prove to be of some interest to my fellow teachers.

I would like to express many thanks to Dr. Corrinne Hales at Fresno State University, for her help in providing materials books, and for sharing her ideas on the process-centered approach to writing ; to the thirty-one students of our college who answered the questionnaires and to the students whose written work I have used.

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