
UNIT 15 THE WRITING PROCESS

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15.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will be introduced to

- a) the various facets of the process of writing
- b) the organisation of writing
- c) the categorisation of writing tasks according to purposes :
(e.g.) describing, narrating, reporting and arguing.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus in language teaching, as you must be aware, has now shifted from 'product' to 'process'. What does this mean? How does 'process' differ from 'product'? What are the implications of this difference for classroom teaching? These are some of the questions we would have answered by the end of this unit.

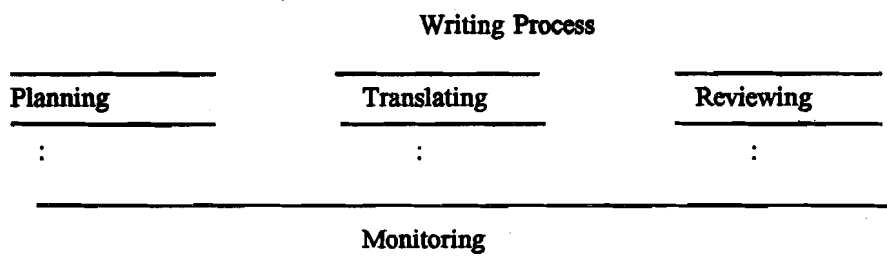
When we look at writing as a 'product' we are mainly interested in learning outcomes — that is, we identify what the students have to produce. e.g. grammatical accuracy, mechanics of writing, proper format, good organization, etc.

Recent research on writing has provided us with an important insight: good writers go through certain processes which lead to successful pieces of written work. "They start off with an overall plan in their heads. They think about what they want to say and who they are writing for. They then draft out sections of the writing, and as they work on them, they are constantly reviewing, revising, and editing their work". (Hedge, p9). It is considered useful to enable our learners to engage in this 'process' rather than worry about the 'product'. For, they should learn how to go about the process of writing, rather than what the end product should be. If the process is proper, the product will take care of itself.

15.2 THE WRITING PROCESS : SALIENT FEATURES

"Writing is a creative process because it is a process of reaching out for one's thoughts and discovering them. Writing, as such, is a process of meaning making" (Third Year Student, 1994 National University of Singapore).

The following diagram attempts to capture the major phases of the writing process :



15.2.1 Planning

The planning stage is also known as the pre-writing stage. Before putting pen to paper, good writers try to answer two basic questions: Why am I writing this? Who is supposed to read this? In other words, they have a clear sense of the purpose and the audience. These two, together, constitute the writing context.

The plan, however, need not be strictly adhered to. As we keep writing, our plan keeps changing. Writing is in fact a messy process as represented by Frank Smith (1982) in his book *Writing and the Writer* (London : Heinemann).

Let us look at the practice of composition in the schools. Think of the usual questions

we ask children to write: "Summer Holidays," "Hobbies", "My favourite book", etc.

Children are most reluctant to write on such topics which do not motivate them. Further they are not able to conceive of an audience and purpose for the writing task. As far as they are concerned, they are writing for the teacher, who is all knowing and whose only intention in looking at their work is to assess them and fill their pages with red marks. Instead, if our tasks simulate a interesting real-life context, children will be willing to write. For example

- e.g. (1) Imagine that your best friend has been missing since yesterday. Write a short but good description of him, to be telecast on "Persons Missing"
- (2) You have recently seen a film which was most boring. Write a letter to your sister in Bombay, advising her not to see the film. Say why you don't like the film.

15.2.2 Translating

'Translating here means, putting your thoughts into appropriate language — in other words, finding the right words and sentences for your thoughts. At this stage we make the first draft. This forms a crucial and difficult stage for learners who do not have the required linguistic competence. Though they may have the ideas, they do not have the vocabulary. They tend to repeat the same words; they commit a number of grammatical mistakes also. It may, perhaps, be worthwhile trying group composition initially as it would enable peer learning.

15.2.3 Reviewing/Editing

This may be regarded as the post-writing stage, though, in reality there is a great deal of overlap between this and the previous stage. Many good writers keep reviewing their work as they write. Between the first draft and editing there is much rethinking and re-organization. The writer adopts a reader's perspective here and assesses whether the reader would be able to follow his/her ideas. Many poor students do not edit their writing as they assume that what is clear to them must be clear to other! Others are lazy or do not know how to review their own work.

15.2.4 Monitoring

As the diagram shows, the process of monitoring is in operation right through the three stages of composition. As we plan, we monitor our ideas; while drafting, we monitor the mechanics, including punctuation, vocabulary and grammar. Editing and reviewing are also forms of monitoring.

We shall now look at three different tasks in writing which help to develop the skills of planning, writing and reviewing respectively.

Task 1: Planning: Making Mind Maps

The task given is a description of a festival—Diwali. Students jot down ideas in a notebook. Then the teacher elicits their ideas and puts them down as a mindmap on the blackboard.

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3. Design one task each for the planning, writing and reviewing stages.
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15.3 THE ORGANISATION

Generally, the essay consists of three types of paragraphs: introductory, supporting and concluding.

15.3.1 Introduction

The opening paragraph introduces us to the subject matter or topic and the author's attitude to the subject matter. The purpose of the introductory paragraph is to attract the reader's attention and motivate him/her to read on. The introductory paragraph could be a definition, a question, a proverb, an anecdote, an example, a universal truth, etc. Look at the following introductions.

1. Definition

One of the finest definitions for education comes from Swami Vivekananda: "Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man". And religion? - "is the manifestation of the divinity already in man".

2. Question

Why don't learners learn what teachers teach? This is a question that worries every committed teacher. Who is to be blamed—the teacher? Or the student? Or both?

3. Proverb

A rolling stone gathers no moss. A man who has no fixed goal, but keeps shifting from one thing to another, never achieves anything significant in life.

4. Anecdote

Last week I was coming out of a lift when a young man said to the lift operator, "Seventh Floor". The lift operator said "Sorry, this won't go". The young man was furious. "What do you mean?" he roared. The liftman answered calmly, "You must say "Please" if you want me to take you up!"

15.3.2 Supporting Paragraph (The Body)

The supporting paragraphs, as the name suggests, 'support' the main theme in various ways. The major types of organisation of the body of an essay could be **chronological**,

- b) You have gone on an educational tour of the South Indian temples as a part of your History Project. On your return, you are asked to present a detailed description of the temples.
- c) One of your friends has applied for a job and asks you to give him/her a testimonial.

In the above contexts, you are asked to describe a place or person. In order to write a good description, we must follow certain guidelines. Try to observe carefully what you're going to describe. Then collect as many details as possible. The more detailed your description, the better it would be. Then decide on your 'focus'. This will help you to exclude irrelevant details. An important rule for descriptions is "show your readers don't just tell them." In other words, give life and human interest to your descriptions. In fact, the boundaries of description and narration are fluid. A description can tell a story, and a story can include descriptions.

15.4.2 Narration

We use narrative writing when we need to talk about something that has happened within a definite time span. Narrative writing relates an event, usually in simple chronological order. In other words, it tells a story. Haeker & Renshaw (1989:175) present the following grounds rules for narrative writing:

1. Put readers on the scene immediately
2. Select details for a specific effect
3. Keep the story moving.

The use of dialogues and the avoidance of irrelevant details adds to the tempo of the narrative.

We could devise different types of tasks on narration:

- e.g.
- (a) Narrating events in order: We can present a jumbled up story and ask learners to put it in the right order.
 - (b) Narrating a story from different points of view—that is, as told by different characters.
 - (c) Using flashback techniques, etc.

15.4.3 Reporting

A report usually present information in a logical, orderly and precise manner. The following are some occasions when you have to write a report.

- a) There has been a burglary in your house. You report this to the insurance company to claim compensation.
- b) As an NCC Junior Officer you have to present to your Senior Officer a detailed report on the proceedings on the NCC day.
- 3) Your little sister has a heart problem. You are seeking the advice of a famous American Cardiologist. Enclose a report on her condition and the treatment she has been receiving so far.

What are the characteristics of a good report?

a) **Completeness**

The purpose of a report is to inform your reader about things s/he doesn't know. Hence make sure you include all necessary details. At the same time, make sure you avoid unnecessary details.

b) **Accuracy**

The report should not include any false information.

c) **Clarity**

The report should be clear enough for readers to understand, and take action if necessary. Simple language contributes to clarity. Jargon should be avoided.

15.4.4 Arguing

Consider the following contexts:

- a) There is a proposal to demolish an ancient 200 year old building in your city. Write a note of protest.
- b) The Government proposes to increase the price of milk by Rs.2/- per litre. Write a letter of protest to the Commissioner, Dairy Development Project.

In each of the above you have to argue your case, as your reader needs to be convinced of your point of view.

An argument will be effective if you follow these guidelines:

- i) Decide on the precise issues to address
- ii) Select evidence to support your arguments
- iii) Anticipate the arguments of the other side
- iv) Avoid fallacies, sweeping statements, emotional language, arguing in a circle, etc.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1. Say why the following description is not very effective: My favourite city is Madras. I was born and brought up there. I have many friends there. It is wonderful city. I feel happy whenever I return to Madras after a long trip. Madras is the capital of Tamil Nadu. It lies on the shores of the Marina beach.

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15.5 TECHNIQUES IN STRUCTURING PARAGRAPHS

Every paragraph has a main idea, which is usually stated in a topic sentence. This idea needs to be supported and developed in the rest of the paragraph. The structuring of the Paragraph may be of different types, depending upon the writer's purpose. In this section, we shall look at some of the major techniques for structuring paragraphs.

15.5.1. Examples

In order to convince the reader of the truth of the topic sentence, a writer may provide a number of examples.

e.g. The history of India's freedom struggle is filled with great people who were brave and sacrificed their lives for the sake of their country. Look at Jhansi Ki Rani who died fighting for India. The south produced the famous Veerapandiya Kattabomman, who refused to bow down to the British. More recently, we have had Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and countless others.

15.5.2 Cause and Effect

Here the topic sentence may state the result, while the rest of the paragraph may list the cause or vice-versa.

e.g. Television is beginning to be regarded as the worst evil of modern life. Children become addicted to the TV and do poorly in their studies. Housewives get so lost in TV programmes that they are not even aware of burglars entering the house and stealing. Psychologists say that the TV turns people into idiots. Doctors feel that constant TV watching affects the eyes.

15.5.3 Definition

Very often we have to define concepts in a paragraph.

(e.g.) What is Democracy? It is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. In other words, people rule themselves; they elect their own representatives and finally they work for each other's welfare. This is radically different from monarchy, where one person rules all the people, as s/he pleases.

Check Your Progress 4

1. Think of linking words usually found in paragraphs of different types.

e.g. cause/effect

so, thus, therefore, consequently.

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15.6 LET US SUM UP

- (i) While teaching writing, it is better to focus on the 'process' rather than the product.
- ii) The major phases of the writing process are: Planning, Translating, Reviewing and Monitoring.
- iii) In the planning stage, the writing context, viz. audience and purpose, are envisaged.
- iv) In the translating stage, ideas are 'translated' into appropriate language.
- v) The reviewing stages involves editing and reformulating.
- vi) Monitoring is operative in the three stages of writing.
- vii) A piece of writing usually has introductory, supportive and concluding paragraphs.
- viii) The four major types of development of the body of a piece of writing are: describing, narrating, reporting and arguing.
- ix) The major techniques in structuring paragraphs are: exemplification; comparison and contrast; cause and effect; definition.

15.7 KEY WORDS

Monitoring	The process of checking and assessing as we are engaged in planning, translating and reviewing.
Process	'How' we write.
Product	'What' is the outcome of the writing activity.
Planning	The first stage of writing, when we collect our thoughts and think of an audience and purpose for writing.
Reviewing	The last stage of writing where we edit, reformulate and refine what is written.
Translating	the stage when we 'translate' our abstract thoughts into concrete words.

15.2 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

- (i) (e.g.) Writing is a process of problem-solving, a way of processing information.
- (ii) Writing is a transcription of the process of composing ideas. It is not a product of thought but its actualization and dramatisation.
- (iii) Writing is a thinking process.

Check Your Progress 2

1. e.g. Statistics, Joke.
2. Open-ended.

Check Your Progress 3

1. It does not describe the city at all. There are no details about the city. It 'tells' readers, but fails to 'show' them the city.
2. Open-ended. e.g. an accident; a meeting with a criminal; a fire/an earthquake.
3. Open-ended.
4. Phase 1: Brain storming for ideas (Planning)

Phase 2: Organisation of ideas according to a logical plan

Phase 3: Group writing (Writing).

Phase 4: Exchange, Peer correction

Phase 5: Reviewing, Editing, Reformulating (Group work)

Phase 6: Individual writing.

Check Your Progress 4

1. a) Examples for example; for instance; such as; particularly, etc.
b) Comparison and Contrast
Similarly, likewise; but; though; still; however; on the other hand.
2. e.g. addition, choice, clarification.

15.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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