

# Process Writing Framework as a Pedagogic Tool in the Context of ESL/EFL



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## **ABSTRACT**

*This paper attempts to make a case for using a 'Process Writing Framework' (PWF) as an effective way to teach writing skills in the context of ESL. A lot of research in the past has shown us the efficacy of 'rewriting' as an inevitable activity to improve or even complete writing. There have been myriad ways in which writers have been 'rewriting' or writing 'revised drafts'. The present study proposes a Process Writing Framework (PWF) that will not only be useful to refine a particular text but also serve as an effective pedagogic tool for teaching writing skills in English Language. The PWF can be used for improving one's writing' by the learners on their own at any time. PWF, which remains as an external tool in the classroom, gradually becomes an internalized 'skill set' that helps produce better 'writing'.*

**Keywords: ESL, EFL, Process Writing Framework**

## **Introduction**

Conscious teaching of writing in the L2/ ESL/ EFL contexts has been a myth in our classrooms. Students are seldom taught 'writing skills' in the classroom. The commonly noticed 'writing activities' in the classroom are related to grammar, vocabulary and construction of isolated sentences. In the study conducted for this purpose, it is noticed that following are some of the activities conducted in the few writing classes that are held. The activities are, a. 'gap filling for choosing the right grammar items such as an article, verb, adjective, coherence markers etc', b. matching the

sentence halves to form grammatically acceptable sentences', c. completion of sentences with the beginning or the end of a sentence given, d. constructing sentences given a word, e. transformation of sentences (active-passive / direct indirect ) etc., It is noticed that students, sometimes, write in class letters, paragraphs, dialogues, instructions, recommendations etc. for the purpose of examinations.

The input for these activities is mostly from a prescribed text book, reference to internet and other materials improvised by the teacher. If at all these writings are checked by the teacher, they are for format, grammar

and spelling. The teacher's feedback is limited to a few 'red marks' on paper. The post writing activity is unusual and the belief seems to be that the learners have learnt 'writing' from this experience. But samples of their writing subsequent to this classroom exercise do not really show acquisition of writing ability in the real sense of the term.

The study suggests revision of texts using PWF, a post-writing task. It is found that this activity helps the learner to reflect on his/her writing, make sense of the text and bring about a host of changes to improve the quality of transfer of meaning, the primary purpose of 'writing'. The focus is not only to enable writers write 'error-free sentences' and score marks in the examination but to produce 'most meaningful texts'. The shift is from a mechanical 'sentence level grammar' to that of a 'text level grammar' focusing on 'meaning'. The suggestion has been tested and found useful. This is not to suggest that this is the only way to teach writing but certainly one of the effective ways of teaching writing.

### **Background**

Writing remains an important skill for academic and career related purposes in the context of English as L2 in India. Though the TL for this study are drawn from students from an engineering college, the improvement of writing ability is crucial for students from arts and science colleges as well. Teaching 'writing' remains a grey area in the

context of the TL. Based on the perception of both the teachers and the students, it can be pointed out that the acquisition of 'writing' skills is either incidental or cultivated by the sheer motivation of a few individual learners. It is, by and large, not consciously taught or learnt.

When students attempt international language proficiency tests like the IELTS, 'Writing Test' poses a great difficulty to many. In addition, most of the scientific community in India find it very difficult to write papers for journals or even make presentations for lack of adequate ability in writing in spite of their adequate knowledge in the area. The state-based curriculum has given the TL the ability to score high marks in the university examination that tests only rote memory or a mechanical production of language. A major chunk of the TL is drawn from these schools and students from CBSE, ICSE, IGCSE, IB are an exception to this rule. But this second group comprises hardly 10% of the students at the tertiary level in India. Hence the present study assumes importance against this background of the need for good writing abilities on the one hand and the absence of appropriate teaching methodology on the other.

### **Research questions**

1. What would be an ideal methodology to teach Writing Skills in a short span of time?
2. Is this methodology pedagogically viable?

## Writing as Rewriting

It is well known that writing improves with successive drafts of writing or rewriting. Dissertations which form part of a post graduate or doctoral programme are not complete without rewriting. Précis Writing, a popular task in English Test in the bygone days followed rewriting as a procedure. Several writers and critics from the past to the present have agreed on the need for 'rewriting'. Ernest Hemingway points out in an interview

*Interviewer:* How much rewriting do you do?

*Hemingway:* It depends. I rewrote the ending of *Farewell to Arms*, the last page of it, 39 times before I was satisfied.

*Interviewer:* Was there some technical problem there? What was it that had stumped you?

*Hemingway:* Getting the words right. (1956)

Vladimir Nabokov points out, "I have rewritten—often several times—every word I have ever published. My pencils outlast their erasers." (1966). Helen Dunmore, the famous British poet and a novelist, in her famous 'quotes', points out, "Reread, rewrite, reread, rewrite. If it still doesn't work, throw it away. It's a nice feeling, and you don't want to be cluttered with the corpses of poems and stories which have everything in them except the life they need." (2012)

Though it is a well known fact that writing improves with successive revision or redrafting, it has not been thought of as a

pedagogic tool for improving writing. As redrafting helps self reflection on all the sub skills in one's own writing, it is conceived to be an effective way of 'improving writing' in the longer run. The present study is an attempt to prove the hypothesis that 'rewriting', if systematically conceived, can be an effective pedagogic tool to teach writing.

At present rewriting of successive drafts of writing is made on the basis of one's own intuition and awareness of what to correct. Generally grammatical errors, faulty punctuations, inappropriate vocabulary and related issues are corrected. The outcome of such 'rewriting' results in a mechanical improvement of the text and does not really improve the 'writing' to express meaning more effectively. Therefore, the focus of this study is to make this activity more meaningful and also uniform across different genres of writing. As a result, the concept of creating a checklist or a framework that can be used as an intervention to write the successive drafts of writing was conceived.

After going through several rounds of tests, the process writing framework (PWF) has been evolved as a tool to be applied for writing successive drafts of a text. The PWF has been found useful in many ways. For one thing, it provides a concrete framework ensuring uniformity in one's approach toward writing revised drafts. Secondly, the tool is helpful in moving away from mere mechanical changes in writing to a more dynamic process of improving the meaning potential of the text. This tool can be used

by the teacher in the classroom and it can also be used independently by the learners on their own, in course of time.

Students who have used PWF, given below, for improving their texts have admitted that it has helped them to improve the quality of their text better than the one they did on their own without any checklist. Students also felt that with regular use of this tool, their writing skills, in general, improved considerably. But this change takes its own time as writing is a complex process and the quality of one's writing cannot change

drastically within a very short span of time.

**The checklist (PWF)**

The checklist or the PWF has been evolved with inputs from students who have used it. The checklist is designed to check the text paragraph by paragraph. The checklist (PWF) is a sign- post to the students to look at the text as a whole and assess it for its 'meaning potential'. In the process, the students are sensitized to various sub-skills of language. The Process Writing Framework (PWF) is given below:

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Activity</b>
<b>1. Content</b>	Is there a central idea? Is it adequately developed? Can you identify the topic sentence? Is there any irrelevant or redundant data? Is the content lacking in something? Answer these questions and fill in gaps.
<b>2. Syntax and coherence</b>	Does the text flow logically and meaning emerge smoothly? Are the sentences well-connected through the use of linking devices? Supply appropriate connecting words (linking devices) wherever necessary. Study the order of words in a sentence. Reorder them appropriately. Examine the order of sentences in a paragraph. If there is a need, rearrange them in the right order.
<b>3. Lexis and sentence structures</b>	Are the words appropriate? Do they have a range / variety? Are collocations, idioms and phrases put to good use? Are the sentence structures appropriate, display a range ( complex sentences, passive voice etc) and contribute to meaning? Avoid repetition and irrelevance in lexis as well as structures
<b>4. Accuracy</b>	Check for spelling, grammar accuracy and punctuation.

## The Study

First of all, the TL (students from SSN College of Engineering) were assigned a task to write a paragraph based on a topic sentence. The TL read the paragraph written by them carefully with a view to improving it. The second draft was written rectifying the errors in the original text.

In the next stage, the students were given the PWF and told how to use this tool. They were asked to read their second draft and apply this framework to see if there were any other corrections. More than 80% of them found opportunities for further changes. Others found the framework challenging as they did not have the

proficiency in language to make the corrections.

Students who were not able to, independently, make any improvements to their writing were provided help by way of pairing them with others to help them self evaluate their writing. This experience was reported by the students as being highly productive.

The final drafts were submitted to the teacher for comments. The teacher provided comments both on a scale of 1 to 5 in addition to the specific notes on the scripts. Students found both kinds of assessments useful for self reflection and gradually overcame their drawbacks.

## Assessment on a scale of 1 to 5

	1	2	3	4	5
Theme (content)					
Syntax and Coherence					
Lexis and sentence structures					
Accuracy					

1. Can identify the problem areas satisfactorily.

2. Some ability to identify the glaringly evident problem areas with some difficulty, but unable to carry out any revision.

3. Ability to identify problem areas both evident and subtle to an extent and carry out certain corrections with some difficulty

4. Can identify all types of problems and

carry out revisions. The revision may have some errors.

5. Ability to identify all errors and improve on them satisfactorily.

## Teachers' Comments on scripts

In addition to the marking on the assessment scale given above, the teacher made comments on relevant portions of the script. Some of the comments are listed below category wise.

**Theme (Content)**

Off topic / Needs Focus / Topic misunderstood

**Syntax and Coherence**

Change the order of words in some sentences (when needed)

Delete the words marked in red as they are redundant

Introduce a few words to complete the sense.

Linking words are not appropriately used.

Introduce a connective word

Words are repetitive.

Ideas are repeated. The progression of ideas within the paragraph is not gradual.

**Lexis and Sentence structures**

Irrelevant word, ambiguous meaning etc,

Good collocation, appropriate use of words.

**Accuracy**

Grammatical error/ spelling error/ wrong punctuation/ punctuation missing

**Student Feedback on teachers' assessment and comments**

Students said that the assessment score as well as the feedback was very helpful. It helped them become sensitive to the different sub-skills of writing and also focus on expressing meaning. They further pointed out that the revision of writing based on the PWF was helpful not only to improve the quality of writing in the text at that point

in time but also enabled them to enhance their writing ability in general. They pointed that they were able to gradually internalize the PWF and carry out improvements without the need for a PWF in hand. In other words, continuous use of this checklist helped them imbibe some of the skills of writing. This is evident from the fact that they recognized their mistakes instantaneously as they wrote. Most of them were happy with carrying out the revision work as an individual activity. However they felt that peer group interaction was also very useful. It was also seen that the students, whose proficiency levels were low, preferred this revision activity to be done as a collaborative activity. They felt that they learnt more from the peer group. This study has several pedagogical implications for teaching 'writing'.

First of all PWF is a good tool to use for teaching writing. But it needs to be applied appropriate to the learners' proficiency in language. Students whose writing skills are above the bench mark profit more from this exercise. Students whose writing skills are not up to the mark need additional help from the teacher. Peer Group support has also been very productive. In the longer run, this helps in improvement of writing. This is not suggested as the only means of improving or teaching writing. Students need adequate reading and listening before they start writing. Production of language certainly follows comprehension (NS Prabhu 2017)

**Conclusion**

Introduction of PWF for rewriting successive

drafts using a checklist to help students improve their writing has several positive outcomes.

A shift in focus from teacher-centered 'writing' class to a learner centered 'writing experience' helped students internalize the process of improving their writing.

It challenged the teachers to be sensitive to every minute sub skill of writing in their students' performance and to provide positive feedback

Students realized the importance of collaborative learning in a 'writing' class'. Though this activity is ultimately an individual one, there was scope for pair or group work leading to mutual benefit.

It vastly helped the shift from a mere form (grammar) orientation to one of dynamic discourse orientation focusing on meaning in acquiring writing skills.

Writing several drafts has its own limitations. It is a slow process. One cannot look for changes overnight. If one practices it regularly, then there is a scope that the PWF is internalized and they are able to carry out the corrections effortlessly.

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