

Second Language Writing

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Series Editor's Preface

Learning how to write in a second language is one of the most challenging aspects of second language learning. Perhaps this is not surprising in view of the fact that even for those who speak English as a first language, the ability to write effectively is something that requires extensive and specialized instruction and which has consequently spawned a vast freshman composition industry in American colleges and universities. Within the field of second and foreign language teaching, the teaching of writing has come to assume a much more central position than it occupied twenty or thirty years ago. This is perhaps the result of two factors.

On the one hand, command of good writing skills is increasingly seen as vital to equip learners for success in the twenty-first century. The ability to communicate ideas and information effectively through the global digital network is crucially dependent on good writing skills. Writing has been identified as one of the essential process skills in a world that is more than ever driven by text and numerical data. A further strengthening of the status of writing within applied linguistics has come from the expanded knowledge base on the nature of written texts and writing processes that has been developed by scholars in such fields as composition studies, second language writing, genre theory, and contrastive rhetoric. As a result there is an active interest today in new theoretical approaches to the study of written texts as well as approaches to the teaching of second language writing that incorporate current theory and research findings.

This book is therefore quite timely. It provides a comprehensive and extremely readable overview of the field of second language writing, examining how theories of writing and the teaching of writing have evolved, the nature of good writing, the nature of texts and genres and how they reflect their use in particular discourse communities, the relationship between writing in the first and second language, how a curriculum can be developed for a writing course, the development of instructional materials for a writing class, the uses of the computer in writing instruction, and approaches to feedback and assessment. The book also examines approaches to research on second language writing and shows how teachers can investigate their

students' writing problems and explore their own practices in the teaching of writing.

The book reflects Professor Hyland's dual role as a leading researcher in the field of second language writing and an experienced teacher of second language writing. Theory and research are hence used throughout to illuminate some of the pedagogical issues and decisions that are involved in teaching second language writing. The insights presented both through the text as well as through the tasks readers are invited to carry out will provide an invaluable source of ideas and principles to inform teachers' and student teachers' classroom decision making.

Preface

Writing is among the most important skills that second language students need to develop, and the ability to teach writing is central to the expertise of a well-trained language teacher. But while interest in second language writing and approaches to teaching it have increased dramatically over the last decade, teachers are often left to their own resources in the classroom as much of the relevant theory and research fails to reach them. This book addresses this problem by providing a synthesis of theory, research, and practice to help teachers of *language* become teachers of *writing*.

This book is written for practicing teachers and teachers in training who have little or no experience teaching writing to students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. More specifically, it attempts to meet the needs of those who are or will be teaching students who speak English as a second or foreign language in colleges, universities, workplaces, language institutes, and senior secondary schools. Those who teach children or teach basic literacy skills to adults will also find much of value. The book pulls together the theory and practice of teaching writing to present an accessible and practical introduction to the subject without assuming any prior theoretical knowledge or teaching experience.

This text is founded on the premise that an effective teacher is one who can make informed choices about the methods, materials, and procedures to use in the classroom based on a clear understanding of the current attitudes and practices in his or her profession. A strong teacher is a reflective teacher, and reflection requires the knowledge to relate classroom activities to relevant research and theory. The book's practical approach toward second language writing attempts to provide a basis for this kind of reflection and understanding. In the text the reader will find a clear stance toward teaching writing which emphasizes the view that writing involves composing skills and knowledge about texts, contexts, and readers. It helps to develop the idea that writers need realistic strategies for drafting and revising, but they also must have a clear understanding of genre to structure their writing experiences according to the demands and constraints of particular contexts. I incorporate this emphasis on strategy, language, and context throughout the book.

The book also recognizes that teachers work in a range of situations – in schools, colleges, universities, corporate training divisions, and language institutes – and with students of different motivations, proficiencies, language backgrounds, and needs. They also work in contexts where English is taught as a Second Language (*ESL*) or as a Foreign Language (*EFL*), a distinction based on the language spoken by the community in which English is being studied. An *ESL* situation exists when the local community is largely English speaking, such as Australia, the United States, or the United Kingdom, while *EFL* contexts are those in which English is not the host language. Like most polarizations, however, this distinction obscures more complicated realities. For instance, *ESL* contexts can be further distinguished between learners who are migrants and who may therefore need occupational and survival writing skills, and those who plan to return to their own countries once they complete their courses. *EFL* contexts may include those where an indigenized variety has emerged (Singapore, India) or where colonization has afforded English a prominent role in local life (Hong Kong, Philippines), and those where English is rarely encountered (Korea, Japan).

These differences will have an impact on the kind of language students need and their motivation to acquire it, the cultural and linguistic homogeneity of the students, and the resources available to teachers. There are, however, sufficient similarities between these diverse types of context to focus on issues that concern all those who teach writing to non-native English speakers. In recognition of these similarities I shall use the acronym *L2* as a generic form to refer to all users of English from non-English-speaking backgrounds and *ESL* as shorthand for all contexts in which such students are learning English. (Likewise, I use *L1* to refer to those for whom English is their primary language.) The text also treats these students and contexts as similar by systematically setting out the key issues of classroom teaching in both contexts, addressing topics such as assessing needs, designing syllabuses, writing materials, developing tasks, using technology, giving feedback, and evaluating writing. In this way I hope to provide teachers with the resources to plan, implement, and evaluate a program of writing instruction for any teaching situation in which they may find themselves.

The book provides opportunities for you to engage with the ideas presented. *Reflection tasks* occur regularly through the chapters, encouraging readers to think about their own views on a topic and their potential needs as writing teachers. Each chapter concludes with a series of *Discussion questions and activities* which ask readers to consider ideas, examples of lesson plans, questionnaires, tasks or materials and so on, or to devise those of their own.

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