

**Course Topic: Teaching Writing****Course Instructor:**

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**Course Synopsis**

Two of the most commonly used approaches to teaching writing are the product approach and the process approach. In this course we will define both approaches and discuss the advantages of each. We will then look at activities to use for each approach. Teachers will come away with a toolkit of writing activities that are appropriate for a wide range of student language proficiencies. The process of writing can seem like a daunting task for our students, but by taking advantage of the product and process approaches, students can learn how to break down the writing process into manageable tasks.

**Course Agenda**

1. The Product Approach
2. The Process Approach
3. Which Approach is Better, Product or Process?
4. Activities for the Product Approach
5. Activities for the Process Approach

## 1. The Product Approach

The product approach to writing is a traditional approach. Students write with the end product in mind. Their objective is to create the best possible piece of writing—error free and neatly presented. The only thing that the teacher marks is the final piece of writing that students hand in. The focus of the grading system is on form and grammatical accuracy. The teacher has no interest in how the students got there, only in where the students ended up.

What goes into making a good finished product in writing? Below are some of the components to look at. Match the component on the left with its description on the right.

Component	Match	Description
1. audience		a. the parts that make up the structure
2. purpose		b. how the components are arranged
3. genre		c. the intended readership
4. language style		d. a category or a certain expected style of writing
5. components		e. the reason for the piece of writing
6. structure		f. an expected grammatical form or use of vocabulary and phrases determined by the genre

## 2. The Process Approach

The process approach to writing emerged in the late 1970s as a result of developments in cognitive psychology and studies in how we write in our first language. It was a reaction against perceived restrictions of the product approach. The primary focus of the process approach is on the steps the writer goes through in order to arrive at the final product. The teacher marks outlines and various drafts of the writing as well as the final product. The outlines and drafts are collectively worth more in the grading system than the final product.

What goes into the process approach to writing? The acronym POWER is a helpful way for your students to learn the basic steps of process writing.

1. **P**lanning —introduce the topic.
2. **O**rganizing —what format is to be used?
3. **W**riting—the actual pen to paper or keystroke to document process.
4. **E**ditting—who edits and who evaluates?
5. **R**evising—what comes next?

### 3. Which Approach is Better, Product or Process?

Which approach is better? Researchers have debated this furiously over the years, with some leaning one way and some the other way. As teachers we have to be practical and the reality is that both the product and process approaches are valuable. *“In a writing class, students need to be taught both how to use the process to their advantage as language learners and writers, and also how to produce an acceptable product on demand.”* Raimes (1991: 415). Our job, as teachers, is to draw upon the advantages of each approach in our teaching.

Look at the list of advantages below. Decide which advantages apply to the product approach to writing and which apply to the process approach.

	Students produce a polished, neat piece of work.
	Students don't always work alone while writing.
	Students focus on the accuracy of their writing.
	Students make sure the reader can understand their writing.
	Students explore a topic fully before writing about it.
	Students learn the steps of writing.
	Students learn what good writing looks like.

### 4. Activities for the Product Approach

The following are some writing activities that follow the product approach.

1. Students follow a model (of a sentence, paragraph, essay or poem) provided by the teacher and put their own ideas into the model.
2. The teacher provides the beginning of a piece of writing (either a sentence or paragraph) and the students write the ending.
3. Students write a response to something they have listened to or have read.
4. Students write different types of paragraphs—narrative, descriptive or persuasive, for example.

### 5. Activities for the Process Approach

Try the following activities with your students to work on the process approach to writing, following the POWER acronym.

#### A. Planning Activities

Planning involves: introducing the main topic, brainstorming for ideas, developing vocabulary, generating phrases, reviewing language structures, and selecting ideas. The following are some example activities at this stage:

1. Pair, small group or whole class brainstorming about the main topic.

2. Develop a word web to incorporate vocabulary that goes with the ideas.
3. Generate useful phrases that describe the main topic.
4. Review language structures that might be used to express the ideas.
5. Prioritize ideas that were generated in class brainstorming.

### ***B. Outlining Activities***

At this step, students organize their thoughts into an appropriate structure for the type of writing they are doing. This might be an e-mail structure, a letter structure, a paragraph structure or an essay structure depending upon the writing you have assigned.

The following are some example activities at this stage:

- 1a. Have students look at a model of the type of writing and identify the components of the structure.
- 1b. Scramble the components of the structure and have students reorder them correctly.
2. Have students create an outline for their writing that copies the model provided.

### ***C. Writing Activities***

This step is fairly self-explanatory. Students begin writing based upon the planning and outlining steps. Students can write individually, in small groups or as a class.

### ***D. Editing Activities***

Feedback on writing that is done at the very end of the writing process is not very useful. Students need and want correction and feedback during the writing process so that they can change course if necessary. Here are some editing activities to try:

1. Students self-edit. They read their own writing critically to identify errors.
2. Students peer edit. They work with a partner and look at each other's work and comment on a particular component of the writing. This is especially useful when a language structure has been recently taught in class.
3. Conduct a class edit. Students submit portions of their writing and the class works together to identify errors.
4. Students hand in drafts for the teacher to edit. BEWARE, this can be very time consuming!

### ***E. Revising Activities***

At this final stage, students process all of the errors identified in the editing stage to create a polished version of their work.

**Now you are ready to integrate both the product and process approaches to writing into your classes!  
And there is a third approach that you might also want to learn about—the genre approach.**

**Thanks for participating!**

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