

Teaching Second Language Writing: Historical Approaches and Methodologies and Integrating Artificial Intelligence

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Article Received: 23/12/2025

Article Accepted: 29/01/2026

Published Online: 31/01/2026

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2025.8.01.599

Abstract

Teaching writing has always been challenging because of the complexity of the writing skill itself. It is also argumentative because of the number of approaches to teaching writing. The teaching practices in a typical second-language classroom depend on decades of shifting methodologies. This article surveys how writing instruction evolved through six primary approaches: form, functional, expressive, process, content, and genre. It evaluates the specific teaching methods, including the Grammar-Translation, Direct, and Audio-Lingual techniques, shaped by these approaches. While early methods focused strictly on grammatical accuracy and rote repetition, later models prioritised writer identity, cognitive processes, and communicative purpose. Today, as we face the realities of 2026, artificial intelligence completely alters the traditional teaching strategies. This article explains how we can implement hybrid feedback systems where generative software corrects routine grammar while teachers guide students in evaluating the automated advice. By understanding this historical context and current technology, a teacher can actively shape how the students write. This ensures teachers combine traditional essay formats with digital storytelling without losing their unique personal voice or critical-thinking skills during drafting. By synthesising these historical trends and modern applications, the article provides a comprehensive overview of how writing theory informs practical instruction. This article serves as a resource for educators seeking to align their teaching methods with current research to support diverse student needs in the Second-language classroom.

Keywords: approach, method, second language, product approach, process approach, artificial intelligence, writing.

Introduction

Several researchers and theorists viewed the process of teaching writing to second-language learners in different ways and proposed various approaches and methodologies of teaching writing. It would be complicated to draw distinctions among the various approaches and to study each approach individually since many of them overlap. It is clear that no theory is completely independent; instead, these approaches complement one another. All these approaches for teaching writing can be put under the following heads:

- a. Form approaches
- b. Functional approaches
- c. Expressive approaches
- d. Process approaches
- e. Content approaches
- f. Genre approaches

a. Form approaches: Most approaches practised during the mid-nineteenth century come under this category. The Grammar-Translation method and the Audio-Lingual method, popular during 1900-1960, were a product of this approach. This approach prioritises the written product. According to this approach, writing is considered a product constructed by the writer's command over grammar and syntax. Students are given opportunities only to imitate certain grammatical structures, manipulate statements, and, in the advanced stages, to practice controlled and free-writing exercises. In a Form-approach classroom, the teacher plays a very prominent role, with students being passive learners. Achieving accuracy, avoiding errors, and limiting the risk of using incorrect language is the main aim of this approach (Hyland, 2003; Raimes, 1983).

This approach was widely practised and accepted worldwide for nearly three to four decades, but it had some drawbacks. Though this approach provided students with opportunities to master certain formal structures of language, it failed to equip them with the knowledge and competence to write new structures in varied situations since most of the teaching involved only imitation and manipulation of certain grammatical and lexical structures.

b. Functional approaches: Influenced by the form approach, this approach is based on the principle that certain language forms perform certain functions, and the students should be taught those functions that are relevant to their needs. The Direct method, dominant during World War II, belongs to this approach. This approach focuses on the student's ability to write sentences and paragraphs by creating topic sentences, supporting sentences, and transitions, and to develop different types of paragraphs (Hyland, 2003). Similar to the form approach, this approach also ignores meaning and the purpose of what is taught to the students; it is concerned only with imparting knowledge of certain functions in the target

language. Activities used in this approach involve developing a paragraph based on a topic sentence, reordering jumbled sentences in a paragraph, and writing parallel texts by imitating model paragraphs (Raimes, 1983).

Because of its overt emphasis on language forms and functions, ignoring meaning, context, and purpose, this approach invited criticism that language teaching is more than just making learners remember and reproduce language patterns (Hyland, 2003).

c. Expressive approaches: With considerable influence in the L1 classroom, this approach, unlike the two previous approaches, focuses on the writer. The quantity is more important than quality; that is, very little attention is paid to the grammar and form. Murray (1985) suggested that this approach urged teachers to respond to learners' ideas rather than responding to and dwelling on formal errors (Hyland, 2003). Much emphasis is on the writer, and the teacher has very little to do; the teacher is just a facilitator providing stimulus and assigning vast amounts of free-writing activities. Considering writing as a developmental process centred on the writer, teachers do not interfere in the writing process by offering models, suggesting responses, and imposing their views (Raimes, 1983; Hyland, 2003). Friere (1974) explained that this approach, by organising the classroom around students' personal opinions and experiences, helps the student learner develop self-awareness, and he opines that writing is an act of self-discovery. Moffett (1982) suggested that this approach also facilitates clear thinking, effective relating, and self-expression.

Despite giving much importance to the writer, this approach has the disadvantage of ignoring the learner's cultural background, the social consequences of writing, the purpose of communication, and context.

d. Process approaches: Similar to the Expressive approach, the Process approach also focuses on the writer. While the expressive approach sees the teacher as a facilitator, the process approach emphasises what the teacher should do to help learners perform the writing task effectively (Hyland, 2003). But, unlike the expressive approach, this approach gives equal importance to both the writer and the teacher; the teacher plays a prominent role during the teaching-learning activity by making the learner aware of the various stages involved in the writing process. While guiding students through the writing process, the teacher's role involves helping them develop strategies for generating ideas, drafting, and revising through a variety of pre-writing activities. These pre-writing activities involve reading, encouraging brainstorming, outlining, requiring multiple drafts, providing excessive and extensive feedback, and facilitating peer responses (Raimes, 1983). The Process approach sees writing as an exercise of linguistic skills, nothing to do with knowledge, such as grammar and form (Badger and White, 2002). In support of this, Carl Beriter and Marlene Scardamalia (1987) proposed three strategies for teaching writing through process approach: first, the sub-skills

approach, which assumes that the learner should be taught various skills independently, and that these skills will come together during the act of writing. Second, the holistic approach assumes that teaching skills in isolation will not help the students develop their writing skills and suggests that all the skills should be taught together. Third, the cognitive approach considers both the former approaches and suggests that writing should be taught systematically (Peacock, 1986). The process approach was well received, yet it also faced considerable criticism. With an overemphasis on the writer and the writer's inner world, process approaches fail to explain the social nature of writing and the role of language and text structure in effective communication (Hyland, 2003).

e. Content approaches: The content approach is an amalgam of both the product and process approaches. The content approach does not ignore the features of product and process approaches (Raimes, 1991). While this approach includes activities like generating ideas, collecting information, and classroom discussions, it also focuses on form, language structures, and functions. The main emphasis of this approach is on learners' needs and specifications, and students have the opportunity to select the topics to be included in the course. The learners' level is kept in mind while designing a content-based course. Elementary level students are provided with the required information to generate and organise material, and the advanced students are required to conduct research, gather information from various sources, and collaborate to collect and share information. The teacher's role in this approach is prominent, yet limited. The teacher helps the students with data collection, generating ideas, collecting information, and structuring the texts. Hyland (2003) suggests that themes and topics form a basis for this approach. The writing activities organised around social issues that the learners are not familiar with may not offer any advantage to the learners, but they encourage the learners to think about these issues in new ways (Hyland, 2003). Reading forms an important aspect of content-based instruction and relies heavily on reading. In support of this, Krashen (1993) suggested that second-language writing skills cannot be acquired without extensive reading, and reading is equally important to writing. Reading equips students not only with the knowledge in the subject area but also with the rhetorical and structural knowledge (Hyland, 2003). This emphasis on reading for rhetorical knowledge paved the way for the genre-based approaches.

f. Genre approaches: This approach is based on the principle that learning should be based on the explicit awareness of language but not through experiment and exploration (Hyland, 2003). This approach is similar to the product approaches and is regarded as an extension of product approaches (Raimes, 1991). This approach is similar to the communicative approach, where the writer writes for real writers, and writing is truly a communicative act and has a purpose (Raimes, 1983). This approach emphasises the purpose of writing, the

reader who reads it, the context in which the text is written, and most importantly, the communication activity the text performs. While it emphasises the various features mentioned above, it does not discard the importance of form and structure. Hyland explains that the central belief in this approach is that we do not just write, we write to achieve some purpose through some abstract, socially recognised ways of language form called genres (Hyland, 2003). The teacher plays a significant role in this approach by providing opportunities to develop students' writing through analysing expert texts and structures, and helping students distinguish between different genres. This overemphasis on analysing expert texts brought back severe criticism that the students' creativity is restricted.

Methods of Teaching Writing

After the discussion of various approaches to teaching writing to ESL learners, we now examine the traditional methods that have been used by ESL teachers. The following are a few widely accepted methods used in the second-language teaching context.

Popular for a long time until World War II, the Grammar-Translation method mainly aims at imparting knowledge of rules of grammar, and training the student to write accurate sentences by involving the learner in imitation and transformation exercises. The entire teaching-learning activity involves excessive translation into the mother tongue and vice versa. Little scope is given for the students' active use of language, and this method puts more emphasis on memorisation of rules (Rivers, 1968). Because of this overt emphasis only on the linguistic knowledge of grammar and no emphasis on active usage of the language, this method is highly criticised, thus opening the doors to the direct method. The Direct method aims at developing the ability to think in the language while reading and writing. In this method, grammar is taught inductively, giving students the scope to draw conclusions and generalisations on their own. The teaching of writing begins primarily with the transcription, and then moves on to substitution tables, and only at advanced stages provides the students opportunities to write summaries of what they have been learning (Rivers, 1968). With the increasing emphasis on reading skills after World War II, the Reading method originated. This method involves exercises that help students remember sentences that are essential for the comprehension of text (Rivers, 1968). According to this method, writing skill is considered tertiary, and it assumes that writing follows if the student attains mastery over the reading skill first.

The Audio-Lingual method emphasises speaking skills. However, it also gives students opportunities to develop writing skills. The structural patterns are systematically introduced; the teaching of writing progresses from imitation, transcription, and pattern drilling exercises to manipulation of sentences and construction of varieties of sentences. Once the students acquire considerable proficiency in the structure, they are allowed to write small

compositions on topics selected by the teacher (Rivers, 1968; Richards and Rodgers, 1986). The elementary level activities involve writing activities based on what they have learned, whereas the advanced level activities include writing activities such as composition writing on topics that they have read in the extensive reading exercises, thus giving importance to reading in general and writing in particular.

Very similar to the Direct method, the Situational language teaching method aims at teaching practical command over the four language skills — listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Before writing is taught, the oral structures are practised and mastered first, and this method believes that writing is derived from speech. The writing activities involve substitution tables, repetition, dictation, drills, controlled oral-based reading, and writing activities (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

With the changing assumptions and approaches of language teaching, the use of authentic material in the language classroom has gained great importance. Especially, communicative approach for language teaching, in general, and genre and process approaches for teaching writing, in particular, have stressed the importance of the use of authentic materials in ELT. This has made newspapers an important teaching aid in language teaching and learning.

Artificial Intelligence in the Writing Classroom

Artificial intelligence changed how schools teach writing. A few years ago, software mostly just checked spelling and caught basic grammar mistakes. Now, in 2026, teachers approach writing composition entirely differently. Students no longer write alone as they work with intelligent systems throughout the entire drafting process. The computer acts as an active participant responding to prompts and questions, completely altering the traditional solo writing experience.

1. Splitting the Feedback Workload

Schools currently use hybrid feedback methods. This means the grading workload is split between software and human teachers. Generative AI handles the mechanical parts of writing. It checks grammar, sentence variety, and basic paragraph structure. Teachers entrust these routine corrections to the computer, so they can spend their time and energy on deeper thinking exercises.

The teacher now curates the learning experience. They no longer write endless comments in the margins. Instead, they help students understand the computer's suggestions. Educational researcher Zhang (2025) described how this works in practice. If a program tells a student their argument lacks logic, the teacher steps in. They ask the student to decide if the machine's critique makes sense. Students learn to question automated advice instead of blindly accepting it. This turns them into active participants in the editing process.

2.The Problem of Sounding the Same

Writing instructors in 2026 face a specific problem with text generators. These models learn from massive collections of data, so they tend to produce average, middle-of-the-road prose. Students who ask software to write their essays usually end up with boring, featureless text. Their unique voice disappears entirely.

Kelsen et al. (2026) explained how classrooms address this issue. Teachers instruct students to use the program as a sounding board rather than a ghostwriter. Students must draft their main ideas first. This ensures their personal perspective gets on the page. After that initial step, they feed their work into the system. They ask the software to find weak arguments, suggest counterpoints, or fix confusing paragraphs. While the student does the actual thinking, the software just reflects those thoughts to them in a cleaner format.

3. Mixing Media and Languages

Modern composition classes rarely focus on plain text essays. Teachers expect students to combine standard writing with digital storytelling, audio clips, and interactive elements. People communicate differently today. Plain words often share the screen with visual data and soundbites.

These automated programs also help multilingual students in new ways. Writing in a second language requires intense mental effort. Students often struggle to organise complex academic concepts while simultaneously searching for the right vocabulary words. Aydın Yıldız (2025) and Pearson (2025) observed that non-native speakers now use automated translation tools to brainstorm. They map out their logic and build their outlines in their native language first. Once they have a solid structure, they use the software to help convert those thoughts into academic English. Students get to do the hard intellectual work in the language they know best. This removes a major barrier for non-native speakers taking advanced classes.

Conclusion

Teaching second-language writing requires navigating decades of changing methodologies. Historically, educators relied on six distinct approaches to shape classroom instruction. Early methods prioritised rigid grammatical accuracy and rote repetition. Later models shifted your focus toward the writer's cognitive process, the social purpose of the text, and the use of authentic materials. Today, the reality of the 2026 classroom demands that teachers integrate artificial intelligence into these established frameworks. Teachers no longer need to spend hours grading mechanical errors as generative software now handles basic paragraph structure and syntax corrections. This split workload allows teachers to guide their students through complex critical thinking exercises. Teachers can ask a student to evaluate a computer's logical critique rather than just marking their paper in red ink. However, to

prevent automated systems from erasing a student's unique personal voice, the teacher must enforce a strict drafting sequence. The teachers can instruct their learners to write their core arguments before opening any software. They should use the computer to test counterpoints or fix confusing phrasing, completely avoiding the trap of generating featureless prose. These digital tools also offer specific advantages for multilingual students. By combining traditional pedagogical approaches with these modern computational tools, teachers can provide students with the exact skills they need to produce clear, original, and multimedia-rich compositions.

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