

In fact, this understanding has led us to make the majority of the activities in our own writing textbook, *Writing from Within* (Cambridge, 2000), prewriting activities. We have found that for student writers, generating content and organizing is a far greater challenge for our students than writing out the content or improving its accuracy, and these are things that occur in the pre-writing phase. The usual reason students perform so poorly in expository writing is not due to a lack of language proficiency, but rather, because they don't have anything to write or if they do, they do not know how to organize it in a readable fashion. Good pre-writing activities solve these problems.

information is being added to the previous sentence, “second” or “next” shows a new idea at the same level is being introduced, and “therefore” shows an inference is being made.

Third, since English is top-oriented, students need to learn how to write introductory paragraphs. The standard introductory paragraph 1) catches the readers’ attention, 2) introduces the main topic, and 3) provides a guide to the rest of the discussion.

Fourth, and most important, let us go back to Murray’s Process Approach. Organization occurs primarily in the prewriting phase, not in the writing or post-writing phases, at least not in good writing. Therefore, to teach students how to organize, we must provide them with pre-writing activities, not revision activities. Almost every writing teacher I have met, at least in Asia, understands the importance of shaping learner pre-writing, which makes it even that much more of a surprise that so many textbook writers seem not to. Of course, knowing that the pre-writing phase is important for teaching organization does not make devising activities for it easy, and this might be why so many textbooks focus on revision instead.

Therefore, in conclusion, let us integrate the knowledge provided in Murray’s and Kaplan’s paradigm-shaping articles. To teach students how to write good expository prose – the kind of writing they must master for business or academic writing – we must teach them the rules of English organization, and to do so, a process approach is called for, one that focuses on pre-writing rather than revision.

That’s it. Two seminal articles have shaped our thinking in relation to teaching EFL writing, and at their intersection, a specific approach is called for. Now, let us get on with the teaching.

References

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Murray, D. (1980). Writing as a process: How writing finds its own meaning. *Eight approaches to teaching composition*. T. R. Donovan and B. W. McClelland. Urbana, IL, National Council of Teachers of English: 3-20.

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I had this self-promoting dirty paragraph in there two, but figured you’d prefer it was left out:

were transferring whole discourse structures from their own languages that teachers could understand why their efforts were so futile. And with that light, came the understanding that it is not grammar that writing teachers should be teaching, but rather, organization. His ideas, in fact, spawned a whole new field of research known as contrastive rhetoric.

Let us look, then, at one rhetorical style L1 transfer that seems to give us the most trouble, the transfer from East Asian languages. First of all, research has shown that Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese, Koreans, and Thais all share the same discourse style in relation to expository writing (It should be pointed out that descriptive and narrative modes of writing are organized in pretty much the same way in all languages; it is not until we get into expository and argumentative modes that discourse structures differ.) Thanks to the work of Dr. John Hinds (1976) and others, we have been able to identify three key differences between English and East Asian styles:

<u>English</u>	<u>East Asian</u>
Topic-based	Theme-based
Assertive, direct	suggestive, indirect
Top-oriented	Bottom oriented

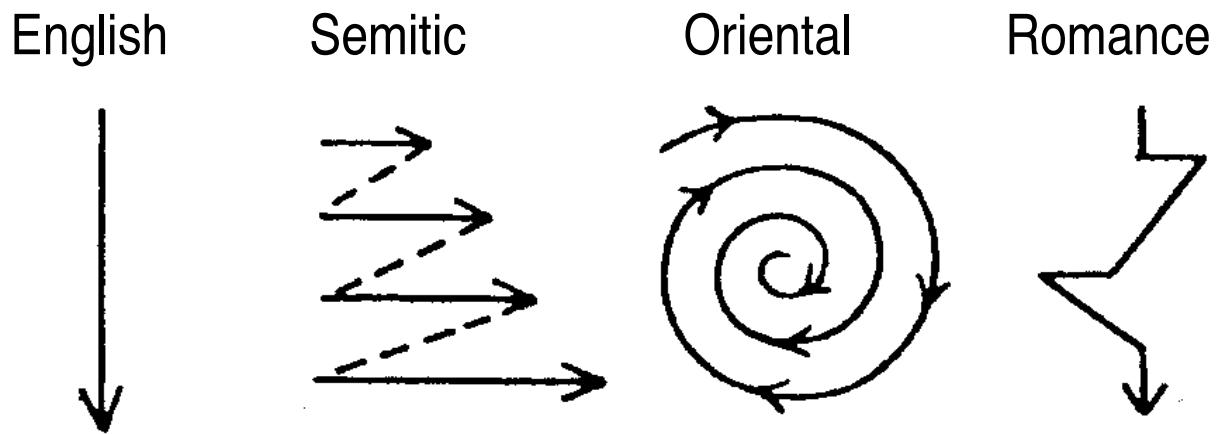
English is organized by having the content chunked into distinct topics, or paragraphs. Each paragraph contains one topic. East Asian languages, on the other hand, tend to use a theme-based approach in which anecdotes are used for development around central unifying theme. English tends to be assertive and direct, using what is called the “claim-support” style of development, whereas East Asian languages favor a less direct, suggestive approach. Being from more harmonious group-oriented cultures, these writers try to gently draw their readers in before they declare their point of view. As another result of this orientation, East Asian writers tend to be bottom oriented, not stating the main point until late in the article, usually three quarters of the way through. Top-oriented English writers, on the other hand, usually state the main idea of the article early on, in the introduction.

From my own 20 years of teaching Japanese how to write in English, studying theory, and writing composition textbooks, has led me to identify four techniques that are useful for teaching organization.

First, students must be taught how to chunk ideas into expository paragraphs. Having the students write topic sentences for each paragraph, and underline them is especially useful for achieving this goal. Although topic sentences only exist in one quarter of real published paragraphs, they are nonetheless a powerful teaching tool. They force the students to focus on the topic, and allow teachers to quickly assess whether they have done so correctly. In addition, by scanning the underlined topic sentences in a student paper, the teacher can quickly discern the overall strategy of organization.

Second, teaching transition words is effective, because these are the words we use to sculpt the ideas and sentences in a paragraph. Transition words (or “transitional words’ if you prefer) show the hierarchical relationship between ideas. “In addition” shows

much grammar and vocabulary he taught his ESL students, they still kept producing writing that as hard to understand. Then, he noticed some unusual patterns. Students from different cultures seemed to write in different ways, and he realized that their papers were hard to understand because they were transferring in rhetorical styles from their native languages. He conducted a study, in which he divided 598 student papers up into five culture groups, and had teachers analyze their rhetorical styles. He found each culture group had a different predominant tendency to organize writing, which he illustrated with the diagram below:



Native speakers write in a straight line¹. Students from Middle Eastern countries use parallel structures like those you might find in the King James Bible. Oriental students, meaning students from East Asian countries, tend to write around and around the main point of their essay and then state it at the end, a tendency we now call “delayed statement of purpose.” Romantic and Slavic writers tend to digress from their main line of development.

Kaplan’s article has been criticized, but indeed, it turned on a light for us. For years, we had been beating our heads against the wall, teaching our students more grammar and vocabulary to get them to write better. It was not until he pointed out that these students

¹ The main criticism of Kaplan’s article is that it is ethnocentric. Why do English speakers write, and as he implied in his title, “think,” in a straight line while everyone else is circuitous. I thought he was ethnocentric too, until I realized one day that it was perfectly appropriate to illustrate English speakers as writing in a straight line; he and his evaluators were using English as the referential standard! Had they been evaluating organization in Spanish writing, the “Romantic” squiggle would be straight and English would look boxy and rigid. As for connecting writing styles to ways of thinking, we must remember that “writing as a way of thinking” was a new and crucial concept of his time and that these terms were often used interchangeably.

before writing the first draft; 2) the writing phase – when the first draft is written, and 3) the post-writing, or revision, phase – when re-writing and correcting takes place. Obviously, these are not purely separate stages in the process of writing, especially since computers give us so much writing mobility, but these phases do represent three distinct composing activities.

Well, Murray's Process Approach took writing instruction by storm, and became one of its central concepts, but it left us with a problem too. As Tim Caudery (1995) discovered through an internet survey, no one really knows what the "process approach" is. In asking fifty teachers, he found a number of different interpretations, most of which focus on revision.

Maybe I have been isolated here in Japan for too long, and out of touch with the greater circles of composition teaching, but over the last twenty years, I had come to form an interpretation on my own. Murray's words and my own experiences with Japanese students had led me to abandon the revision approach long ago, and I had assumed everyone else had too. How surprised I was then, at TESOL, to find how many writing books were using revision as their main method. "Wait a minute," I thought, "Isn't revision really just intervention in the product, exactly what Murray had told us not to do?" After all, unless you are teaching ten or fewer students, it is hard to conference or intervene it is hard for teachers to do much more than point out errors, which is only a superficial part of writing proficiency. So why were so many new books coming out vaunting the revision approach?

I think there are three reasons why the revision is still so widely employed. First, Murray is partly to blame. Murray wrote about spending a lot of time on revising and experimenting with style, leading many to interpret the process approach as being based on post-writing. This might be true for Murray, who is a native speaker and professional writer, but Murray is hardly representative of the students we teach, who have little command of English expression. Second, we tend to focus the product rather than the process because it is easier to do. As Vygotsky pointed out, our educational systems are set up around the *assign and assess* model of instruction rather than the superior *assisted performance* model. Third, since we are language teachers, and as research has shown, we tend to place a greater weight on language accuracy and mechanics, rather than overall communication or content. We seem to be working with an underlying assumption that if we can give our students enough grammar and vocabulary that they will someday be able to write. But is this really so? Of course not, and the proof is in the fact that most native speakers, who have already mastered vocabulary and grammar, must also be instructed on how to write.

So then, assuming every human being has a sufficient creative potential, what other secrets does the English language contain – beyond grammar and vocabulary – that must be mastered before our EFL students can become good writers? And this question brings us to the second seminal article, one that was written even earlier, in 1966, although it was not widely available until 1972. The article, "Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education," was written by Robert Kaplan after he realized that no matter how

How Two Seminal Articles have Shaped EFL Writing Instruction - Curtis Kelly

Two years ago, I was a bit surprised at Vancouver TESOL. Because I live and teach in Japan, I have not had the opportunity to see many of the writing texts published elsewhere, so I took advantage of my presence at TESOL to look over what others had written in this area. I looked at a few composition textbooks written for low intermediate students, and was surprised to see that a number of them used a revision-oriented approach to teaching writing, and none offered much in terms of prewriting. I also attended a presentation by an ex-colleague, where he verily stated, to my horror, that having students revise is the only way they can improve their writing.

I was baffled. I thought that we had learned, as early as the eighties, that a revision approach might improve accuracy, but it has little effect on helping learners acquire what might be the single most important skill in writing English, although it is a hard one to teach. Rather than inform you of what that skill is, however, although you probably already know, let me discuss two seminal articles that have shaped much of what we know about teaching L2 writing instruction and see if you can figure out what it is on your own.

Neither article is new – both were written over 20 years ago – and neither is known for its research method. Only one was written in relation to second language teaching, and the other created more questions than it answered. And yet, each of these articles has stimulated a new school of thought in relation to the teaching of writing.

Up until the first article appeared 20 years ago, composition instruction was generally done the same way everywhere, regardless of whether the budding writers were being taught L1 or L2 composition. At the end of one writing class, the instructor would give the students a writing assignment to be finished by the start of the next class. The students would write their compositions at home, bring them to class, turn them in, and then, and only then, would the teaching begin. Most teachers focused on error correction with a few suggestions towards content, style, and organization. Students were sometimes, but not always, asked to revise.

Then came along, Donald Murray, both an L1 writing instructor and professional writer himself. He considered this popular approach and realized that it did not fit the way he had learned to write at all. He learned to write by composing, not by being edited, and so it seemed to him that teachers were wasting their time working with papers that were pretty much, already written. He pointed out that a finished paper is a “product,” but for instruction to be meaningful, the teacher must intervene in the process, not act on the product. In his article “Writing as a Process: How Writing Finds its Own Meaning” (Murray 1980), he called for a “process approach” to the teaching of L1 writing, and you will be hard pressed to find an L1 or L2 composition book on the market today that does not claim to use the process Approach.

Murray defined the process of writing by breaking it down into three stages (which I have slightly reinterpreted to fit convention): 1) the prewriting phase – everything you do