

## SOME TRENDS IN CURRENT RESEARCH ON COMPOSING<sup>1</sup>

LESZEK SKIBNIEWSKI

*Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań*

The purpose of this article is to present to an interested reader the present state of current research on composing as reflected in its prevailing trends. What I mean here as current research on composing dates back to the late 1960's when findings in cognitive developmental psychology gave it a true impetus.<sup>2</sup> Applying research in cognitive developmental psychology to rhetoric has shifted the emphasis from the what of composing to the how of composing, i.e., from the written product to the writing process. It has also brought qualitative changes to perceiving the role of writing (viewed now as social-emotional as well as cognitive development), the role of audience (moving from egocentrism to audience awareness means moving from ineffective to effective writing), and the role of errors (viewed now as windows into the mental processes involved in language use).

In this article I will try to signal in most general terms the efforts of composition researchers to describe writing, the factors determining the writer, and the methods of evaluating writing. I will do that by pointing to the following trends in current research: 1. seeking the definition of writing by placing it in a larger context of discourse analysis, 2. perceiving writing as an expression of a particular philosophy of composition, 3. discovering what writing really is and what it involves through empirical observation, 4. identifying the factors determining the writer in the composing process, and finally 5. looking for the best method of evaluating writing. Of these five general trends only the third, i.e., discovering the nature of writing through empirical observation, is really

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<sup>2</sup> I base my article on the research conducted in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain primarily because this is where most of the research has been done (Americans being most active in the field), but also because I had access only to the English language literature.

new in rhetoric; the other trends have been explored in some way ever since Aristotle's "Rhetoric". Current research, however, has redistributed old and added new values within them and their subtrends. In my article I will try to signal this new understanding of writing, the writer, and evaluation of writing.

The limited scope of the article format does not allow me to pursue in detail the issue of how to teach composition skills in keeping with the findings of current research. Therefore only some implications of these findings will be pointed to in the final part of the article.

#### WRITING AS A MODE OF DISCOURSE

##### *The Role of Reading in Writing*

Reading and writing have long been considered congenial and affecting each other. According to H. G. Widdowson (1978:63) writing proceeds by reference to the writer's own interpretation of what has preceded and by reference to his assessment of how what has been written and is being written will be received by the reader. We may infer from this that the writer possesses some critical reading skills which he uses in directing and evaluating his writing.

Reading regularly can help acquire writing, as some researchers claim. They argue that the classroom should be a place both for learning to write through training or monitor-building, and for acquiring writing through reading. Julia Falk (1979) goes even further in promoting reading for the purpose of acquiring writing skills; she claims that a long exposure to the writing of others will lead to the production of one's own writing. Teaching writing must allow students to formulate their hypotheses about how written language works, the data for which will come from reading. To test their hypotheses students should write to communicate and their communicative efforts ought to be tested by as many readers as possible.

To sum up, to write well one has to read critically and with understanding in order to direct and revise one's own writing. It is also hypothesized that extensive reading leads to the acquisition of writing skills.

##### *Writing versus Speaking*

Widdowson (1978) treats these two as parallel activities. On one level (that of usage) he perceives them both as productive manifestations of the grammatical system of the language as well as manifestations of the phonological system (speaking) or the graphological system (writing). On another level (that of use) both speaking and writing are for Widdowson receptive activities since they depend on the understanding of what has preceded the actual speaking and writing, and on how what has been said or written will be received by the listener or reader.

James Moffett (1968) analyzes the distinction between speaking and writing against the background of his theory of discourse. The two modes differ in the distance in time and space between speaker and audience which increases when we progress from speaking to writing. Speaking involves interpersonal communication between people in the vocal range, while writing as correspondence involves interpersonal communication between remote individuals and writing as publication involves impersonal communication to a large and anonymous audience extended over time and space. This implies that the speaker can relate to his audience with a better knowledge of their responses than the writer.

Another difference between speaking and writing is that the speaker is surrounded by a rich context of gestures, facial expressions and intonation to which he can relate his language. The writer, however, is devoid of this context and is therefore forced to create it of words alone.

The ability to read and reread diminishes in writing the necessity to be as repetitious as speaking is. On the other hand, writing has to convey information in a more orderly fashion than speaking to eliminate the anticipated difficulties of the reader in understanding the text.

These functional differences between oral and written discourse, i.e., the absence of actual listeners and the absence of actual contexts in writing, require, according to E. D. Hirsch (1977:41), the creation of implied listeners in implied contexts. This necessity to self-contextualize written discourse explains why one needs to be taught composition in one's own language.

#### DIFFERENT PHILOSOPHIES OF WRITING

We have seen in the preceding sections how rhetoricians, by describing writing as involving reading and as parallel to but at the same time different from speaking, have tried to place writing in a larger context of discourse analysis. But writing has also been described as an expression of a particular philosophy of composition. This fruitful approach has brought about an abundance of different composition theories which can be grouped under four headings proposed by Richard Fulkerton (1979): the formalist, expressionist, mimetic, and rhetorical philosophies of composition. In this section I will briefly discuss these four philosophies and will try to signal current research conducted within them.

##### *The Formalist Philosophy of Composition*

Its adherents judge student work primarily by whether it shows certain internal features. They emphasize the composed product rather than the composing process. Formalists analyze discourse into words, sentences, and para-

graphs; they are concerned with usage (punctuation, spelling, syntax) and style (economy, clarity and emphasis). E. D. Hirsch (1977), with his theory of readable writing, can be classified as a formalist.

Hirsch has found that there is a universal tendency among writers to achieve ever more efficient communication of any semantic intentions. Consequently, he has decided to make communicative effectiveness, which he calls relative readability, the most valued intrinsic feature of prose. He defined relative readability in this way (Hirsch 1977:85): assuming that two texts convey the same meaning, the more readable text will take less time and effort to understand. On the basis of a very thorough examination of the psychological bases for relative readability he has set up four practical suggestions for making one's prose more readable: 1. omit needless words, 2. keep related words together, 3. use linking words between clauses and sentences to integrate them, 4. make the paragraph the unit of composition. Hirsch's relative readability is then a prescribed intrinsic quality of writing elevated to the position of its most valued feature. Hirsch's claim that more readable prose takes less time and effort to comprehend has been supported experimentally, e.g., Robert de Beaugrande (1979) found that a rhetorically poorer version of an informationally identical text is harder to read aloud, its recall protocols are more disorganized, and its readers are forced to rearrange and reconstruct more than the readers of the better versions.

Formalists are in definite minority among the theorists of composition (but not among the authors of composition textbooks), and have recently been contributing the least to the understanding of composing.

#### *The Expressionist Philosophy of Composition*

This approach to writing became common at the turn of the 1960's and 1970's. Its source was cognitive developmental psychology which stressed the link between social-emotional and cognitive development. This philosophy emphasizes self-discovery through writing. Expressionists value writing that is about personal subjects and that contains a credible, honest, personal voice. Peter Elbow's "Writing Without Teachers" is an almost classical example of the many composing handbooks written in the spirit of the expressionist philosophy. Elbow advocates freewriting as a way to discover one's own personal voice (the main power which draws audience to writing), to discover in oneself ideas (available only through writing), and to grow intellectually.

Expressionism as a goal in itself and as the one and only method of teaching writing has rarely been taken up by teachers but it has been extensively used in the classroom in the form of the brainstorming or free-writing techniques.

#### *The Mimetic Philosophy of Composition*

Its adherents stress the connection between good writing and good thinking. Students should be taught two things: how to learn about the topic to have something worth saying about it, and how to think.

Theories of invention, which help mobilize the writer to gain new knowledge about the subject or to transform his old knowledge about it into an interesting point of discussion, are as old as Aristotelian topics or as new as Burke's dramatist method (cf. Burke 1955), Gordon's synectics (cf. Gordon 1961), or Pike's tagmemics (cf. Young, Becker and Pike 1970). Some theories of invention employ free-writing as a way to generate ideas, but most of them employ heuristics which are series of questions and operations that guide writers to examine their topics from multiple perspectives to gain new insights.

Current research conducted within the other approach, which says that writers should be taught how to think in order to write well, has revealed the reciprocal character of writing in this regard. On the one hand, in order to write well, students need to be taught to reason and think logically, on the other hand, writing itself develops in students the ability to do that. This has been one of the revelations of applying cognitive psychology to rhetoric. Moffett's (1968) theory of discourse is a good example of rhetoric drawing on psychology to determine how writing and learning are related.

Moffett points out that writing itself brings about the development of knowledge through the reasoning of the abstraction process inherent in writing. For Moffett composing means representing reality to oneself and presenting it to others. These are two aspects of the same process of abstraction which consists of three levels (Moffett 1968:18-20):

1. the ranging of the mind's materials into hierarchies of classes and subclasses, superordinates and subordinates
2. constructing in one's mind an object out of the external world by singling out some environmental features and ignoring others — perceptual selection. In substituting inner events for outer events we automatically audit reality
3. utilizing one's memory — selecting features that are already integrated with other, previously abstracted, information — recalled perception.

We may conclude from Moffett's presentation of the abstraction process that knowledge, which we gain as a result of this process, is an awareness of relationships among pieces of information structured hierarchically under more inclusive concepts. By writing we forge new connections between our ideas and thereby know more than we knew before starting to write.

Moffett has redefined traditional categories of writing in terms of levels

of increasing abstraction. These levels represent the sequence in which students should learn to handle writing categories (Moffett 1968:38—39):

1. what is happening — drama-recording — chronologic of perceptual creativity
2. what happened — narration — reporting — chronologic of memory selectivity
3. what happens — exposition — generalizing — analogic of classification
4. what may happen — logical argumentation — theorizing — tautologic of transformation

Such a sequencing of student assignments ensures that writing students reinforce their own progression through the levels of abstraction. As this involves organizing their perceptions of the external world into hierarchies, seeking relationships between these hierarchies, and thereby finding meaning, writing sequenced in this way will develop students intellectually.

To sum up, the adherents of the mimetic philosophy of composition stress the developmental role of writing. This role is realized both by learning about the topic by employing heuristic procedures, and by writing itself which combines many mental activities interacting among themselves and thus building new knowledge.

### *The Rhetorical Philosophy of Composition*

This philosophy says that good writing is writing adapted to achieve the desired effect on the desired audience. It has rich traditions which go back to Aristotle's "Rhetoric" and encompasses the vastest regions of composition research: the purpose of writing, the writer's audience, and the communication process by means of which writers achieve their desired effect on their desired audience. Current research conducted within this approach can be summarized by discussing these three elements,

#### *the purpose of writing*

Setting up goals by the writer is the force that drives composing. It is the writer's duty to articulate his goals so that they may guide and organize his writing.

I. L. Kinneavy (1971) and James Britton (1975) have demonstrated that all kinds of discourse are purposeful. The following table summarizes their findings in this respect.

	Kinds of discourse		Their goals
	Britton	Kinneavy	
transactional		reference /scientific, exploratory/	to designate and reproduce reality
		persuasive	to induce some practical choice or to prompt an action on the part of the audience
expressive		expressive	to articulate the writer's personality or point of view
poetic		literary	to create a language structure worthy of appreciation in its own right

To sum up, all kinds of discourse are purposeful. Acknowledging this will help writers organize their writing around their goals, which is one of the most powerful writing strategies.

#### *the audience*

All kinds of discourse are directed to some audience; in expressive discourse the writer is the audience.

An essential amount of research conducted in the past fifteen years to define the role of the reader in the composing process has drawn on the findings of Jean Piaget (1967) and Lev Vygotsky (1962). Piaget understands egocentrism (lack of audience awareness), most characteristic of children, as a cognitive state in which a person fails to perceive the perspectives of others. Piaget's egocentric speech corresponds to Vygotsky's inner speech. Egocentric and inner speech have been found to share three important features:

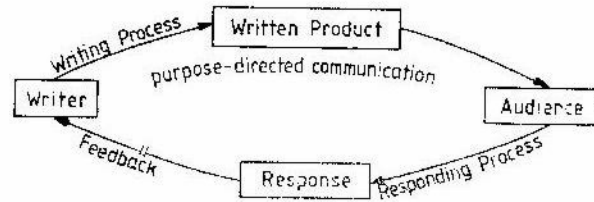
1. they are elliptical — the old information in the form of explicit subjects and referents often disappears,
2. the sense of some words is personal and even idiosyncratic,
3. they lack logical and causal relationships.

The process of acquiring audience awareness entails the ability to take the role of the other. It has been found experimentally that both the role taking ability, and its consequence — audience awareness develop only gradually, e.g., Crowhurst and Piche (1979), Barry M. Kroll (1978). They are, however critical features of any kind of communication, and therefore their development has to be strongly encouraged in writing.

To signal the research on audience in writing I will go back to the writings of three rhetoricians already mentioned in this article. Julia Falk stresses the role of audience in the composing process by giving them the role of testing the adequacy of the writer's hypotheses about communicative writing in the process of acquiring writing skills. Hirsch also emphasizes the position of the read-

er, as it is for his ease and comfort that he imposes on writing his requirements of readability. For Moffett it is the process of removing the audience in time and space from the speaker/writer that marks the transition from one mode of discourse to another.

To summarize the vast literature on the role of the reader in writing, I reproduce below a slightly altered version of Mitchell and Taylor's (1979) diagram representing their audience response model for writing, and I briefly interpret it.



The writer wants to achieve some effect on his audience and he embarks on the composing process to do so. He produces a written product which communicates his message to his audience. By responding to his writing, the audience not only judges but also motivates it. The reader's response may or may not be transmitted to the writer but successful writers continually modify their work with reference to their audience. The writer need not only know his intended audience but also how that audience is likely to respond to his message. This kind of knowledge helps him attain an optimal response to his writing, which is its purpose.

#### *Writing as communication*

Good writing has always been understood as the writer's act of informing the reader about something, usually new for him, either for its own sake (expressive discourse), or to induce in the reader a desired response (transactional discourse), or both (poetic discourse). Such is also the definition of communicative writing. Keith Johnson (1979: 203), a theoretician of the communicative approach to language teaching, defined communicative writing as one in which the writer is able to successfully express intents (purpose) within contents (subject + audience).

However, I do not intend to say that the stress placed on communicative writing in the past decade has been merely calling an old concept by a new name. Drawing on the findings of cognitive psychology in America and the interest of English language teaching theoreticians in communicative language use have among other things resulted in a much closer attention paid on both sides of the Atlantic to the three kinds of awareness necessary for successful

writing. These are: the writer's awareness of the purpose for communicating, his anticipation of the reader's responses to his writing, and finally his anticipation of the difficulties that the reader may have in understanding the message. The first two kinds of awareness have been touched upon before, but not to the extent that they are emphasized now. The stress on the writer's anticipation of the reader's trouble spots, on the other hand, is one of the effects of applying research in cognitive psychology to rhetoric.

I would now wish to mention three authors to signal how these three kinds of awareness have been promoted in composition theory. Widdowson, a theoretician of communicative language teaching, has done it for the first two unceasingly insisting on a clear sense of purpose in the writer's discourse, as well as on a clear sense of his audience. Hirsch and William Page (1974) have promoted the second and third types of awareness.

Hirsch's relative readability not only draws the writer's attention to the reader, but also and primarily accounts for his trouble spots in reading prose. I find that Page's psycholinguistic model of communication between writer and reader lends itself to the promotion of the third kind of awareness:

#### WRITER

knowledge—meaning—deep structure—con-  
ceived surface structure—graphic surface  
structure

#### READER

graphic surface structure—perceived  
surface structure—deep structure—  
meaning—knowledge

Without going into details of the writer's and reader's progression through the stages of text production and reproduction, we can conclude that the graphic surface structure is the only element in the communication process between writer and reader that they both share. All the other elements are likely to be different for them both. It seems logical that if the writer wants to transfer his knowledge relatively intact to the reader, he must make sure that the graphic surface structure reflects his knowledge in such a way that the reader's reproduction of this graphic surface structure will carry only a minimal danger of misinterpretation. To do that, the writer must first anticipate his reader's potential difficulties in inferring the writer's meaning and knowledge embedded in the graphic surface structure and then he must organize it in such a way that it will eliminate the reader's potential pitfalls.

To conclude, writing as communication is an act of purpose-directed bridging of the information gap between the writer and the reader whose response to writing and whose methods of decoding it the writer takes into account in his process of composing. This definition of communicative writing expresses in a nutshell form the whole rhetorical philosophy of composition.

Concluding this section on the four philosophies of composition, I cannot fail to mention that they are not mutually exclusive. In fact, many rhetoricians

have acknowledged the existence of some or all of these types of writing. Kinneavy's and Britton's kinds of discourse correspond roughly to these four philosophies:

Kinds of discourse		Corresponding Philosophies of Composition
Britton	Kinneavy	
transactional	reference	mimetic
	persuasive	rhetorical
expressive	expressive	expressionist
poetic	literary	formalist

Also Linda Flower's (1981) strategies for writing express a philosophy of composition which is basically rhetorical but which contains the mimetic and the expressionist philosophies in its stage of generating ideas and the formalist philosophy in its two steps of editing writing.

#### WRITING AS A PROCESS. GOOD AND POOR WRITERS

The idea of viewing writing as a process composed of discrete stages came to rhetoric from cognitive developmental psychology which emphasized the sequential stages through which mature intelligence emerges. Researchers started to empirically observe the process of writing, which revealed that it is composed of recursive stages and additionally helped to explain the sources of differences between good and poor writers.

Janet Emig (1971), the author of one of the first case studies of the composing process, observed eight student writers over an extended period of time and asked them many detailed questions, thus managing to perceive certain repeating patterns in their writing and to arrive at the description of their process of composing. Emig's case study technique turned out to be a very effective method of research; more than a dozen duplications and replications of her case study were carried out in America in the 1970's. Case studies revealed that the composing process of all writers — good, average, and poor — is a process encompassing three major subparts which are not ordered sequentially but occur recursively. What distinguishes skilled from unskilled writers is that they behave differently during these stages. Of the linguists researching the writing process of good writers I would like to mention Charles Stallard (1974) and Sharon Pianko (1979a, 1979b), and of those researching the composing strategies of poor writers Mina Shaughnessy (1977) and Sandra Perl (1979) need to be mentioned.

Below I summarize the case study research, which examined mostly the writing of high school students and college freshmen. This is done by describing the three stages of the writing process and the differences between good and poor writers within them.

*Pre-writing* refers to everything that precedes writing: conscious thinking, planning, associating thoughts and language.

- *good writers* spend more time pre-writing than poor writers. They think more about purpose at this stage. This includes the effect that they want to have on the reader, and the meaning they want to express.
- *poor writers* spend less time pre-writing. They often rephrase the topic so that it connects with their experience, they turn the complexity of the topic into a dichotomy, and initiate a string of associations to a word in the topic.

*Writing* refers to the writer at work putting thoughts on paper. It is a complex psychological process involving finding a tone, establishing attitudes toward the topic and audience, developing the topic, scanning the material to determine the next steps and to make revisions. At this stage the first draft is completed.

- *good writers* spend more time writing than poor writers. They pause and rescan more often. They pause to plan what to write next. They make more revisions during writing.
- *poor writers* spend less time writing. They pause less often usually glancing around in the hope that something else to say will suddenly appear to them. They proceed in a linear order.

*Re-writing/Revising* refers to the developing of writing to make it meaningful and communicative. It consists of rereading the first draft followed by editing carried out to communicate to an audience what the writer has found that he had written. At this stage large and small scale revising are distinguished. Large scale revising is editing for the treatment of topic and audience, whereas small scale revising is editing for the treatment of lexicon and syntax. Re-writing is the most recursive stage of composing.

- *good writers* revise more. They revise on the word, sentence, and paragraph level. They in general reflect more in their writing (on both the large and small scale) and are more aware of the evolution of a piece of writing.
- *poor writers* revise less. They tend to revise more for lexicon and syntax than for organization, coherence, and audience. They take the reader's understanding for granted. Their editing occurs prematurely, which often results in hunting for grammatical errors. Poor writers are generally non-revisers, or at most ineffective small scale revisers.

Questioning revealed that better writers did more writing in school, saw more writing being done by family and peers, and more often engaged in self-initiated writing.

Linda Flower (1979), who has researched the prose of efficient and non-efficient writers, concluded that the differences between their prose result mainly from their different behaviour at the stage of revising. Poor writers in general express their thoughts and leave them unprocessed, whereas good writers express their thoughts and transform them for the needs of their readers. The writer-based prose of poor writers expresses their thinking about the subject for themselves, reflects the survey-like path of their discovery process about the subject, contains words saturated with private meaning, and its chaotic organization reflects the writer's shifting focus of attention. In contrast, the reader-based prose of good writers is a deliberate attempt to communicate meaning to their readers. It creates a shared language and context between writer and reader. It offers the reader hierarchically structured concepts rather than a replay of the writer's discovery process. Good writing, then, is a transformation of the writer-based prose into a reader-based prose which good writers never fail to make, while poor writers do.

Cognitive psychology provides an explanation for these differences. Unskilled writers sign off before their writer-based prose is adapted for the reader because they still remain at some point along the continuum between egocentricity and audience awareness. The occurrence of personal words in their prose and its chaotic organization stem from their dependence on inner speech which, as cognitive psychology has revealed, is idiosyncratic and elliptical in nature and lacks logical and causal relations.

This reliance of unskilled writers on the sequential and nonhierarchical structure of writer-based prose may also be explained by the findings of research of neurology. According to Robert Ortstein (1972: 51-53), the left hemisphere of the human brain, where language activities reside, is predominantly sequential and analytic in its mode of operation; while the right hemisphere is more holistic and simultaneous in its operation. We can speculate from this that the activation of the left hemisphere is responsible for a sequential kind of writing, and the activation of the right hemisphere is most probably responsible for a simultaneous surveying of data and seeing their underlying hierarchical structure. If this is true, then poor writers, as all language users, easily activate the operation of the left hemisphere; but, unlike good writers, experience difficulties activating the operation of the right side of the brain.

Summing up, writing is now viewed as a highly individual, complex psychological process consisting of recursive stages which engage the linguistic, stylistic and rhetorical choices of different writers differently, depending on their cognitive development. By raising the students' level of consciousness of the intricacy of the writing process we may help them become more involved in its phases, which should lead to better writing.

## FACTORS DETERMINING THE WRITER

This section signals three subtrends in current research on composing whose aims are to explore the factors that determine the writer in the process of composing. These factors are: the writer's cognitive development, its correlant — the writer's age (the period between childhood and adulthood), and his attitudes toward writing.

*Cognitive Development*

Both Lew Vygotsky (1962) and Jean Piaget (1967) have explored and identified the stages of cognitive development through which intellectual maturity emerges. Predictably, as these stages characterize the potential development of every human being, they correspond to one another. The following table summarizes the findings of Vygotsky and Piaget:

Vygotsky	Piaget
1. The synergetic stage, in which words denote to the child a vague conglomerate of individual objects	1. The sensori-motor stage 2. The pre-operational stage
2. The stage of thinking in complexes, in which individual objects are united in the child's mind not only by subjective impressions but also by bonds actually existing between these objects	3. The stage of concrete operation, in which the child's thought is closely linked to the concrete data
Representational hypothetical thought still eludes the child.	
3. The stage of concept formation characterized by the ability to single out elements and to view them apart from the totality of the concrete experience in which they are embedded	4. The stage of formal operations, characterized by the ability to abstract, synthesize and form coherent, logical relationships.
The ability to form and define concepts develops gradually in the adolescent	
As the child moves through the stages of cognitive development he outgrows his initial egocentrism.	

As the writer progresses through the stages of his cognitive development, acquiring his audience awareness he gradually manages to handle descriptive, narrative, expository, and finally argumentative writing, or in Moffett's terms: recording, reporting, generalizing and theorizing<sup>3</sup>. It follows, that poor writers, who stop short of transforming their writing from writer-based to reader-based

<sup>3</sup> The stages of cognitive development presented here seem to provide a satisfactory rationale for such a sequencing of writing assignments in elementary and secondary schools, and for poor writers at the college level.

prose, are below the stage of concept formation in Vygotsky's taxonomy, or the corresponding stage of formal operations in Piaget's taxonomy. We can gain certainty that this is so if their writing remains writer-based despite instruction. This is when we should help them to develop cognitively if we want them to improve their writing.

#### *Age*

Until cognitive maturity is reached, syntactic complexity correlates with the writer's age. The best statistical measure of syntactic complexity is the minimal terminable unit (T-unit), developed by Kellogg Hunt (1965), which is one main clause plus all subordinate clauses attached to that main clause. The mean length of the T-unit has been found to correlate closely with the writer's age, as its length increases as the writer matures<sup>4</sup>.

#### *Attitudes toward Writing*

It has been found that students' attitudes influence their writing. They are measurable by means of writing apprehension, a method suggested by Daly and Miller (1975). Students low in apprehension are satisfied in coursework requiring writing, and they engage in out-of-class writing projects. High apprehensives, on the other hand, fear evaluation of their writing, avoid writing situations, and moreover display poor writing abilities. This leads to a vicious circle, since they tend to select academic majors which require less writing, so they have few chances to ever improve their writing.

To remedy this situation we should act cautiously, as compulsory writing has been found to increase apprehension, e.g., Powers, Cook, Meyer (1979). First, we need to identify high apprehensives, which can be done by assessing students' attitudes toward writing by means of questionnaires — e.g., Barry M. Kroll (1979). Then we should strive to change their negative attitudes by a sensitive integration of acknowledging their successes in writing and dealing with only a limited number of errors at a time.

Concluding, students who have not reached full cognitive maturity should be provided with writing instruction which is suited to their stage of cognitive development and should be at the same time helped to develop cognitively. As pertains to students who disdain writing, we need to motivate them to

<sup>4</sup> Mode of discourse and audience have also been found to affect the syntactical complexity of writing — Crowhurst and Piche (1979). Moving from description/narration to exposition and then to argumentation correlates with an increase of average length of the T-unit. Writing for more distant audiences (older and higher in status) also results in an increase of mean T-unit length, of course for those writers only who have acquired audience awareness.

write by praising their writing strengths whenever possible, pointing at the same time to their errors one by one thus showing them that to overcome their weaknesses is within their capabilities.

#### EVALUATION AS FORMATIVE FEEDBACK

Experimental studies have revealed that teacher evaluation by itself does not result in better writing. Instruction, on the other hand, when aimed to help students generate and organize ideas, has been found to improve writing, e.g. Betty Bamberg (1978). It follows that if evaluation is to contribute to the improvement of students' writing, it has to contain elements of instruction. In other words, the emphasis in evaluation has to be shifted from grading to providing formative response to students' writing. Treating evaluation as a response to writing has three significant advantages: it motivates students to write, reinforces their sense of audience, and integrates all instructional guidelines.

Thus, evaluation has been redefined as student feedback. However, evaluating students' papers, we should not merely inform them what mistakes they have made and what emotions their writing has generated in us as readers, but we should also offer them information about what they still have to master and how they can go about it. Evaluation, then, should be formative.

Furthermore, in order to be valid, evaluation needs to reflect teaching priorities which in turn need to reflect the priorities of good writing. There is general consensus among researchers that rhetorical and intellectual strategies ought to be valued higher than syntactical strategies, since the problems with the first two harm papers the most. Charles Cooper (1975:35—38) proposed a sequence of three types of strategies ordered according to their diminishing power to generate good writing. Students' inadequacies in carrying out these strategies should be pointed out by the teacher together with ways of overcoming them.

*Rhetorical strategies* include the writer's audience (who is the reader? is the writing appropriate for him?), voice (is it appropriate for this audience? is it consistent?), and topic (how is it developed? is the writing coherent? does it contain any ambiguities?). Rhetorical structure should also be placed here.

*Intellectual strategies* include the focus of the composition (the subject of main clauses) and the writer's elaboration of this focus. By examining the writer's use of context, contrast, classification, logical sequence, change, and qualification, we can determine how he has elaborated on his focus and if he has stayed with the topic without wandering.



be encouraged to edit their semi-final drafts for syntax and lexicon (small scale revising, third draft).

Student writers should be taught composing through exercises that stimulate their cognitive development. Going through the sequence: recording-reporting-generalizing-theorizing is advised.

Evaluation ought to be treated as a final link in the chain of composition instruction, providing students with formative feedback, i.e. pointing to a limited number of errors selected according to the priorities of writing, giving students strategies for overcoming these errors, and finally acknowledging the writer's strengths.

Almost all the research signalled in this article has been carried out with native English composition students in mind. Research on second and foreign language advanced composition is practically non-existent. However, the advanced second or foreign language student, who is ready to express his own thoughts, opinions or ideas in the target language, is similar to the regular English composition student. Therefore, the implications of current research on composing are applicable to advanced foreign and second language composition instruction.

Finally, a word about the influence of teaching grammar on the growth of writing abilities. I have purposefully omitted this trend in current research because the findings in this respect are least conclusive. What seems certain is only that sentence combining exercises do improve syntactical complexity of student prose. Apart from that nothing is certain. Conclusions that overt grammar instruction does not result in the growth of writing skills have been recently questioned or rejected by some researchers, e.g., Thomas Newkirk (1979). Additionally, to my knowledge, no experiments have been conducted to test the effects of teaching grammar in second or foreign language advanced composition where the necessity of grammar instruction appears to be more indispensable than in the case of native student writers.

I hope that my article has brought the reader a little closer to the complex issues of composing. Even if he has not accepted all of my conclusions, by reviewing with me some of the main trends of current research, he has had a chance to rethink his own views on writing and to see how many factors condition it. If this has been so, my general aim in writing this article has been fulfilled.

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