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din 2002



**Alecu Russo Bălți State University**  
**Faculty of Philology**  
**English and German Philology Department**

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## DEVELOPING STUDENTS' WRITING STRATEGY



**Olha SUSHKEVYCH, PhD**

Associate professor

Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical

University

[olha.sushkevych@gmail.com](mailto:olha.sushkevych@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** The article runs about principles to address teaching and learning writing from the perspective of a strategic approach. The paper presents the peculiarities of a writing skill as a complex cognitive process as well as requirements to such a skill provided by “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages”. We focus on the components of a writing skill from language use to pragmatic efficiency. We also analyze the classroom-based problems and issues connected with writing obtained due to the conducted Action Research in Ukrainian secondary, high schools, and home university. The results of the research and intervention allowed developing strategies to approach writing from the perspectives of teaching and learning which should result in a personal writing strategy. In this paper, we provide overall strategies and tactics for teaching writing (psychological, cognitive and methodological), activities to facilitate learning writing strategies.

**Key words:** writing strategy, language proficiency, pragmatics, learning writing, teaching writing.

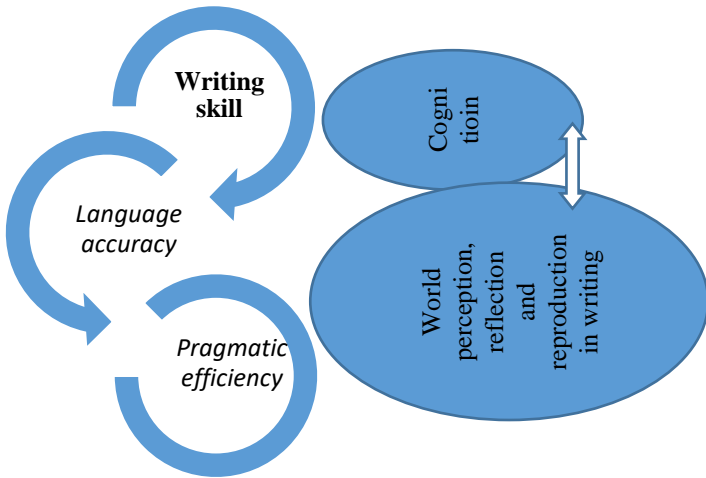
Writing is a complex cognitive and reflective process, which characterizes a personality in various dimensions: the level of intelligence, psychological profile, social standing etc. Being a complex skill it requires and demands mastering step by step like shaping a diamond, from the very first time a person takes a pen in his/her hand to the moments of developing sophisticated texts. Thus, we can state that learning writing can become a life-long process with no limits to perfection. Clearly enough, the complexity of writing skill should be addressed in a strategic way to be successful.

To understand how to approach developing writing skills, let us focus on the notion itself. In this paper we follow the Melse's (1990)

definition for this term: “Writing skills refer to the skills of producing a written, cohesive, and well-rounded text in which formulations can be chosen freely” (Melse: 9). Obviously, being good at writing presupposes high level of language use abilities, developed cognitive processes, understanding the writing process, genre peculiarities, medium, potential reader, topic and its focus, socio-cultural context and the purpose of writing itself etc. Written language is perhaps the most difficult of all skills to acquire because its development involves the effective coordination of many different cognitive, linguistic and psychomotivating processes (Mauroof).

Overall, such a skill can be represented schematically.

Scheme 1 *Nature of writing skill*



Moreover, nowadays employers highlight that excellent speaking and writing skills of their employees are extremely necessary for reaching professional goals and maintaining adequate communication in the team and with clients (SLO: 5). It means that good writing skills are beneficial for all stakeholders: they predetermine personal professional growth, company growth, and teacher’s growth, more widely school’s growth.

Consequently, the objective of our paper is to analyze and present the strategy, which is targeted at developing writing skills in a systemic and consistent way.

To find the strategic approach to developing writing skill we should cast light upon the requirement for such a skill. Accordingly, “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages” establishes what a writer can do passing the stages from Basic to Proficient User meaning from Lower level (A1) of language command to Higher (C2). We provide some examples of requirements for several levels of language acquisition:

**A2:** I can write down short, simple notes and messages. I can write a very simple, personal letter, for example to thank someone for something.

**B1:** I can write a simple, cohesive text about topics that are familiar or of personal importance to me. I can write personal letters in which I describe my experiences and impressions.

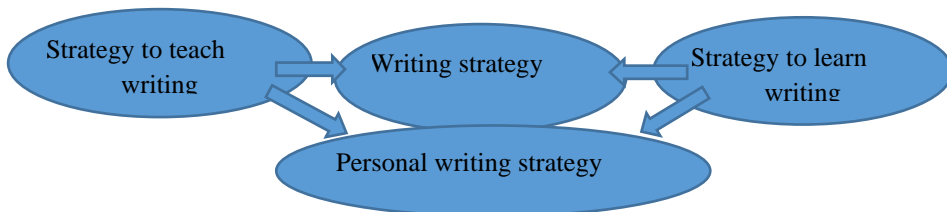
**B2:** I can write a clear, detailed text about a wide range of topics that are of interest to me. I can write an essay or report, pass on information, and give reasons to support the pros or cons of a specific point of view. I can write letters in which I indicate the personal interest of events and experiences (SLO: 9).

Correspondently, the learner starts mastering writing skills from orthography, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax proceeding to proper contextual stylistic use of his / her linguistic arsenal with the reference to paper cohesion and coherence, genre peculiarities and structure, focus on the topic, analysis of resources, avoiding plagiarism and any more. Thus, adequate writing skills consist of many components, which need to be practiced step by step. It demands to approach it with a relevant strategy.

By the term “**strategy**” we usually mean the way we plan to do something, more specifically according to “*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*” it is “a planned series of actions for achieving something” (LDCOD: 1640). Correspondently, by a **writing strategy** we understand taking planned actions to produce desired piece of writing at a definite level of language proficiency. It should be noted that a writing strategy will consist of small steps (**tactics**). Moreover, we consider a writing strategy from the perspectives of *teaching writing*, *learning writing* and as *an individual manner of writing*.



## Scheme 2 Writing strategy: dimensions



To understand how to build a proper writing strategy with a variety of tactics, we should consider what really happens in the English classroom from Level A 1 to C 2. According to the results of the Action Research carried out at my home university and at 10 town and rural secondary schools teaching and learning writing is done in the following way at the Ukrainian school:

- in mixed groups with the students of different level of language proficiency;
- students do not really understand the principles of writing;
- teaching writing is not systemic, mostly it is given as a homework assignment. It is rarely practiced in the classroom;
- students are oriented on receiving good marks rather than good knowledge and skills;
- students are afraid of the teacher's and other students' criticism and making mistakes;
- interference of the mother tongue: students are oriented on native language orthography; writing in a "beautiful" way rather than producing well-structured and -thought pieces;
- students do not know how to approach the topic for writing, they do not pay attention to the reader and pragmatic goals of the paper;
- good writing is usually reduced to proper grammar and vocabulary use;
- students consider writing as a boring, uninteresting vague task.

Correspondently, understanding the problematic issues made it possible to reconsider the approach to teaching and learning writing and suggest some changes during the intervention. Thus, we have approached **the strategy for teaching writing**, which consists of psychological and methodological tactics.

### **Psychological tactics:**

- \*Taking into account student's age and individual peculiarities;
- \*Raising students' adequate self-esteem;
- \*Understanding that making mistakes is a natural way of learning-writing;
- \*Getting a good mark is not a real objective of writing;
- \*Creating positive encouraging and stimulating atmosphere in the classroom.

### **Cognitive tactics:**

- \*Suggesting such topics for writing with which students are familiar;
- \*Introducing writing activities which raise students' interest for searching and learning more;
- \* Focusing on media and genres which are potentially useful in job, career and personal life of students.

### **Methodological tactics:**

- \*Teaching writing should be of a systemic character and up to the
  - \*Gradually forming writing skills from language accuracy to pragmatic programme requirements; efficiency;
  - \* Referring to gaming tasks and collaborative learning;
  - \*Balancing time management: spending enough time in the classroom on making writing activity clear for the students;
  - \*Correcting mistakes should be done tactfully, individually (sometimes with the help of a peer review and self-check), highlighting positive aspects of a student's work;
  - \*Introducing writing activities in relevant cultural and situational context;
  - \*Developing students' strategic understanding of the writing process from pre-writing, writing, editing, revising to publishing every time you practice writing various genres;
  - \*Focusing on the objective of writing, topic and your potential reader;
  - \*Understanding the structural peculiarities of a paper genre;
  - \* Teaching how to analyze relevant resources and avoid plagiarism;
  - \*Employing visual aids apps for making writing enjoyable and interesting for the students;
- Making a final piece visible to a large audience – “publishing” them in class, at school, online etc.

Summarizing this block we admit that “...students need clarity: understanding the tasks for writing, the way, how to deal with such assignments, and realize the results of personal efforts” [Turkish].

While learning writing students can also improve their own writing strategy with the teacher’s example and tips. We suggest the following activities developed by the author for a book “*Writing for success*” (in press) which can guide your students to a proper approach to writing. You can use the suggested tactics on a poster in your classroom.

### Activity 1.

#### What is a writing strategy? Do I need it?

*By the term “strategy” we usually mean the way we plan to do something, e.g. the way you or your mom cooks soup is different from the way your neighbour does it. So, the dishes taste differently as well. Every cook believes that his/her soup is splendid because it accumulates the experience of several generations and has some secret ingredient, which makes it superb. Correspondently, by a writing strategy we understand the best approach to write some paper. Your writing strategy will consist of small steps (tactics). What are YOUR steps to write well?*

### Activity 2.

*Consider the following tactics of the writing strategy. Explain them in your own words. Add 3 more tactics of your own. Then tick those, which you consider necessary for your own writing strategy.*

My writing tactic 1

My writing tactic 2

My writing tactic 3

- Read a lot. “Pick up” useful expressions from authentic English papers.
- Plan your writing carefully.
- Consider whether you have enough informational resources to write about the subject.
- Think about you potential reader. Communicate with him/her to understand the priorities.
- Define the focal point of view.

- Consult native speakers. Ask them to read your paper.
- Pay attention to the paper structure of the genre.
- Think about the way to support your point of view.
- Be ready to improve your paper. Write and rewrite again.
- Turn to your colleagues or group mates for help.
- Follow the recommendations of English writing manuals.
- Arrange your ideas logically
- Make your work visible, think about the way to publish it for your audience.
- Think about employing illustrations, special font and colour of your text.
- Avoid plagiarism.

Summarizing the points of the research presented in the paper, we should admit that being cognitive and demanding process, writing requires special approach to make the process productive and enjoyable for students. Teachers and learners need to cooperate and ameliorate while teaching and learning writing from the very beginning of their academic life to ensure reasonable development of an individual manner of writing which meets job market demands, personal and professional goals. That is the reason why writing should be addressed strategically when students not only understand the task and requirements but also the situational and cultural context, structure of a paper, cognitive, process and pragmatic aspects of writing.

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