# An Hybrid Approach to Second Language Writing

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This study was instigated by the need to develop more efficient ways to teach writing to Korean university EFL students. Product versus process writing has long been debated in second language literature as teachers seek to decide which approach is better for language learners without offering significant satisfactory solutions being found. In an attempt to update the writing course for Korean EFL students at university level which had a product-based syllabus, we decided to try adding process writing techniques into the curriculum to see if this approach helped students with their academic writing skills. As we considered these changes, it was important to consider how process writing could be incorporated into the product-based course, and more importantly, how it could be adapted to suit both the wants and needs of the students. Thus, we kept some lessons regarding the mechanics of writing which students found useful, but also introduced the main elements of the process approach which are essential to good writing. The result was a writing course which incorporated the ideal aspects of both approaches. Product gives students their desired focus on accuracy while process provides opportunities to improve their fluency. This paper encourages teachers of writing to ask themselves how they can blend product and process techniques in order to create interesting and effective lessons and tasks for their students strategically.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Nunan (1999, p. 271) notes that "producing a coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing is probably the most difficult thing there is to do in a language" (p. 271). It is a skill many native speakers unable to completely master in their own language while as a second language learner, comprehensive writing is even more formidable. For many Korean university EFL students, writing is fraught with the difficulty of knowing what they want to say, but being bewildered by the immense task of articulating it. Therefore, teachers must go into the language classroom armed with a variety of techniques that can help students how to improve their writing as well as communicate their thoughts clearly. One of the most significant current discussions in second language writing education is which approach to writing is the most effective for language learners. In the past, the product-based approach to writing was the most popular approach since it offers a range of model texts for students to imitate or adapt (Jong, 2013). However, after the introduction of process writing approaches into classrooms later, there has been some debate about which approach is better. The product approach works well with L2 students who desire a strong focus on grammar and accuracy, but the structure means that teachers focus heavily on the end result (Brown, 2001); on the other hand, process approaches focus on writing as a whole - from planning to presentation - although this means stressing the importance of learners' ideas and creativity over correct grammar and language usage (Raimes, 1985). The research to date has tended to focus on one approach versus the other rather than considering how the two approaches can actually complement each other. The purpose of this paper was to show how product and process writing techniques could be integrated to create an effective academic writing course while also offering students better approaches to writing. This paper begins by outlining the literature regarding product and process approaches and will then go on to outline the various techniques we have used in our own writing course in a Korean university; in doing so we consider the best aspects of the product and process approaches to be incorporated into the curriculum, and how appropriate these actually will be for the students themselves.

# II. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the ability to communicate in English since the world has become one community, not to mention that the widespread use of the Internet (Jong, 2013). Nowadays, the ability to write in

English has become a valuable educational and social asset. This is mainly because writing is primarily "a means of communication" (Raimes, 1985, p. 83). Horwitz (2008) argues that writing is an important ability in itself, and that it becomes even more crucial when writing in the second language is required for professional or academic advancement. However effective writing can be challenging (Jeon, 2010) since it "requires a number of things: a high degree of development in the organization of ideas and information; a high degree of accuracy so there is no ambiguity of meaning; the use of complex grammatical devices for focus and emphasis; and a careful choice of vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and sentence structures to create a style which is appropriate to the subject matter and the eventual readers" (Hedge, 1998, p. 5).

Theories about how writing should be taught in the second language classroom have gone through a change since the 1970s. The three current methods which dominate are product, process, and genre approaches. The procedures used within different theories are quite varied, reflecting the different ideas of language learning behind them. Several researchers offer two major types of writing approach in which second language students and teachers are interested (Hyland, 2002, 2004; Jordan, 1997; Nunan, 1991, 1999; Raimes, 2002). The first approach is writing for display where the student is expected to use their English writing skills to prove to the reader that they know or understand something, such as in an examination. The second one is writing for learning which includes the processes of planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Both types of writing approaches are important, although this paper explores the techniques for writing for learning more thoroughly, as it is the skill our Korean university students seem most concerned with when surveyed at the beginning of the course for their preferences.

## 1. The Product Approach

The product approach is the traditional approach to writing in a foreign language. Nunan (1999) summarizes that product-based approaches focus on the end result, which is expected to be a fluent, error-free text and students are mainly "engaged in imitating, copying and transferring models of correct language" (p. 81). The idea was that students learned through imitation, thus the process approach uses model texts, which are presented and analyzed at an early stage in the class. For example, if students are learning how to write an expository paragraph, then the students would read a model text and highlight its specific features of the text, such as structure, transition words, and imperatives. Then the teacher would introduce the controlled practice where students try writing themselves in a highly structured and

regulated way. Writing sentences using pictures of a recipe and words from a language box would be an example of this. The focus is very much on creating perfect sentences, for the belief being, "that sentences are building blocks of discourse" (Nunan, 1999, p. 272). The lesson builds to the final stage where students use the skills, language, and structures they have learned in class to produce the final text which will be presented for the teacher's review. However, one question that needs to be asked, however, is whether the product approach genuinely offers students the ability to develop their own ideas during the period of composition. Jordan (1997, p. 122) argues, "a fully teacher-directed course will require a large direct input of teaching" and teachers tend to impose their own ideas on students by offering a model sentence. Consequently there is little evidence to show that syntactic complexity or grammatical accuracy are either the principal features of writing development or the best measures of good writing (Hyland, 2002).

## 2. The Process Approach

For the process writing teacher, the process is as important as the final product. While the product approach focuses on the production of a perfect final text, the process approach puts the emphasis on the creative stages of writing. A process writing teacher shows students how to generate ideas through brainstorming and discussion, and shows writing as a fluid rather than a rigid process. White and Arndt (1991) identify six non-linear procedures which include generating ideas, evaluating, focusing, drafting, structuring, and reviewing. The relationships between the stages are clearly demonstrated in Figure 1.
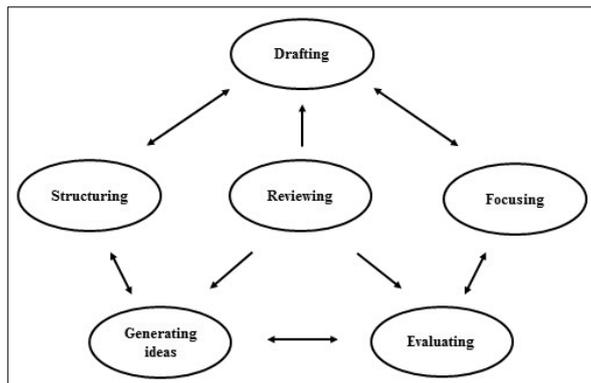


Figure 1
**Process Writing (White & Arndt, 1991, p. 4)**

In many cases, product writing aims to have one draft, while process encourages constant re-writing, reviewing, and editing of the text, which can result in numerous drafts. Like product writing, the process approach can use model texts, but as a model of comparison rather than a model for students to mimic. Furthermore, unlike the product approach which is very individualistic, the process approach is highly collaborative. Students are encouraged to work in partners or small groups throughout the different stages of the writing process. Using the expository paragraph as an example, the process writing teacher encourages students to brainstorm ideas about how to do something. As students consider and plan each step in the process, they are able to notice more clearly what information needs to be added to create a clear sequence. As the teacher monitors they can see and indicate gaps in the sequence where important information is lacking, so students can add it in before starting to write.
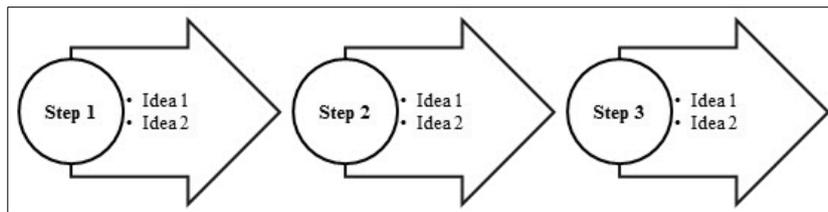


Figure 2
**An Example of a Blank Mind Map Outline**

## 3. The Genre Approach

The genre approach to writing is a relatively new way of teaching ELT writing compared to product and process approaches to writing. Duff (2000) defines genre as "a recurring type or category of text, as defined by structural, thematic and/or functional criteria" (p. xiii) whereas genre can be "a frequently appearing fixed form as a result of recurrent actions which may be dynamic with a set of specific communicative purposes within a particular discourse community" (Jung, 2011, p. 30). While a variety of definitions of the term genre has been suggested by various genre scholars and practitioners, there seems to be a consensus that it is useful to classify genre scholarship into three broad perspectives: North American New Rhetoric (NR), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Australian Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as suggested by Hyon in 1996. Hyland (2002, p. 17) summarizes the different genre scholarships: 1) Genre in the NR is "systems of complex literature activity constructed through typified actions", 2) Genre in the

ESP is "genre comprises a class of communicative events linked by members of a discourse community", p. 3) Genre in the SFL is "genre is a staged, goal-oriented social process which involves the interaction of participants using language in a conventional, step-wise structure".

Hyon (1996) has identified some common goals among different genre schools, for example helping students succeed and empowering students; however, at the same time, she found each genre school had a different emphasis. According to her extensive three years study, the pedagogic approaches which emerge from the three different genre orientations have been theorized to be more or less effective in different social and educational contexts. The intricacies of the three approaches are relative far too broad for the scope of this study. The New Rhetoric school is largely considered unsuitable for the language classroom, as "its contribution to L2 writing instruction has been minimal" (Hyland, 2003, p. 22). It is the ESP and SFL approaches which have had the most influence. SFL focuses on the meaning and function of a text. It regards writing as reflecting the knowledge of language, and the development of writing skills is mostly seen as analysis and imitation of the texts provided by the teacher. Therefore, the role of the teacher is to provide students with model texts and help students understand both the purpose and the context of the piece of writing.

Finally, the ESP approach focuses on both the research and development of materials for a variety of adult students who all have different needs. Because of this, many of the ESP pedagogies which have arisen over the years have originated from teachers and researchers interested in second language learning. Not unlike the process approach, ESP focuses on both purpose and audience, but unlike process, it also closely addresses context, structure, and the genre itself. For example, university students might need to study a variety of essays in order to prepare them for their academic careers in L2 tertiary institutions.

## III. OUTLINE OF CURRENT TECHNIQUES

### 1. English Academic Writing

The non-credit, mixed-level academic writing course at a Korean university used to be a 10-week, twenty-five hour course. At first glance, the course appeared to espouse the theories of the process writing approach since there were classes in the syllabus which were based on pre-planning, reviewing, and editing. However, a closer look at the student handouts for the course showed that these essential parts

of the writing process were given just three classes of the twenty, and the concepts of brainstorming and editing were not enforced or even particularly encouraged for any of the other writing assignments. The reality of the course was that it was predominantly product-based. Previous teachers of the class had followed the guidelines for the courses and lectured for the majority of 75-minute lesson, which did not allow much time for writing. Classes used model texts and substitution tables to analyze and practice different sentence and paragraph types. Fifty percent of the classes were devoted to the 'mechanics of writing' and used exercises to practice such writing procedures as punctuation, sentence fragments, and parallel structures. The other half of the classes was used to analyze models of different kinds of academic texts; paragraphs such as opinion, narrative, and compare-and-contrast were studied in depth. Students might start writing in class, but the bulk of the work would be done individually at home.

The curriculum was cut from 10 weeks to six which meant the loss of eight classes from the curriculum. It was challenging to pick and choose which classes should be kept and which should be cut; essentially half the course was to disappear. This was a change to redefine the course entirely and incorporate some process writing techniques. First we had to decide to what extent the ideas advocated by a variety of different academics and researchers would be suitable for the Korean adult students who sign up for the writing course.

## 2. Techniques Used

Teachers of the previous course had followed a product-based curriculum closely. Pre-planning had been taught as the very first class of the course; this was kept, but the lecture was eliminated and the class instead spent the 75-minute class talking about concepts of audience, purpose, and planning. Practical activities were added, including a variety of texts to demonstrate differences in audience and language and an opportunity for students to create their own mind map. This also added the opportunity for pair work and group work which was an element of class work which was missing from the original curriculum due to the teacher-centric nature of the classes. Hedge (1998) suggested that this kind of collaboration in the classroom can be very useful at all stages of the writing process while Leki (1998) believed that discussion between peers was a powerful way for them to generate ideas and exchange useful information.

Before the changes to the writing curriculum, after the initial introduction to the 'stages of writing' in the first class, the techniques were almost never referred to again during the course, and the handouts rarely left any space for brainstorming.

After taking over the course, the handouts were altered to ensure that every writing assignment had space for planning, specifically for mind mapping. Different types of planning outlines were introduced from the traditional one, so that the mind map shape reflected the type of writing they were doing. For example, a compare-and-contrast mind map might look like the one demonstrated in figure 3. In it the circles overlap to indicate the similarities of their two topics; in the part of the circles which do not connect, students can note the differences. This kind of mind map is good for visual learners particularly, but all students can benefit from seeing the visual relationship between the two subjects as it helps them physically categorize the similarities and differences before starting to write.
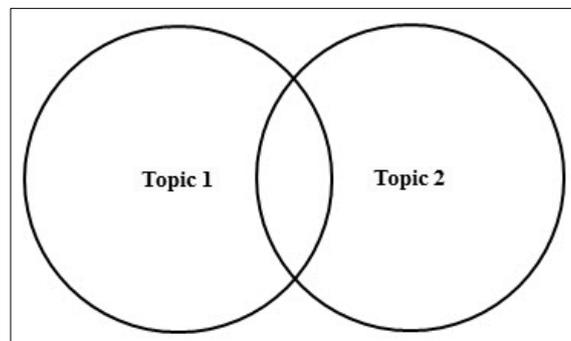


Figure 3
**A Mind Map Outline for a Compare and Contrast Essay**

Practical exercises were a key part of the class. Once a week, students were taught how to use certain language functions; the theory behind this decision was that if the students could understand how to use them at sentence construction level, it would improve the overall quality of their writing. Hedge (2000) notes that an example of a sentence-level exercise which aims at accuracy, points out that such exercises are designed to raise awareness as well as giving practice. Students studied model sentences, which showed examples of how the language, grammar, or punctuation were used, and then completed controlled exercises in class, allowing students to question the teacher and check their own work. As Hedge (2000) points out, "these are aspects of crafting a text, putting together pieces of the English language" (p. 326). Exercises used in class varied from finding errors in sentences and paragraphs, to writing sentences using the key vocabulary, to gap fills, where students chose the best possible word from the substitution box. This style of teaching writing very much reflected the philosophy behind the product-based approach, with sentences being building blocks to creating a perfect piece of

writing.

The second class of the week was much more focused on writing, or more specifically creating fluent texts which used techniques from both product and process approaches. Idea generating and brainstorming techniques as well as consideration of audience and purpose were taught while students were also encouraged to use the techniques they had learned and practiced in the previous class. For example, in the class on compare and contrast paragraphs, students worked together to find similarities and differences on teacher assigned topics while also reviewing the conjunctions and transitions we had learned earlier to make the comparisons. This kind of verbal practice was a way of reminding students about the sentence structure we had already studied before creating the first draft of their paragraphs. After completing the collaborative exercise, students could choose their own topics and start the assignment in class allowing the teacher time to speak to each student individually and give feedback on their plan.

The focus of the course was very much on academic writing as students taking the course usually needed to improve their writing for university or post-graduate courses. Thus, students were encouraged to avoid informal language like phrasal verbs, informal quantifiers, contractions, and abbreviations. Model paragraphs were used to show the linguistic forms within the different styles of paragraphs, whether it was transitions showing time order in a narrative paragraph, or conjunctions used in a cause and effect essay. Students analyzed the text, answered questions, and then prepared to write their own paragraph based on their understanding of the model. However, the models differed by topic from their own assignment to avoid students too closely mimicking the model. Although they were asked to pre-plan their paragraph, the bulk of the lesson incorporated ideologies of both product-based and SFL genre approaches to writing.

After brainstorming, controlled practice, and free-writing came marking. The academic writing teacher was solely responsible for reviewing and editing the students' texts and for providing feedback. The teacher was expected to find and correct every single error within the text, an often daunting task with a large class. In theory, students were supposed to have completed error-free texts and submitted them to teachers, but the reality was quite different. Even if students have mastered the special features of the model text, there were still ever-present errors such as spelling, subject-verb agreement, preposition and article misuse, incorrect word usage, and so on.

## IV. TECHNIQUES CONSIDERED

The revised academic English Writing course's aims have changed to incorporate ideas taken from the process-based approach to teaching writing.

### 1. Pre-planning

Although pre-planning was always taught in the course, it needed to be constantly re-enforced for every piece of writing the students undertook. More than just brainstorming, students needed to constantly consider the important writing questions about why they were writing and for whom. Hedge (2000) introduces four elements that students should address during the pre-writing activities, namely audience, purpose, idea generation, and the organization of the text. Students also needed to be reminded that pre-planning was a step they could come back to; that writing is not a fixed step process, but fluid set of stages they can return to as often as they wish. Hedge (2000) makes the point that "it is essential to communicate the flexible nature of plans, which ideally should change and be adjusted as the writing progresses and generates alternative ideas and structures" (p. 308). Following Hedge's ideas, there is also now an attempt to give students a stronger sense of purpose and audience than before. Instead of writing solely for the teacher, as they were before, students are asked to write pieces that class members will read and review. Also, the fourth element in Hedge's list, organization of text, is incorporated into the course. Selecting and narrowing ideas makes it easier for students to order their points and therefore construct the strongest argument in their writing. Having taught these four elements in the very first lesson in the new curriculum, the techniques learned are then to be used and reinforced at the start of every writing class over the rest of the six-week course.

### 2. Workshops

The structure of the original academic English writing course remains the same, with one exercise-based class per week, and one writing class. A big change to this structure was turning the writing class into a workshop, rather than a class based around lecturing and model paragraph dissection. In the workshop environment, students are removed a little from the pressure of grammar and text structure and are instead allowed to learn instead through the action of writing itself. Badger and White (2000) describe this technique as letting "second language learners develop, rather than consciously learn, writing skills" (p. 154). The teacher is a facilitator,

rather than a lecturer and instructor, who can sit with the students in class and discuss their work as they write, allowing students to ask questions and get feedback as they compose. The workshop also allows students to do the bulk of the writing in class instead of being expected to do it unguided at home. However, Hedge (2000) warns about the danger of such unsupported conditions of learning since "poorer writers struggle alone and the experience confirms them in their perception of themselves as failing writers" (p. 301). In addition, good writers may miss out on the chance to improve through discussion and feedback. This raises the third point about the benefits of workshops: collaboration and the strength of group work.

## 3. Group Work

Pair work and group work can be done at almost every stage of the writing process. Activities can be given to students at the various stages which allow students to work interactively. For example, during pre-planning students can discuss the meaning of the question or work together to create a mind map. Lower level students can collaborate to create a piece of writing at the drafting stage. Students can check each other's work and give constructive feedback. Horwitz (2008) suggests that "group interaction and negotiation helps learners determine what they want to say and to phrase their ideas more comprehensibly" (p. 147). To this end, many pair and group activities in their process writing book are included "so that the writing class becomes, in a very genuine sense, a communicative experience in which much more than skill in writing is practiced and developed (White & Arndt, 1991, p. 5). Hedge (2000) also advocates group work, suggesting both the teacher and the other students can be readers, who question, prompt, support, and provide ideas, which in turn help the writer to become more clear, organized, and accessible. After all, six weeks in the writing classroom is a relatively short time and at the end of the course students will no longer have the support of the teacher, and in most cases, henceforth will be writing alone.

## 4. Feedback

There can be three ways a teacher can choose to check students' work: teacher editing, peer editing, and self-editing. The introduction of self-editing was a significant change in the course. A major flaw with product writing is the reliance on the writing teacher to do all of the editing, reviewing, and feedback. While it may give students some understanding of their major problems (Yang, 2011), it does

not really prepare them for writing outside of the L2 classroom, where there is usually no editor to polish their work up to publishable quality. As Ferris (1998) notes in her article about classroom editing, since the teacher cannot always be there for students, it is essential that students learn how to edit their own work at some point.

For these reasons, self-editing has been added to course. The one class per week which was used for the 'mechanics of writing' has been altered slightly to become more focused on self-editing. Each week a problem area is targeted, which since there are only six classes in the course, needed to be focused on errors that could be considered universal to Korean university students. This was not a move away from product techniques, but an attempt to incorporate the grammatical accuracy of the product approach into the more process-based course. Showing students how to look for these errors in their completed work is important for, as Ferris (1998) points out, a large number of errors in a piece of writing both distracts and frustrates the reader. Once the students have spent a lesson on exercises and practicing proof-reading, the point is added to an ever-growing checklist which they can use for editing their own work. The hope being that by the end of the course, students will not only have learnt a variety of skills for how to proof-read their own work, but how to specifically target certain recurring problems.

The idea of a checklist for reviewing and editing can be used not only for self-editing, but for teacher correction and peer editing. Peer editing has several benefits to the students. First, knowing that other students will be reading and checking their texts gives them a sense of audience for, as Tribble (1996) points out, knowing that their peers will be reading and evaluating their work provides them with a more motivating context in which to write. Secondly, Dheram (1995) found in her case study on teaching writing that peer feedback appeared to reduce students' dependency on the teacher, which is one of the goals of the writing course. Checklists can also make marking easier for the teacher by reducing the pressure to find every single error within the text. Even with peer-editing and self-editing introduced into the class, the teacher is still responsible for the final review, at least initially. Ferris (1998) writes that she gradually decreases the amount of editing feedback she provides, slowly turning the editing task over to peer editors, and finally to the writers themselves. The checklist, which can be applied by both teachers and students, can target specific areas of error. Checklists could incorporate both editing, which looks at the accuracy of the writing (grammatical, lexical, and mechanical errors), and reviewing, which focuses on the fluency of the text. Hedge (2000) suggests that 'appropriacy', 'range' and 'complexity' are three categories that could be included, while Dheram (1995)

proposes checklists which are divided into form-focused and text-focused. Another style, proposed by Seow (2002), is a checklist written as a list of questions for the reader to consider. Whichever method is chosen for assessment, it is essential to think about which criteria are most suitable for the students. Because this writing course is heavily academic, the criteria currently being attempted is a mix of the editing and reviewing skills studied in class. Once taught a writing skill, students must try to use it consistently throughout the rest of their writing. This kind of feedback also means that not every single error within the text has to be found, changed, and noted. Furthermore, checklists encourage students to analyze their returned assignments, which in turn will hopefully avoid the situation where "students cast a mere cursory glance at all the teacher's hard work and file it in the circular file" (Raimes, 2002, p. 313). It is a debatable point whether the writing students from previous classes spent any time assessing the changes made to their writing assignments.

## V. SUITABILITY FOR THE STUDENTS

The majority of changes to the course are based upon converting a product-based course into a more process-based one. Pre-planning, workshops, group work, and student-centric reviewing are all important techniques of process writing. However, there are still some issues which have to be considered as these changes are introduced. The big question is how suitable are these new techniques for academic English writing students? Close observation of the class and individual students helped answer this.

First, pre-planning is a technique which the students seem unwilling to do. Despite explaining the value of brainstorming, selecting, and narrowing, the pre-planning which is submitted with the finished writing is often under-utilized and contains very little of the information which actually appears in the written assignment. If students do not really believe in the value of mind mapping, they will do it only because the teacher requests it. The lack of success of this technique could be an example of an observation by Richards and Lockhart (1996) when they note that "differences between learners' and teachers' beliefs can lead to students undervaluing an activity assigned by the teacher" (p. 54). In other words, although pre-planning is now a major part of the curriculum, if students do not really value it, it may never be used once they leave the classroom.

Secondly, although group work makes the class more communicative, some students who take the course do so to avoid conversation classes. Students are often

unwilling to work together, and pair work assignments can devolve into silent individual work, where two students share the paper, but not the workload. Constant vigilance and encouragement by the teacher is needed. Richards and Lockhart (1996) note the truism that some people like working with other people, while others just prefer to work independently. Thus, although there is real value in group work, it will not always be a technique which all the students embrace wholeheartedly. A variety of group-based and individual activities may help keep the balance in the classroom.

The writing workshop is the change with the highest possibility for improvement in students' writing. Writing in class rather than at home allows students the opportunity to ask questions and for clarification as they plan and write which they previously could not do. More importantly, it ensures that students are doing the work since they are actually writing during class time. In previous courses, the number of students who actually handed in homework assignments was surprisingly low for a course they had voluntarily registered for. However, one downside to workshops is that weaker students in the class tend to take much longer to finish their writing than stronger students, which can make it difficult to coordinate peer-editing.

Finally, students have their own opinions about how their work should be assessed. As Richards and Lockhart (1996) argue, "students have specific expectations of how teachers teach and what their roles and responsibilities are" (p. 54). They bring to the classroom their own ideas about how languages should be learned and what exactly the teacher should be doing and not doing. Their expectations may be with a non-credit writing course may be that the teacher does all the work of marking by telling them what is wrong, why, and how to change it. Ferris (1995) observes that one of the most important steps in teaching students to become their own editors "is to convince them of the necessity of doing so" (p. 329). How realistic this goal is for the academic English writing course has yet to be seen.

More changes and adaptations in the course will need to be undertaken before the perfect balance between product and process writing approaches is found. Weaker classes who wish for a stronger focus on grammar and vocabulary may need more modeling and sentence level practice while stronger classes may thrive more on collaborative writing and longer writing assignments. For now though, the move away from teacher lectures and into a more student-centered classroom as well as introducing essential process writing techniques into the lessons is the right step for these L2 writing students. Further studies which take the variables of level into account will be useful for teachers of carefully leveled writing classes.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This paper has argued that incorporating techniques from product and process approaches is the best approach to take for second language writing instruction. This method is advocated several times in the literature on second language writing. Hedge (2000) claims that "it seems to be the sensible way forward for the teacher to use the best of product and process approaches in order to develop those aspects of writing most needed by the students" (p. 329). Raimes (1983) also points out that there is a shortcoming in the debate about which approach is better. Badger and White (2000), though advocating a process-genre approach, claim that the most effective methodology is to take an approach and adapt it. These findings suggest that "each teacher needs to develop a methodology which integrates the specific needs of his or her students" (Hedge, 2000, p. 330). In reality, the two main approaches can be seen as complementary rather than polar opposites, and an improved course that implements the best techniques of each will be able to provide a strong framework for the academic English writing students to practice and improve their English writing skills.

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**Examples in English**
**Applicable Levels: College Level**

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