



Genre pedagogy: Language, literacy and L2 writing instruction

Ken Hyland*

*Room 620A, University of London, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way,
London WC1H 0AL, United Kingdom*

Abstract

For teacher educators, genre-based pedagogies offer a valuable resource for assisting both pre- and in-service writing instructors to assist their students to produce effective and relevant texts. Instead of focusing on the process of composition, the content of texts, or the abstract prescriptions of disembodied grammars, genre pedagogies enable teachers to ground their courses in the texts that students will have to write in their target contexts, thereby supporting learners to participate effectively in the world outside the ESL classroom. Genre theory and research thus give teacher educators a more central role in preparing individuals to teach second language writing and to confidently advise them on the development of curriculum materials and activities for writing classes. In this paper, I will briefly introduce the principles of genre-based language instruction and sketch some broad classroom models, looking at ESP and SFL approaches. I then explore what it means to implement genre teaching in more practical terms, setting out some key ways in which teachers can plan, sequence, support, and assess learning.

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Introduction

The last decade or so has seen increasing attention given to the notion of genre and its application in language teaching and learning. This is largely a response to changing views of discourse and of learning to write which incorporate better understandings of how language is structured to achieve social purposes in particular contexts of use. For teacher educators, genre-based pedagogies offer principled ways of assisting both pre- and in-service writing teachers to provide their students with targeted, relevant, and supportive instruction. By enabling teachers to

* Tel.: +44 20 7612 6789; fax: +44 20 7612 6534.

E-mail address: k.hyland@ioe.ac.uk.

ground their courses in the texts that students will need to write in occupational, academic, or social contexts, they help guide learners to participate effectively in the world outside the ESL classroom.

These theoretical advances have been particularly welcomed by teachers as they have emerged in a period of considerable social and demographic change in education in many countries. Not only have we seen the growth of modular and interdisciplinary programmes increase the complexity of writing in the academy, but with expanding numbers of students from traditionally excluded groups entering universities, classrooms are now more culturally, socially, and linguistically diverse places than ever before. These students bring different identities, understandings, and habits of meaning-making to their learning, and teachers cannot assume that students' previous learning experiences will provide them with appropriate writing schemata for their studies. The old certainties of cognitive homogeneity which supported process writing models for so long are no longer sustainable, and there is an urgent need for more theoretically robust, linguistically informed, and research-grounded text descriptions to bridge the gap between home and school writing and prepare learners for their futures.

The identification and analysis of text features have not typically figured in courses preparing teachers for second language writing instruction, and teacher education programs have instead, especially in the US, tended to draw more often on the insights of composition theory, cognitive psychology, or traditional grammars (e.g. Matsuda, 2003). Increasingly, however, we have grown ever more conscious that these dominant pedagogical orthodoxies are unable to address the *language*, as well as the *writing*, needs of our students (Christie, 1990; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). By making explicit what is to be learnt, providing a coherent framework for studying both language and contexts, ensuring that course objectives are derived from students' needs, and creating the resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses, genre approaches provide an effective writing pedagogy.

In this paper, I will briefly introduce the ways that current theory and research on genre feed into L2 writing pedagogy and discuss some of instructional practices which teacher educators might introduce to teachers. I suggest that an approach to L2 writing teacher education informed by genre can encourage teachers to participate in their own professional development by providing them with opportunities to reflect on their own writing experiences, to understand the ways in which patterns of language work to shape meanings, and to develop supportive writing classrooms. The paper begins with a brief definition of genre and its value to writing teachers. It then goes on to outline some principles of genre-based language instruction and sketch some broad classroom models, looking at ESP and SFL approaches. Finally, I explore what it means to implement genre teaching in more practical terms, setting out some key ways in which teachers can plan, sequence, support, and assess learning.

The concept of genre

Genre refers to abstract, socially recognised ways of using language. It is based on the idea that members of a community usually have little difficulty in recognising similarities in the texts they use frequently and are able to draw on their repeated experiences with such texts to read, understand, and perhaps write them relatively easily. This is, in part, because writing is a practice based on expectations: the reader's chances of interpreting the writer's purpose are increased if the writer takes the trouble to anticipate what the reader might be expecting based on previous texts they have read of the same kind.

Hoey (2001) likens readers and writers to dancers following each other's steps, each assembling sense from a text by anticipating what the other is likely to do by making connections to prior texts. While writing, like dancing, allows for creativity and the unexpected, established patterns often form the basis of any variations. We know immediately, for example, whether a text is a recipe, a joke, or a love letter and can respond to it immediately and even construct a similar one if we need to. As teachers, we are able to engage in more specialised genres such as lesson plans, student reports, and feedback sheets, bringing a degree of expertise to the ways we understand or write familiar texts. In more precise terms, we possess a *schema* of prior knowledge which we share with others and can bring to the situations in which we read and write to express ourselves efficiently and effectively.

Classroom applications of genre are an outcome of communicative approaches to language teaching which emerged in the 1970s, continuing a pedagogic tradition of stressing the role language plays in helping learners achieve particular purposes in context (Hyland, 2004). They are also closely related to current conceptions of literacy which show that writing (and reading) varies with context and cannot be distilled down to a set of abstract cognitive or technical abilities (e.g. Street, 1995). There are a wide variety of practices relevant to and appropriate for particular times, places, participants, and purposes, and these practices are not something that we simply pick up and put down, but are integral to our individual identity, social relationships, and group memberships.

Genre pedagogy: a brief justification

The introduction of genre pedagogies is also a response to the still widespread emphasis on a planning-writing-reviewing framework which focuses learners on strategies for writing rather than on the linguistic resources they need to express themselves effectively. The value of this inductive, discovery-based approach has long been questioned (e.g. Feez, 2002; Hasan, 1996) as it fails to make plain what is to be learnt and minimizes the social authority of powerful text forms. Providing students with the “freedom” to write may encourage fluency, but it does not liberate them from the constraints of grammar in constructing social meanings in public contexts. Genre instruction, in contrast, stresses that genres are specific to particular cultures, reminding us that our students may not share this knowledge with us and urging us to go beyond syntactic structures, vocabulary, and composing to incorporate into our teaching the ways language is used in specific contexts. It assists students to exploit the expressive potential of society's discourse structures instead of merely being manipulated by them.

Genre pedagogies promise very real benefits for learners as they pull together language, content, and contexts, while offering teachers a means of presenting students with explicit and systematic explanations of the ways writing works to communicate (e.g. Christie & Martin, 1997). To summarise the main advantages, we can say that genre pedagogy is (Hyland, 2004, pp. 10–16):

Explicit	Makes clear what is to be learnt to facilitate the acquisition of writing skills
Systematic	Provides a coherent framework for focusing on both language and contexts
Needs-based	Ensures that course objectives and content are derived from students' needs
Supportive	Gives teachers a central role in scaffolding students' learning and creativity
Empowering	Provides access to the patterns and possibilities of variation in valued texts
Critical	Provides the resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses
Consciousness-raising	Increases teachers' awareness of texts to confidently advise students on writing

I am not claiming here that all of these characteristics are unique to genre pedagogy; they obviously are not, but I can think of no other approach to writing instruction which embodies them all. Perhaps the most important feature is that genre-based writing instruction offers students an explicit understanding of how target texts are structured and why they are written in the ways they are. This explicitness gives teachers and learners something to shoot for making writing outcomes clear rather than relying on hit or miss inductive methods whereby learners are expected to acquire the genres they need from repeated writing experiences or the teacher's notes in the margins of their essays (Hyland, 2003a). Providing writers with a knowledge of appropriate language forms shifts writing instruction from the implicit and exploratory to a conscious manipulation of language and choice. As Christie (1987, p. 45) observes, it makes clear “the ways in which patterns of language work for the shaping of meanings” empowers both writers and teachers.

For teacher educators, genre pedagogies not only address the needs of ESL writers but also draw teachers into considering how texts actually work as communication. This does, of course, come at a price. Teachers of *writing* clearly need to be teachers of *language*, as it is an ability to exercise appropriate linguistic choices in the ways they treat and organise their topics for particular readers which helps students to give their ideas authority. A knowledge of grammar, focusing on how students can codify meanings in distinct and recognisable ways, becomes central to teacher education programs. In summary, such a grammar

first considers how a text is structured and organised at the level of the whole text in relation to its purpose, audience and message. It then considers how all parts of the text, such as paragraphs and sentences, are structured, organised and coded so as to make the text effective as written communication. (Knapp & Watkins, 1994, p. 8)

Knowledge of genres has an important consciousness-raising potential for teachers, with significant implications for both their understanding of writing and their professional development. By categorising and analysing the texts they ask their students to write, teachers become more attuned to the ways meanings are created and more sensitive to the specific communicative needs of their students. Teachers are thus in a better position to reflect on their own writing and that of their students, offering them a means to understand, deconstruct, and challenge texts. A reflective teacher is therefore also a more effective teacher. A person who understands how texts are typically structured, understood, and used is in a better position to intervene successfully in the writing of his or her students, to provide more informed feedback on writing, to make decisions about the teaching methods and materials to use, and to approach current instructional paradigms with a more critical eye.

Genre approaches have not been uncritically adopted in L2 writing classrooms, however. Proponents of the “New Rhetoric” approach to genre (e.g. Dias & Pare, 2000; Freedman & Medway, 1994), for example, argue that writing is always part of the goals and occasions that bring it about, and it cannot be learnt in the inauthentic context of the classroom. Such a view, however, ignores the fact that L2 writers are often at a considerable disadvantage in such unfamiliar naturalistic settings and that genre-based writing teaching can short-cut the long processes of situated acquisition. Critical theorists have also attacked genre teaching, both for accommodating learners to existing modes of practice and to the values and ideologies of the dominant culture that valued genres embody (e.g. Benesch, 2001). Genre proponents, however, contend that this argument can be levelled at almost all teaching approaches. Learning about

genres does not preclude critical analysis but, in fact, provides a necessary basis for critical engagement with cultural and textual practices.

Finally, genre teachers have had to defend themselves against process adherents and the charge that genre instruction inhibits writers' self expression and straightjackets creativity through conformity and prescriptivism (e.g. Dixon, 1987). Obviously the dangers of a static, decontextualized pedagogy are very real if teachers fail to acknowledge variation and apply what Freedman (1994, p. 46) calls "a recipe theory of genre." But there is nothing *inherently* prescriptive in a genre approach. There is no reason why providing students with an understanding of discourse should be any more prescriptive than, say, providing them with a description of a clause, the parts of a sentence, or even the steps in a writing process. The fact is, of course, that genres *do* have a constraining power which limits the originality of individual writers. Selecting a particular genre implies the use of certain patterns, but this does not *dictate* the way we write. It enables us to make choices and facilitates expression. The ability to create meaning is only made possible by the possibility of alternatives. By ensuring these options are available to students, we give them the opportunity to make such choices, and for many L2 learners this awareness of regularity and structure is not only facilitating, but also reassuring (Hyland, 2003b).

Genre and writing instruction

There are a number of principles which underpin all genre-based teaching which can be translated into syllabus goals and teaching methodologies. These key principles are

Writing is a social activity

Communication always has a purpose, a context, and an intended audience, and these aspects can form the basis of both writing tasks and syllabuses. This means that students need to engage in a variety of relevant writing experiences which draw on, analyse, and investigate different purposes and readers.

Learning to write is needs-oriented

Effective teaching recognises the wants, prior learning, and current proficiencies of students, but in a genre-based course, it also means, as far as possible, identifying the kinds of writing that learners will need to do in their target situations and incorporating these into the course.

Learning to write requires explicit outcomes and expectations

Learning occurs more effectively if teachers are explicit about what is being studied, why it is being studied, and what will be expected of students at the end of the course, representing what Bernstein (1990, p. 73) calls a "visible pedagogy."

Learning to write is a social activity

Learning to write is supported within familiar routines, or cycles of activity, and by linking new contexts and understandings to what students already know about writing. Teaching is,

therefore, always a series of scaffolded developmental steps in which teachers and peers play a major role.

Learning to write involves learning to use language

Genre teaching involves being explicit about how texts are grammatically patterned, but grammar is integrated into the exploration of texts and contexts rather than taught as a discrete component. This helps learners not only to see how grammar and vocabulary choices create meanings, but to understand how language itself works, acquiring a way to talk about language and its role in texts.

In practice, these principles may be expressed in very different ways as genre approaches do not represent a single set of techniques. The two most influential orientations in L2 classrooms worldwide, Systemic Functional Linguistics and English for Specific Purposes, for example, have different views of genre and different pedagogies.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), known in the United States as the “Sydney School,” is perhaps the most clearly articulated approach to genre both theoretically and pedagogically, with its basis in Hallidayan functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994) and sociocultural theories of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). These perspectives are complementary in that both language and learning are seen as social phenomena embedded in specific cultural, historical, and institutional contexts. Genre in SFL emphasises the purposeful and sequential character of different genres and the systematic links between language and context (Martin, 1992). Because this conception of genre has emerged within a linguistic framework, genres tend to be characterised as broad rhetorical patterns such as *narratives*, *recounts*, *arguments*, and *expositions*. These are sometimes referred to as *elemental genres* which combine to form more complex everyday *macro genres* (Martin, 1992). Thus, an elemental genre such as a *procedure* can be found in macro genres such as *lab reports*, *instruction manuals*, and *recipes*, while a macro genre like a *newspaper editorial* might be composed of several elemental genres such as an *exposition*, a *discussion*, and a *rebuttal*.

As Fig. 1 suggests, even very young or elementary level learners can understand the social purposes of these genres, the ways they are staged, and their significant language features. By describing the typical stages and features of valued genres, teachers can provide students with clear options for writing so their texts seem well-formed and appropriate to readers. It also helps teachers to identify why weak texts seem incoherent and to suggest clear remedies to assist learners.

	A Procedure	A Report
Purpose	Tells how to do something	Informs reader about something
Structure	Goal – materials required – steps needed	Identifying statement - description
Grammar	imperatives, action verbs, describing words, adverbials to express details of time, place, & manner, connectives, and sequencers.	general nouns, relating verbs, action verbs, timeless present tense, topic sentences to organise bundles of information.

Fig. 1. Identification of features for procedures and reports at elementary level.

ESP differs significantly from SFL in the way that it conceptualises genres and draws from more eclectic theoretical foundations (e.g. Swales, 1990, 2004). ESP teachers are concerned with the communicative needs of particular academic and professional groups and so genres are seen as the purposive actions routinely used by community members to achieve a particular purpose. Genres are therefore the property of the communities that use them rather than the wider culture, and ESP teachers look to the specific practices of those groups and the names group members have for those practices. So while genres are seen more specifically as related to groups, they are also seen in the wider context of the activities that surround the use of texts. Thus, for Swales (1998, p. 20), genres:

orchestrate verbal life. These genres link the past and the present, and so balance forces for tradition and innovation. They structure the roles of individuals within wider frameworks and further assist those individuals with the actualisation of their communicative plans and purposes.

Although Swales goes on to show that matters may be more complex than this, the idea that people acquire, use, and modify the language of written texts in the course of acting as members of academic/occupational groups offers teachers a powerful way of understanding the writing needs of their students.

While genres are conceptualised differently, both approaches seek to reveal the rhetorical patterning of a genre together with its key features. This involves studying a representative sample of texts to identify the series of moves, or communicative stages, which make up the genre. Linguistics thus becomes a practical tool that teachers can use in their classrooms, revealing how distinctive patterns of vocabulary, grammar, and cohesion structure texts into stages which, in turn, support the purpose of the genre. While SFL tends to emphasise language rather more in this process, drawing on functional grammar to do so, and ESP stresses the importance of the situatedness of genres in particular contexts through rhetorical consciousness-raising, both recognise that the ability to see texts as similar or different, and to write or respond to them appropriately, is vital to achieving literacy in a second language.

Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995, p. ix) refer to this as *genre knowledge*, “an individual’s repertoire of situationally appropriate responses to recurrent situations.” While it may be the case that genre pedagogies are more complex and demanding for teachers than earlier approaches to writing instruction, they also offer them more possibilities for informed intervention through greater direction and situational focus. In the following sections I attempt to spell out some of the key elements in implementing genre pedagogies.

Planning learning

Genre writing classes are usually planned either around themes, as in many SFL teaching classrooms, or the genres likely to be encountered in a relevant context, as in ESP learning situations. Themes are best seen as real-life activities in which people do specific things through writing, providing potentially relevant and motivating ways into writing by drawing on students’ personal experiences and prior knowledge (Feez, 1998). General topics such as *Health*, *Work*, *Pollution*, *Relationships*, or *Crime* can be a useful way to contextualise research and report-writing skills, although they can also stimulate other kinds of writing. The topic *Technology*, for example, suggests a factual description (explaining how something works), a narrative of personal experience (an encounter with a computer helpline), an argumentative essay (pros and cons of ICQ), and so on. As they progress, learners are better able to discuss a greater range of

topics, in more abstract ways, using genres which are increasingly more complex in their structure and linguistic demands.

More usually, however, genre-based writing courses are organised around the texts students will need to use in a particular target context, and these needs are easier to identify in ESP situations. A vocationally oriented writing course, for instance, may be organised around the range of oral and written genres needed in a particular workplace. A group of laboratory technicians, for example, may have to keep inventories of materials, receive written and verbal instructions from scientists, take notes during experiments, produce written reports, and help produce project proposals. It is often possible to grade the genres we find in a situation according to their rhetorical demands or their immediate value to learners and then sequence them to reflect these priorities.

The possible stages involved in designing a genre-based course from a text-focus perspective have been outlined by Burns and Joyce (1997) as follows:

1. Identify the overall contexts in which the language will be used.
2. Develop course goals based on this context of use.
3. Note the sequence of language events within the context.
4. List the genres used in this sequence.
5. Outline the sociocognitive knowledge students need to participate in this context.
6. Gather and analyse samples of texts.
7. Develop units of work related to these genres and develop learning objectives to be achieved.

These steps are more often simultaneous than sequential; steps three and four, for instance, are generally undertaken concurrently as it is difficult to distinguish the language events in a context from the genres which comprise them.

Although not explicit in these points, course design always begins with what the students know, what they are able to do, and what they are interested in learning to do. Teachers working on a genre-based course then ask, “why are these students learning to write?” and seek to answer this by identifying the competencies that will be required of them in target contexts. Helping the students move from current to target proficiencies becomes the purpose of the course and determines the objectives, materials, and tasks it employs. The ability to evaluate students’ current needs and analyse target texts is therefore a key feature of a teacher’s role and of the training which leads to becoming a writing teacher.

Needs analysis expresses the fact that literacy acquisition does not occur in a vacuum. It is a concept which seeks to ensure that learning to write is seen both in the context in which it occurs and the contexts in which these skills will be used; it is the means of establishing the *how* and *what* of a course (see Long, 2006, for papers on L2 needs analysis). Typically, needs are said to involve a *present situation analysis* concerning information about learners’ current proficiencies, perceptions, and ambitions; a *target situation analysis* relating to communication needs rather than learning needs and referring to the linguistic skills and knowledge students need to perform competently in their future roles (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998); and a *means analysis* (Holliday, 1994) involving consideration of the teachers, methods, materials, facilities, and relationship of the course to its immediate environment.

While sometimes seen as a kind of educational technology designed to measure goals precisely (Berwick, 1989), we should ensure that trainee teachers are aware that the idea of student *needs* is both subjective and controversial. Needs analysis is always influenced by the ideological preconceptions of the analyst, and so ‘needs’ will be defined differently by different

stakeholders, with administrators, subject tutors, teachers, and learners perhaps having different views (Hyland, 2004, 2006). Decisions about what to teach and how to teach it are, therefore, not neutral professional questions but involve issues of authority in decision-making with important consequences for learners. In fact, treating *need* as something existing and measurable is itself an ideological stance, and teachers should be encouraged to reflect on whether students' needs are best served by adopting exclusively pragmatic and instrumental goals, or whether they should assist them to a more participatory and critical stance (e.g. Benesch, 2001).

Teacher education programmes can therefore highlight the dangers of conflating students' needs and institutional demands and the importance of encouraging students to assess their options and prioritise what they need for themselves. In this way, teachers can use needs analyses to support learners in taking active responsibility for their learning, a point which resonates with the literature on autonomy in language learning (e.g. Benson, 2001). Reflection on the complexity of needs can also assist teachers to see that teaching writing is not a simply a neutral transfer of skills or competencies and that identifying a relevant context and the genres that students will find in that context does not simply involve institutional understandings of those contexts. Moreover, moving beyond considerations of needs exploration of genres themselves helps learners to see the assumptions and values which are implicit in those genres and helps them understand the relationships and interests in that context. In other words, seeing needs contexts, and genres together is both a means of considering writing in a wider frame and a basis for both developing the skills students' need to participate in academic or professional communities and their abilities to critically understand those communities.

Sequencing learning

A number of different principles can inform the sequence in which genres are studied, but among the most common are

- determining the most critical skills or functions relevant to students' immediate needs;
- following the sequence of a genre set in a real world series of interactions; and
- grading genres by perceived increasing levels of difficulty.

In many ways, sequencing genres in terms of urgency is implicit in the other two approaches, and so I will concentrate on those in this section.

One key feature of ESP pedagogy is that considerable attention tends to be given to the context in which genres are employed, and particularly to how genres form “constellations” (Swales, 2004) or “colonies” (Bhatia, 2004) for users in particular areas. Genres are almost never found in isolation in the real world. The concepts of “genre sets” (Devitt, 1991) to refer to the full array of genres a particular group must deal with in a context and “genre systems or chains” (Bazerman, 1994), or how spoken and written texts cluster together in a given social context, have proven useful. These concepts offer ways of contextualising what is to be learnt by basing instruction on how genres are sequenced and used in real-world events. Some of these genres may depend on others, some may be alternatives to others, some may be spoken, others read, and some will require written competence.

Sometimes, for example, genres follow each other in a predictable chronological order, and these event sequences can be helpful in ordering genres into a writing course and allow teachers to address the third and fourth principles mentioned above: providing learners with explicit

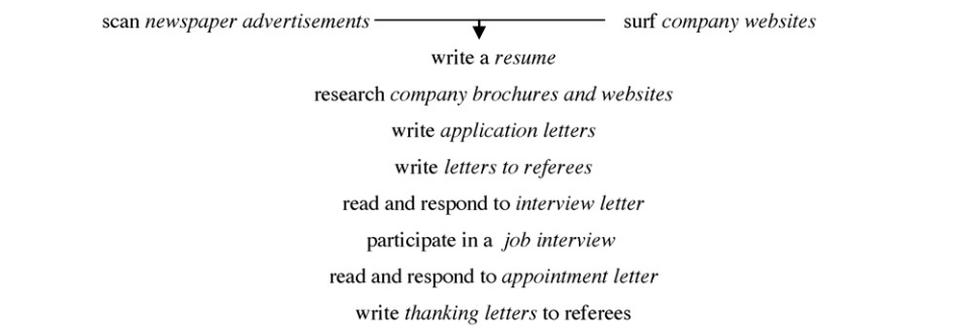


Fig. 2. A linear sequence of genres for job seeking (genres in italics).

expectations and with the language resources they require to communicate. A simple illustration of a linear event is the sequence of genres often required in job seeking (Fig. 2).

In other circumstances, the occurrence of one genre may be less dependent on the outcome of another, so that an activity unfolds with genres employed more concurrently. An example of this is the genres involved in the process of writing an academic assignment, which combine a variety of skills and genres and may resemble the schematic in Fig. 3.

Approaching genres in this way also helps to integrate reading, speaking, and writing activities naturally in the classroom. As Grabe (2001, p. 25) concludes in a recent review, “One of the most consistent implications of two decades of reading and writing relations is that they should be taught together and that the combination of both literacy skills enhances learning in all areas.” By teaching genres in the sequences they occur in target contexts, we not only help students to develop an understanding of context and the ways texts can be employed to realise situated purposes, but also reap the benefits of reading-writing integration.

A possible alternative approach to sequencing learning is to order genres according to their apparent increasing level of difficulty. The SFL model provides teachers with a principled way of understanding how genres differ in the demands that they make on students and so help inform the sequence in which genres are presented in a course. Descriptions of key genres, for instance, show that *expositions* and *explanations* contain more complex forms and are consequently more difficult for learners to write than *recounts* and *procedures*. A *procedure*, for instance, consists of a series of steps which shows how to achieve a goal and at lower levels may be based around simple imperative clauses using familiar action verbs and everyday objects. *Explanations*, on the other hand, are more demanding because they typically require students to use sequential, causal,

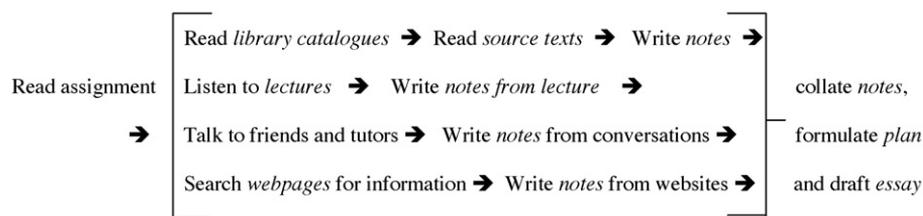


Fig. 3. A possible non-linear genre system for writing a researched essay (possible genres in italics).

and conditional conjunctions and move writers further from their own experience to more generalised events and objects outside their experience. Not only are these kinds of meanings valued more highly in academic and professional settings, but the structure and features students need to draw on to write them effectively become more complex and demanding.

Rhetorical complexity can similarly be employed as an organising principle where just one genre is the focus of the course. An example from ESP is Swales and Lueb's (2002) intensive course for Asian doctoral students in social psychology, where the sections of the research article were sequenced according their perceived order of increasing rhetorical complexity: *methods*, *abstracts*, *results*, *introductions*, and *discussions*. In both approaches, of course, this method of sequencing encourages teachers to analyse texts and reflect on their structure and how to present writing to students in the most accessible way. In both approaches, too, this method involves making genres central to teaching: a talking point and focus for analysis to raise awareness of the interdependence of texts, of the resources used to create meaning in context, of the connections between meanings and social forces, and of ways to negotiate the genres of power and authority.

Supporting learning

In addition to providing writing teachers with a way of organising their courses, genre-based writing instruction follows modern theories of learning in giving considerable recognition to the importance of *collaboration*, or peer interaction, and *scaffolding*, or teacher-supported learning. While these principles are not unique to genre pedagogies, it is perhaps the case that other approaches have not developed them as systematically nor combined them as powerfully with other classroom practices. Together, these concepts assist learners through two notions of learning:

- Shared consciousness—the idea that learners working together learn more effectively than individuals working separately.
- Borrowed consciousness—the idea that learners working with knowledgeable others develop greater understanding of tasks and ideas.

More specifically, genre-based pedagogies employ the ideas of Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978) and the American educational psychologist Bruner (1990). For these writers, the notion of scaffolding emphasises the role of interaction with peers and experienced others in moving learners from their existing level of performance, what they can do now, to a level of “potential performance,” what they are able to do without assistance. Research shows that students are able to reach much higher levels of performance by working together and with an expert than they might have achieved working on their own (e.g. Donato, 2000; Ohta, 2000). The degree of teacher intervention and the selection of tasks therefore play a key role in scaffolding writing, representing a cline of support from closely controlled activities to autonomous extended communication, reducing direct instruction as the learner gradually assimilates the task demands and procedures for constructing the genre effectively.

Scaffolding takes many forms but typically includes modelling and discussion of texts, explicit instruction, and teacher input. One way of providing this kind of support, for instance, is through the use of “writing frames” (e.g. Wray & Lewis, 1997), which are simply skeletal outlines used to scaffold and prompt students' writing. These provide a genre template which enables students to start, connect, and develop their texts appropriately while concentrating on what they want to say. Frames provide a structure for writing and can therefore take many

different forms, depending on the genre, the purpose of the writing, and the proficiency of the students, even being devised for individual learners. They are introduced after teacher modelling and explicit discussion of the forms needed for a particular kind of text and can be used to scaffold planning or drafting. Basically, they provide something of the prompting missing between a writer and blank sheet of paper, assisting writers to envisage what is needed to express their purposes effectively and to anticipate the possible reactions of an intended readership. Students will need to use them less and less as their confidence in writing and their competence in writing target genres grow.

In SFL, scaffolding has been elaborated into an explicit methodological model, represented by the teaching-learning cycle shown in Fig. 4. The cycle informs the planning of classroom activities by showing the process of learning a genre as a series of linked stages. Here, the teacher provides initial explicit knowledge and guided practice, moves to sharing responsibility for developing texts, and gradually withdraws support until the learner can work alone. The key stages of the cycle are

- setting the context—revealing genre purposes and the settings in which it is commonly used;
- modeling—analysing representative samples of the genre to identify its stages and key features and the variations which are possible;
- joint construction—guided, teacher-supported practice in the genre through tasks which focus on particular stages or functions of the text;
- independent construction—independent writing by students monitored by the teacher; and
- comparing—relating what has been learnt to other genres and contexts to understand how genres are designed to achieve particular social purposes.

Each of these stages therefore seeks to achieve a different purpose, and as a result, is associated with different types of classroom activities and different teacher–learner roles (Hyland, 2004, pp. 130–140). The cycle is one way of understanding the Five E's concept long

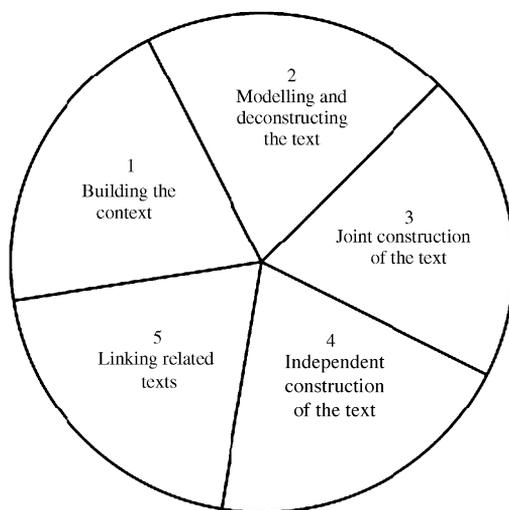


Fig. 4. The teaching-learning cycle (Feez, 1998, p. 28).

familiar in science teaching, helping learners to *engage, explore, explain, extend, and evaluate* (e.g. Trowbridge & Bybee, 1990). The cycle is intended to be used flexibly, allowing students to enter at any stage depending on their existing knowledge of the genre and to enable teachers to return to earlier stages of the cycle for revision purposes.

A key purpose of the cycle is to ensure repeated opportunities for students to engage in activities which require them to reflect on and critique their learning by developing understandings of texts, acting on these through writing or speaking, reviewing their performance, and using feedback to improve their work. The model, therefore, allows vocabulary to be recycled and the literacy skills gained in previous cycles to be further developed by working through a new cycle at a more advanced level of expression of the genre.

The concept of scaffolding is also implicit in much ESP genre teaching which seeks to provide learners with the means to understand and then create new texts by a process of “gradual approximation” (Widdowson, 1978, pp. 91–93). A common approach in EAP classrooms is to ask students, often in small groups, to analyse, compare, and manipulate representative samples of the target discourse in a process known as *rhetorical consciousness raising*. Consciousness raising is a “top-down” approach to understanding language and encourages learners to see grammatical features as “the on-line processing component of discourse and not the set of syntactic building blocks with which discourse is constructed” (Rutherford, 1987, p. 104). By guiding students to explore key lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical features and to use this knowledge to construct their own examples of the genre, it is designed to produce better writers rather than simply better texts.

The teacher’s goal in this process is to illuminate the genres that matter to students by exploring academic practices and discourse conventions with students so they can see the options available to them when writing. In other words, this is related to the SLA concept of “noticing” as a prerequisite for acquisition of a feature and its use in their students’ own work. Swales and Feak (2000) offer numerous examples of such tasks and familiar activities encourage students to

- Survey the advice given on a feature in a sample of style guides and textbooks and compare this with actual use in a target genre or students’ own writing.
- Conduct a mini-analysis of a feature in a text in a student’s discipline, count and tabulate results, and compare these with those of students in other fields.
- Discuss the extent to which students feel they have to adopt an English “academic style” in their writing or are able to preserve something of their own academic culture or personal identity.
- Explore the extent to which a feature can be transferred across genres the student needs to write.
- Reflect on how far these features correspond with writing in the students’ first academic language.
- Compare spoken and written modes, such as a lecture and textbook, to raise awareness of the ways which these differ in response to audiences and purposes.

One path of consciousness raising is discussed by Johns (1997) as a “socioliterate approach” where learners acquire academic literacies via “exposure to discourses from a variety of social contexts” and by inquiring into their own literate lives and the literacy practices of others. Johns recommends introducing students to the concepts of genre and context through familiar “homely” genres, such as wedding invitations, then moving on to explore pedagogic genres like textbooks and exam prompts, and then less familiar academic genres. This helps students to gain

an understanding of the ways register features interact with social purposes and cultural forces in known genres before they study academic genres. A key element is for students to become researchers themselves, not only exploring texts but also interviewing subject tutors and more advanced students about specific classes and assignments or their own use of genres. Here, then, teachers can find a potentially effective and engaging source of tasks which can also encourage the critical exploration of texts and the institutional contexts in which those texts are used.

Assessing learning

Assessment is an integral aspect of the teaching-learning process and central to students' progress towards increasing control of their writing. Genre-based approaches bring several advantages to the assessment of L2 writing, and, in particular, they take more seriously than many other approaches the following basic principles (Hyland, 2004, pp. 163–166):

Explicit	They provide explicit criteria for assessment and feedback
Integrative	They integrate teaching and assessment
Relevant	They are directly related to learners' writing goals
Competency	They specify student competencies and genre features
Preparedness	They ensure assessment occurs when students are best prepared for it

Current theories of language assessment emphasise the importance of assessing student writing against clear and agreed upon performance criteria. This is both because teachers need to apply consistent standards to judge each task performance fairly and then to communicate these criteria clearly to students. This is sometimes called a *competency-based* procedure, which utilises an analytic approach based on the primary traits of the particular genre, ensuring that key features of these texts are clearly specified, taught, and used to describe a standard of performance. By making clear to students what teachers value in writing and emphasising exactly what is expected from them in any writing task, students know how they will be assessed and what they have to do to be successful, and this gives them greater motivation and confidence to write. Genre approaches also mean that teachers are in a better position to identify the kinds of problems students may be having with their writing, allowing them to target feedback precisely and to plan the remedial interventions needed to assist improvements. In other words, giving learners an explicit idea of what is required means there is a direct link between teaching and assessment and enables teachers to see how far students have gained control of the genre.

As far as possible, teachers engaged in genre-based writing courses try to ensure that assessment tasks are only administered when learners are ready and likely to succeed. In SFL approaches, for instance, the teaching-learning cycle allows learners to move towards increasing independence in using a particular genre as the teacher gradually removes support. This enables ongoing diagnostic assessments to be made which help teachers to identify areas where learners need extra practice and to target additional teaching to assist them. Achievement assessment can then occur at the end of each cycle, if institutional constraints allow, when students are at their most proficient in using a genre and are most confident and comfortable with their writing. So, students' writing abilities are gradually stretched until they can achieve successful independent performance in the genre, and one result of this is that teachers can make the transition from teaching to assessment as seamless as possible. This process works to establish a writing environment rather than a grading environment in the classroom.

In addition, by moving away from vague descriptors often found in analytic scoring rubrics such as “adequate knowledge of syntax” or “a limited variety of mostly correct sentences,” genre specifications mean that teachers can intervene more effectively in offering feedback on writing. Genre-based writing courses are organised around texts and around talk about texts, and this support provides teachers and students with a shared vocabulary for discussing writing. This organisation means that teachers are not only able to refer back to specific knowledge and strategies using the same terminology and targeting the same key features that were introduced to learners during the scaffolded stages of writing, but they can also offer feedback with greater confidence that students will recognise and make use of their suggestions. Such genre specifications empower both teachers and students and offer writing teachers a more effective way of responding to student drafts than decontextualised and ad hoc reactions to error.

An approach to assessment well suited to genre-based writing teaching is the use of portfolios, as these not only represent multiple measures of a student’s writing ability, providing more accurate assessments of competence across a range of genres, but also help students to understand more about the genres they have studied. As Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) point out, reflection is one of the main strengths of portfolios as students are able to compare different genres and writing experiences and consider their writing and the criteria employed for judging it. Multi-genre portfolios, perhaps including both narrative and expository genres, can highlight how texts are organised differently to express particular purposes. Alternatively, a portfolio can illustrate how one genre often relates to or interacts with others as routine sequences or “genre sets,” (Devitt, 1991) such as cases where students assemble all the genres for a formal job application. Because the criteria used for assessment have been made explicit, students can use these criteria to select pieces for the portfolio and to understand more clearly the connection between what they are taught and how they are assessed. For teachers, this also provides more information about students’ progress to help them give greater support to writers.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted, albeit briefly, to suggest some of the ways that genre can be of considerable theoretical and practical relevance to teacher educators preparing individuals to teach writing in L2 classrooms. I have argued that an understanding of the ways language is used to create meanings in writing empowers teachers by offering them ways to analyse texts, to reflect on the workings of language, and to provide more robust and targeted support for learners. Because they emphasise the importance of making known what is to be learnt and assessed, genre theory and research give teacher educators a more central role in preparing individuals to teach second language writing and to confidently advise them on the development of curriculum materials and activities for writing classes.

L2 writing teachers may feel daunted at the prospect of reinventing themselves as genre-teachers. We may not usually see ourselves as applied linguists or discourse analysts and may regard analysis as “research,” an activity removed from the everyday business of “teaching.” The increasingly varied students we find in our classrooms, however, offer a persuasive argument for bringing a knowledge of *language* to an understanding of *writing*. We have come to recognise that we can no longer subordinate the ways meanings are conventionally constructed to an emphasis on individual creativity and that part of what it means to teach writing is to meet students’ social, political, and cultural needs beyond the classroom.

Writing instruction must help demystify prestigious forms of discourse, unlock students' creative and expressive abilities, and facilitate their access to greater life chances. To accomplish these goals, we require a systematic means of describing texts and of making our students' control over them more achievable. In short, a well-formulated theory of how language works in human interaction has become an urgent necessity in the field of teaching second language writing. Genre pedagogies are a major response to this need, providing teachers with a way of understanding how writing is shaped by individuals making language choices to achieve purposes in social contexts.

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Further reading

For those readers persuaded to give genre teaching a try and looking for teacher-friendly ways into to the topic, I can recommend the following books:

- Feez, S. (1998). *Text-based syllabus design*. Sydney: McQuarie University/AMES.
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