# TEACHING WRITING TO ESP LEARNERS: APPROACHES AND CHALLENGES

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The objective of this paper is to highlight the existing approaches to teaching writing and the problems which ESP learners and teachers face.

For ESP learners (English for specific purposes), writing is not just one of the four language skills alongside speaking, listening, and reading, it is also an essential skill in a work environment since writing well makes it easier to express thoughts in an informative, and understandable manner. However, teachers frequently face students' unwillingness to practice writing. To the three causes of learners' problems which Boukhatem Nadera partially relates to poor classroom planning and, partially, to the lack of motivation on the part of ESP learners [1], we would also add the choice of approach to teaching writing on the part of a teacher. The latter is not always a simple decision to make.

In "Learning Teaching", Jim Scrivener notably starts the chapter on writing by questioning whether it is possible to teach writing skills at all. Further, he reveals the cause of his skepticism: "For many teachers, the answer seems to be mainly by setting a writing task, leaving the students to do it <...> then collecting it and marking it" [6, p. 193]. Consequently, given the extensive use of this simplified approach to teaching how to write, a brief overview of the current methods of instruction is required.

Contemporary methodological literature mostly focuses on two main approaches: the process approach and the product approach for teaching writing.

When teachers employ the process approach, they lead learners through the natural stages that authors take to finalize their work. The process of writing prioritizes the writing procedure over the final product. Since the learners receive feedback in the moment of writing and they have enough time to accomplish multiple writing stages, it helps improve. Nevertheless, Jeremy Harmer claims reasonably that "one of the disadvantages of getting students to concentrate on the process writing is that it takes time. <...> There are times when process writing is simply not appropriate, either because classroom time is limited, <...> or <...> we want them to compose a letter <...> on the spot" [4, p. 258]. So, the product approach compels the writer to put more emphasis on the final product – the text – rather than on creative activities that lead to it.

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Harmer also states that choosing the most effective method or approach for a given teaching situation can be quite a challenging task since it widely depends on the age, character type, cultural background, and academic aptitude of the learners. All of which results in the understanding of the importance of students' needs analysis [Ibid, p. 95–97].

While methodologists continue to debate the precise definition of ESP [5], one thing remains abundantly clear: ESP is a learner-focused approach to teaching English in a particular area of activities. As Tony Dudley-Evans accentuates "ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre" [2]. Therefore, learners' needs and methods of instruction are quite specific and varied. For instance, learners of English for Academic Purposes mainly aim at lengthy written forms such as essays, theses, and research paper, the production of which often takes more than one month of thinking and rethinking. Nevertheless, for other ESP learners time is of the essence. Medical practitioners or businesspeople lack the time to hone their writing skills and would benefit more from going the other way around. Many of them do not need to self-express themselves through writing, they need the final, polished document that serves some specific function like arranging a meeting or making a referral for counseling. Most of the time, a piece of writing is completed in one sitting without any breaks or revisions.

Like Ros Wright [7], a freelance editor and materials writer, specializing in English for Medical Purposes, we concur with Dudley-Evans who recommended using real tasks from the given discipline to create effective ESP courses [*Cit*. ex., 5]. The aim is to shift the focus from a broad variety of common English onto the language which these learners deal with in their mundane high-frequency tasks at work, for instance, official letters, emails, memos, blogs, reports, case histories, referrals, etc.

At this point, there is some more to consider: "Are the learners already in-work and fully aware of their operational needs or are they pre-experience learners who are taking ESP course because it is on their mandatory curriculum"? Evan Frendo, a training consultant working in the fields of Business English and ESP, believes that pre-experience learners are frequently terse in the discourse of the professional community, even in their first language. The aim should therefore be to "expose students to a target discourse community and help them become members of that community" [3].

Thus, ESP learners' needs analysis should underlie a methodology and approach to teaching writing skills to increase learners' motivation and teaching outcomes.

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