

Modes and Approaches of Teaching and Learning Writing in BBS First Year

Ramji Timalina, PhD

Lecturer

Department of English

Mahendra Multiple Campus, Dharan, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Email: ramjikoshi@gmail.com

Abstract

This article analyses the planning, process and application of *Patterns for College Writing: A rhetorical reader and guide* that has been prescribed as a textbook for BBS first year English course in Tribhuvan University Nepal since 2019. The analysis focuses on two aspects of the textbook: the making of the textbook to facilitate the students' writing in the classroom and the practical outcome of the application of the textbook in real classroom setting. The first aspect concentrates on the textbook itself, whereas the second one is on a survey among the instructor of the same textbook. The analysis of the textbook shows that the course is well structured and so is useful for the writing class in the college level. But the survey has indicated the mismatch between the process designed in the book and its real application in the classroom. Some good practices have indicated that if the academic institutions, instructors and students work honestly for the student's skill development, this textbook can be a good guide for developing the international-level writing skill of students in Nepal.

Keywords: essay, pattern, process, teaching, writing

Introduction

Patterns for college writing: A rhetorical reader and guide has been a textbook for teaching and learning writing prescribed for the BBS (Bachelor of Business Studies) English Course since 2019 in Tribhuvan University, Nepal. As the BBS course has the objective of preparing a "strong foundation in allied areas of business such as language" (Curriculum 2019), its English course has designed the objectives to align with the objective of the course in total. The English syllabus (2019) has mentioned that "building business language competence and improving reading and writing skills, ... helping students become successful communicators in business situations" and "enabling them to hone their grammar and mechanics, and critical reading and writing skills" are the objectives of the course.

The syllabus has also envisioned some expected outcomes of the course. They are to make the learners able to “improve linguistic competence at lexical, structural/grammatical levels”; to “comprehend literary texts and writing modes”; to “produce correct sentences, cohesive paragraphs and organized texts”; to “respond the literary and business readings critically and analytically” and to “boost competence towards global understanding thereby strengthening their confidence in using English in professional and social scenarios.” To develop these skills and capacities in the learners, the textbook has focused on process-based reading, thinking and writing for improving critical reading and writing skill, comprehending literary texts and writing modes, and producing cohesive paragraphs and organized texts.

This textbook has practically shown the purpose and process of writing. Regarding the reasons to write and its value, Bauman (2007) has claimed that writing is the most important skill one can develop in a college. It reminds us the famous quote from Bacon (n.d.) that writing makes an exact man. These claims can be materialized when the learners of writing can explore one’s creative potential, organize one’s learning and persuade readers through writing (Timalsina, 2021). These are equally essential skills for both the teachers and students.

Regarding the process of writing, the book deals with the roots and shoots of writing that helps both learning and teaching writing. For this, the contents of the text have been managed for rhetorical reading and writing. The book has been designed with the concepts that rhetorical reading helps the readers find how reading can be done critically and writing can be done to persuade the audience. It has also provided the texts for reading and process guide with the hope that it can prepare the learners to become analytical readers and writers. The textbook has also included the basic advice on drafting, writing, revising and editing needed for beginners in the field of writing and rhetoric. The activities designed are freewriting, brainstorming, clustering, and journal writing.

The most practical aspect of this textbook is the introduction to the patterns of development of essays: narration, description, exemplification, process, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, classification and division. For each pattern, the text has provided the literary texts of common human interest so that a learner of any discipline can be interested in the reading as a human being. Thus, this textbook is a practical guide to academic writing that demands both the teacher’s and students’ creative involvement in the writing process. This textbook envisioned a classroom as a writing workshop.

Methods and Materials

This study is qualitative. The primary data were the textbook *Patterns for college writing: A rhetorical reader* and the interviews with the teachers of this book. Ten teachers who taught this book as a part of the BBS first-year course in 2020 and 2021 were interviewed. It was a purposive sampling that included two female and eight male teachers. The location of their teaching was the government-funded, public-funded and private-funded colleges under Tribhuvan University. The interview was unstructured and open-ended in the conversation mode. After the collection of the data, the analysis was done to see how successfully the text was used in the classroom. The analysis has been concerned with whether the objectives of the course were fulfilled or not. As the answer was mostly no, the reasons behind the failure of such courses in Nepali classrooms have been analysed. The result and discussion have been presented in the following section.

Results and Discussion

Design of the Textbook: Integrating Reading, Thinking and Writing

The book has been divided into three sections. Part, one deals with the writing process; part two deals with reading for writing, and the process and practice of working with the sources have been presented in the third part. As the BBS first-year English syllabus deals with the first two parts only, this study has concentrated on the same.

The textbook has been designed with the widely established belief that writing can be learnt only through writing. Writing is like learning to swim or learning a bicycle for which a certain process of writing should be kept in mind while writing. Such a process should be personalized so that every writer can develop a different process for work. This textbook has presented a common process that is necessary to be learnt before the process is personalized.

Roots and Shoots of Writing

Roots refer to the hidden aspects of writing or the writing process, while shoots refer to what is seen in the writing. These images of roots and shoots present a writer as a gardener. People can see only the shoots of a plant. They are not aware of the process of planting and growing it. So is the case of writing. Readers can see only the final product, the writing. Only the writer knows the pain and pleasure in the process.

Roots of Writing: Process of Writing

The writing process covers five steps: reading to write to become a critical reader, invention, arrangement, drafting and revising, and finally editing and proofreading. In the first step, the writers should learn how to be critical readers of their own and others' writings. A critical reader is one who can find out and evaluate the purpose of writing, the thesis of writing, the use of supports for the thesis along with the style of a writing. They are also capable of previewing a text, highlighting the main points and finally annotating a text. This textbook has discussed the details of the processes of developing these qualities and capacities.

Similarly, writers need to learn invention techniques and processes. It means they have to know how to generate the necessary ideas for their writing. For this the book has discussed some basic techniques and processes. The first step in it is setting limits for the writing carefully deciding length, purpose, audience, occasion and information/idea for the writing. Then the writers need to use freewriting, brainstorming, journal writing, clustering/grouping ideas and outlining. When a writer develops the thesis for the writing, the invention step is complete.

After the ideas are ready, it is necessary to learn how to arrange them in a writing. To arrange the materials a certain pattern of writing is needed. This book has discussed some basic patterns such as narration, description, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, definition and argumentation. Each of these patterns of essay has some common elements: introduction, body paragraphs and conclusion. The writer needs to learn what they are and how they can be developed and shaped.

With the basic ideas discussed above, a writer can enter into the phase of drafting and revising. The first draft is merely the writer's effort; whereas from the second draft the efforts of the writer's immediate peer reviewers are also merged with the writer's work. Working on three consecutive drafts is a general practice in writing. In this process, the first draft focuses on the structure/organization of writing, the second draft on the ideas and their organization, whereas the third draft is prepared with the focus on the mechanics of writing through editing and proofreading. Editing includes the correction of the slips and unorganized grammar, punctuation, word choice and sentence style. Similarly, proofreading is the process/step of checking for commonly confused words, misspellings, faulty capitalization and typos before the confirmation of the appropriate format of the writing. Only after the completion of all these processes, writing is prepared for submission either for publication or for evaluation as a part of the examination. The book has given the details of all these elements and processes.

Shoots of Writing: Elements and Parts of Writing

Shoots or the elements and parts of writing are what a reader can see on the paper or the screen. Elements are like elephants. If a writer can handle this big aspect of writing, it is very useful. But if elements are mishandled, they turn out to be angry wild killers. The basic elements of writing are ideas and language used in the composition. These elements are used in the thesis and support. The elements are divided into title, introduction, body and conclusion. The layers of writing starting from the words that are grouped to form sentences, paragraphs and finally an essay exhibit the use of such elements. The book has presented different varieties and possibilities of the arrangement of the elements depending on the pattern of the writing.

Reading for Writers

After the discussion of the basic requirements of a writing, the textbook takes the students and teachers to some readings as examples. Each reading text is followed by discussion questions and writing assignments. For each pattern, some readings are included with such questions and assignments. Discussion on each includes definition of/introduction to the pattern, use of that pattern in writing (where it is appropriate!), planning for writing an essay of that pattern, discussion on the process of writing in that pattern, a sample student essay, reading assignments that work as the model of the essays in that pattern, assignment to go inside the details of each model essay and finally the free writing assignment in that pattern.

When the learners follow all these steps the textbook has designed, they are supposed to get the integrated skills in reading, thinking and writing. Such an integration makes writing not only the jumble of ideas, but a systematic process of exploration and presentation of the findings. This textbook envisions the students and their course instructors to use the basic structure of a five-paragraph essay that has at least a title, thesis statement and three supporting ideas. And each supporting idea is to be developed with the help of supporting details.

Classroom Practices: Survey Results

The main focus of this study is to find whether the process and products envisioned by the textbook and syllabus have materialized or not. The instructors who used the textbook in the first academic session after it was prescribed revealed that there were many mismatches between the objectives set and the achievements gained. The interviews revealed some shocking realities and encouraging attempts.

The most shocking incident was found in a government-aided constituent campus of TU. An instructor revealed the fact that an associate professor of English in the 2020

BBS class entered with *Reason to Write*, the textbook of the level used a decade ago. Sadly, that associate professor was once head of the department of English at that campus. We can imagine the level of preparedness of such teachers at Tribhuvan University. But these are some extreme exceptions.

Commonly what many teachers did in the classroom was a different practice. Many of them revealed, without any hesitation, that they explained the process pointwise without any concrete examples; and summarised the model essays for students. Some of them provided written summaries as well. After that, they provided answers (mostly oral and in some cases written ones) to the questions in comprehension, purpose and audience, and style and structure. It was the end of their writing classes. They reported, with many pretensions, that they did not care about the writing assignments that are provided after each chapter in part II of the text.

When the teachers dealt with the textbook this way, many students had their own way of learning writing in the bachelor level. They attended their classes without textbook and other study materials. Instead of learning and involving themselves in the writing and thinking process, they demanded that the teacher should explain the texts in Nepali; and many teachers did it. And after the explanation was done, they demanded written answers to the questions. The day they had to submit some assignments, which were occasional, the teachers reported that their classrooms remained empty.

In response to the interview question ‘Why was such a malpractice in the writing classes?’ the teachers reported that the students did not have the habit of studying properly; colleges did not care about the quality of students and classes; what the colleges wanted was just high pass rate in the final examination; as a result, the teachers did not want to intervene in the do situation for doing something different and good. In those classrooms, the college, teachers and students together let the course get failed and students passed the examination without getting any writing skills. Some teachers blamed the examination pattern as well for this mishandling of the course. One of them reported that her students were following the process till they got the model questions for the final examination. The model question included the question for the writing of the summary of a sample reading from the text in place of the demand on the discussion of the elements used in the making of a certain text. Then the students were demotivated for toiling to learn the writing following the process. The most interesting but appalling finding was that most of the teachers were not found dissatisfied with such teaching and learning of writing.

The survey revealed some appreciable practices as well. Two of the teachers (20%) reported that they got a level of success in achieving the objectives of the course. Both of them convinced the students for attending the classes with study materials, working systematically and doing good in English. They divided the class into many groups and made them work group-wise. They encouraged students to follow the process of writing and helped them wherever needed. Both the students and teachers did almost everything the textbook has demanded. And finally, the instructors helped the students with hints, but they never provided written notes except in the case of some samples. As a result, their students learnt the basics of writing and could produce some good essays by the end of the session.

The survey showed that teachers can do a lot if they are determined to do something good. Many teachers need to change their attitude towards the profession. And the success of the course mostly depends on the teachers whether the college is public, private or government funded. So, it is necessary to encourage, motivate and modify the teachers' professional commitment to bring change into the present pedagogy and make the writing courses a success.

Dealing with a Sample Chapter

This section of this article deals with an example of how a chapter can be handled in the classroom to teach an essay using the textbook *Patterns for college writing: A rhetorical reader and guide*. The discussion concentrates on the way of planning, handling the process and creating the product. One should modify the process as per the level of the students in the classroom without going away from the spirit of the textbook. The following design is for the students who can understand and use oral and written forms of communication in English. The sample chapter chosen here is reading and writing a narrative essay.

In the planning phase, the course instructor needs to encourage the students to form groups. The learners should be convinced to attend the class with all necessary study materials. In case of financial problems, one group should have a minimum book to use in the class when they are together i.e. a book minimum in each group. Then the students need to be made aware of the pre-, while-, and post-writing stages they have to work through. As the text has not been set for a while- and post-writing exercises, the teacher has to design them based on the discussion in the first part of the book (pp. 29-93). The teacher should be careful enough not to miss out on their basic roles: supporting the students in the writing process and involving themselves in writing together with the students. They should keep in mind that the teachers' role does not end with discussing the

essays selected in the syllabus. Their real role starts after it. They have to support the students in the writing process!

With these preparations, the students should be reminded about what they need to do during the three stages of writing: pre-, while-, and post-. In the pre-writing stage, they need to understand the principle of narrative essays. Then the learners have to read the sample of narrative essays given in the chapter to understand how the principle has practically been applied. When they can recognize the elements and organization of narrative essays in practice, they can plan for their own essay. For this, at first, the class should be involved in the discussion on “What Is Narration?” letting the students read the content on the first page of the chapter i.e. p. 97 and ask what they understand by the term ‘narration’. Then the discussion should concentrate on the idea of narration. When the students are clear on the idea that narration means storytelling, the class should discuss the appropriate place and conditions for the use of narration. They should be made aware of the fact that they are not writing a story, but an essay that tells a story and proves a thesis it has claimed. The narration is used as a support for the main idea (explicit or implicit) of an essay.

After the idea and use of narration in an essay is clear, the class discussion needs to concentrate on planning a narrative essay. The class can talk about implicit and explicit theses with an example for each. The discussion on ‘chronological order’ and ‘flashback’ with examples from someone’s life can be helpful guide for the students to be conceptually clear. Then the class discussion should deal with structuring a narrative essay. The sample outline given in pp. 100-101 can be useful for the students to start the structure of their upcoming essay. Reading and working with the samples such as a student writer’s “My Field of Dreams” (pp. 103-4) following the process the book has presented in pp. 105-7 can guide the students to understand the elements and structuring of a narrative essay. Then the reading of Sandra Cisneros’ “Only Daughter” can be given as a reading assignment for the students. When they join the class with the reading and a certain level of understanding of the essay, the next class can include the discussion on comprehension, purpose and audience. Here, the teacher’s role should be assisting and encouraging students to express their findings and give opinion about the findings of their classmates’ expressions. The next class can deal with style and structure. Following the same process, the next two classes should deal with Bonnie Smith-Yackel’s “My Mother Never Worked”. These discussions will make students clear about the composition of a narrative essay.

Then, they need to start writing the responses as the text has designed the process. On *the first day*, they can work with the journal entry. For this, the students can choose

(group-wise) one of the following two entries: a) Recount an incident that illustrates how the number and gender of your siblings “Explain[s] everything” about who you are today. b) Do you believe that a homemaker who has never been a wage earner should be entitled to a Social Security death benefit for her survivors? Explain your reasoning (p. 113). In the class, they will listen to each writing in a group and choose one for presentation to the whole class. The length of the writing should be flexible. They will write from one paragraph to five.

On *the second day*, they should work on finding a topic for their writing. Students may choose (group-wise) from the “Writing Assignment for Narration” (pp. 126-27) or find their own topic for writing. The teacher needs to help them determine their title. The students will plan for the writing (with group discussion, brain-storming, clustering, outlining...). The assignment of the day can be to decide the thesis of their writing and main incidents to support it. In the class on *the third day*, the students can arrange the incidents they have collected to support the thesis. For this, in the beginning the students will first report the incidents they have collected in respective groups. One from each group will report to the whole class after the group discussion. The teacher will observe their discussion, suggest and help them, and listen to their presentation. Finally, the assignment of the day can be the writing on their topic in about 400 words. They should be made clear that in a narrative essay there cannot be any exact form of paragraph like in the case of argumentative essay. But they have to make sure that each paragraph discusses one incident or a cluster of similar incidents.

The students will join *the fourth day* class with their first draft of a narrative essay. It will be the day for the first peer review within the group. They can use the following checklist for the peer review I:

- Thesis statement: Is it appropriate?
- Introduction: Does it have all the elements of an introduction? How can it be improved?
- Body paragraphs: Are they related to the title?
- Is each paragraph about a single incident or the clustering of the incidents of one type?
- Conclusion: Does it reinforce the thesis?

After the comments from the group members, the class will discuss on the way these writings can be improved following the comments and suggestions from the peer reviewers. Then they can be made aware of the process of the next peer review designed for the next day. They have to join the next class with their improved version of the writing which will be the second draft.

On *the fifth day* of class, they will practice with the second peer review that will concentrate on the following checklist:

- Words: Can some words be changed to make the writing more effective?
- Sentences: Are the sentences of a variety of types and lengths?
- Any other suggestions on the language of the writing?

The assignment for the day can be to finalize their writings, to put them on A4 size paper and submit it to their course instructor/teacher in the next class. The next class will deal with the post-writing stage. So, *on the sixth* or the *final day*, students need to present the selected writings to the class so that the whole class can find a way of writing a narrative essay.

Conclusion

Patterns for college writing: A rhetorical reader and guide is a good book for learning writing at the college level, but the practice has shown it a failure in TU classrooms. The process of learning writing with the intensive involvement of both the course instructor and learners has been practically mentioned and explained in the first part of the book. In the second part, there are examples and opportunities for practice. When the students and teachers are well prepared and involved in the writing process, it can lead a learner to achieve the course objectives. But the real classroom practices of BBS first year in Tribhuvan University campuses did not go along the spirit of the curriculum and the textbook in most of the cases. Some teachers who were committed to their professional duties and responsibilities could do justice to the course, the textbook and the students' right to learning writing appropriately. The survey has indicated that teachers can be change agents if they are well prepared and devotedly involved in their academic responsibilities.

References

- Bacon, F. (n. d.). Of Studies. <https://www.psy.gla.ac.uk>
- Bauman, M. G. (2007). *Ideas and details: A guide to college writing*. 6th ed. Thomson Wadsworth.
- BBS Curriculum. (2019). Faculty of Management, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.
- Kirszner, L. G. & Mandell, S. R. (2012). *Patterns for college writing: A rhetorical reader and guide*. Customized for Nepal. Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Timalsina, R. (October 7, 2021). *Patterns for College Writing: Modes and Approaches*, a paper presented at Course Orientation Programme organized by UGC, Nepal, and coordinated by City College Biratnagar.