

## **You Write What You Read: A Case for Combining Reading and Writing in EFL Programs**

読んだことを書く：

EFLにおけるリーディングとライティングを融合する試み

Brian J. English

**Abstract:** This paper intends to offer rationale for combining the teaching of L2 reading and L2 writing as well as offer suggestions on how to design courses that bridge connections between reading material and writing assignments. The bifurcation of L2 reading and L2 writing courses can lead to incongruent pedagogical approaches and goals. An examination of the inherent relationship between reading and writing provides rationale for a reading-for-writing approach in EFL programs. In addition to the benefits for the second language learner, reading for writing can provide teachers with comprehensive feedback on how well students are able to use the targeted language elements. Since writing is a language skill that has a focus-on-form emphasis, combining reading and writing into one class can help instructors understand to what degree students comprehend grammatical structures and new vocabulary.

**Keywords:** EFL writing, EFL reading, reading for writing, schemata building,

**要約:** 本稿は、リーディングとライティングを結合させた L2 指導法の理論的根拠を提示し、また、リーディングの教材とライティングの課題がうまく結びついた授業を立案する方法について、いくつかの提案をする。L2 のリーディングとライティングを分離させると、指導方法や目的に不調和が生じるかもしれない。「読むこと」と「書くこと」の間に存在する本来的な関係を考えれば、外国語として学ぶ英語のプログラムに「書くことを目的とした読み」の手法を取り入れることは理に適ったものと言える。また、このような授業は学習者にとって有益であるだけでなく、学習者が目標言語を実際に使用できるのかを教師が把握するためのフィードバックの提供にもなる。ライティングは形式に焦点を当てる活動であるから、リーディングとライティングが融合した授業を行う教師は、学習者の文法・語彙の理解度を容易に把握できるであろう。

**キーワード:** ライティング、書くための読み、スキーマビルディング

### **Introduction**

The title of this paper is an obvious twist on the old adage, “You are what you eat.” Although eating and reading may be very different actions, the connection between the old saying and this paper’s title should be apparent. Just as it is important to eat the proper food to have a healthy body, it is important for teachers to feed their students the proper reading texts to prepare them for writing. In second language (L2) teaching, the common term for this connection is *reading for writing*. This approach to combining L2

reading and L2 writing instruction can “be understood as acknowledging that writing is often the physical artifact of reading/writing encounters” (Carson, 1993, p.85). However, this approach is not as simple as providing a reading text and then having students write their thoughts and opinions based on what they have read. The intricate connections between reading and writing require a more complex approach to combining L2 reading and L2 writing instruction. Therefore, this paper intends to offer rationale for combining the teaching of L2 reading and L2 writing as well as offer suggestions on how to design courses that bridge connections between reading material and writing assignments.

### **Challenge for EFL Programs**

English as a foreign language (EFL) is a required course at many colleges and universities in countries where the majority of citizens do not speak English. Although many students enroll in multi-skills classes that focus on oral communication and basic survival English, some universities offer comprehensive programs that focus on developing language skills appropriate for students to continue academic encounters in the target language. These programs intend to prepare students for matriculation into English language universities or for employment in companies that require a high level of fluency in English. In EFL settings (schools located where English is not widely spoken), it is common for these programs to isolate the teaching focus of classes according to the four basic language skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing. Why this arrangement is so common is somewhat unclear. It may be due to an apparent logical way of arranging teaching goals in course syllabi to coincide with and emphasize specific language skills or it may be due to a tradition of evaluating students’ ability for each skill separately on tests such as the TOEFL and the TOEIC. Whatever the reason is for institutions to design programs that isolate the teaching of language skills, publishing companies reinforce the system of separating skills by offering numerous textbooks that focus on teaching a specific skill.

However convenient or logical this arrangement may seem, it is counterintuitive to the principles of language acquisition. Isolation of these skills ignores the interactive relationship of reading and writing and the value that connecting the teaching of these skills can have on students’ language acquisition (Hirvela, 2004; Tsai, 2006). Specifically, the bifurcation of L2 reading and L2 writing courses can lead to incongruent pedagogical approaches and goals. Basically, the isolation of skills in

teaching a second language changes the purpose for practicing a particular skill. According to Leki (1993), isolating L2 reading can result in instructors and students getting lost in details of hunting for main ideas and learning suffixes or prefixes instead of focusing on decoding the texts. This isolation disregards the need for reading to be a purposeful, real world activity. In addition, Nation (2009) asserts that L2 reading courses should involve the practice of other language skills. Reading, as meaning-focused input, provides background knowledge for meaning-focused output. Although Nation specifically mentions using the ask-and-answer technique as an example for meaning-focused output, there are ample types of other meaning-focused writing assignments.

The bifurcation of L2 reading and L2 writing courses creates a disconnectedness that is disadvantageous for the second language learner. Conversely, reading-for-writing courses can aid in establishing connections that facilitate acquisition of language. Brown (2007) emphasizes this point by being very specific about the value of connecting reading and writing:

Clearly, students learn to write in part by carefully observing what is already written. That is, they learn by observing, or reading, the written word. By reading and studying a variety of relevant types of text, students can gain important insights both about how they should write and about subject matter that may become the topic of writing. (p. 347)

Perhaps the key word is “relevant”. One of the main reasons for teaching L2 reading and L2 writing in the same course is to relate the material that students read to the assignments that students write. This adds meaning and purpose to the activities and tasks that students complete in a given unit. Reading texts provide models for style, vocabulary and specific sentence structures. Therefore, a reading-for-writing course provides students with adequate models for understanding writing assignments on both a macro-level (organization and style) and a micro-level (vocabulary and sentence structure). By combining reading-oriented approaches that promote inductive learning with consciousness-raising deductive teaching approaches, students can practice emulating the rhetorical models they have discovered in assigned readings. For example, if the writing goal is to write a movie review, students should first read a

significant number of movie reviews. Through the readings of authentic texts, students will begin to understand the organization of information and the general style for a movie review. Additionally, students should realize that movie reviews contain some specific vocabulary that they can use in the writing assignment. Another example could be an assignment in which students are to write a typical comparison and contrast paragraph or essay. Reading a variety of examples for both block organization and point-by-point organization, students begin to understand possibilities for organizing their ideas. Consciousness-raising classroom exercises can help students understand the various adverb clauses that are necessary in a comparison and contrast paragraph. The readings should be full of models for adverb clauses denoting similarities (in the same way, likewise, just as) and adverb clauses denoting contrast (however, whereas, while, although).

## **L2 Reading and L2 Writing Connections**

In a paper that advocates EFL programs combine reading and writing, it would be remiss not to mention Stephen Krashen's research on second language acquisition and L2 reading. Krashen (1985) postulates in his widely accepted "Input Hypothesis" that L2 learners acquire language when messages are comprehensible. If the level of the language is slightly higher than the learner's linguistic competence (commonly referred to as  $i + 1$ ), learners will acquire new language provided the input is comprehensible. This early research has become the foundation for Krashen advocating the power of reading in second language acquisition. Stressing that reading material should be meaningful and interesting to capture the L2 reader's attention, Krashen (2004) claims that reading large amounts of text increases reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition as well as having an influence of developing writing skills.

Reading may differ from writing in that reading is decoding a message while writing is transcribing a message. This difference, though, further reinforces the connections of reading and writing because it is through the decoding of messages that L2 students learn how to organize and transcribe their ideas (Brown, 2007).

The connections between reading and writing go well beyond decoding and transcribing. Tierney and Leys (1986 as cited in Carson, 1993) claim the connections involve information storage, information retrieval, discovering of new information, logical thought processing and communication. These connections are part of a shared process since the way a reader comprehends text is similar cognitively to the way a

writer composes a text (Carson, 1993; Hirvela, 2004). Both reading and writing require significant background knowledge; therefore, schemata-building activities are essential in the pre-reading and pre-writing stages of the process. Schemata-building activities increase the funds of knowledge for the L2 learner enabling the L2 reader to understand specific content while decoding a text and, in the same way, enabling a L2 writer to have a greater pool of information to draw on while transcribing a text.

These connections strengthen the argument for why L2 reading and L2 writing should be combined in academic EFL programs. Since the process that an L2 reader uses in decoding the meaning of a text is so similar to the process that an L2 writer uses to create meaning, it makes sense to emphasize reading for writing so that newly acquired knowledge and language skills will have a reciprocal effect on skills development for the L2 reader/writer. In this sense, reading for writing is not just an approach, it is a facilitative strategy for instruction in L2 literacy classrooms (Tsai, 2006).

### **Rationale for Combining L2 Reading and L2 Writing Courses**

There are a number of reasons for combining L2 reading and L2 writing into a single “reading-for-writing” course. These reasons include pedagogical reasons and logistical reasons:

1. *Efficiency in building schemata* – If reading material is linked to writing assignments, pre-reading techniques such as watching videos or topical discussions for building schemata will be effective in the idea-generating stage for a writing assignment. Additionally, the reading material should fortify students’ newly acquired content knowledge of topics for writing assignments.
  
2. *Reading is idea generating* – Reading is valuable in the pre-writing stage for triggering a thought process to spawn ideas and encourage students to see topics from a variety of angles. Tabatabaei and Ali (2012) found that reading-based pre-writing activities significantly improved the writing performance of EFL learners in their study sample. Consequently, they recommend using a variety of reading tasks as pre-writing activities.

3. *Combining inductive and deductive approaches for learning vocabulary and grammar* – Through extensive reading, students acquire new vocabulary and build their grammatical competence (Krashen, 1985; Brown, 1987; Hirvela, 2004; Plakans, 2009; Mo, 2012). In reading-for-writing courses, language acquisition is inductive learning through reading. Once students begin writing, teachers can use a variety of deductive methods to build students' awareness of how to use new vocabulary and newly acquired grammatical structures. For example, assignments may require students to use specific vocabulary or sentence patterns that the students need to highlight to demonstrate they have achieved that goal for the assignment. However, if the target structures are not used correctly, the teacher will explicitly review the grammar as an additional step in the consciousness-raising process for teaching grammar.
4. *Similar cognitive process* - The SQ3R strategy for decoding texts approximately parallels the five steps in the writing process.

<b><i>Reading – SQ3R</i></b>	<b><i>Writing Process</i></b>	<b><i>Commonality of Process Step</i></b>
Survey	Idea-generating	Building schemata and developing a general understanding of the topic.
Questioning	Organizing ideas	Holistic approach to making connections of main ideas
Reading	Writing	Reception vs. Generation
Recite	Macro-revision	Seeing, saying hearing approach to understanding how ideas are connected
Review	Micro-revision	Focus on meaning vs. Focus on Form

5. *Reciprocal effect for understanding texts* – Hirvela (2004) explains that the linguistic challenges that differentiate L1 students and L2 students lead to difficulties not only in writing, but also in reading. Therefore, the unique challenges of teaching writing to L2 students may require an explicit emphasis on building reading skills. Grabe (1991) aptly summarizes the reciprocal

nature of reading and writing by stating that better writers tend to be better readers since better writers read more. Likewise, better readers tend to write “more syntactically mature prose” (p. 394).

### **Reading for Writing Strategies**

One of the major goals of an EFL reading course is to teach students reading strategies so that they may apply those strategies to any text whether it is a novel or a passage on an exam. These strategies usually include previewing, skimming, scanning and guessing the meaning of new vocabulary words for the context of the sentence. Typically, EFL reading textbooks include an assortment of exercises designed for students to practice using these strategies. Although, as Leki (1993) points out, these strategies may be useful for the proficient reader, these strategies are not the “cause” for proficiency in reading. Rather, these strategies are the result of reading proficiency.

Unfortunately, despite being aware of such strategies many EFL readers either lack the confidence to trust these strategies or lack the language knowledge to use them effectively. As a result, the EFL reader will drudge through the text focusing on the meaning of individual words while losing the meaning of the text. The convenience of electronic dictionaries tends to reinforce this practice as readers frantically look up every word they do not understand. Leki (1993) further notes, “In the same way, excessive attention to details in inexperienced writers is the symptom, not the cause, of difficulty with the task (p.16).” Therefore, the implication is that instructors include more holistic strategies that focus on meaning. This is not to say that focus on form is not important, it is merely a confidence-building technique to encourage students to read for meaning first. Likewise, a focus-on-meaning technique may be beneficial in quick-write exercises and first drafts in order to free students from fear of writing grammatically incorrect sentences or using the wrong words.

Since both reading and writing require an adequate level of language knowledge such as lexical awareness and grammatical competence, the more reading material that is offered in a writing course the greater the opportunity students will have to acquire knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures, or rhetorical features of texts (Tsai, 2006). The pedagogical implication is for teachers to use strategies that facilitate the acquisition of language while scaffolding reading material to encourage the production of target language on written assignments. Many proponents of combining L2 reading

and L2 writing courses (Hirvela, 2004; Tsai, 2006; Plakans, 2009) suggest teaching various strategies for reading to write such as mining, writerly reading, rhetorical reading, modeling, and extensive reading. Mining, a common process of gathering information from a text to satisfy a specific goal is similar to skimming and scanning for information. This reading strategy can be easily practiced in task-based exercises to train students how to use mining as a way of collecting necessary content for writing longer essays or research papers. Writerly reading differs from mining in that writerly reading aims to improve students' use of vocabulary and rhetorical modes by example.

### **Recommendations for Integrating L2 Reading and L2 Writing**

In the last ten years, there has been a growing advocacy among L2 researchers to integrate L2 reading and L2 writing into a reading-for-writing approach. With this growing advocacy comes a variety of suggestions that benefit L2 writing instructors who are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with teaching L2 reading and vice versa.

#### ***Combining Intensive and Extensive Reading***

Many experts stress the importance of providing as much reading material as possible for students (Krashen, 1985; Brown, 1987; Hirvela, 2004). Reading extensively builds awareness of the ways English is used in written communication (Mo, 2012). However, just providing material and hoping that students will read is certainly not enough. Some motivated students who are adept individual learners may take the initiative to read on their own, but other students may need more encouragement and guidance. Therefore, to integrate reading and writing adequately, Mo (2012) suggests writing exercises such as summarizing and imitation since these types of exercises combine extensive and intensive reading.

Summarizing is valuable practice that requires students to search for main ideas and then restate those ideas using their own words. Summarizing exercises are suited for short articles and essays as well as other material such as novels, biographies or other longer prose that students read from an extensive reading collection (Mo, 2012). Imitation is using thematic readings that are commonly found in college textbooks as models for students to imitate. Instructors can analyze these texts in class as a way of explicitly emphasizing various aspects of the writings. The analysis should begin on a macro-level that draws attention to writing styles, rhetorical modes and organization.



As students begin to understand those aspects of writing, the instructor can shift the analysis to the micro-level by focusing attention on relevant vocabulary and sentence patterns. After presenting and analyzing several model texts, students are asked to write a similar piece while trying to imitate style, rhetorical modes and organization.

### ***Highlighting Targeted Language***

This is very similar to analyzing texts for imitation as mentioned above. As L2 writing students either correctly or incorrectly use similar grammatical structures to those sentence patterns highlighted in reading material, instructors become aware of specific points that need review and additional practice on a micro-level. For such explicit language teaching, instructors may incorporate traditional grammar exercises to support students' efforts during the revision process of composition assignments. Likewise, L2 writing instructors can use students' compositions to receive feedback on how well students acquire new vocabulary and are able to use those words or expressions effectively.

### ***Web-based Materials***

Using web-based materials to build schemata is beneficial as both pre-reading and pre-writing activities. Pictures, videos, blogs and other internet sites are excellent for familiarizing students with content that may be new. For example, if students are to read several articles about the causes and effects of various environmental problems and then write a cause-and-effect essay on an environmental problem they choose; it would be very useful to first show the students several videos or pictures of related environmental topics so they can begin to visualize what they are about to read. Web-based schemata-building activities that prepare students for both reading and writing assignments are also a way of conserving resources since the activities serve to build schemata for L2 reading texts and an L2 writing assignments simultaneously.

### ***Peer Sharing***

Although many writing instructors use peer evaluation or peer sharing of writing assignments as pedagogical tool in the L2 writing class, it should be considered as an integral exercise in the reading-for-writing class. Leki (1993) claims the peers sharing

what they write in the classroom can add a social dimension. She explains, “By reading each other’s texts in a reading/writing class, students directly confront the elusive, slippery nature of meaning” (p. 22). Since what a writer intends may not be what the reader perceives as the meaning, such peer sharing creates an opportunity for “real negotiation over meaning.” Qian (2010) reasons that peer sharing “is an important part of the writing experience because it is by responding as readers that students will develop an awareness of the fact that a writer is producing something to be read by someone else” (p.15).

### ***Encourage Students to Avoid Translation***

As electronic dictionaries have become ubiquitous in the EFL classroom, students often use them as if they were magic wands capable of deciphering the secret code of all those unfamiliar words. However, rather than being a shortcut to language acquisition, electronic dictionaries are more like to be a crutch that can permanently handicap a language learner. Therefore, it is imperative that instructors teach students how to use dictionaries effectively. Students should minimize using dictionaries while reading so as not to dwell on each word, but rather focus on the meaning of the text. For writing, instructors need to stress the usefulness of using dictionaries as tools to find models for how new words are correctly used in sentences. Part of this process is encouraging students to use English-to-English functions on their electronic dictionaries.

## **Conclusion**

Students need challenges in language production that provide an opportunity to build on what they have learned (Olajide, 2010). Creating those challenges for students is exactly what reading for writing does. As L2 reading students acquire vocabulary, gain syntactic awareness and increase their funds of content knowledge, they require an outlet to reinforce, evaluate and analyze what they have learnt. Combining writing assignments with what students are reading affords students the chance to demonstrate their ability to use the targeted L2 language elements. Writing assignments that require students to use highlighted sentence patterns from readings (e.g., comparison and contrast; cause and effect) can help students build grammatical competence and expand their lexical abilities.

In addition to providing students with opportunities to build on what they have

learnt, reading for writing also has benefits for providing teachers with comprehensive feedback on how well students are able to use the targeted language elements. Since writing is a language skill that has a focus-on-form emphasis, combining reading and writing into one class can help instructors understand to what degree students comprehend grammatical structures and new vocabulary as well as to what degree students are able to replicate those sentence models and use new vocabulary words.

### References

- Brown, H. Douglas. (2007). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. New York: Pearson Education.
- Carson, Joan G. (1993). Reading for writing: Cognitive perspectives. In Joan G. Carson and Ilona Leki (Eds.). *Reading in the Composition Classroom*. Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle.
- Grabe, William. (1991). Current developments in second language reading research. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25, (3), pp. 375 – 406.
- Hirvela, A. (2004). *Connecting Reading and Writing in Second Language Writing Instruction*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Krashen, Stephen. (1985). *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*. Harlow: Longman.
- Krashen, Stephen. (2004). *The Power of Reading: Insights from Research*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann
- Leki, Ilona. (1993). Reciprocal themes in ESL reading and writing. In Joan G. Carson and Ilona Leki (Eds.). *Reading in the Composition Classroom*. Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle.
- Mo, Haiwen. (2012). A study of the teaching of ESL Writing in Colleges in China. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 2, (1), pp. 118 – 127.
- Nation, I.S.P. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing*. London: Routledge.
- Olajide, Stephen Billy. (2010). Linking reading and writing in an English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classroom for national reorientation and reconstruction. *International Education Studies*, 3, (3), pp. 195 – 200.
- Plakans, Lia. (2009). The role of reading strategies in integrated L2 writing tasks. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, doi:10.1016/j.jeap.2009.05.001
- Qian, Xinyu. (2010). A balanced approach to the teaching of intermediate-level writing skills to EFL students. *English Language Teaching*, 3, (2), pp. 13 -16.
- Tabatabaei, Omid and Ali, Hamed Amin. (2012). The effect of reading-based prewriting activities on the writing performance in an EFL setting. *Journal of Educational and*

*Social Research*, 2, (3), pp. 371 – 382.

Tsai, Jui-min. (2006). Connecting reading and writing in college EFL courses. *The Internet TESL Journal*, XII, (12). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/TsaiReadingWritingConnection.html>

---

Received on January 5, 2014.