*The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning, 2011–1, 64-77*

# Putting the Writing Process into Action in the L2 Classroom: Pre-writing Techniques that Work

## David R. Byrd[*]

**Abstract**

Writing in a second language is a complex process. Learners are expected to develop an idea—that may or may not be their own—into a fully articulated product while paying attention to linguistic features of the target language that they might not yet possess. Often they are asked to do this on their own without the guidance of their instructor, who expects a polished piece of writing to be turned in later. This article presents several ideas to help jumpstart the writing process; providing students with much needed support throughout. These ideas can be used at any level of second language writing instruction to produce more focused writing pieces and aid in making writing more communicative in nature.

**Key words:** Writing; group work; writing process; second language writing; pre-writing

## 1. Introduction

Writing in second language (L2) classrooms is often viewed merely as a way of completing homework assignments, especially at the beginning and intermediate levels (Lally, 2000). However, it is an important skill that helps reinforce language, content, culture and literacy in a second language. In order to help move this skill toward its full potential, L2 educators must begin to accept writing as a process, and – furthermore – writing as an activity that deserves explicit attention in the curriculum and daily lesson planning. Unfortunately, most students do not take the time to form and organize their ideas in an L2 writing project; rather they simply aim for the final product, thinking that one draft is enough. This begins a vicious cycle, as pointed out by Barnett (1989) when she stated, "students submit frankly unpolished papers which teachers treat as final products, encouraging them to offer similar work the next time" (p. 32). Much of this is allowed to happen by our profession's tendency to view L2 writing as exercises in

---

[*] Weber State University, email: davidbyrd@weber.edu

practicing grammatical or lexical skills, rather than as opportunities to develop written communication skills (Bräuer, 1997; Greenia, 1992; Lee, 1994; Williams, 2005). Leki (1996) even found instances of foreign language teachers implementing writing in their classrooms just for the sake of writing with no specific goal in mind.  Frequently, the students are given one topic and few guidelines, such as how many sentences or pages the final product should be.  Students can struggle even to begin the task; much less complete it in a satisfactory manner. Clark (1983) emphasizes that students may need help to narrow the assigned topic, but are instead left to complete the composition by themselves (p.151).  Kroll (quoted in McKee, 1981) emphasizes that without pre-writing guidance students launch into ideas that they may have trouble expressing due to limitations of linguistic forms. With the help of pre-writing activities, writers are given the guidance needed to produce a more successful piece of work, by allowing them to examine possible interpretations of the writing prompt, or review vocabulary necessary to complete the assignment successfully.  Pre-writing activities allow students to activate existing schemata or create new ones for vocabulary, syntax and cultural content for the writing task (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Kroll, 1990; Swaffar, 1988).

Pre-writing guidance is often given in the first language (L1) classroom and the students may not be aware that the skills they learn there can be transferred to their L2 writing project (Ovando, Combs & Collier, 2006). Most L2 teachers are not always aware of the skill that a majority of their students possess, into which they can tap to improve L2 writing (Barnett, 1989). Furthermore, writing is arguably a neglected child in L2 classrooms because very few teachers take the time to teach it explicitly.  Rather, we assume that since our students can write in the L1, they can automatically transfer this literacy skill into the L2 content. However, this is not the case and the gap is most visible when students arrive at higher level courses and struggle with writing assignments that require them to address content in addition to mechanics and vocabulary (Lally, 2000). The present article offers some practical pre-writing techniques to help teachers activate their students' latent skills at all levels of L2 instruction in jumpstarting the writing process wherever it may be lagging and develop better student writing.

## 2. Review of Literature

Ackerman (1989) reports that professional writers use pre-writing techniques in creating their works.  For instance, the eccentric, 20th century British poetess, Dame Edith Sitwell, would lie in an open coffin before beginning to write. The French journalist and writer, Balzac, drank more than fifty cups of coffee each day to help the ideas to begin to flow. We can hardly ask our students to do these same or even similar activities as a pre-cursor to their writing. However, we can emphasize in our classes that pre-writing is part of professional writers' creative processes by showing examples similar to, though perhaps not so extreme as those cited above. By demonstrating that those who earn their living as writers make pre-writing activities a regular and important part of the composing process, we can help our students realize that they, as developing writers, need to participate in such endeavors to help them to grow in this vital area. As Dörnyei (1997) suggests, "the cohesiveness-performance effect can be particularly strong in language classes in which the learners' communicative skills are developed primarily through participatory experience in real world tasks" (p. 485). Pre-writing allows students to participate in this real world task of the writing process.

Researchers have found that pre-writing activities help increase the quality of work done by writers in both L1 and L2.  Perl (1994) found in a study of L1 writers who were deemed as "unskilled" benefited from some type of pre-writing to improve composition skills. She observed and interviewed these students throughout a semester enrolled in a social science class and

examined their writing processes, coding the results. One significant finding about pre-writing that Perl made was summed up in the following statement "that seeing ideas on paper enables students to reflect upon, change and develop those ideas further" (p. 54). Rau and Sebrechts (1996) found that it was not enough for students to see the ideas just on paper. Rather, they discovered that using pre-writing activities led to more changes to text content and less to syntax, and that the resulting compositions were judged to be more sophisticated and creative, regardless of the writing medium. In this experiment, subjects were divided first into two groups, one using a word processing program and the other using pen-and-paper, according to their usual preferred writing method, ascertained by a previously given questionnaire. The subjects in each of these groups were divided into two further groups; half were assigned to a pre-writing condition and half to an immediate writing condition, thus resulting in four subgroups: 1) word processing / pre-writing; 2) word-processing / immediate writing; 3) pen-and-paper / pre-writing; 4) pen-and-paper / immediate writing). Whether writers used word processing or pen-and-paper, students who completed the pre-writing activities outperformed their non-pre-writing counterparts.

Examining the writing of 424 adult German learners at various levels of instruction, Becker (1991) studied the use of the pre-writing technique known as clustering, described below. One group of students used this technique for five minutes before writing a composition, while the other group simply began writing.  Becker found that the essays from the group that used this pre-writing technique were rated higher than those of the control group in imagery and interesting ideas when the written products were presented to two independent evaluators. Likewise, Martinez-Gibson (1998) studied Spanish composition students, who were divided into a 'cultural-discussion' group and a 'non-cultural discussion' group, both of which were told before viewing a television commercial that they would be expected to write a comparison/contrast essay afterwards. The cultural discussion group participated in several pre-writing activities, including brainstorming and categorizing the ideas generated and class discussions.  In contrast, the other group was told simply to identify gestures, words or actions that were familiar or unfamiliar to them. The cultural discussion group outperformed the other group in cohesiveness in writing, which was defined as including a thesis statement, supporting details, connections between paragraphs and an appropriate introduction and conclusion.

 Similarly, Hornung (2000) reports on a study conducted with two sets of native Italian speaking students, who were asked to write a summary in German of an article on economics originally written in German.  The control group, known as Trento, received no pre-writing help; whereas the experimental group, Verona, participated in a ten minute free writing exercise and discussion group.  The Verona group was able to produce better summaries, defined as having a greater number of important utterances, better coherence and the paper was written in more proper, although not perfect German. The Trento group tended to give more word-for-word translations from Italian to German, losing overall comprehension in the process.

Research has found that writing process skills can be obtained in the target language and/or successfully transferred from the L1 to the L2. Zamel (1982, 1983) reported that her advanced English as Second Language (ESL) writers understood the writing process; and, likewise, her weaker writers were aided in their writing by learning to pre-write, as well as implementing other writing process steps. Raimes (1987) compared ESL students' writing processes with processes by basic L1 writers as established by research and concluded that the two groups had much in common, such re-reading the prompt, rehearsing ideas, planning their writing and rescanning what they have already written. Hornung (2000) found that her students were not only able to transfer writing process skills from L1 to L2, but she encouraged them to code-switch, or use either language in pre-writing activities. She cites Schreuder and Weltens (1993),

who state that code-switching is regarded as a normal part of growing up bilingually and acquiring competence in more than one language. Hornung feels that this code-switching is a great motivator, as L2 writers are no longer blocked by words with which they are initially unfamiliar and they are willing to take risks. Likewise, Friedlander (1990) found that native Chinese speakers were able to pre-plan better and, subsequently produce better texts in English when they used the language, Chinese or English, which corresponded to which country and language they were speaking during the experience in the pre-writing stage. Finally, Stapa and Abdul Majid (2009) demonstrated that English as foreign language students who were allowed to brainstorm in their native language as well as English produced writing drafts that contained greater content and achieved overall higher scores on their holistically graded products. They encourage the selective use of the L1 to increase writing proficiency, particularly at the early levels of language learning.

As the literature suggests, pre-writing activities can help to make writing in the L2 into a more communicative skill, allowing students at all levels of instruction to benefit from such tasks. The final writing products of students who take part in some type of pre-writing task show a definite increase in quality. Students can benefit from the limited use of their L1 during a pre-writing session to help improve their L2 writing task. Since many of our students already possess some degree of knowledge of pre-writing methods, instructors can help facilitate the transfer of this understanding from the L1 into the L2 and make practical use of pre-writing tasks in the L2 classroom.

## 3. Conducting a Pre-Writing Activity

Though pre-writing tasks vary, the following guidelines are recommended to lay the groundwork for most types of pre-writing sessions:

- Emphasize that pre-writing activities deal with the word and phrase level of writing and that students need not be overly concerned with mechanics and syntax.
- Students write the topic of the writing assignment on the pre-writing handout or paper as a constant reminder.
- The initial pre-writing session can narrow a broad topic into more manageable chunks.
- Further pre-writing sessions can generate global ideas based on the manageable topic and supply supporting details for the topic.
- A time limit needs to be given for a pre-writing activity to encourage the students to focus their thoughts on the topic at hand. The time limit depends upon the type of activity and is generally short (i.e. 30 to 90 seconds) with some important exceptions detailed below.
- Stress to students that by providing as many details as possible in this stage of the writing process, they form a strong foundation upon which to complete the writing task.
- Depending upon the level of the students, the use of the L2 needs to be encouraged, but not necessarily used exclusively. The higher the level of the writers, the more the L2 can play a significant role.

## 4. Types of Pre-Writing Tasks

For the L2 classroom, there are several options for pre-writing activities. Some of these include: brainstorming, clustering, drawing, dyad and triads, free-writing and graphic organizers. This final category consists of, for example, narrative strips, KWL, four column chart,

and flowcharts. The following sections provide examples of each of these activities. Unless otherwise noted, all of these pre-writing activities can be performed individually, in small groups or as a large group or a class; and the goal of the pre-writing activity should be considered when determining grouping configurations. Such considerations may include identifying the characteristics of the audience for the paper; generating vocabulary that is useful to the entire class; narrowing a general topic so that each student will be able to discover their individual connection to it; or small groups coming up with ideas for a group writing task or individual tasks that are similar in nature.

*4.1 Brainstorming*

This is a good beginning pre-writing task for L2 writers, as it does not require any special handout or much practice. During a brainstorming session, students are given a topic and they generate a list of words or phrases in a group. This can be done either in small groups at the students' desks or as a whole class activity (Sebranek, Meyer & Kemper, 2000; Williams, 2005). In a brainstorming session, it is easy to guide students, if necessary, by steering students towards ideas and vocabulary they may not have otherwise considered by asking specific questions, like 'who' or 'what' or by providing words or phrases with which they may not yet be familiar. For instance, to generate or review vocabulary through brainstorming for free-time activities, the instructor writes the phrase on the board or projects them on the screen via an overhead projector and allows the class to offer any item that they may think of related to the topic. The teacher can, if necessary, guide the students by asking, "When do we do our free-time activities?" or "With whom do we do them?" Conducting a simple brainstorming session can move beginning students beyond basic, simple sentences to more personal sentences that better express what they feel about the given topic. Remember that accepting words from the students' L1 is a viable option at this point in the writing process.

*4.2 Clustering*

Vacca, Vacca and Mraz (2010) suggest that students begin a clustering activity by writing a key word (or phrase) related to their topic in the middle of a piece of paper. Student writer then enclose the topic with a shape, such as a circle or box. Ideas related to that main point can be connected to it are then added around the main idea. However, another effective use for clustering allows students to consider their audience and their needs; a crucial step met by pre-writing activities. An example of this type of activity is offered in Figure 1.
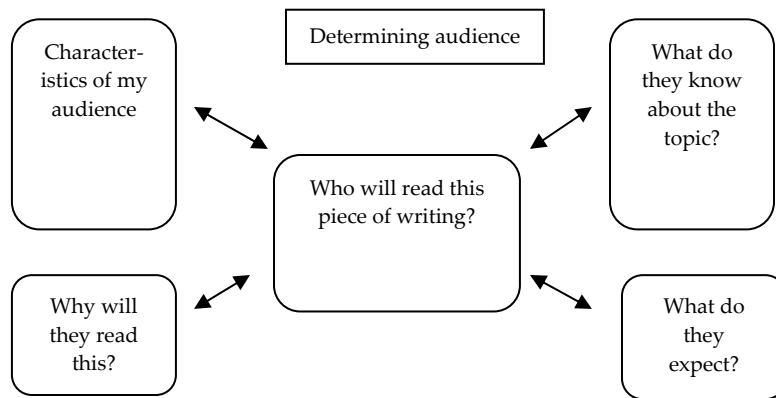
```
┌─────────────┐     ┌──────────────────┐     ┌─────────────┐
│  Character- │     │ Determining      │     │  What do    │
│  istics of  │     │ audience         │     │  they know  │
│  my         │     └──────────────────┘     │  about the  │
│  audience   │                               │  topic?     │
└─────────────┘          ┌──────────────┐     └─────────────┘
                          │ Who will read│
                          │ this piece of│
                          │ writing?     │
┌─────────────┐          └──────────────┘     ┌─────────────┐
│  Why will   │                               │  What do    │
│  they read  │                               │  they       │
│  this?      │                               │  expect?    │
└─────────────┘                               └─────────────┘
```

Figure 1 An example clustering activity

The students write, "Who will read this piece of writing?" in the middle of the paper, then draw a shape around it, where they can answer the question and keep the idea connected to it. Although the main reader of a paper is the teacher, this is not always the case and students can use this time to consider both the primary and/or secondary readers of the paper, depending on the level of the class and the complexity of the writing. The student can further consider the characteristics by listing ideas that describe the target audience. This can include ideas such as the audiences' age, gender or educational level. Another vital idea to determine what the audience already knows about the topic. This will help the writer to realize the amount of background details that need to be included. For example, will the writer need to define key terms or will the audience already have that knowledge? The third box can include an examination of why the audience will read the piece that they are writing. Here the student can look at the type of writing, such as persuasive, informational or entertaining. A fourth box can examine the expectations of the audience members. Different types of writing may conform to certain structures, which the audience may anticipate. For instance, if the piece is a compare/contrast piece, the audience can expect the two points to be presented in a highly structured fashion. It is also with audience expectations in mind that student writers can determine if the writing needs to be formal or informal. By determining ideas like these before writing, many of the concerns of students as to how the piece should be written will be addressed and students' stress levels will decrease. Students can be given up to five minutes per box, depending on the amount of information that needs to be included and the level of the students.

*4.3 Drawing*

This technique is particularly useful for beginning students, since it requires little or no vocabulary in the beginning. On a sheet of blank paper, students draw a picture(s) relating to the assigned topic, using stick figure drawings, if necessary, and providing as much detail as possible, such as location or time elements. For instance, when generating ideas about dining, students can draw a picture showing who is participating, where the meal is taking place, what foods are being eaten and so on.

A drawing activity that focuses on the past includes a larger sheet of paper that students fold into eight sections. The teacher then asks eight questions, such as "What did you do last weekend?" or "Where did you go on vacation last summer?" and allows the students time to draw a detailed picture answering each question in a separate section of the paper. In this

manner students create eight ideas upon which to draw for the topic of their paper. Later, usually as homework, students do a second pre-writing activity, such as brainstorming, focusing on one of the drawings.

### 4.4 Dyads and Triads

Sometimes students need the opportunity to talk about their ideas before they begin their writing task (Freeman & Freeman, 2001). Dyads and triads are small discussion groups that allow students to express themselves verbally in order to bring out ideas and details. Students are grouped together in pairs or sets of three. The small grouping forces the students to talk, since participation is mandatory and they cannot 'hide behind' the larger number of students found in a full-class discussion. In these small groups, students talk about the topic of their writing, whether from a reading or an original writing topic, using as much detail as possible. If others in the group do not understand a certain point or would like more information, they can ask for help. After everyone in the dyad or triad has spoken, students quickly write the details that they remember from the discussion. Others in the group can be encouraged to take notes to help the writer record his/her thoughts as they are spoken aloud.

Dyads and triads are a natural pairing with the drawing activity listed above. After the student writers have completed their drawings, they come together in these small groups and describe verbally what they have included in their picture. Again, the other members of the group ask for more details or explanations about the content of the drawing. They finish the activity by writing down the details that they have discussed in their groups.

### 4.5 Free Writing

This pre-writing task works quite well for more advanced L2 writers and generally needs to be conducted for a minimum of five minutes (Vacca, Vacca & Mraz, 2010; Williams, 2005). By 'forcing' students to write for a minimum of five minutes, ideas and connections can emerge from their long-term memory because students are concentrating deeply on the assigned topic (Martinez, 2010).

Traditionally, to provide focus, students write the topic at the top of their paper. Next, students write, non-stop, generating ideas for their topic, while disregarding spelling or grammatical errors. If the writers cannot think of a new word or phrase, they simply re-write the last idea they had until they are able to move on to another idea or concept. After the writing period is finished, the students closely examine their free write papers. They determine what specific ideas occurred; which ones occurred multiple times naturally; and try to connect threads of ideas that interlink throughout. Based on these tendencies, they can ascertain what ideas can be used as details for their writing assignment.

### 4.6 Graphic Organizers

Historically, this is a category of pre-writing that provides the students with some type of visual worksheet to bring together their ideas. Many, however, can be produced with blank paper and guidance. The following graphic organizer ideas provide students with a framework to identify patterns in reading/writing assignments and generate and/or organize ideas (Novak, 1998).

*4.6.1 Narrative Strips*

This graphic organizer works extremely well with sequential or chronological writing (Col, 2003). Narrative strips are a series of blank boxes on a sheet of paper with spaces between them that provide students the room to write words and phrases that supply the details for a sequential writing task, such as the example in Figure 2.

Topic: _____

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                                         │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                                         │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                                         │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Figure 2.
Narrative strips

In the first strip, the student writers provide the information for the first action/event in their writing project. The second strip is for the second action/event and so on until details for all the actions/events are provided. Teachers can help guide students' writing by provided transition words, like 'first,' 'second,' 'next,' or 'last of all' in the strips. A significant advantage of this pre-writing technique is that, if students discover that they have a detail that is out of place in the narrative, the strips can later be cut out and re-arranged. Although labeled 'narrative strips,' they can be used for many genres, not just sequential stories. Students can use them for a pre-writing task for persuasive or argumentative writing, having the freedom to move arguments around so that they may be more effective if placed elsewhere in the essay. Similarly, the strips can be used to record the major events in a piece of literature and provide the basis for a summary written later on.

As an alternative to providing students with a handout, teachers can have students tear pieces of paper into strips. Students can then write their ideas on these strips as described above.

*4.6.2 KWL*

The KWL chart is an excellent tool to help students find where they stand in regards to their knowledge of a topic (Vacca, Vacca & Mraz, 2010). In the first column the students write whatever they **know** (K) about the assigned topic. Based on the information generated in the first column, students produce questions to fill in the second column to fill in the information that they do not already possess, or **what they want to learn** (W). The students are then encouraged to discover more about the topic before they begin writing. Any information that they **learn** or **still need to learn** (L) is written in the final column. This is an effective method to guide writing ideas for topics that are fairly new to the students. By discovering what they do not know, they have a direction to go for further research. Figure 3 shows a KWL chart.

Topic: _____

| K | W | L |
|---|---|---|
|   |   |   |

Figure 3
KWL chart

This pre-writing method is particularly effective for analysis of reading selections. After determining a topic, students begin with a short session that allows them to list as much as they know from the reading in the first column that deals with their chosen writing topic. Afterwards they spend some time sharing these ideas, so that all can benefit. Next, the students generate questions that they feel will help them glean vital information from their further reading. Finally, as students read, they answer the questions from column two, writing down the information in the last column, adding any further information they may take from their reading. When the reading and the chart are complete, they have a wealth of information upon which to draw for a writing activity.

### 4.6.3 Four Column Chart

As writing assignments become more complex, students can tend to forget to add the necessary details to make the assignment a success. The four column chart can help with this. At the top of this graphic organizer, the students write the general topic about which they want to generate ideas (Auman, 1999). At the top of each of the four columns, they write an idea related to the topic. Below each of the ideas, they list supporting details that are associated with the idea.

Each column now contains the material necessary to write a paragraph for the assigned piece by fashioning a topic sentence from the main idea and subsequent support sentences from the details they have listed. An example Four Column Chart is given in Figure 4.

Topic: _____

| Support #1 | Support #2 | Support #3 | Support #4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Detail #1 | Detail #1 | Detail #1 | Detail #1 |
| Detail #2 | Detail #2 | Detail #2 | Detail #2 |
| Detail #3 | Detail #3 | Detail #3 | Detail #3 |

Figure 4
Four column chart

For example, students may be assigned an essay, requiring them to describe a character in a novel. The students write the name of the character at the top of the sheet and add four ideas vital to the description of the character. Below each of these ideas, the students then supply any

number of details that they can glean from the piece to support each of the ideas at the head of the column, depending on the goals of their paper.

A simple alternative to the handout is to have students use a clean sheet of paper, which they fold in half length-wise and, then fold that in half again. This will give them four columns with which to work.

### *4.6.4 Flowcharts*

Before they begin to write a paper, students may need to determine how the paper will proceed or flow. This is particularly true for the writing of some advanced L2 students. In these instances, flow charts provide an ideal guide for this situation, providing students with a visual representation of how the paper will proceed. Depending on the structure of the paper, students can be given a pre-formatted flowchart or they may need to create their own, based on their unique requirements. Traditionally three shapes form the basis of the basic flow chart: elongated circles to represent the starting and/or ending points; rectangles for actions or instructions and diamonds that allow students to symbolize when a decision must be made. However, teachers and students can adapt the shapes to fulfill their needs. One-way arrows illustrate connections from one point to the next, suggesting movement in one direction. Two-way arrows demonstrate that the ideas are connected and can influence each other mutually. A basic flowchart may resemble the one given in Figure 5.

Topic: _____

Main idea

First action
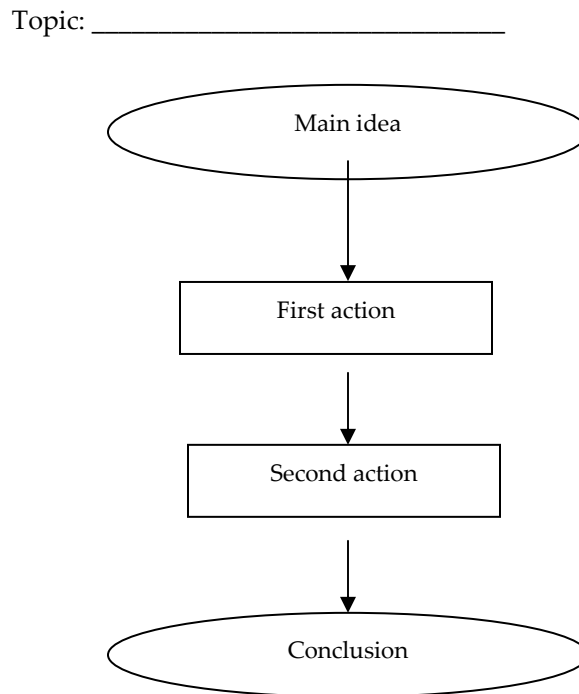
Second action

Conclusion

Figure 5
Basic flowchart

A more involved topic may require that the students discuss options and provide a solution. A flowchart relative to this situation may look more like the example in Figure 6. If students are

reading a piece of literature where a character has performed some action that is questionable and the writer must determine if the character is justified in that action, this type flowchart can help organize their thoughts. The statement or question regarding the action is written in the diamond, and the options are placed in boxes.
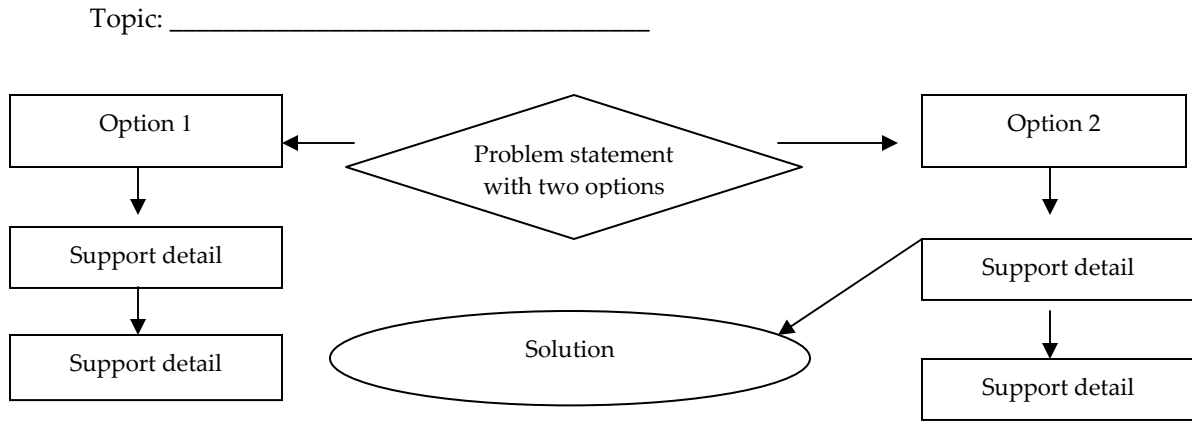
Topic: _____



Figure 6
Options flowchart

Support details or thoughts can be added in boxes below on each side. When the student has exhausted what they feel are all the possible options, they can look at their ideas and provide a solution, drawing an arrow from either side connecting their supports to it. Flowcharts similar to this one provide fertile opportunities for L2 writers to come together in pairs or small groups, as described above, and discuss the issues being addressed.

Flowcharts are also useful for complex reading/writing tasks. When students read an article, such as an article detailing various points-of-view, students can use a flowchart to track the different viewpoints. Regardless of their use, if the teacher provides students with a flowchart, they must be careful to supply students with sufficient graphics to complete the task, favoring too many over too few.

*4.6.5 Lots of variations, lots of fun*

Many of the graphic organizers listed above can be made to be fun or interesting according to the teacher's creativity. A listing activity for young students can be done on a graphic that resembles a playground slide, if they are writing about free time activities. If students are writing about forests, the columns on a KWL chart can be drawn to resemble trees. Instead of using traditional shapes, such as boxes, use the auto-shapes feature on your word processing program to provide students with bubbles, sunbursts or other unique figures to write their words and phrases. Generally, adding graphics is not difficult, either by hand or by computer, but they will add to the enjoyment, and possibly, stimulate the creativity of the students. The addition of creative figures or graphics will also add variation to an activity that has already been repeated several times.

4.7 Grading

For some students, a pre-writing activity may not be taken seriously if a grade is not associated with it in some manner. The type of assessment recommended for pre-writing varies, as do the types of pre-writing themselves. For some pre-writing activities, participation in the activity would be sufficient, as it would be difficult to judge lists generated for different topics. However, the teacher needs to require a minimum amount of work be shown, such as X number of items, to achieve a satisfactory grade.

Another option is to have the pre-writing activity be given a certain percentage amount of the entire process grade. Having the pre-writing work be 5%-25% of the total grade will depend upon how much pre-writing has been done during the writing process. If a longer pre-writing activity or multiple activities have been connected to the total process, a high percent of the grade can be applied.

## 5. Conclusion

Although some view writing as a linear process (Barnett, 1989; Hewins, 1986), the realization that it is more recursive in nature is quickly coming to the fore (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Omaggio-Hadley, 2001). Regardless of how a teacher may see the process, pre-writing can be implemented as an effective tool in the L2 classroom. The name 'pre-writing' suggests that it should occur at the beginning of writing process, but more and more, teachers are encouraging students to use this valuable technique whenever the student is stalled in his or her writing. Pre-writing is a process of discovery, allowing for mistakes and misstarts. As Rohman (1965) states, "[A] writer is just a man (sic) like ourselves with an exceptional power of revealing his experience by expressing it, first to himself [Pre-writing] and then to others [Communicating] so that we recognize the experience as our own too" (p. 108). Utilizing pre-writing techniques can help elevate a writing assignment beyond a vocabulary practice exercise and allow students to delve deeper into the personal connections that they have with the topic assigned, thus allowing themselves to make the final product more communicative in nature and foster acquisition of their L2 (Kramsch, 1993; Strasma & Foster, 1992).

Whichever pre-writing technique is used, the instructors must feel comfortable with it, so that they can model it effectively for the students. It is also important that instructors practice a pre-writing technique, become well acquainted with it, use it in class and then begin working on becoming familiar with another. This will ensure that a variety of pre-writing activities is available in the classroom.

Pre-writing activities will not become a cure-all for writing assignments, making them perfect from the start. They will, however, start students on a journey through the writing process with a firmer foundation upon which to produce a stronger end product. This improvement will come as the teacher becomes familiar with various pre-writing techniques, planning carefully to accomplish specific goals. With encouragement students will begin to use these techniques on their own, regardless of where they may be in the writing process.

**Biostatement**: David R. Byrd, (Ph.D. University of Iowa) is an assistant professor in the Jerry and Vickie Moyes College of Education at Weber State University. His research interests include teacher education, writing and culture issues in the L2 classroom.

## References

Ackerman, D. (1989, November 12).  O muse! You do make things difficult! *The New York Times Book Review*. 1-3.

Auman, M.E. (1999). *Step up to writing*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West Publishing.

Barnett,  M. A. (1989). Writing as a process. *The French Review*, *63*, 31-44.

Becker, C. (1991). *Quality and quantity of writing German in early acquisition: a case for associative activities in foreign language courses.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation.  Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

Bräuer, G. (1997). Schrieben im Fremdsprachenunterricht? *Die Unterrichtspraxis/ Teaching German*, *30*, 1-7.

Carrell, P.L., & Eisterhold, J.C. (1983). Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, *17*, 553-573.

Clark, F. (1983).  Writing as learning and the superior student. *Journal of Advanced Composition*, 4, 147-160.

Col, J. (2003). *Enchanted learning*. Retrieved from http://www.EnchantedLearning.com.

Dörnyei, Z. (1997). Psychological processes in learning cooperative language learning: Group dynamics and motivation. *The Modern Language Journal*, *81*, 482-493.

Flower, L., & Hayes, J.R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, *32*, 365-387.

Freeman, D., & Freeman, Y. (2001). *Between worlds: Access to second language acquisition.* 2ⁿᵈ ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Friedlander, A. (1990). Composing in English: Effects of a first language on writing in English as a second language.  In B. Kroll (Ed.) *Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom*  (pp. 109-125). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Greenia, G.D. (1992). Why Johnny can't *escribir*: Composition and the foreign language curriculum. *ADFL Bulletin*, *24*, 30-37.

Hewins, C.P. (1986). Writing in a foreign language: motivation and the process approach. *Foreign Language Annals*, *3*, 219-223.

Hornung, A. (2000).  Method awareness and the teaching of writing. In G. Bäuer (Ed.), *Writing Across Languages* (pp. 131-140). Stamford, CT: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kroll, B.M. (1990). *Second language writing: Research insights for the classroom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lally, C.G. (2000). First language influences in second language composition: The effect of pre-writing. *Foreign Language Annals, 33* (4), 428-432.

Lee, L. (1994). L2 writing: Using pictures as a guided writing environment. Paper presented at the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association.  ERIC Document 386951.

Leki, I. (1996). The role of L2 writing research and pedagogy in the struggle for truth, justice and good grades in school. Paper presented at the 1996 SLA Research Forum, Tucson, AZ.

Martinez, M.M. (2010). *Learning and cognition: The design of the mind.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

Martinez-Gibson, J. (1991). A study on cultural awareness through commercials and writing.  *Foreign Language Annals*, *31*, 115-139.

McKee, E. (1981). Teaching writing in the composition/conversation class at the college level. *Foreign Language Annals*, *14*, 273-278.

Novak, J.D. (1998). *Learning, creating, and using knowledge: Concept maps as facilitative tools in schools and corporations*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Omaggio-Hadley, A. (2001). *Teaching language in context*.  3ʳᵈ ed. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Ovando, C.J., Combs, M.C., & Collier, V.P. (2006). *Bilingual and ESL classrooms: Teaching in multicultural contexts*. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Perl, S. (1994) The composing process of unskilled college writers.  In S. Perl (ed.) *Landmark Essays on the Writing Process*. Davis, CA: Hermagoras Press.

Raimes, A. (1987). Language proficiency, writing ability, and composing strategies: A study of ESL college student writers.  *Language Learning, 37*, 439-467.

Rau, P.S., & Sebrechts, M.M. (1996). How initial plans mediate the expansion and resolution of options in writing. *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*. 49A, 616-638.

Rohman, D.G. (1965). Pre-writing: the stage of discovery in the writing process. *College Composition and Communication*, *16*, 106-112.

Schreuder, R. & Weltens, B. (Eds). *The bilingual lexicon*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Sebranek, P., Meyer, V., & Kemper, D. (2000). *Writer's inc.* Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co.

Stapa, S., & Abdul Majid, A. (2009). The use of first language in developing ideas in second language writing. *European Journal of Social Science, 7* (4), 41-47.

Strasma, K., & Foster, G. (1992). Collaboration within writing classes: An ethnographic point of view. *The Writing Instructor*, Spring/Summer, 111-127.

Swaffar, J.K. (1988). Readers, texts, and second languages: The interactive process. *Modern Language Journal*, *72*, 123-145.

Vacca, R.T., Vacca, J.L., & Mraz, M.E. (2010). *Content area reading: Literacy and learning across the curriculum*. 10th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Williams, J. (2005). *Teaching writing in second and foreign language classrooms*. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Zamel, V. (1982). Writing: The process of discovering meaning. *TESOL Quarterly*, *16*, 195-209.

Zamel. V. (1983). The composing process of advanced ESL students: Six case studies. *TESOL Quarterly*, *17*. 165-187