COMPOSING STRATEGIES OF SUCCESSFUL AND LESS SUCCESSFUL ESL ESSAY WRITERS: A COMPARISON

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
CHAPTER 1	**INTRODUCTION**	1
1.1	Problem statement	1
1.2	Purpose of the study	2
1.3	Central theoretical statement	3
1.4	Method of research	3
1.4.1	Review of the literature	3
1.4.2	Empirical investigation	3
1.5	Programme of study	3
CHAPTER 2	**THE PROCESS APPROACH TO WRITING**	5
2.1	Introduction	5
2.2	The Process Approach: A brief historical perspective	5
2.3	Key aspects of the Process Approach	8
2.3.1	Preamble	8
2.3.2	Writing as a complex, recursive and non-linear process	8
2.3.3	The phases or sub-processes of writing	10
2.3.3.1	Pre-writing	11
2.3.3.2	Writing	12
2.3.3.3	Rewriting	13
2.3.4	The use of strategies	14
2.4	Classroom practice	15
2.5	Weaknesses of the process approach	17
2.6	Conclusion	20
CHAPTER 3	**THE USE OF STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING**	22
3.1	Introduction	22
3.2	Language learning strategies	22
3.2.1	Defining the concept: Language learning strategies	22
3.2.2	Why language learning strategies are not easily identifiable	23
3.2.3	Classifying language learning strategies	26
3.2.4	Language learning strategies and the successful language learner	27
3.2.5	The use of strategies in successful English second language writing	28
3.3	Strategies recommended for improving writing	30
3.3.1	Pre-writing phase	30
3.3.1.1	Introduction	30
3.3.1.2	Individual writing	31
3.3.1.3	Free writing	32
3.3.1.4	Making notes	32
3.3.1.5	Brainstorming	33
3.3.1.6	Using questions	34

3.3.1.7 The use of visual material 35
3.4 The writing phase 36
3.4.1 Introduction 36
3.4.2 Selecting ideas 37
3.4.3 Structuring information 39
3.4.4 Drafting 41
3.5 The rewriting phase 42
3.5.1 Rewriting 42
3.5.2 Editing/Proof-reading 45
3.6 Conclusion 46

CHAPTER 4 METHOD OF RESEARCH 47

4.1 Introduction 47
4.2 Design 47
4.3 Subjects 47
4.4 Instrumentation 48
4.4.1 The questionnaire 48
4.4.2 The interview 49
4.5 Data collection procedure 50
4.6 Analysis 51

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS 52

5.1 Introduction 52
5.2 The use of strategies during the pre-writing phase 52
5.2.1 Individual writing 52
5.2.2 Mind maps 54
5.2.3 Brainstorming 55
5.2.4 Free writing 57
5.2.5 Use of visual material 58
5.2.6 Making notes 60
5.2.7 Reading about a topic 61
5.2.8 Setting questions 61
5.3 Conclusion 62
5.4 The writing phase 65
5.4.1 Selecting and structuring ideas 65
5.4.2 Considering the reader 66
5.4.3 Drafting 67
5.5 Conclusion 68
5.6 The rewriting/revision phase 69
5.6.1 Rewriting 69
5.6.2 Reading in role 70
5.6.3 Conferencing/Writers' groups 71
5.6.4 Checklists 72
5.7 Conclusion 72
5.8 Subjects' insight into the application of writing strategies 72

5.9 Guidelines for the teaching of writing strategies 74
5.9.1 Teach pupils to acquire a holistic view of the writing process 75
5.9.2 The pre-writing phase 75
5.9.3 The writing phase 78
5.9.4 The revision/rewriting phase 78
5.9.5 Time constraints 79
5.10 Conclusion 79

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION 80

6.1 Introduction 80
6.2 Conclusions from the findings of this study 80
6.3 Limitations of the study 82
6.4 Recommendations for future research 83
6.4.1 Linking research to specific genres 83
6.4.2 The influence of first language writing on second language writing 84
6.4.3 Motivation and successful English second language writing 84
6.4.4 Writing and the word-processor revolution 84
6.4.5 English second language writing and time constraints 85
6.4.6 Research design 85
6.5 Conclusion 85

SUMMARY 87

OPSOMMING 89

BIBLIOGRAPHY 91

APPENDIX 94

LIST OF FIGURES **Page**

Figure 1: Writing as a complex, recursive process made up of various sub-processes. 10

Figure 2: Diagram of a strategy system 26

Figure 3: Illustration of a mind map indicating links between focal ideas and supporting information. 38

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	Brainstorming	55
Table 2:	Making notes	60
Table 3:	Number of drafts written	68
Table 4:	Rewriting	69

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem statement

Pupils who learn a second language utilise certain strategies in the process of acquiring competence in the second language (Oxford,1990). Scarcella and Oxford (1992:63) define language learning strategies as follows: "Language learning strategies are specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques used by students to enhance their own learning". Oxford (1990) has argued that a greater emphasis needs to be placed on identifing effective language learning strategies and teaching students how to use them. The differential success of English Second Language learners when writing essays suggests a need to examine what strategies "successful" English Second Language essay writers employ. When English Second Language students perform written assignments, skilled English Second Language writers select those strategies that best fit the particular text they are composing (cf. Scarcella & Oxford, 1992:120).

Research results indicate that successful and less successful writers approach writing assignments differently. While certain writing strategies are used by successful and less successful writers, it appears that certain strategies are only used by successful English Second Language writers. It is clear, therefore, that successful English Second Language writing requires the use of composing (writing) strategies that are not related to mastery of linguistic structures but to the way writing assignments should be approached. Experience in the classroom has shown that successful writers tend to ask questions about the format and presentation of a written assignment while less successful writers hardly ever address these issues. Instead, less successful writers seem to be pre-occupied with the content of written work assignments.

A further significant difference between less successful and successful writers that has been

observed in the classroom is that less successful writers approach almost all written work assignments in the same way, while successful writers seem to be able to adapt their approaches as the situation demands. Observations by researchers have confirmed this difference between successful and less successful writers. Zamel (1987:269) points out that less successful writers approach writing in a "mechanical" and "formulaic" way and that they are unduly concerned with "teacher-generated rules". This raises the question whether successful writers use a greater variety of strategies than the less successful writers or if successful writers use the same strategies but apply these strategies differently.

These general similarities between research findings and practical experience give rise to the following questions:

- Do successful English Second Language writers use different composing strategies from those of less successful writers?
- Do successful English Second Language writers use a greater variety of strategies as well strategies more frequently than the less successful writers?
- Do less successful writers employ the "most effective" strategies for their writing tasks (i.e. essays)?

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to:

- determine whether successful English Second Language writers use writing strategies that differ from those of less successful writers.
- determine whether successful English Second Language writers use a greater variety of strategies as well as strategies more frequently than less successful writers.
- determine whether less successful writers use the "most effective" strategies for writing tasks (i.e. essays).
- formulate guidelines for the teaching of writing strategies.

1.3 Central theoretical statement

Successful English Second Language writers use composing strategies which differ from those of less successful English Second Language writers.

1.4 Method of research

1.4.1 Review of the literature

Literature on the following aspects of writing was surveyed: the Process Appoach to writing, theoretical perspectives on language learning strategies, as well as writing strategies recommended for improving English second language writing.

1.4.2 Empirical investigation

The design for the empirical investigation is a one-shot cross-sectional survey. A group of successful writers is compared with a group of less successful writers to determine whether the successful writers use different strategies from those used by the less successful writers. The instrumentation used for establishing the above is a practical written essay in the form of an argumentative essay, a questionnaire and a follow-up interview (cf chapter 4).

1.5 Programme of study

Chapter 2 comprises an examination of the Process Approach to writing, including a look at the history of the Process Approach, its theory and possible weaknesses. In Chapter 3 language learning strategies are discussed and specifically those strategies which are recommended for improving ESL writing. Chapter 4 involves a discussion of the method of research used for the empirical investigation. The results of the investigation and the implications of these results for the teaching of writing strategies at schools are discussed in

Chapter 5. Chapter 6 provides a conclusion to the study, including a short discussion of the limitations of the study as well as recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

THE PROCESS APPROACH TO WRITING

2.1 Introduction

During the past two decades the Process Approach has been the most influential approach in the teaching of writing. It has been equally influential as regards research into writing. The Process Approach has also resulted in intense focus on and wide investigation of the use of strategies in the writing process.

Consequently, this chapter comprises:

(a) A general but extensive examination of the Process Approach.

(b) A brief evaluation of the Process Approach.

2.2 The Process Approach: A brief historical perspective

Prior to the 1970's product-centred approaches dominated the teaching of writing. Product-centred approaches are approaches that focus primarily on the final written product. Particular attention is paid to form and correctness and the extent to which the product conforms to accepted norms.

The 1950's and the 1960's were dominated by two similar product-centred approaches - the Controlled Composition approach and the Current-traditional Rhetoric Approach. The Controlled Composition (Guided Composition) Approach showed strong influences of Behavioural Psychology. Learning was regarded as habit formation while speech was regarded as more important than writing (an influence from Structural Linguistics). Systematic habit formation, which included practice with separate units of language, was the

preferred method for teaching writing. The teacher was the intended audience for classroom writing and the main concern was with the linguistic features of writing. Little attention was given to quality of ideas or purpose and audience (Silva, 1990: 12-13). In the Controlled Composition classroom, therefore, the pupil learned to write by practising previously learned language structures. Methodology involved imitations and manipulation, for example, transformations such as rewriting a passage from direct into indirect speech or completing sentences of which parts had been left out (Silva, 1990:13).

The middle 1960's saw the emergence of the Current-traditional Rhetoric Approach. This approach involved a slight shift in emphasis, especially in the case of English Second Language writing. The "organizing of syntactic units into larger units of discourse" was given prominence. This was to minimize "first language interference which resulted in the second language learner using unacceptable idiom" (Silva, 1990:13-14).

This new concern with discourse was especially evident in the attention given to how the arrangement of paragraphs influenced the quality of writing. Typical teaching activities included the imparting of information concerning various modes of writing, for example, narrative, descriptive and argumentative. Attention was also given to the various options for the development of paragraphs such as illustration, comparison or definition (Silva, 1990:14). In short, therefore, classroom procedures focused students' attention on form.

The Process Approach originated because of dissatisfaction with these approaches. Consequently, there was a shift from concern with *product* to the *processes* of writing as well as the *writer* as originator of meaning (Silva, 1990; Freedman et al., 1987).

Product-centred approaches were regarded as a too narrow perspective on writing. Zamel (1987:267-270) cites the following as the most important criticisms of product-centred approaches:

- What the act of writing entailed was not taken into account nor was the complex nature

of the writing process recognised.

- Emphasis on form and correctness overlooked the fact that writing was a process of discovery by the individual.

- Important considerations such as purpose, audience and the process of composing were ignored.

- Teaching practices were directed at usage and ignored real communication.

Three schools of thought can be identified as part of the Process Approach, viz. the Cognitivist view, the Expressivist view and the Social view on writing. By the mid 1980's the central theoretical principles of the most important school of thought within the Process Approach, the Cognitivist School, had been formalised. That this approach is radically different from the previous product-centred approaches is clear from the following description of the focus of this approach:

> The writer is viewed as the originator of text and the process through which the writer goes to create and produce discourse is the most important component in the theory (Johns, 1990:25).

The Expressivist view emphasises, in particular, the individual expression of thought. To this end, this approach is non-directive and encourages spontaneity, creativity, originality and self-discovery (Johns, 1990:25; Christie et al., 1989:131). Owing to the influence of the Expressivist view, the writing of journals became a popular strategy for improving writing within the Process Approach.

The Social View of writing focuses primarily on the individual "as a constituent of culture" and "rejects the assumption that writing is the act of a private consciousness" (Christie et al, 1989:131).

Within the Process Approach, the Cognitivist view, however, has had most influence on English Second Language writing, teaching and research. Over the past two decades the influence of the Cognitivist view has been such that "it cannot be exaggerated" (Johns, 1990:26). Such an influential approach justifies closer examination. This follows in section 2.3.

2.3 Key aspects of the Process Approach

2.3.1 Preamble

The term "Composing Process" recurs frequently in discussions by adherents of the Process Approach. According to Raimes (cited in Silva, 1990:15), "Composing means expressing ideas, conveying meaning. Composing means thinking". Zamel (1987:268), states that "process" involves "not only the act of writing itself but prewriting and rewriting". By implication the term *composing process* means the various thought processes of the individual when engaged in the various sub-processes of writing.

Before discussing the various sub-processes that constitute writing, the complex, recursive and non-linear aspects of composing are examined.

2.3.2 Writing as a complex, recursive and non-linear process

It was noted in section 2.2 that adherents of the Process Approach believe that product-centred approaches to writing did not give due emphasis to certain important aspects of writing. According to Zamel (1987:268), product-centred approaches "focused on usage, structure or correct form" while the Process Approach focused on "more important considerations such as purpose, audience and the composing process itself." In addition, the importance of the sub-processes of the writing process was recognised. Taylor (cited in Silva, 1990:15) points out the inadequacies of product-centred approaches, stating that "Writing is not the straight-forward plan-outline-write process that many believe it to be". Zamel (1987:268) expresses

similar criticism in pointing out that "The composing process seems to be an extremely complex undertaking, the nature of which militates against prescriptive approaches to the teaching of writing".

Flower and Hayes (1980:33) describe the complexity of the writing process as follows:

> We know that when people write, they draw on a variety of mental operations such as making plans, retrieving ideas from memory, drawing inferences. As a dynamic process, writing is the act of dealing with an excessive number of simultaneous demands or constraints.

Evidence for the recursive nature of writing was established by means of research conducted by Perl in 1980. The composing processes of twenty writers were investigated by means of composing aloud protocols. The most visible evidence that writing was recursive was that writers continually went back and reread bits of discourse. Writers also went back to refocus on key items of the topic and reread their work to "get the feel" of what they had written.

Czerniewska (1992:84) explains how the recursive aspect of writing might manifest itself:

> After an initial draft, the writer may return to prewriting behaviour such as discussion and note-taking or during editing the writer may carry out further drafting.

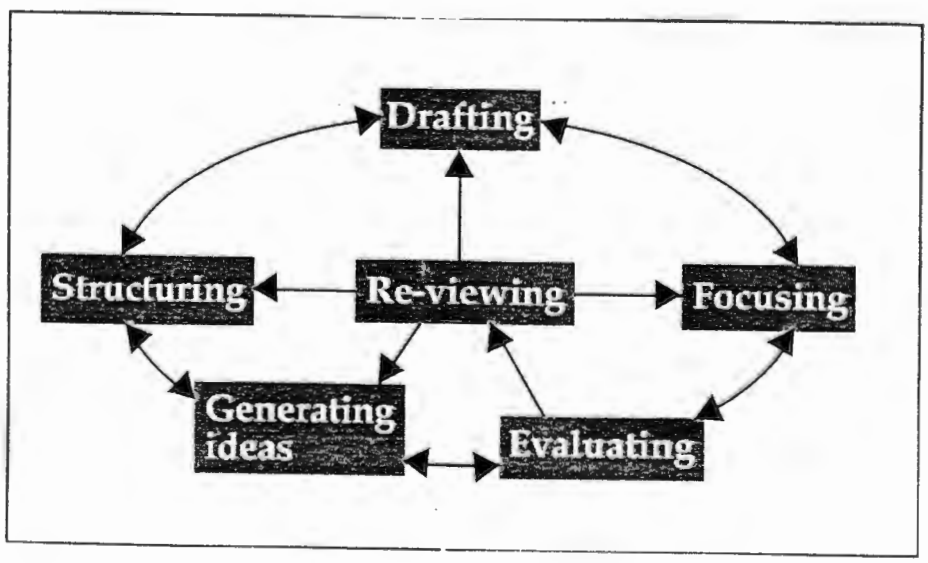
The above quotation implies that the writing process is made up of various phases or sub-processes. The following section focuses on this aspect.

2.3.3 The phases or sub-processes of writing

Zamel (1987) refers to the phases or sub-processes of the writing process as pre-writing, writing and re-writing (cf. section 2.3.1). Geyser (1996:22) also points out these three phases of the writing process. This, however, does not imply that the act of writing is a linear process as suggested by product-centred approaches. Zamel (1987:268) points out that, "while this process entails several stages, these stages interact together and repeatedly in order to discover meaning". For the purposes of this study the terms *pre-writing*, *writing* and *re-writing* will be used to refer to these sub-processes of the writing process.

Figure 1 illustrates the interdependency of the sub-processes, the possibility of using different terms in describing these sub-processes as well as that these sub-processes can be re-divided into more sub-processes to facilitate understanding and discussion of the sub-processes, if necessary.

Figure 1: Writing as a complex, recursive process made up of various sub-processes.



(White & Arndt, 1991:4).

2.3.3.1 Pre-writing

The main activity of the pre-writing phase is the generation of ideas. There are limitless ways that ideas can originate or, as phrased by Brutton (cited in Maher et al., 1983:5), "all of life is a pre-writing exercise". However, the writer needs to set goals and establish a writing plan to guide the production of a text that will meet these goals (Hayes & Flower, 1980:12).

Writers also need to refine their ideas. If they are experienced writers they will have established strategies to do this. If inexperienced, writers need to be taught such strategies. Opportunities to discuss ideas are helpful to student writers. Product-centred approaches usually did not give due recognition to the importance of generating ideas, with resultant difficulties for learner-writers:

> The obsession with the final product ... is a sure way to close off avenues to discovering what it is you have to say (Halsted cited in Zamel, 1987:270).

The importance of pre-writing activities necessitate that teachers be less rigid about the application of time constraints (Zamel, 1987:275). Geyser (1996:223) points out that students need "ample opportunity" to explore a topic. She suggests that a "broad theme" be investigated first and that "by means of questions, discussions, reading other texts , et cetera, the theme is narrowed down to the topic .... that the student wants to and can write about". The teacher has numerous possibilities of stimulating the learners to think, such as small group discussions or constructing mind maps. (These are discussed in more detail in section 3.2.) According to White and Arndt (1991:45), once the topic has been explored from as wide and inclusive a perspective as possible, writers need to establish "focal ideas"; ideas that are central to the reader's understanding of the topic. Generating ideas, however, is not restricted to the pre-writing phase. As will be seen in the section which follows, the act of writing can also serve to generate ideas.

Geyser (1996:230-231) points out that the importance of the pre-writing phase should not be

ignored and that the writing phase should only be embarked upon after the necessary progress has been achieved during the pre-writing phase.

2.3.3.2 Writing

A variety of terms are used in the literature on the Process Approach to describe the writers' activities during the writing phase. Terms that are used, for example, are *translating* (Flower & Hayes, 1980:12) or *drafting* (Maher et al., 1983:41) or *structuring and drafting,* i.e. this phase contains two possible sub-processes (White and Arndt, 1991:78; 99) or *construction procedures* (Du Toit et al., 1995:254).

These terms indicate that this phase of the writing process is not characterised by the physical act of writing only but by the "organization of ideas into sentences and paragraphs" (Geyser, 1996:231). The writing phase constitutes a transition from writer-based to reader-based writing (White & Arndt, 1990:99).

This phase of the writing process includes activities such as the writing of a draft and/or an outline or organisational scheme. However, within the Process Approach these initial drafts do not have to be rigidly applied in determining the final product as is the case with product-centred approaches (White & Arndt, 1991:79; Maher et al., 1983:41).

Although the emphasis is on organisation of ideas during this phase, this does not preclude the generation of new ideas. Odell (1980:143) points out that the act of writing often helps the writer to discover what he/she wants to say or does not want to say. E.M. Foster (cited in Maher et al. (1983:36) expressed a similar point of view with the remark: "How do I know what I think until I see what I say!" It was pointed out in section 2.3.1 that new ideas can be generated at any phase of the writing process. White and Arndt (1991:74) see this as a "re-organisation" aspect of process writing:

> Writing should not be thought of as a process where organisation of ideas is a preliminary and finite stage, but rather where on-going re-organisation is the key word.

If writing involves re-organisation of ideas it stands to reason that this will necessitate re-writing. Re-writing, the final phase of the writing process, is discussed in the section that follows.

2.3.3.3 Rewriting

According to Geyser (1996:23), "rewriting is the backbone of a successful writing process". It was pointed out in section 2.3.2 that the writing process is non-linear so rewriting may occur at any stage of the writing process. However, the lion's share of rewriting will be done after a reasonably complete draft has been written - a draft which includes an introduction and conclusion (cf. Geyser, 1996:233).

Two sub-processes of the rewriting phase are revision and editing. Rewriting, therefore, comprises more than merely rewriting the text into legible and neat format; a common misconception among pupils (Geyser, 1996:233).

Successful rewriting requires revision which means taking another look at what has been written in terms of the reader's perspective and not merely paying attention to detail. Revision is not the same as proof-reading, a mistake often made by inexperienced writers (Maher et al., 1983:43). The emphasis during revision is on making ideas clearer to the reader. To revise successfully implies that the writer must be able to evaluate whether the text fulfils its goal (White & Arndt, 1990:16).

Editing, proof-reading and publishing are sub-processes of the rewriting phase. Geyser (1996:236) distinguishes between editing and proof-reading on the grounds that editing focuses on sentence structure while proof-reading focuses on punctuation, spelling and

language errors. Du Toit et al. (1995:286-299) include all these activities as part of editing. Geyser (1996:236) points out that successful editing requires thorough knowledge of the content of the text which makes it possible for other aspects of the text such as tone and coherence to be assessed. Similarly, White and Arndt (1991:172) point out that editing involves a shift in emphasis from focusing on meaning to issues such as "grammatical accuracy and correctness of form" as well as "how closely the language conforms to conventions of linguistic and formal appropriacy".

Publishing, as described by Maher et al. (1983:47), is an activity which contributes to helping pupils develop a sense of audience. Obviously pupils' written work is hardly ever published in the literal sense. However, school magazines, class magazines and/or approval by the principal are all possibilities which can be explored to help pupils acquire reader-awareness.

Professional writers are only too aware of the importance of considering the reader and write with a primary and secondary reader in mind. In the case of a journalist, for example, his/her editor is the primary reader while the reader of the published product is the secondary reader (cf. Brookes & Grundy, 1990).

If the writing process is viewed in its totality, including the various phases and the sub-processes which constitute these phases, it is clear that Zamel's (1987:268) assertion that the writing process "seems to be an extremely complex undertaking ..." is not an exaggeration. One can deduce that in such a complex process there is extensive risk that "things can go wrong". To guard against this, the writer has at his/her disposal various strategies, the effective use of which can contribute towards successful writing. How the use of strategies is viewed within the Process Approach is discussed briefly in the section that follows.

2.3.4 The use of strategies

The use of strategies is not restricted only to writing but applies to all aspects of language use or acquisition. Ellis (1994:529) points out that a strategy is "a mental or behavioural activity

related to some specific stage in the overall process of language acquisition or language use". Scarcella and Oxford (1992:63) point out that "strategies are especially important for language learning because they are the tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communication ability".

Research has revealed that successful and less successful writers alike use certain strategies. An example of such a strategy is "retrospective structuring" (Zamel, 1987:269; Perl, 1980:29). "Retrospective structuring" involves going back to what has been written before continuing with writing. In contrast, certain strategies are only applied by successful writers. Successful writers, for example, revise what they have written critically, while less successful writers revise in a limited way, focussing only on relatively unimportant aspects of writing such spelling and grammar.

From the above it is clear that successful writing (as is the case with other activities of language learning) necessitates the successful use of strategies (cf. Scarcella & Oxford, 1992:63). However, the selection and use of strategies is the prerogative of the individual because it is "the responsibility of individual writers to identify and appropriately address the particular task, situation ... in which they are involved" (Silva, 1990:16).

The use of strategies is a complex issue which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. It is important, however, to point out that the goal of the teacher of writing is "to produce good writers who have a large repertoire of powerful strategies" (Flower, cited in Johns 1990:26).

Equipping his/her pupils with effective strategies is but one of the challenges that the teacher in the Process Approach classroom has to face. The section which follows involves a closer look at the Process Approach and classroom practice.

2.4 Classroom Practice

The Process Approach differs radically from earlier product-centred approaches when it comes

to classroom practice. The following are distinguishing features of the Process Approach classroom:

- The teacher and pupil are partners/collaborators in the writing process.
- The classroom is relaxed, with an atmosphere that encourages pupil participation.
- Time constraints are not rigidly enforced.
- The teaching of grammar is viewed differently from product-centred approaches.
- Every attempt is made to help pupils experience their writing as being authentic and meaningful.

In the Process Approach classroom, the teacher loses the status of being an "imparter of knowledge" and becomes a collaborator who gives feedback in such a way that "students learn to view their writing as someone else's reading" (Zamel, 1987:267). The teacher's collaborative role can extend so far that the teacher becomes personally involved as a learner-writer, sharing his/her efforts at interpreting the topic with the pupils. This type of teacher-pupil relationship involves trust and some degree of self-disclosure (Maher et al., 1983:2-8; White & Arndt, 1991:2).

Silva (1990:15) describes the atmosphere of the Process Approach classrooms "as that of a workshop where students with ample time and minimal interference can work through their composing processes". As will be seen in section 2.5, the absence of time constraints for writing assignments within the Process Approach is controversial because it is still standard practice that they apply during written work examinations. Nevertheless, within the Process Approach it is accepted that successful writing requires a "great deal of time" (cf. Zamel, 1987:271).

The teaching of grammar in the Process Approach classroom is not as formal as in product-centered approaches. According to Maher et al. (1983:4), linguistic structures are not taught - they are acquired through extensive reading and writing. According to White and Arndt (1991:2), "Grammar is important ... but it is through attention to meaning, and not just form

that language and writing improve". Geyser (1996:237) points out that in the Process Approach the emphasis is on "*integrated language teaching*". Pupils are taught functional use of language structure in order to perform a particular linguistic function". Grammatical rules are learnt "by applying them, and not in a parrotlike fashion, aimed simply at passing a test or examination".

In the Process Approach classroom it is recognised that for writing to succeed, the writer must experience the exercises as having purpose and audience (Maher et al., 1983:2). Through discussion (with peers and the teacher) writers help determine the nature and content of the assignments. This helps the writer to accept responsibility for his/her writing. White and Arndt (1991:5) state that "Writers work out their own solutions to the problem they set themselves".

Although the Process Approach to writing can no longer be viewed as a new development, it certainly was a radical and revolutionary development if contrasted with the earlier product-centred approaches. The extent to which it is such a radical departure is clear from the following description of Process Approach writing by White and Arndt (1991:6):

> "Disorder, imprecision, recursiveness, complexity, individual variation
> - this is the very stuff of process-orientated approach to writing".

According to Silva (1990:16), the Process Approach has been widely and well received in English Second Language composition instruction. However, it has been criticised for certain weaknesses. A closer look at the weaknesses of the Process Approach follows in the next section.

2.5 Weaknesses of the Process Approach

Despite widespread acceptance and endorsement (cf. section 2.1), certain weaknesses (or perceived weaknesses) of the Process Approach have been pointed out. The following

are some of the criticisms that have been raised regarding the Process Approach:

- The Process Approach does not take into account the differences between individuals, writing tasks and situations.
- Not enough consideration is given to language proficiency and level of cognitive development.
- The Process Approach classroom differs considerably from real-life writing situations.
- Socio-cultural aspects of writing are not fully recognised by Process Approach theory. (Silva, 1990:16)

According to Horowitz (1986:788-789), certain aspects of writing such as "the social nature of writing: the conventions, regularities, genres, requirements, typical task types" are ignored within Process Approach theory. Academic writing at universities, for example, requires that students be given "pedagogically useful formulations" so that they will understand "a specified range of acceptable writing behaviors" which are determined by the academic community and not the individual. Scarcella and Oxford (1992:129) express a similar view in pointing out that certain formulaic genres such as business letters can be taught by using models. Teaching pupils how to write such genres requires attention to form without the elaborate processes recommended by the Process Approach.

The absence of time constraints in the Process Approach classroom is a departure from real-life writing situations. When students are required to complete written work examinations, time constraints are imposed.

The Process Approach perspective of the teacher as the pupils' partner or collaborator in improving writing has been criticised as unacceptable within certain cultures (Freedman et al., 1987:1; Christie et al., 1989:132). These are cultures where the relationship between adult and child is rigidly authoritarian. Pupils within these cultures see the teacher as a figure who teaches or instructs from a position of authority.

It should be noted, too, that in its emphasis on process rather than product, the Process Approach is at odds with the way schools usually operate. Schools reward products - completed assignments, tests or examinations without emphasising the process. Pupils may therefore not understand the importance of giving due attention to the subprocesses of writing and/or the link between the writing process and the final product. It can, therefore, be presumed that pupils may not always understand the Process Approach.

It was pointed out in section 2.2 that the Process Approach originated because of dissatisfaction with product-centred approaches. In their efforts to point out the shortcomings of product-centred approaches, it is possible that Process Approach pioneers over-emphasised certain aspects of writing and thus neglected to focus on other equally important aspects. Silva (1990:18) refers to such mistakes as "an unproductive cycle in approaches to English Second Language writing". This cycle operates as follows:

1. an approach is conceptualised;
2. it is enthusiastically promoted;
3. it is accepted uncritically;
4. it is rejected prematurely;
5. a new (but not always much improved) approach takes its place.

To date no approach has been conceptualised that can replace the Process Approach to writing. In fact, it seems impropable that fundamental aspects of the Process Approach such as emphasis on process not product, recognition of the importance of the thought processes of the individual and that prewriting and rewriting are important aspects of writing, will ever be disregarded. Horowitz (1986:788), a proponent of an English for Special Purposes approach to writing and critic of the Process Approach, points out that critics of the Process Approach do not criticise the validity of Process Approach theory but the way it is applied in practice. According to Horowitz (cited in Silva, 1990:16), the Process Approach "creates a classroom situation that bears little resemblance to the situations in which students' writing will eventually be exercised."

2.6 Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter (section 2.2) it was noted that the Process Approach has had an extensive influence on the understanding of English Second Language writing. The importance of this influence is summarised by the following statement:

> The concern with process has been a useful and probably necessary antidote to previous preoccupation with product. (Freeman et al. 1987:13)

However, to see the importance of the Process Approach to the understanding of writing merely as a necessary counter-balance to product-centred approaches is to minimise the broad conceptual framework of the Process Approach. (Zamel (1987:276) explains how scrutiny of product can be applied within the approach to improve individual writing.) Essentially, this entails that the writer continually assesses what has been written from the prespective of the reader. This ensures that the completed product complies with the original purpose of the writing.

Exactly how inclusive and non-prescriptive the Process Approach to writing is, is explained by Liebman-Kleine (1986:783), who states that the Process Approach is not to be viewed "as a dogma but as a concept". She clarifies this statement by explaining that " The Process Approach is not *an* approach, it is many approaches. There will never be *a* Process Approach because writing - the process of writing - is such a complicated and rich process".

Criticism that the Process Approach does not give the necessary emphasis to completed products is short-sighted. In fact, the emphasis within the Process Approach on rewriting is to ensure that the product complies with the original purpose of the writer.

Freedman et al. (1987:3) suggest that an inclusive theory of writing is required that will include "the three inherited threads of research - process, product and context". The Process Approach gives clear directives on product and process. Context(s) differ(s) for each writing

assignment. To attempt an adaptation of the Process Approach to include context as well will inevitably sacrifice the inclusive aspect of the Process Approach. To interpret context remains the prerogative of the individual writer.

Valid criticism of the Process Approach amounts to no more than the observation that certain genres of writing do not fit all aspects of Process Approach theory. However, the general relevance of the Process Approach as a model for understanding writing, has ensured that it is still the most widely-accepted approach. This is not likely to change soon, if at all.

CHAPTER 3

THE USE OF STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING

3.1 Introduction

It was pointed out in section 2.3.3.4 of the previous chapter that the way skilled English Second Language writers use strategies contributes to the success of their writing. The successful use of strategies, it is believed, plays a significant role in all aspects of language acquisition. Consequently, the study of learning strategies has seen an "explosion of activity in recent years" (Skehan cited in Ellis, 1994:530).

This chapter comprises a brief discussion of language learning strategies as well as a detailed discussion of those strategies that are recommended for improving English Second Language writing.

3.2 Language learning strategies

3.2.1 Defining the concept: language learning strategies

As pointed out by Ellis (1994:529-533), an exact definition of language learning strategies is not easy, one reason being that language learning strategies is a general and somewhat vague concept. However, there is consensus about many of the features of language learning strategies as can be seen from the following general definition:

> In contrast to general styles, language learning strategies are specific actions, behaviours, steps or techniques used by students to enhance their own learning (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992:63).

According to Ellis (1994:529),

> A strategy consists of mental or behavioural activity related to some specific stage in the overall process of language acquisition or language use.

It is important to note for the purposes of this study that language learning strategies are "specific actions" taken by language learners and that language learning strategies are used in the "overall process of language acquisition", i.e. they are used in learning to speak, read and/or write a language.

If a closer look is taken at language learning strategies it becomes clear that certain issues complicate definition or identification of language learning strategies.

3.2.2 Why language learning strategies are not easily identifiable

Whether language learning strategies are conscious or subconscious actions, is not always clear. To complicate matters further, there is a perception that language learning strategies that are initially conscious actions may with repeated use became automatic or subconscious actions.

As pointed out by Ellis (1994:532), linguists have generally used the term "strategy" to refer to both subconscious and conscious actions. However, Stern (cited in Ellis, 1994:531) distinguishes between "strategies and techniques" on the grounds that strategies are "more or less deliberate approaches to learning" while techniques are used in "particular areas of language learning".

Other researchers use the term "strategy" to describe what Stern calls techniques. Seliger (cited in Ellis, 1994:531) for example, sees strategies as subconscious activities, "basic abstract categories of processing by which information perceived in the outside world is organized and categorized into cognitive structures as part of a conceptual network" while "tactics" are more deliberate actions employed in specific learning situations (Ellis, 1994:532).

The "dilemma" of whether language learning strategies are conscious or subconscious activities can be resolved in two ways. Ellis (1994:533) refers to "an information-processing model of learning developed by Anderson (1980:1983)". According to this model, three stages of skill-learning can be distinguished: 1) the cognitive stage which involves conscious activity 2) the associative stage which involves incorporating the strategy or skill "among the various elements or components of the skill" and 3) the automatic stage where "execution is more or less autonomous and subconscious". In terms of this model strategies can be viewed in two ways. One is that strategies are conscious activities that cease to be strategies once they became subconscious activities. The other possibility is to see strategies as spanning the conscious- subconscious continuum.

The issue whether strategies are conscious or subconscious actions also raises the problem of whether strategies are mental or behavioural and therefore observable. Ellis (1994:531) points out that certain researchers such as Oxford see them as essentially behavioural, whereas others such as Weinstein and Mayer see them as both behavioural and mental.

A further obstacle to defining language learning strategies precisely is the difficulty in determining whether use of a strategy by a learner is motivated by the desire to learn or to communicate. If a language learner initiates a conversation, for example, there is no way of establishing whether his/her intention is to communicate or simply to practise speaking the target language. According to Canale and Swain (cited in Scarcella & Oxford, 1992:71-81), communicative competence involves four areas of knowledge and skills, namely (1) grammatical competence, (2) sociolinguistic competence, (3) discourse competence and (4) strategic competence. Strategic competence involves using certain strategies to enhance the effectiveness of communication. A speaker can, for example, resort to mime if he/she does not have adequate vocabulary to express himself/herself. Strategies, therefore, apply to communication as much as they do to language learning. Jarone (cited in Ellis, 1994:530) distinguishes between language learning strategies and communication strategies and adds a third type, production strategies, which are "attempts to use one's linguistic system efficiently

and clearly, with a minimum of effort".

Another distinction that can be applied to strategies is to distinguish between language learning strategies and skill learning strategies. Language learning strategies "are concerned with the learners' attempts to master new linguistic and sociolinguistic information about the target language". Skill learning strategies are "learners' attempts to become skilled listeners, speakers, readers or writers" (Jarone cited in Ellis, 1994:530).

The term "language learning strategies" can, therefore, be misleading because it includes skill learning strategies and communication strategies. Ellis (1994:533) concedes that "definitions of learning strategies have tended to be ad hoc and atheoretical". Strategies can be better understood by looking at some of their main characteristics. The following list of characteristics applies to those strategies that form part of this study (cf. Ellis, 1994:532).

- Strategies refer to both general approaches and specific actions or techniques used to learn a second language.

- Learners are generally aware of the strategies they use and can identify what they consist of if they are asked to pay attention to what they are doing/thinking.

- Some strategies are behavioural while others are mental. Thus some strategies are directly observable, while others are not.

- Strategy use varies considerably as a result of both the kind of task the learner is engaged in and individual learner preferences.

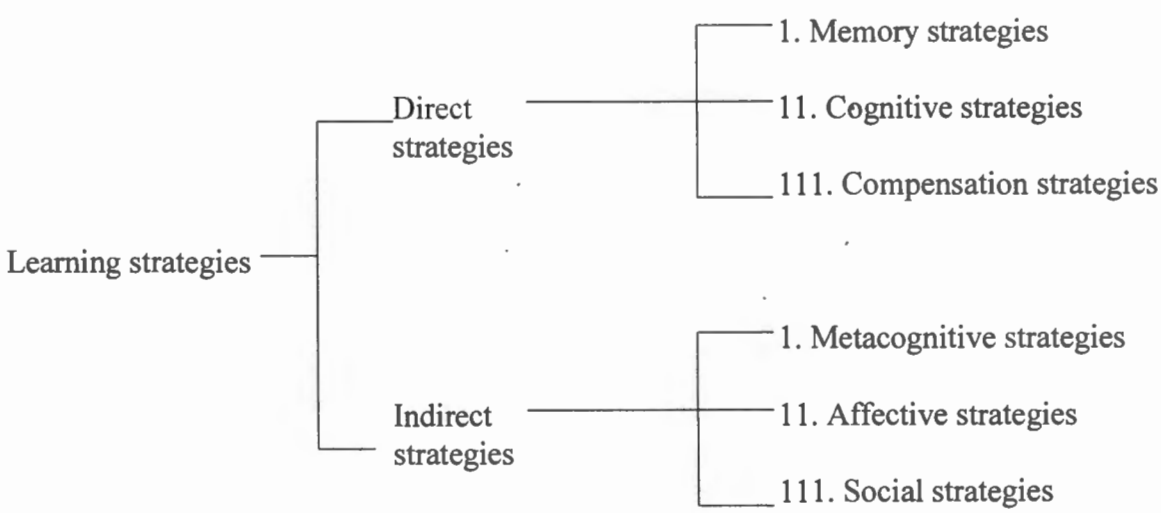
Difficulties in defining language learning strategies have not deterred researchers from listing and classifying them. This aspect of language learning strategies is discussed briefly in the section which follows.

3.2.3 Classifying language learning strategies

According to Ellis (1994:535-536), earlier research aimed at compiling inventories of learning strategies without attempting to classify these strategies into categories. Later studies have identified broad classes of language learning strategies under which large numbers of more specific strategies can be grouped. The most comprehensive classification and taxonomy of language learning strategies to date has been provided by Oxford (1990).

The general framework used by Oxford is illustrated in Figure 2 below. From the figure it is apparent that a distinction is made between direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies consist of "strategies that directly involve the target language" in the sense that they "require mental processing of the language", while indirect strategies "provide indirect support for language learning through focusing, planning, evaluating, seeking opportunities, controlling anxiety, increasing co-operation and empathy and other means" (Oxford, 1990:151).

Figure 2: Diagram of a strategy system.



(Oxford, 1990:16)

In terms of the above distinction cognitive strategies, described by Rubin (cited in Ellis, 1994:536) as "the steps or operations used in problem-solving that require direct analysis transformation or synthesis of learning materials" are seen as direct strategies. Examples of such strategies are "repetition" - imitating a language model, or "note-taking" - writing down information presented orally. On the other hand, social/affective strategies are indirect strategies in that they "concern the ways in which learners elect to interact with other learners and mature speakers" (Ellis, 1994:538).

Each of the categories and sub-categories listed in Figure 2 can be broken down further, resulting in a comprehensive inventory of several hundred strategies.

Ellis (1994:539) points out that despite the comprehensiveness of Oxford's classification scheme it does have certain weaknesses. The scheme does not make a distinction between strategies directed at learning the English Second Language and those directed at using it, while certain strategies are classified differently from other researchers. It is also not clear whether the range of strategies available to the learner is finite or infinite in number.

Despite differences and contradictions concerning language learning strategies and language theory, research results have indicated how the "good language learner" applies strategies in practice. This is discussed briefly in the section which follows.

3.2.4 Language learning strategies and the successful language learner

Ellis (1994:546-548) points out that although there can be marked differences in the way successful learners use strategies, research results seem to point to certain similarities. These are:

- Good learners attend to form and meaning. Research results are not conclusive about which of these aspects always receives priority, but it appears that the ability to attend to meaning and form is crucial to successful language learning.

- Good language learners are actively involved in their own learning. They set their own goals and decide about which strategies they wish to use to achieve these goals.

- Good language learners are aware of their learning process and have insight into how learning is achieved. This makes it possible for these learners to communicate effectively about how they learn. Such knowledge also enables these learners to have control over their own learning.

There is some doubt about the validity of some of these conclusions concerning good language learners. Ellis (1994:550) points out that the research that has been conducted, focused primarily on formal learning situations, so not much is known about the use of strategies in informal learning situations. Many of the subjects of the research studies have been successful learners. Because such learners are articulate communicators it is possible that undue importance has been given to the strategies they use.

However, research into the good language learner and his/her use of strategies has been conducted over a considerable period of time. Consequently insights gained from this research should not be ignored. Confirmation of the relevance of these research results is that there are definite correspondences between the way good language learners use strategies and the way successful English Second Language writers apply strategies. These are discussed briefly in the section which follows.

3.2.5 The use of strategies by successful English Second Language writers

Skilled English Second Language writers give due attention to meaning, while unskilled writers are too concerned with the formal aspects of writing such as grammar and corrections (Zamel, 1987:269). In the same way that successful second language learners have insight into the processes of their own learning, skilled second language writers are actively involved with their own writing. Such writers know how to use strategies "to stretch their

competence to write effectively" (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992:120).

Flexibility in the way they use strategies is a characteristic of successful language learners. Successful English Second Language writers also display flexibility in the way they use writing strategies. Strategies are used in accordance with the requirements of the written assignment (Scarcella & Qxford, 1992:120).

Good writers, like good language learners, are aware of the dynamics of the process. Zamel (1982:269-270) points out that skilled writers are aware that in the course of writing the writer will discover new things to say which necessitates rewriting what has been written. Unskilled writers are not as "open" to discovering new meaning and do not modify ideas once they have been written down. Skilled writers are able to anticipate the needs of their readers while unskilled writers are more "mechanical" in the way they view writing (Zamel, 1982:269).

Successful English Second Language writing, like successful English Second Language learning, is not determined only by the successful use of strategies. According to Scarcella and Oxford (1992:120-122), factors such as motivation, background knowledge, culture and linguistic experience, amongst others, affect English Second Language writing development. According to Ellis (1994:541), learners' personal background affect strategy use. Factors such as age, aptitude and personal background can have an influence on how learners choose to use strategies.

According to Ellis (1994:544), learners' ability to use a broad range of strategies depend largely "on the nature and range of the instructional tasks that they experience in the classroom". A similar view is expressed by Van der Walt and Dreyer (1995:316) who point out that learners should not only be taught about strategies but be given the opportunity to practise these strategies. In addition, pupils should be given feedback and they should be taught "under what conditions it is appropriate to use" these strategies. Therefore, teaching pupils how to use strategies effectively is vitally important to the teaching of writing.

Literature on teaching writing according to the Process Approach has revealed that the use of certain strategies is generally recommended for improving writing. These are discussed in the section that follows.

3.3 Strategies recommended for improving writing

3.3.1 Pre-writing phase

3.3.1.1 Introduction

Scarcella and Oxford (1992:124) state that "in the pre-writing stage, students need multiple opportunities to generate ideas". During this phase of the writing process, writers use strategies that help to generate ideas.

According to Geyser (1996:223), "thinking is the actual point of departure of the writing process", so many of the strategies used during the pre-writing phase are aimed at encouraging free thinking. Initially the generating of ideas should be unrestricted, which means that writers will focus not just on the topic of the essay but examine the theme which "must be much broader and more general than just an essay title" (Geyser, 1996:223). Any/all ideas are accepted (White & Arndt, 1991:20-21), but as the process continues the focus becomes more specific and the writer starts to take a reflective and critical look at the topic and the ideas that have been generated (cf. Geyser, 1996:223). White and Arndt (1991:18) distinguish between "guided" and "unguided" techniques: guided techniques are dependent on external prompts, while unguided techniques are those where writers generate ideas themselves. From the discussion which follows it will become clear that the extent to which a strategy is "guided" or "unguided" falls within the discretion of the teacher.

Different kinds of writing require different strategies for the generation of ideas. The process will be different, for example, for imaginative writing as opposed to discursive writing (White & Arndt, 1991:18). *Brainstorming*, for example, is a particularly appropriate strategy

for creative writing (Hedge, 1988:34).

Ellis (1994:540) states that individual learner differences such as attitudes, affective states and general factors such as age and aptitude influence learners' strategy choice. Learners will therefore have "natural style preferences" (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992:63) regarding the use of strategies. Teachers should help learners to extend these "natural style preferences". In the discussion which follows, no distinction is made between those strategies that are initiated by the teacher or those which are the choice of the individual because both types of strategies can become part of a writers' repertoire of strategies. If the need for flexibility in the use of strategies is acknowledged and individual preferences are respected, it is clear that the strategies discussed can only be *recommended* and not *prescribed.* As was pointed out in section 3.2.2, if writers practise/use strategies regularly, the use of such strategies becomes automatic/subconscious.

3.3.1.2 Individual writing

Unlike product-centered approaches, the Process Approach places particular emphasis on the importance of the individual and his/her thought processes in the act of writing (cf. section 2.2). Individuals are encouraged to become involved in their own writing processes. The Expressivist view of writing, proposes that "discovery of self" in particular, encourages individual writing, particularly the writing of journals. The writing of journals has been the topic of numerous articles and initially enjoyed strong support. That little mention is made of it in later publications indicates a possible decline in popularity. Those who favour the writing of journals have strong arguments to support their view. Although 'journal' (from the French "jour"- day) originally implied writing on a regular basis, the format of such writing can vary widely to include writing activities such as diaries, logbooks or even notes about an enjoyable occasion (Christie et al., 1989:152). Journals, as personal records, allow pupils to become involved in writing for themselves and allow them to give free expression to their ideas and feelings without the constraints of the teacher who awards marks. In this form journals have been the source of powerful writing; for example, the journals of Anne Frank

and Samuel Pepys (Maher et al., 1983:21-22). However, because the teacher in the Process Approach classroom is also the pupil's partner in helping him/her to learn to write, feedback from the teacher is valuable to the writer of a journal.

Because a journal is private writing, allowing a teacher access to a journal implies a relationship of trust which the teacher must approach with extreme circumspection. Journals can also be content-orientated which allows teachers of content subjects to gauge how much learning has taken place (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992:124; Maher et al., 1983:22-35; Christie et al., 1989:153).

Portfolio writing (as in an artist presenting a portfolio of his work) is a trend which has become popular in recent years. Portfolio writing ensures regular writing over a period of time, but unlike journals do not focus on writing of a primarily personal nature. The writer is, however, strongly engaged in the writing because he/she has been allowed certain choices of genres and the portfolio is the record of *his/her* work.

3.3.1.3 Free writing

Free writing is a strategy which is similar to journal writing, in that writers are required to record, on paper, *any* ideas that come to mind. This must be done quickly and without pause so that an uninterrupted flow of ideas will result. Once enough ideas have been generated the pupil/teacher can focus on those that are most useful for realising the topic (Geyser, 1996:227; Hedge, 1988:44; Du Toit et al., 1995:244-245). White and Arndt (1991:46) suggest *free writing* as an activity to develop ideas that have already been generated (during, for example, brain-storming).

3.3.1.4 Making notes

Another strategy that involves putting pen to paper and is well-known to adult writers is *making notes*. This strategy can be applied to various kinds of writing. *Making notes* can be

useful when doing formal research on a topic or for reporting on a speech or event. During the pre-writing phase, *making notes* should primarily be concerned with generating ideas and not organising them (Hedge, 1988:58; Du Toit et al., 1995:39-244; White & Arndt, 1991:33).

3.3.1.5 Brainstorming

Brainstorming in its simplest form is talking about a topic. In its most sophisticated form it involves the creation of a "mind-map" ("think map", "concept map" or "cluster map" also referred to as "tree diagrams" or "spidograms") which is the final result of a structured process of discussion or thought.

Talking about a topic is a very natural way to generate ideas. Talk stimulates more talk, so ideas are exchanged and new ideas generated. Feedback is immediate, either in the form of teacher or peer response. There is a proviso, however - such talk must be purposeful and seen to be a part of the process of generating ideas. Random chatter will not suffice (Maher et al .,1983: 38-39).

Brainstorming is described by White and Arndt (1991:20) as a "snowball activity". It can start with the writer recording a few ideas on paper, then exchanging these ideas with a fellow-writer, i.e. discussion in pairs, described by Geyser (1996:227) as think, pair, share. Discussion can then expand to include groups in discussion and eventually the whole class. A mind-map which includes all the good ideas can then be drawn up.

There are a few rules about how brainstorming should be conducted:

- There must be opportunity for each individual to generate his/her ideas so that everyone can contribute.
- All ideas are good - there are no bad ideas. When engaged in generating ideas, no ideas are to be discarded. Judging is reserved for the last part of the activity.
- Brainstorming should be done quickly (the entire process should not take

longer than ten minutes) because speed and high energy stimulate creativity (Du Toit et al., 1995:246; Geyser, 1996:228-229; White & Arndt, 1991:20-21).

Mind maps do not necessarily have to be the result of a discussion process. Du Toit et al. (1995:246-247) suggest a procedure which involves writing down a central idea and then surrounding this idea with other ideas that connect to this central idea. A mind map is an attempt to discover connections or patterns in ideas and stimulates the right brain hemisphere (Geyser, 1996:229).

Mind maps are also a useful strategy later on in the writing phase when the writer starts to structure ideas (cf. White & Arndt, 1991:80-81; section 3.4.2).

3.3.1.6 Using questions

According to White and Arndt (1991:22), setting interesting questions yields interesting answers about topics. Asking interesting questions about a topic is often a skill of a good writer. Questions and answers are a fertile way of promoting discussion and generating ideas. Using questions which have been set in accordance with certain formats is one possible method for applying this strategy. *Classic intervention* (heuristics) is a method derived from the teachings of Aristotle. This comprises five categories according to which questions for exploring the topic are set. These are: (1) Definition (2) Comparison (3) Relationship (4) Circumstances and (5) Testimony (White & Arndt, 1991:20; Du Toit et al., 1995:250-251).

A similar procedure is "cubing"- six questions, representing six facets of a topic, are used, as in looking at all six sides of a cube. With this procedure the questions used fall within the following six categories: (1) Describe (2) Compare (3) Associate (4) Analyse (5) Apply (6) Argue (White & Arndt, 1991:26; Scarcella and Oxford, 1992:125).

Another way in which this strategy can be applied (which seems particularly relevant to the second language classroom) is the use of student-generated questions. Students are provided

with a list of easy interrogative words, which they use to set their own questions. The answers obtained will generate information relevant to the topic. As with the other variations of this strategy, the prime motive remains the generation of ideas and the promotion of discussion (Geyser, 1996:226-227).

3.3.1.7 The use of visual material

It is not difficult to see that, in an era where characters and personalities from film and television have superstar status, the use of visual material can be extremely effective in generating ideas.

White and Arndt (1991:35) suggest three possible types of visual material: photographs, pictures (representational material), physical objects (realia) and charts, diagrams and maps (symbolic material). Such materials can be used as prompts for various types of written work exercises, ranging from narratives to discursive type exercises. Geyser (1996:223-224) suggests the use of cartoons and allowing pupils to respond freely to them. This strategy seems particularly appropriate for younger writers.

The only pre-writing activity in product-centred approaches to writing was the writing of an outline of what one plans to say (cf. Zamel, 1987:268). The importance of allowing sufficient time and opportunity for generating ideas during the pre-writing phase is recognised within the Process Approach. The strategies discussed in this section have been developed and are recommended by Process Approach researchers. Recently new strategies such as portfolio writing have emerged (cf. sections 5.9 and 6.3.5). There is no reason to believe that there will not be further developments regarding the use of strategies.

3.4 The writing phase

3.4.1 Introduction

It was pointed out in Section 2.3.3.2 that, during this phase of the writing process, writing changes from being *writer-based* to being *reader-based.* Writing strategies used by the writer are aimed at organising and arranging information (generated during the pre-writing phase) for the benefit of the reader.

Numerous Process Approach researchers (e.g. Flower & Hayes, 1990; Zamel, 1987; Raimes 1987) have pointed out that skilled writers are sensitive to their readers, while unskilled writers are not. Hedge (1988:63) states that "it is a clear sense of audience which enables a writer to select appropriate content". Consequently, the Process Approach places particular emphasis on the importance of authentic writing, i.e. writing with a specific purpose and audience in mind. (cf. sections 2.2 and 2.4). This is to help writers develop an awareness of the reader and his/her needs. Lack of reader-awareness results in inferior writing which "focuses on the topic at the expense of the reader" (Hedge, 1988:63). The concept of reader-awareness merits further discussion.

Brookes and Grundy (1990:19) point out that even in the simplest forms of writing an awareness of the reader is essential. Writing down a message given over the telephone, for example, requires that the writer takes into account the relationship between the caller and the reader. This will determine if a first name or a more formal title will be used when recording the message. Reader-awareness is of particular importance in writing for newspapers. Because newspapers have different readership, reports of the same item of news often differ substantially.

Reader awareness implies, too, that the writer keeps secondary readers in mind. Academic writing, for example, will have the examiner as primary reader and an external examiner as secondary reader. In the case of journalists, readers of the publication will be primary readers

while the editor or censors are secondary readers.

Reader awareness leads writers to pay attention to aspects such as the discovery or selection of main ideas, structuring this information and considering in what form the information can best be presented to the reader. Regardless of the nature of the writing exercise, the writer needs to find answers to the following questions:

- Who is my reader?
- What do I need to say?
- How can I make it unambiguous and accessible to my reader? (Hedge, 1988:63).

Du Toit et al. (1995:262) list the same set of questions formulated slightly differently:

- Who is my audience?
- What is the assignment topic?
- What is my purpose?
- If nothing else, I want my audience to understand that / how / why ...

The use of strategies that can help writers find answers to these questions are discussed under the following headings: Selecting ideas, structuring information and drafting.

3.4.2 Selecting ideas

White and Arndt (1991:44-45) point out that just as photographers have a central focal point, writers have to focus on a central idea or point of view that will provide unity and structure to the text they wish to produce. According to White and Arndt (1991:45) "the realisation of a focal idea and view point will be related to the writer's engagement with the subject".

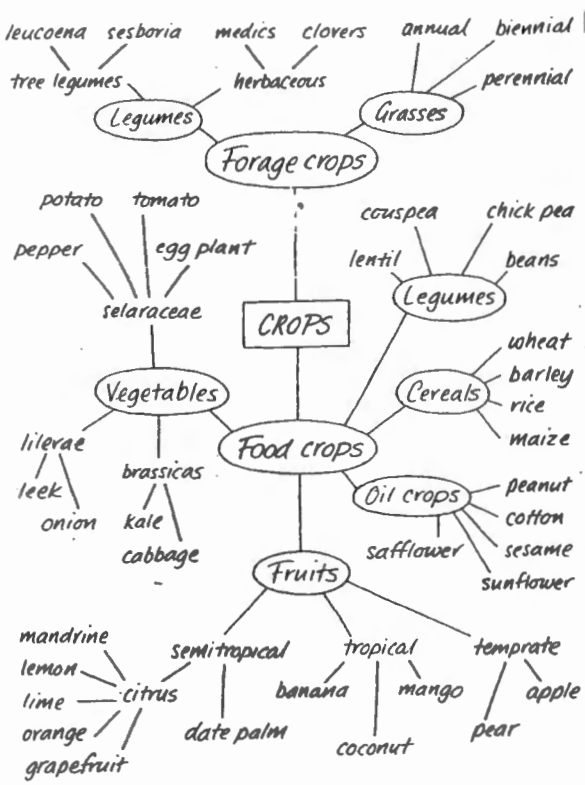
The establishment of a focal idea makes it possible for the reader to get a clear idea of what the writer wishes to communicate and what the writer' attitude towards the subject is. The lack of such a focus has negative consequences - the writer will find it difficult to organise ideas coherently and the reader will find it difficult to understand what the writer is trying to get across. This will result in the reader reacting negatively to the text (White & Arndt, 1990:45).

The focal idea of a written piece can often be summarised in a simple statement, for example, "My main point is that travel does not always broaden the mind", in the case of an argumentative essay.

Various strategies for *generating* ideas were discussed in section 3.3. Strategies for *selecting* ideas link closely to or are continuations of these strategies. For example, when ideas have been generated by using a strategy such as *free writing* (cf. section 3.3.3), these ideas can be sifted for focal ideas. If required, such ideas can be reformulated as summary or topic sentences, usually one or two sentences per paragraph of information (White & Arndt, 1991:46-48).

Mind maps (cf. section 3.3.5) can be drawn up in such a way that focal ideas receive prominence on the page and supporting ideas are structured around them. Figure 3 below (White & Arndt, 1991:81) is an illustration of a *mind map* on the topic "Crops". As can be seen from the illustration, focal/central ideas have been written prominently in the centre of the page with additional information on the periphery.

Figure 3: Illustration of a *mind map* indicating links between focal ideas and supporting information.



(White & Arndt, 1991:81)

Similarly, information and ideas about a topic collected by means of *mking notes* (during the pre-writing phase) have to be arranged into sections or categories that belong together. Such categories can then be examined individually for focal ideas and irrelevant ideas can be discarded (Du Toit et al., 1995:262).

White and Arndt (1991:55) point out that student writers often fear that they will not have enough information about a topic. However, if the generating processes of the pre-writing phase are properly implemented, writers often find that they have superfluous information.

The process of selecting ideas enables the writer to find answers to the questions: "What is the topic?", "What do I need to say?", "Who is my reader?" and "Who is my audience?". These are very important considerations for successful writing. White and Arndt (1991:49-75) regard the consideration of purpose and audience to be of such importance that they recommend that writers pay particular attention to these aspects of a written assignment, i.e. these aspects are given independent consideration and are not seen merely as part of process of selecting ideas.

Once the writer has selected ideas, giving due consideration to the issues topic and reader, the third important consideration of this phase of the writing process must be addressed. This is finding answers to the question: "how can I make the information unambiguous and accessible to my reader? If nothing else, I want my audience to understand that/how/why...".

3.4.3 Structuring information

Decisions that the writer takes about arranging or structuring information are crucial to the success, or otherwise, of a piece of writing. This is because the reader has "certain expectations about the likely content, structure, development and graphic appearance of different types of written texts" (White & Arndt, 1991:75). Comprehension is facilitated if the writer matches the reader's expectations.

Actual writing of a draft can help certain writers to decide about how to structure a piece of writing. Zamel (1987:271) describes this process as follows: "As they reread what they have written, they may experience a sense of dissatisfaction, at which point they may have to make partial changes or start over". Most writers, however, find it useful to structure information before writing a draft (Du Toit et al., 1995:271).

Ideas can be structured by constructing an outline. Du Toit et al. (1995:263-267) illustrate two possible ways of drawing up such outlines. *Tree diagrams* or *flow charts* work much the same as mind maps - essentially they are visual illustrations of how the main sections and sub-sections of a topic relate. *Linear plans* list the topic of each paragraph in linear fashion with the first paragraph as the introduction and the final paragraph as the conclusion.

Such outlines should not be seen as rigid plans and the same organisational scheme cannot be applied to every piece of writing. Each piece of writing has its own rationale and context which have to be considered (White & Arndt, 1991:79).

In addition to the ways of constructing outlines described above, there are also various patterns according to which information can be arranged. Du Toit et al. (1995:267) list the following possible patterns of arrangement:

- general to particular.
- chronological order.
- ascending/descending order.
- cause and effect.
- comparison and contrast.

Certain patterns of arranging information work better for certain essay types. Arranging information in *chronological order* is suggested for a history-type essay focusing on events that took place during a specific period of time, while *comparison and contrast* is more suited to any essay topic which focuses on different methods of research.

Of particular interest to the empirical part of this study is the suggestion by Du Toit et al. (1995:272) that the most useful and least time-consuming strategies to be used for arranging information in an essay examination, where time limits apply, are the largely similar strategies of "*mind maps*, *tree diagrams* and *tables*".

Organisation of information is not a final stage in the writing process - *reorganisation* is a key factor in successful writing (White & Arndt, 1991:79). Re-organisation is often the result of writing a draft. This is discussed in the section that follows.

3.4.4 Drafting

Maher et al. (1983:41) describe a draft (by referring to the Oxford American Dictionary) as "a rough, preliminary written version". The key words are "rough" and "preliminary". A similar description of a draft is given by Brookes and Grundy (1990:22), who describe a draft "as a version of the text which the writer knows he or she will improve on".

When the writer starts to write a draft, he/she is making the transition from writer-based writing to the reader-based writing which must characterise the final product, (White & Arndt, 1991:99). Consequently, the writer now has to pay attention to aspects such as form, discourse organisation, paragraph and sentence structure, cohesive devices such as discourse markers and choice of vocabulary (Hedge, 1988:90-92; Geyser, 1996:231). The writer has to keep in mind that, although a draft approximates the final product, there will inevitably be differences between the two. It is, therefore, not necessary to pay too much attention to details such as punctuation and grammar while drafting (Maher et al., 1983:40).

White and Arndt (1991:100) suggest that students should go through the "write-revise-rewrite cycle" at least once - i.e. students write at least three drafts of which the third is the final product. If two or more drafts are written, successive drafts tend to become similar.

From the above it can be concluded that drafting is a prerequisite strategy for successful

writing. Du Toit et al. (1995:274) list the following as mistakes that can occur frequently when writing a first draft:

- wander off the topic.
- gaps in the argument.
- usage mistakes (concord errors, over-using expressions).
- inappropriate register.

It was pointed out in section 2.3 that the process of writing is not linear but recursive. Writing more than one draft is not only important for organising and structuring ideas, but can also result in the generation of new ideas. Consequently, writing more than one draft implies that rewriting has to take place. Successful rewriting will depend on constant revision (cf. Zamel, 1987:276).

3.5 The rewriting phase

The final phase of the writing process, the rewriting phase, comprises revision and rewriting ("reconstruction procedures", Du Toit et al., 1995:274) as well as editing and proof-reading. Hedge (1988:146-160) uses the collective term "improving" to describe the procedures of this phase. This phase is discussed under the following headings: rewriting, editing and proof-reading.

3.5.1 Rewriting

According to Geyser (1996:233), "the product of the writing phase is definitely not the final writing product". During the revision phase the writer takes a critical look at what has been written - literally *revising* or *re-viewing* - taking another look, from the perspective of the reader, at what has been seen before (Geyser, 1996:233; Maher et al., 1983:43; White & Arndt, 1991:136). Students often make the mistake of thinking that rewriting means rewriting into a neat and legible form. On the contrary, it is a far more complex process.

According to Geyser (1996:233), "rewriting is the backbone of a successful writing process". This necessitates that the writer is able to take a critical look at his/her work (White & Arndt, 1991:116). The writer needs "a realistic picture of the reader's background and knowledge" so that "he or she can reread what has been written *in role*". If the writer manages this successfully, the difficulties and inadequacies of the writing will become clear (Brookes & Grundy, 1990:21).

A critical look at what has been written can reveal the need to alter meaning and rewrite sections of the draft or in some cases write a new draft (Maher et al., 1983:44). Even at this late stage of the writing process new ideas may emerge which have to be worked into the original concept. Rewriting is essentially what writing is about and writers will always find something in a text that can be improved on - in that sense a writing task is never complete; it is abandoned to its fate (White & Arndt, 1991:116;136). According to Chenoweth (cited in Brookes and Grundy, 1990:25), "Reformation is characteristic of expert rather than poor writers". Zamel (1987:26) refers to research results that indicated that expert writers "changed whole chunks of discourse, and each of these changes represented a reordering of the whole". Unskilled writers rarely modified what had been written. How does the writer revise his/her work so that mistakes which occur in earlier drafts can be corrected? As noted above, reader-awareness is of paramount importance. A strategy that helps the writer to see the text from the reader's perspective is *conferencing.*

According to White and Arndt (1991:131), "*conferencing* is a procedure in which the teacher/reader or another reader (such as a fellow student) and the writer work together on what the writer has written, motivated by a concern with clarifying the writer's intentions, purpose and meanings". *Conferencing* has the following advantages:

- Teachers have the opportunity to listen, learn and diagnose.
- The teacher gives the pupil better advice than is possible with written remarks.
- Pupils have the chance to talk about their writing, reflect on process and clarify thinking about audience and purpose (White & Arndt, 1991:131).

Conferencing also offers opportunity for pupils to receive technical assistance and advice. In this way, pupils learn to think about writing as something that can be organized and improved. (White & Arndt, 1991:131; Hedge, 1988:154).

A strategy that can contribute to successful revision is the strategy known as *writers' groups*. Students meet on a regular basis to discuss written work assignments that each member of the group is working on at that time. Meetings are conducted according to prescriptive rules to ensure that each writer gets the same opportunities to present his/her work and receives constructive feedback. It is compulsory that positive aspects of the writing be identified so that writers remain motivated. Questions from the group will point the writer to those areas of the writing which are confused or unclear. White and Arndt (1991:117) point out that "by learning to evaluate others' writing, and responding in turn to evaluation of their own, students will gradually build up that capacity for self-assessment which is such a vital element in the process of writing". Presenting a writers' group with oral rather than written versions of the text ensures that minor considerations, like spelling, do not dominate group discussions. On the other hand, English Second Language writers might prefer to hand out written versions of a text so that they can be given advice on spelling and grammar. Regardless of how a *writers' group* is made-up or of the procedures followed by the group, one of the best ways to improve writing is to have an audience which responds to the writing (Maher et al.,1983:46-47; Du Toit et al., 1995:280; Geyser, 1996:233-234).

According to Geyser (1996:234) one option for ensuring that the revision aspect of rewriting is "a meaningful and well organised event", is to issue writers with one or more *checklists*. *Checklists* are particularly useful for the writer who does not have the benefit of readers' responses. A *checklist* assists the writer in determining if the writing conforms to acceptable standards with regards to aspects such as context (purpose, audience, form), discourse markers (also referred to as "checking connections" or signposts), checking divisions (i.e. paragraph structure) and assessing impact (White & Arndt, 1991:136-172; Du Toit et al., 1995:274-280). *Checklists* can be very specific (to the extent of focusing on individual paragraphs) or general, depending on what the needs of the writer are (Geyser,1996:235).

After a text has been revised and the necessary re-writing has been done, the final stage of the writing process, editing, commences.

3.5.2 Editing/Proof-reading

Some of the sources consulted regard editing as a careful look at structure (Maher et al., 1983:46; Geyser, 1996:236). However, Du Toit et al. (1995:285) state that editing is the final step before publication: "If you edit a text you examine it and make corrections to it so that it is suitable for publication". White and Arndt (1991:172) take a similar view to editing and regard it as the "final step in the process of completing the final draft which the writer will submit to the reader". During editing, attention is given to surface details "such as grammatical accuracy and correction of form". Brookes and Grundy (1990:55-58) recommend that student writers should be helped to see proof-reading "as an act of courtesy towards the reader".

To improve editing, the writer can use checklists to ensure that grammar, spelling, register and punctuation are correct. Du Toit et al (1995:294) suggest that the individual writer draw up a personal revision/editing checklist that will focus primarily on those problems that he/she is most likely to encounter. Dictionaries should be used to monitor and correct spelling (Geyser, 1996:236).

Editing is often more effective if the writer has not seen the text for a day or two (Du Toit et al.,1995:294). Geyser (1996:236) suggests that for editing purposes in a classroom situation, the text should be shown to a new classmate, i.e. one who was not involved with the text previously.

Writing, however, is an individual process. This, in essence, is what the use of strategies is all about - the individual using those strategies he or she finds effective in improving his/her writing.

3.6 Conclusion

Writing is distinctly human activity with infinite possibilities. Examples of idiosyncratic uses of writing are James Joyce's stream-of-consciousness novels or "novels" that users of the Internet can "write" and read at the same time. The use of strategies is an integral part of writing, so by implication, the use of strategies in writing too has infinite possibilities.

Successful writers are flexible in the way they use writing strategies and know how to adapt the use of strategies as the situation demands.

Although it is not clear exactly how the use of strategies contributes to successful writing, it is accepted that they do. Du Toit et al. (1995:284) state this emphatically in asserting that the use of strategies is the tool that gives the writer control of the writing process in that "it can liberate and empower your writing processes".

The strategies that successful writers (as opposed to less successful writers) use and how such usage contributes to successful writing are the focus of the empirical research of this study? This is discussed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD OF RESEARCH

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate and compare writing strategies used by successful English Second Language writers to those used by less successful English Second Language writers in order to establish whether the use of certain strategies contributes to successful English Second Language writing. The following aspects of the investigation are discussed in this chapter:

- design
- the selection of subjects
- the instruments used in this study
- how the data were collected and administered
- the analysis techniques used.

4.2 Design

The design used for the empirical investigation component of this study comprised a one-shot cross-sectional survey.

4.3 Subjects

Two groups of Grade II English Second Language pupils from the De Aar High School in the Northern Cape were used in the research. Both groups were made up of 3 boys and 2 girls between the ages of 16 ½ years and 17 ½ years. Group one (successful writers) comprised pupils all of whom regularly achieve high marks (B-symbols - 70% and above) for English written work assignments.

Group two (less successful writers) comprised pupils who regularly achieve relatively poor marks (E-symbols - ± 45%) for written work assignments. In selecting the subjects for both groups, particular attention was paid to the following aspects:

Grade 11 pupils were selected as subjects because it was felt that, as relatively senior high school pupils, the strategies that they use when writing have been entrenched over time.

All the subjects took part in the research on a voluntary basis. This ensured that differences in the levels of motivation of the subjects would not influence the validity of the data.

4.4 Instrumentation

The following instruments were used in the research:

- A questionnaire
- An interview

4.4.1 The questionnaire

A twenty-item questionnaire was constructed to investigate the subjects' general use of strategies when they engaged in writing assignments. In drawing up the questionnaire special attention was given to the following:

- The use of strategies in all types of writing that the subjects are required to write or write voluntarily.
- The use of all those strategies that are recognised in the literature on the subject as useful in improving the quality of writing.
- The questionnaire was constructed in such a way that all phases of the writing process were investigated systematically. This was done so that answering the questionnaire would approximate as closely as possible the process of completing a written work

assignment.

- All items were formulated very simply so that the subjects would understand what information was requested.
- Space was provided on the questionnaire for subjects to explain their preferences for using specific strategies as well as giving reasons why they find specific strategies useful.

The questionnaire was pilot-tested to ensure that the instructions/questions and format would be readily understood by the subjects. No changes were made to the questionnaire as a result of the pilot testing.

For full details regarding the questionnaire the Appendix can be consulted.

4.4.2 The interview

On completion of the questionnaires the subjects were interviewed individually. Each subject was required to verify/clarify, explain and/or motivate his/her responses to every item on the questionnaire. This made it possible to establish exactly which strategies each subject used as well as to determine his/her motivation for using the specific strategy. In the case where a strategy could be applied in different ways the subjects were asked to explain if they had any preferences and why.

All the subjects spoke English fluently but were allowed to switch to Afrikaans if they felt that it would help them to express themselves better. All the subjects were acquainted with the interviewer which made it possible for them to respond openly and honestly. The subjects were also required to explain to what extent the use of certain strategies was deliberate or to what extent the use of such a strategy was habit or instinctive.

4.5 Data collection procedure

All subjects were required to write a 300 - 350 word argumentative essay on ONE of the following topics:

In an over-crowded world all female pets should be sterilised.

OR

School uniforms are out of place in our modern world.

OR

Selling ivory and other products from wild animals should still be banned.

An argumentative essay was decided upon because of all the genres of writing, the argumentative essay has the most definite constraints as regards logical presentation and accuracy of formulation. This type of written work assignment provides ample opportunity for applying writing strategies.

The neutral topics for the essays were selected specifically so that issues around race, gender, religion and politics would not unfairly prejudice any of the subjects. All the subjects could reasonably be expected to have an opinion on one of the topics. Every effort was made to select topics that the subjects had not encountered before. The subjects were informed that no time limits would apply for the writing of the essay. Between one and two hours were required by the subjects for completion of the essay.

On completion of the essay the subjects were required to hand in all notes and rough drafts. This was to ensure that strategies such as "free writing" and "drafting" could be investigated and that the extent to which the subjects rewrite drafts could be established. Following that, the subjects were required to complete the questionnaire. The subjects were informed in detail

about the purpose of the questionnaire (for list of instructions in the questionnaire see Appendix), and it was made clear to them that the questionnaire was not a means of appraisal but an investigation of the individual's "modus operandi" when writing.

After completion of the questionnaire an interview was conducted with each subject. The interviews were conducted firstly to clarify and check the accuracy of the subjects' responses to the questionnaire. The questions used in the interviews were therefore determined largely by the way the subjects had responded to the questionnaire. The interviews did however make it possible to determine the subjects' insight into the purpose for using specific strategies through informal discussion. Each interview was recorded in its entirety on tape-recorder. The average time duration for the interviews was between thirty to forty five minutes.

The entire data collection procedure was completed during school hours. (Special permission for this was obtained from the headmaster.) This arrangement made it possible for the essays to be written while all the subjects were still fresh (rested). Because no demands were made on the subjects' free time the entire procedure could be completed thoroughly and unhurriedly in a relaxed but business-like atmosphere.

4.6 Analysis

The responses to the questionnaire were analysed by means of descriptive statistics (e.g. means, frequency counts). The responses to the interview questions were analysed according to the sub-processes: pre-writing, writing and rewriting. By analysing the data in specific categories it was possible to determine the different types of composing strategies used during each of the phases of the writing process, as well as to compare and contrast the strategies used by the successful and less successful English Second Language writers.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to discussing the results of the research. The results for each phase of the writing process are discussed separately under the following headings:

The use of strategies during the pre-writing phase.
The use of strategies during the writing phase.
The use of strategies during the rewriting phase.

5.2 The use of strategies during the pre-writing phase

During the pre-writing phase the writer thinks about and explores the theme/topic with the intention of generating ideas, some of which will be part of the final written product (cf. Geyser, 1996:222 ; section 2.3.3.1).

5.2.1 Individual writing

Pupils become successful writers if they gain insight into and accept responsibility for improving their own writing (cf. White & Arndt, 1991:5). *Individual writing*, such as the writing of journals or diaries, has been recommended, especially within the Expressivist school of the Process Approach, as a means for pupils to improve their writing.

The investigation of *individual writing* was the point of departure for the interviews so that the influence of *individual writing* on sucessful ESL writing could be investigated (cf. items 1.1 and 1.2 Appendix). The subjects were asked to indicate whether they engaged in *individual writing*, and if so, what kind of writing this was as well as how often this writing was done.

The investigation into the *individual writing* of the subjects of this study yielded the following results:

60 % of the subjects from the group of successful writers indicated that they wrote informal letters to friends at other schools. These were written in their home language, Afrikaans. 20 % of the subjects wrote articles and features for the school magazine. These were also written in Afrikaans. 20 % of the subjects wrote stories in English as means of stress relief - venting feelings of anger and frustration. All of the above writing was done on a relatively infrequent basis.

20 % of the subjects from the group of less successful writers indicated that they corresponded, now and then, with mail order companies in English. 40 % occasionally wrote letters to friends. The correspondence was done in Afrikaans. 40 % did not write anything apart from what they were required to write at school.

Individual writing, as a strategy for improving writing, needs to be practised on a regular basis (cf. section 3.3.1.2). None of the subjects from either group did this. Statistically, however, a significantly higher percentage of subjects from the group of successful writers (100% as opposed to 60%) engaged in some form of *individual writing* compared to the less successful writers.

No definite conclusions can be made from the above data about how effective *individual* (private) *writing* is as a strategy for improving English Second Language writing. However, two issues of interest are apparent. The majority of subjects from the group of successful writers engaged in some form of *individual writing* in their home language. The same was not true for the less successful writers. Certain researchers have indicated that writing skills are transferable from first to second language writing (cf. Krapels 1990:42-49). It can be concluded, therefore, that either the first language writing they are required to do at school and/or the *individual writing* they engage in privately, plays a role in the successful English Second Language writing of certain of the subjects. The successful writers were more

articulate about their approaches to writing (cf. section 5.8), and it became clear as the interviews progressed that they approached first and second language writing in the same way.

The less successful writers conveyed the impression that for them the dynamics of first and second language writing were different - "English written work was a problem - Afrikaans written work was not".

The other issue of interest is the creative aspect of the *individual writing* of the subjects. Analysis of the completed essays revealed that the best essays were written by the writers who engaged in creative *individual writing*, i.e. writing that allows for individual variation in expression. The writing of journals and keeping of diaries, which is recommended by the Process Approach, is an example of this type of writing. Although it cannot be emphatically claimed from the results of this study, it is possible that *individual writing* which focuses exclusively on functional and/or formulaic genres may not be as effective as creative individual writing is for improving English Second Language writing. The role of the teacher as collaborator in *individual writing* (cf. ch 2) must not be overlooked. With class numbers increasing constantly in South Africa, it will become more difficult for teachers to play this role. As a result, pupils who wish to improve their writing skills by engaging in *individual writing* may find it necessary to consult individuals/sources not connected to their schools for the valuable feedback which was previously provided by teachers.

5.2.2 Mind maps

None of the subjects was familiar with the use of this strategy, because their teachers were either unfamiliar with the strategy or neglected to teach them how to use it. This was an unfortunate shortcoming in the subjects' knowledge of writing strategies because use of *mind maps* is recommended by Du Toit et al. (1995:272) as a "most useful and least time-consuming strategy" (cf. section 3.3.1.5). Consequently, no conclusions could be drawn about the way the use of this strategy contributes to successful English Second Language writing.

5.2.3 Brainstorming

Brainstorming is, in essence, thinking about and discussing an essay topic. Two aspects concerning the use of this strategy were investigated: firstly, the number of subjects in each group who employ this strategy, and secondly, the preferences of the subjects from each group for the various types of *brainstorming* (cf. items 2.1 and 2.2 Appendix). The responses are set out in table 1 below.

Table 1: Brainstorming

	Successful writers	Less successful writers
Percentage of subjects who used this strategy.	100%	100%
Percentage of subjects who consulted adults about an essay topic.	60%	40%
Percentage of subjects who consulted classmates.	60%	100%
Percentage (of those subjects who consulted classmates) that preferred small group discussions.	100%	0% (60% indicated that they preferred whole class discussions to small group discussions. 40% had no preference)

The results indicated that this strategy was used by all the successful as well as the less

successful writers. This is an indication of how useful this strategy is for generating ideas - the most important activity during this phase of the writing process.

There were no significant differences as regards the percentage of subjects who discussed essay topics with their teacher and/or other adults. Where *brainstorming* involved discussion with classmates, there were significant differences between the two groups.

Of the 60% of the successful writers who indicated that they consulted their classmates, all of them indicated that they preferred small group discussions to whole class discussions. From the interviews it became clear that the successful writers preferred small group discussions because small group discussions allowed for meaningful exchange of ideas while whole class discussions strayed from the topic and degenerated into disorder. Small group discussions ensured quality feedback if the (successful) writers were allowed to choose the members of the group. Small group discussions made it possible for every individual to take part. Whole class discussions, on the other hand, were often dominated by one or two individuals. Although the successful writers differed in their preferences as regards types of *brainstorming*, they all shared the same concern that relevant ideas should result from *brainstorming*.

The individuals from the group of successful writers (40%) who indicated that they did not discuss essay topics with their classmates gave the following reasons: Classmates may "steal" ideas and, therefore, compromise the marks that the individual could have attained. Information from adults was regarded as more useful than that received from classmates because, in their experience, adults had more knowledge about the topic and gave valuable hints.

As illustrated in Table 1, the less successful writers, unlike the successful writers, did not prefer small group discussions as a type of *brainstorming*. The majority preferred whole class discussions. The subjects indicated that, in their opinion, whole class discussions resulted in the generation of more ideas because more individuals took part in the discussion.

The above data can be summarized in short: Successful writers are concerned about the relevance and quality of ideas generated by *brainstorming*. Less successful writers are concerned primarily about the number of ideas generated regardless of the relevance of these ideas to the topic. The significance of this difference in emphasis is found in the concept "focal ideas". White and Arndt (1991:45) point out that "the realization of a focal idea and viewpoint will be related to a writer's engagement of the subject". Successful writers are better at engaging the subject of an essay because they realize the importance of focal ideas (cf. section 3.4.2). The preferences of the successful writers of this study for *brainstorming* with either adults or in small groups with their classmates proves this.

It can be concluded, therefore, that successful use of this strategy is strongly linked to the writer's awareness of the importance of focal ideas.

5.2.4 Free writing

The strategy *'free writing'* involves the spontaneous writing down of any/all ideas about a topic that come to mind. Investigation of the use of the strategy, *free writing*, (cf. item 4, Appendix) yielded the following results. From the group of successful writers, 40 % indicated that they used this strategy. From the group of less successful writers, 60 % indicated that they used this strategy.

To conclude that this strategy is of limited value for successful English Second Language writing on the grounds of the above findings would be incorrect. During the interview, closer scrutiny of the way that the subjects from the group of successful writers approached the practical assignment showed that the distinctions between *free writing* and writing a first draft were not easily apparent. In certain cases, the first draft was written as if the writer was engaged in *free writing*.

This meant that the writer wrote down ideas in some detail without paying particular attention to the order in which the ideas should be written (cf. section 3.3.1.3). Consequently, the

second draft differed considerably from the first as regards the way the contents were structured. However, if the writer used the strategy, *free writing*, some attention was paid to the sequencing of contents before the first draft was written. In such cases the second draft was quite similar to the first one.

It can be concluded that a certain amount of writing is required from the writer, either in the form of *free writing* or as a loosely-structured initial draft, before the writer gets clarity about how he/she wishes to structure the contents.

These results confirm the perspective of the Process Approach that the act of writing itself often helps the writer to discover what he/she wants to say (cf. section 2.3.3.2). Du Toit et al. (1995:274) confirm that writing a full length draft before paying attention to selection and structuring of ideas is a widely used writing practice.

The usefulness of this strategy should not be disregarded merely because it was used by a majority of the less successful writers of this study. It became clear from the interviews that a more plausible conclusion could be that (as was the case for the use of the strategy '*brainstorming*') the less successful writers were not aware of the importance of 'focal ideas' and consequently did not use this strategy successfully (cf. section 5.2.3.).

5.2.5 Use of visual material

Visual material which includes representational material such as pictures or photographs, realia (physical objects) and symbolic material (charts, diagrams, maps) are often used by teachers as aids to help students generate ideas and to encourage individual writing. When the subjects were asked to indicate whether they found the *use of visual material* helpful in generating ideas the following responses were obtained.

- 60% of the successful writers indicated that they found visual material helpful. These subjects indicated that *use of visual material* made it easier for the writer to understand

what was required for successful completion of an assignment.

- *Use of visual material*, for example, getting pupils to respond to advertisements, made writing assignments more authentic and therefore more interesting.

100% of the less successful writers indicated that they found *use of visual material* helpful. During the interviews these subjects indicated that *use of visual material* stimulated the imagination and helped to generate ideas.

From the above results it is clear that successful writers are concerned with generating focal ideas that contribute to the quality of writing while less successful writers are concerned with generating "enough" ideas regardless of the relevance of these ideas.

Positive responses by 80% of the subjects to the use of *use of visual material* confirms the possibilities that exist for teachers in the use of this strategy. (In fact, it was clear from the interviews that the successful writers, especially, were not only positive about the *use of visual material*, they were enthusiastic.) By using *visual material* teachers will be implementing the accepted didactic principle of "perception" (cf. section 3.3.1.6).

Successful writers who indicated that they did not find *use of visual material* useful said that such material was restrictive in that it forced them to write "the same as everybody else". This objection points to motivation for writing well, and that successful writers accept responsibility for improving their own writing. The confidence that they would be able to cover a topic without the help of visual aids indicated that they had some insight into what was required during the writing process (cf. section 5.8). (During the interview, one of the subjects indicated that for her, writing was an opportunity to "implement" her individuality.)

Objections by successful writers that the *use of visual material* restricts their creativity can be allayed if teachers use abstract visual material, i.e. visual material that can be interpreted any way that the individual chooses to (cf. White & Arndt, 1991:35).

5.2.6 Making notes

This strategy involves making notes when using an extraneous source to generate ideas for an essay. This includes notes on a lecture or interview, books or magazines that the writer consulted, or information given by the teacher in the case of pupils or students (cf. section 3.3.1.4).

The investigation into the use of this strategy yielded the following responses (cf. item 7, Appendix) as set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Making Notes

Percentage of subjects who used this strategy

	Successful writers	Less Successful writers
Often	0%	0%
Now and then	60%	40%
Never	40%	60%

Although approximately the same number of writers from each group indicated that they used this strategy, it became clear from the interviews that the less successful and successful writers have different perspectives on using this strategy in practice. Successful writers used this strategy to record what they regarded as important hints or information given by the teacher. This was done "now and then" when the writers were not familiar with the topic or type of assignment. For the less successful writers, the use of this strategy was primarily about generating ideas, either when discussing the topic with another person or when summarising a source such as a magazine article. In short, for successful writers the emphasis was on important or focal information while for the less successful writers use of this strategy focused

on the generation of ideas regardless of the relevance of these ideas to the topic.

5.2.7 Reading about a topic

This strategy entails consulting books, magazines and reference sources (written or electronic) about a topic to assist the writer in generating ideas (cf. item 8 Appendix). 80% of the subjects from each group indicated that they used this strategy, albeit infrequently.

The subjects from both groups gave similar explanations for using this strategy.

This strategy is useful when the writer does not know enough about the essay topic. One of the subjects indicated that he read up about those topics which he found especially interesting. Writers read up about topics when they were highly motivated to do well in an assignment. It was clear from the interviews that magazines were the most popular source consulted by the subjects.

Two reasons were given by the subjects for using this strategy infrequently. One was that they did not always have sufficient time to read up about a topic. The other was that the nature of their written work assignments was such that this strategy could not always be used.

5.2.8 Setting questions

By *setting questions* which explore a topic (and finding answers to them) writers are able to generate ideas about a topic (cf. section 3.3.1.6). 60% of the subjects from each group indicated that they used this strategy.

During the interview the less successful writers indicated that they found this strategy useful because it enabled them to arrive at the "correct" facts. It also helped them to get more ideas. The successful writers indicated that they found this strategy useful because it helped them to get insight into the topic. *Setting questions* made it possible for the writer to cover the topic

adequately.

The above responses indicated that the less successful writers were more concerned with the generation of ideas while the successful writers were concerned about covering the topic adequately.

These results were similar to those obtained for the use of the strategy *brainstorming* (cf. section 5.2.2). The successful writers were concerned about focal and relevant ideas, while the less successful writers were more concerned about the number of ideas. In the classroom clear evidence for this difference in perspective on writing between successful and less successful writers is that the successful writers are concerned about focal and relevant ideas, while the less successful writers are often unduly concerned about writing the specified number of words and often interrupt the writing process by counting how many words have already been written. Successful writers in their concern for covering the topic adequately focus on both the selection and structuring of content. Examiners have over time assessed what number of words, approximately, an assignment should be if these aspects of writing are given due attention. Successful writers usually find that the piece that they have written falls within the specified number of words without them having tried specifically to achieve this.

5.3 Conclusion

The following conclusions can be made from the results of the investigation into the use of strategies during the pre-writing phase.

Individual writing

Successful writers do more *individual writing* than unsuccessful writers. First language writing and/or *individual writing* that has a definite creative component may contribute to successful English Second Language writing.

Brainstorming

This strategy is used by both successful and less successful writers. Successful writers, however, are concerned with the relevance of ideas to the topic while less successful writers are concerned primarily with the number of ideas generated.

Free writing

Both successful and less successful writers use this strategy. Certain successful writers do not use this strategy but commence immediately with a first draft. Successful use of this strategy is linked strongly to the extent that writers rewrite initial efforts (cf. section 5.6.1).

Use of visual material

Successful and less successful writers find this strategy useful for generating ideas. *Use of visual material* contributes to assignments being experienced as authentic and meaningful. Certain successful writers experience *use of visual material* as restrictive to creativity.

Setting questions

Successful and less successful writers have different emphases in the way they use this strategy. Successful writers use this strategy to explore the topic more extensively while less successful writers use this for generating ideas per se.

From the above summary it is clear that the results of this research revealed no significant differences between successful and less successful writers as regards the use of specific writing strategies and the range or variety of strategies used.

Because the strategies investigated were used by approximately the same percentage of subjects from each group, there was no indication from the results of the research that certain

strategies during the pre-writing phase are more effective than others for successful English Second Language writing.

The results of the research did reveal that the successful and less successful writers had different perspectives and emphases regarding the use of writing strategies. For example, the successful writers used the strategy *brainstorming* to arrive at focal ideas, i.e. ideas relevant to the topic, while the less successful writers were primarily concerned about the number of ideas which could be generated by using this strategy. Similarly, when using the strategy *setting questions* successful writers focused on the relevance of ideas that could be generated, while the less successful writers were concerned primarily about generating enough ideas so that they would be able to write the specified number of words. Stated briefly, successful writers seem to have a more holistic, reader-based perspective on the use of writing strategies than less successful writers.

The above results corroborate results of pioneering Process Approach research into the ways that successful and less successful writers approach writing assignments. Zamel (1987:269) points out that while skilled and unskilled writers alike used retrospective structuring (i.e. going back to what has been written before), only successful writers revealed the opposite writing behaviour, "projective structuring". Projective structuring is the ability to "get beyond the surface, ... to anticipate the needs and expectations of readers, and ... the ability to project oneself into the role of another reader." Less successful writers have a more "mechanical and formulaic view of composing". According to Zamel (1987:269), the results of pioneering Process Approach research confirmed this difference between skilled and less skilled writers. The importance of the use of strategies, therefore, lies not in the number or kinds of strategies used, but in the writers' understanding of how and why strategies should be used. The use of specific strategies should not be advocated without giving due recognition to the encompassing perspective, "projective structuring", which is the determining framework within which any strategy should be used.

5.4 The writing phase

This phase of the writing process marks a transition from writer-based to reader-based writing. The most important considerations (during this phase) for successful writing are:

- Selecting and structuring ideas.
- Considering reader interests.
- Drafting.

  (cf. Du Toit et al., 1995)

5.4.1 Selecting and structuring ideas

There are numerous ways that ideas and/or information can be structured, for example, chronologically, from the general to the specific, from the specific to the general, in ascending order or in descending order (Du Toit et al. 1995: 265-268). The selection and structuring of ideas directly influences the reader's understanding of what is being communicated. Consequently, writers need to be aware of the criteria that apply when selecting and structuring ideas (cf. White & Arndt, 1991:79; sections 3.4.2, 3.4.3).

Results of the investigation into the subjects' knowledge and the application of the possibilities and criteria for selecting and structuring ideas revealed the following:

From the group of successful writers, 60% of the subjects indicated that they were aware of the importance of selecting and structuring information. When interviewed about how they applied this knowledge (cf. Appendix, items 10.1/ 10.2 and 13), these subjects referred to relevant criteria such as logical progression, relevance to the topic and maintaining reader interest. In contrast, only 20% of the less successful writers showed any awareness of the criteria that apply when selecting and structuring ideas. For the most part, the remainder of subjects from this group were emphatic about not structuring ideas - "I use ideas as they come to me" was a response that characterised the point of view of these subjects. Another of the

subjects from the group of less successful writers indicated that selecting and structuring ideas was a question of intuition.

5.4.2 Considering the reader

Successful writers write with their reader in mind. The pivotal role that "reader awareness" plays in successful writing cannot be overemphasized. This is pointed out by Hedge (1986:63), who states that "It is a clear sense of audience which enables a writer to select appropriate content and express it in an appropriate form and style" (cf. section 3.4.2, 3.4.3).

The investigation of how aware the subjects of this study were about the interests of the readers was based on the assumption that the English Second Language teachers were the primary readers of the subjects' writing (cf. items 11,12,14, Appendix). This assumption was based on the grounds that compulsory writing for school was a significant component of all the subjects' writing. In addition, the English Second Language teacher was selected as primary reader because he/she could be expected to examine the subjects' written work critically.

From the group of successful writers, 80% of the subjects indicated that the opinions of their teacher/reader influenced the content and style of their essays. These subjects substantiated these responses with comments such as:

"I always try to remember that the reader may have a different point of view on the topic" and "Teacher X likes you to use big words while teacher Y does not mind how you write as long as you write something different - original".

These subjects were also aware of the importance of sustaining reader interest - the majority referred to the importance of writing a good introduction and conclusion. (One of the subjects revealed advanced knowledge on how to "pad" successfully.)

From the group of less successful writers only 20% were able to give any indication that they

took the reader's interest into account when writing. The subjects from this group either indicated that "they knew they should do it but they did not know how to" or that "allowing your teacher's opinion to influence your writing amounts to sacrifice of your self-respect".

The results above are confirmation of results of pioneer studies of the Process Approach conducted by, amongst others, Perl (1980) and Zamel (1987). From these studies it became apparent that unskilled writers took a mechanical and formulaic view of writing and were unable to anticipate the needs and expectations of their readers. Skilled writers were able to see their written work from the perspective of the reader.

5.4.3 Drafting

Drafting implies that a writer will write a version of a text that he/she knows will have to be improved upon. Writing more than one draft or rewriting an initial draft is accepted practice for successful writing (cf. Geyser 1996:233 and section 3.4.4).

During the interviews the number of drafts that the subjects usually write was confirmed and verified through reference to both the questionnaire and the completed essays. (Writing the essay over, neatly, was not regarded as a draft.) The results of this investigation into the number of drafts written by the subjects of this study are set out in Table 3 below. It was clear that this was a writing pattern that the subjects had established for some time.

It is clear from table 3 that the successful writers tend to write more drafts than the less successful writers. It became apparent from the interviews that the successful writers saw the writing of additional drafts as an opportunity to improve on what had been written, while the less successful writers were more concerned with "correcting mistakes". These findings corroborate the findings of pioneering Process Approach research that "less skilled writers were basically concerned with lexicon and teacher-generated rules and rarely modified ideas that had already been written down", while skilled writers were prepared to make changes which "represented a re-ordering of the whole" (Zamel, 1987:269). The extent of re-writing

that characterised these drafts is discussed in section 5.6.1.

Table 3: Number of drafts written

	Successful writers	Less successful writers
One	0%	60%
Two	80%	40%
Three	20%	0

The above results indicated that the number of drafts written influenced the success or otherwise of the completed assignment. From these results it is also clear that White and Arndt's (1991:100) recommendation, that pupils write at least three drafts (of which the third is the final product) can serve as a useful guideline for teachers of writing.

5.5 Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn from the results of this investigation regarding the use of strategies during the writing phase:

Unlike the less successful writers, the successful writers are aware of the importance of selecting and structuring information in accordance with the needs of the reader. The successful writers, unlike the less successful writers, are aware of the importance of considering the reader. Both of the above skills form part of the encompassing skill, projective structuring that is essential to successful writing. Successful writers write more drafts than less successful writers, so it can be concluded that writing more than one draft contributes to successful English Second Language writing. [Rewriting of a text so that it is neat and legible is not the same as writing another draft (cf. Geyser, 1996:233)].

5.6 The Rewriting/Revision Phase

The Rewriting and Revision phases are synonymous terms used to refer to the final phase of the writing process. This phase includes the activities of rewriting and revision as well as proofreading and editing.

5.6.1 Rewriting

Successful writing requires *rewriting* of initial drafts which will involve reconstruction of and improving on what has been written during the writing phase (cf. section 3.6 and 3.6.1). Pupils are often unaware of the importance of *rewriting* (cf. Geyser 1996:221). It was pointed out in Chapter 1 and 2 that, within the Process Approach, extensive *rewriting* is encouraged. It is believed that *rewriting* improves the quality of the final product.

A comparison of the extent to which the successful and less successful writers of this study rewrote their work (cf. items 15.3 and 16.2 Appendix) yielded the results set out in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Rewriting

	Successful writers % of subjects	Less successful writers % of writers
Significant differences between initial drafts and final products	80%	20%
Final product largely rewriting of drafts	20%	80%

Geyser (1996:221 and 233) points out that pupils have certain misconceptions about writing and rewriting. Exactly how difficult it is to write successfully is not always understood. Another misconception is that *rewriting* is primarily about neatness and legibility. The results of this study indicated that these misconceptions are especially prevalent amongst the less successful writers. These writers write fewer drafts - if they write more than one draft the second (and final) draft is essentially a neater version of the first draft. The successful writers, in contrast, not only write more drafts, but *rewrite* initial drafts more extensively. No time constraints were imposed for the practical exercise component of this investigation. The successful writers spent considerably more time in completing their essays - an indication that they are aware that successful writing requires considerable time.

It can be deduced that the understanding of the successful writers that successful writing requires extensive *rewriting*, contributes significantly to their success. "*Rewriting*", as stated by Geyser (1996:233), "is the backbone of a successful writing process" (cf. section 3.5.1).

5.6.2 Reading-in-role

Effective revision of what has been written requires the writer to *read in role*, i.e. from the point of view of the reader (cf. section 3.5.2). The writer, who has mastered *reading-in-role*, knows that the possibility always exists that part of what has been written might not be clear to the reader (cf. item 17, Appendix).

In their responses, 40% of the less successful writers indicated that their readers might, now and then, misunderstand what they had written. From the group of successful writers, 100% indicated that the reader might, now and then, misunderstand what they had written. It was clear therefore that a significantly higher percentage of the successful writers were aware of the importance of *reading-in-role* (cf. section 3.5.2).

It was clear from the interviews that use of this strategy was "instinctive" for the successful

writers and that use of this strategy related strongly to these writers. understanding the importance of considering the reader (cf. section 5.4.2). These writers were especially aware that "cultural differences" between reader and writer might influence understanding of what had been written. In the case of less successful writers, the prime concern was that spelling and construction errors might influence the reader's understanding of what had been written. The less successful writers, therefore, were unaware of the importance or usefulness of reading in role. This is confirmation that these writers do not apply "projective structuring", the importance of which is discussed in full in section 5.8.

5.6.3 Conferencing/Writers' groups

According to Geyser (1996:234), feedback is as essential to successful writing as a mirror is for shaving or putting on lipstick. Two strategies that enable the writer to obtain feedback are "*conferencing*" and "*writers' groups*" (cf. section 3.5.2). The subjects were not familiar with the strategy, "*writers' groups*". Consequently, no data about the use of this strategy could be collected.

The investigation into the use of the strategy "*conferencing*" yielded the following results (cf. item 18, Appendix).

The same percentage of subjects, 40% from each group, indicated that they used this strategy on an infrequent basis. Their motivation for employing this strategy was the correction of grammar and spelling errors. This amounted to a limited and restricted use of this strategy as a means of ensuring successful revision, because revision involves a more extensive and inclusive look at what has been written. According to Geyser (1996:233), "revision includes a critical look at the relevancy of the content and the clear and logical organisation of the text." Spelling and grammar errors become the focus only where the text, as a whole, has been revised (cf. Geyser, 1996:234-236).

Unfortunately, no conclusion could be made about the way use of this strategy contributes to

successful English Second Language writing, because none of the subjects of the study knew how to apply it correctly.

5.6.4 Checklists

A strategy that assists the writer to revise his/her work properly is the use of a checklist (cf. section 3.5.2). All the subjects of this study were unfamiliar with this strategy. Consequently, the research did not shed any light on the use of this strategy.

5.7 Conclusion

The subjects from both groups were generally unfamiliar with those strategies that can be employed during this phase of the writing process. The results did yield one emphatic conclusion, which is that extensive rewriting contributes to successful writing.

5.8 Subjects' insight into the application of writing strategies

Ellis (1994:546-548) as well as Van der Walt and Dreyer (1995:316) emphasise that it is important for language learners to have insight into the effective use of language learning strategies (cf. sections 3.2.4 and 3.2.5). In order to establish the insight of the successful and less successful writers into their use of writing strategies, all the subjects were given an opportunity during the interview to explain (in an informal way) which strategies they found particularly effective for successful writing and why (cf. item 21, Appendix).

The subjects responded as follows: 60% of the subjects from the group of less successful writers indicated that it was not possible for them to choose a strategy and to explain why, in their experience, use of this strategy was effective for improving writing. The remaining 40% indicated that "using one's imagination" was important when writing an essay. However, these subjects were unable to explain during the interviews how this helped them to improve their writing. It is clear, therefore, that the less successful writers in this study had little, if

any, insight into how writing strategies can be used effectively to improve writing.

The responses from the successful writers differed significantly from those of the less successful writers. During the interviews the successful writers responded as follows: 20% indicated that they found *free writing* to be particularly useful because this made it possible "to discover" the most important ideas of the essay.

20% of the subjects indicated that "imagining my point or statement from another point of view" was particularly effective. This pointed to their use of a strategy similar to "*setting questions*".

40% of the subjects indicated that planning an essay in some detail was important for successful writing. One of the subjects indicated that a writer should "think about how you are going to write your whole essay before you start writing it, while another said that "when I write an essay, I always think about the topic and what I am going to write in which paragraph and when". The subjects, therefore, understood the usefulness of the strategy *brain-storming*.

The successful writers of this study, unlike the less successful ones, revealed considerable insight into the effective use of strategies to improve writing. These results confirm what became clear from the results of this investigation into the use of strategies during the pre-writing phase, namely that understanding the purpose for using writing strategies is more important than the use of a specific strategy or set of strategies.

Teachers of writing should, therefore, not be too prescriptive or rigid in teaching the use of specific writing strategies. There is room for individual preferences in the selection of language learning strategies and, by implication, writing strategies (cf. Silva 1990:16; Scarcella and Oxford 1992:63). The importance of not emphasising the use of specific strategies at the expense of awareness of the reasons for using these strategies, is pointed out by Johns (1990:26), who states that "the goal of a teacher is to produce good writers who not only have a large repertoire of powerful strategies, but have sufficient awareness of their own

process to draw on these alternative techniques as they need them. In other words, they guide their own creative process". As was pointed out in section 5.3, "awareness of reader concerns" is the key aspect of *projective structuring*. *Projective structuring* rather than the use of specific strategies, is essential for successful writing. This is the most important conclusion that can be drawn from the results of this investigation. The implications of the results of this study for the teaching of writing are discussed in the section which follows.

5.9 Guidelines for the teaching of writing strategies

The most important findings of this study are the following:

- Understanding the purpose for using a specific writing strategy plays a very important role in successful writing. The use of a specific strategy or sets of strategies is not especially important because successful and less successful writers generally use the same strategies (those strategies that they have been taught in the classroom). The reason for the differential success of the writers appears to be in the way they apply the same strategies. Successful writers, for example, apply the strategies *brain-storming* and *note-taking* to generate ideas that are central to the topic, while successful writers use the same strategies to generate any ideas that will ensure writing the prescribed number of words.

- Successful writers consider the interests of the reader. The importance of considering the interest of the reader (projective structuring) has long been recognised within the Process Approach to writing. The findings of this study confirm the importance of projective structuring for successful writing.

The Process Approach places particular emphasis on the importance of writing more than one draft and extensive rewriting for successful writing. The findings of this study, that successful writers write more drafts than less successful writers, and that successful writers do more extensive rewriting than less successful writers, confirm the importance of these strategies to successful writing.

The implications of the above findings for the teaching of writing are the following:

- The most important aspect of teaching pupils to use writing strategies is to teach the pupils the *purpose* for using a strategy/strategies. Writers will not apply strategies effectively unless they understand why they are using them.
- Pupils must be taught "projective structuring", i.e. to consider the interests of their reader and to see their writing from the reader's perspective.
- Pupils must be taught that writing more than one draft improves the quality of the written product. They must also be taught that extensive rewriting is a prerequisite for successful writing.

The following teaching guidelines are suggested:

5.9.1 Teach pupils to acquire a holistic view of the writing process

The result of this study validated the Process Approach view that composing/writing should be seen from a holistic perspective. Only if strategies are used within the context of such an approach do they become the useful tools for improving writing that they are supposed to be. By definition, a holistic approach will involve giving due recognition to the importance of each of the sub-processes of the writing process. By taking a holistic view of writing pupils will learn the importance of projective structuring, i.e. anticipating the expectations of the reader and ensuring that what is written is in accordance with the original purpose for writing.

5.9.2 The pre-writing phase

Teachers should make a conscious effort to teach pupils the following strategies that are widely recommended for improving writing, paying particular attention to the points

mentioned below.

Individual writing:

The importance of getting pupils to take responsibility for their own writing has long been recognised within the Process Approach. Creative *individual writing* should be encouraged. Pupils should also be made aware of the possibilities of applying any strategies that prove effective for first language writing to second language writing as well.

Brainstorming:

The use of *brainstorming*, whether in small group or whole class discussions, should be carefully orchestrated to ensure that activities will generate ideas which are central to the topic.

Mind maps:

Mind maps (tree diagrams) are recognised as valuable learning aids across curricula. This strategy can be used to generate and to structure ideas. Its usefulness for successful writing must not be overlooked.

Free writing:

Teachers should keep in mind that to write is seen within the Process Approach as one of the most effective ways of generating and structuring ideas.

Use of visual material:

Although this strategy has proven to be popular with both pupils and teachers, teachers must bear in mind that weaker writers often interpret visual material too literally. This results in

such pupils often writing off the topic.

Reading about a topic:

If pupils find a topic inspiring or interesting they are more likely to read up about it. Integrating reading and written work assignments is a widely recommended practice in ESL teaching. Teachers should try to find interesting reading material for their pupils and then set essay topics on such material. Unsold newspapers or magazines are a cheap and reasonably easily acquired source for such material.

Classroom experience has shown that pupils who read widely are often more accomplished writers. Stoop (1997:45) states that "Reading provides a natural stimilus for writing ..." Teachers should, therefore, encourage pupils to read as much as possible. However, time constraints make it impossible for a writer to read up about a topic every time a written assignment has to be completed. Portfolio writing (where pupils are required to complete a variety of written assignments, having been allowed an extensive period of time) will give writers the best opportunity to apply *reading about a topic* effectively. In this way, portfolio writing can contribute to making writing a more pleasurable activity. However, caution should be exercised when advocating the use of this strategy. Experience has shown that weaker or inexperienced writers are often guilty of plagiarism when *reading about a topic.*

Reading is an endangered habit in the electronic age. Getting pupils to employ this strategy will require some persuasion from teachers.

Pupils should be taught not to start writing a final draft until they have a clear idea of what they want to say. They have to be taught to think over the topic carefully and to plan properly. Thinking through the topic carefully helps writers to establish focal ideas. Focal ideas serve the dual purpose of being central to the content of what is to be communicated and provide the necessary focus for the reader to understand the gist of what the writer wishes to convey.

5.9.3 The writing phase

This study as well as the review of the literature has confirmed the importance of writing more than one draft. Pupils must, therefore, be taught that writing more than one draft is a prerequisite for successful writing. Moreover, good writing involves extensive rewriting. Pupils must be taught to accept that rewriting large sections of an early draft is not an indication that their writing is heading for failure but rather that it is a way of ensuring success.

Considering the reader's interest rather than concerns with neatness and/or spelling and grammatical correctness should be the initial area of focus when rewriting an initial draft. In this way pupils will succeed in applying projective structuring - a hallmark of successful writers.

5.9.4 The revision/rewriting phase

It was pointed out in section 3.6.1 that pupils are often unaware of the sub-processes that form part of this phase of the writing process. Teachers must get pupils to understand that rewriting must be done systematically. This implies that writers have to revise a text, which necessitates taking a critical look at the content and organisation of the text (cf. section 5.6.3). After a text has been revised it has to be edited, which means that sentence structure, tone and register have to be considered before the writer implements the final sub-process, proofreading, which entails checking spelling, punctuation and grammar.

The old adage that many minds are better than one applies to the writing process as well. Pupils should be encouraged to discuss uncompleted essays with teachers and/or classmates. The feedback received can be reliable in assisting the writer to improve the final product and ensure success.

5.9.5 Time constraints

Time constraints and deadlines are the unfortunate but necessary evils of almost all writing done at school. Although there can be no justification for wasting time, teachers should exercise a degree of flexibility regarding written work exercises and the time allowed. If a writer is sufficiently motivated to want to write his/her best he/she should be allowed time to do it. Portfolio writing (pupils are required to hand in a portfolio of completed work after a relatively extensive period of time) can be an innovative way of counteracting the problems caused by having to impose time constraints on writers.

5.10 Conclusion

Successful writers are writers who have insight into the purpose for using writing strategies. Teachers should, therefore, not only teach pupils about writing strategies but also give them the opportunity to practise using such strategies as well as give their pupils feedback on the use of these strategies.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises a synopsis of the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings of this study, an examination of the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.

6.2 Conclusions from the findings of this study

The aims of this study were to establish whether successful English Second Language writers use different writing strategies from those used by less successful writers and to determine whether successful English Second Language writers use a greater variety of strategies than less successful English second Language writers.

There was no conclusive evidence from the results of this study that successful English Second Language writers use different writing strategies from those of less successful writers. It was evident that writers at school, successful and less successful alike, almost exclusively use those writing strategies that they have been taught in the classroom. It follows logically, therefore, that there was no indication from the results of the research that successful English Second Language writers use a greater variety of strategies than less successful writers.

What was clear from the results of the investigation was that successful and less successful writers applied (the same) writing strategies in a different way. This was especially evident in the way the subjects applied the strategies *brainstorming, making notes, selecting and structuring information* and *rewriting*. In each case, it was clear that successful writers applied these strategies in such a way that the written product will be best understood by the reader. When applying the strategy *brainstorming*, for example, successful writers

prefered to discuss the essay topic in small groups with the intention of establishing "focal ideas", which are essential for successful writing. In contrast, less successful writers prefered *brainstorming* in full class discussions because they were concerned with generating as many ideas as possible, regardless of the relevance of these ideas to the topic.

Similarly, the successful writers were aware of the importance of structuring information so that what has been written would be best understood by the reader. The interest of the reader was also the motivation why successful writers wrote more drafts than less successful writers and that these drafts were extensively rewritten.

All these differences in the way that successful and less successful writers apply writing strategies can be best understood within the concept of "projective structuring" (cf. section 5.3). Pioneering research from a Process Approach perspective indicated that successful writers were able to do "projective structuring". Projective structuring means to anticipate the needs of the reader and not getting bogged down by concerns about correctness and form. According to Zamel (1987:269), less successful writers have an inhibited perspective on writing, which is mechanical and formulaic. The most significant result of this study has been confirmation of the validity of the results of earlier research on the importance of "projective structuring".

It is clear, therefore, that as far as the use of writing strategies is concerned, understanding of the purpose for which strategies are used is more important than the selection of a specific strategy. Consequently, use of a strategy will not necessarily prove more effective than the use of another strategy. Evidence for this was the fact that successful writers used the strategies *free writing* or *writing an additional draft* interchangeably to achieve the same result. In an overview of the conclusions that can be made from research into language learning strategies, Ellis (1994: 558 - 559) expresses similar observations. He states that it is questionable that there are "good" strategies and that "It is likely that it is not so much how often learners use strategies as when and with what purpose they use them".

To summarise: The central most important conclusion that can be made from the results of this study is that successful English Second Language writers use writing strategies in a co-ordinated way to achieve success. This conclusion corresponds with an observation by Lavine and Oxford (cited in Scarcella & Oxford, 1992:63):

> It appears that skilled learners tend to select strategies that work well together in a highly orchestrated way, tailored to the requirements of the language task. Less skilled learners might use similar strategies with similar frequency, but without the careful orchestration and without appropriate targeting of the strategies to the task.

The term "projective structuring", that has been referred to frequently in the discussion of the results of this study, is in essence using writing strategies in an orchestrated (i.e. integrated, holistic) way.

6.3 Limitations of the study

Although every care was taken to select the subjects for this study in accordance with the aims of the research, certain aspects about the selection of "successful English Second Language writers" at school remain problematic.

A high premium is placed on original ideas in school writing to the extent that coherence and logical progression receive less emphasis than is usual outside school. This may account for the inconclusive results of this study regarding strategies for editing and proofreading. Conversely, the marked differences in the perspectives on the use of strategies during the pre-writing phase between the less successful and the successful writers may have been influenced to an extent by the fact that successful writers at school are by definition successful/original thinkers who explore a topic extensively. High school pupils often move between classes and/or teachers. This means that it is not always possible to establish long-term writer profiles of the subjects. Ideally, older writers who have well-established profiles as successful English

Second Language writers should be the subjects when investigating the usefulness of specific strategies for successful English Second Language writing.

The subjects for this study were selected from a school in the Northern Cape. The official departmental policy in this province is that senior certificate English Second Language candidates be allowed to choose between either written work exercises with a strong creative bias or written work exercises with a definite functional "English for Special Purposes" bias. It is, therefore, possible that the subjects in this study have over time been trained in writing different genres which necessitate the use of different strategies, especially during the pre-writing phase.

The study was not as successful in obtaining significant data concerning the rewriting phase as it was for the pre-writing and writing phases. There are two possible reasons for this. The first is that the subjects were generally unaware of those strategies that can be applied during this phase of the writing process. The other possible reason is that the activities of the rewriting phase could not be investigated adequately by means of a questionnaire and interview only. Individual observation combined with a composing aloud procedure/protocol aimed specifically at investigating the rewriting phase might have yielded valuable information about the way successful vs. less successful writers do their revision, editing and proofreading.

6.4 Recommendations for future research

6.4.1 Linking research to specific genres

The results of this study are inconclusive about how the use of certain writing strategies contribute to successful English Second Language writing. A possible reason for this is that successful writers should have a large repertoire of strategies which they use as the situation demands. It is advisable, therefore, to link research into the use of writing strategies to specific writing tasks. In this way researchers will be able to advise learner-writers about those strategies that prove to be especially useful for specific writing tasks. Such research, however,

should be done from the holistic perspective of the Process Approach.

6.4.2 The influence of first language writing on second language writing

Research findings on the relationship between L1 and L2 writing have been contradictory. Krapels' (1990:53) tentative assertion that "research this far hints that L1 composing competence somehow affects L2 composing" is all that is known about this aspect of writing. Conclusive research may point the way to increased co-operation between L1 and L2 teachers for the benefit of the pupil.

6.4.3 Motivation and successful English Second Language writing

Motivation has long been recognised as a determining influence in the acquisition of a second language. A significant percentage of the subjects in this study revealed that they go about their writing differently depending on how motivated they are. It seems likely that successful writers are motivated writers. Therefore, research into motivation and successful English Second Language writing as well as research on how to motivate writers can contribute much to the understanding of what writing is about.

6.4.4 Writing and the word-processor revolution

The electronic revolution has had a profound effect on the way people do their writing. The mental processes involved when using the word processor are not likely to differ significantly from those involved when putting pen to paper. However, the mechanics of the processes involved for getting words onto the page do differ considerably. Therefore, research is necessary to investigate if pen and paper strategies have any role to play when a word processor is used for written work. The writer that uses pen and paper has immediate access to what has been written before, which serves as a guide to what has to be written next. This is not always true when the word processor is used. It is therefore an open question how the

user of a word processor compensates for not always being able to refer immediately to what has been written before.

6.4.5 English Second Language writing and time constraints

A study of the article "What does time buy?" (Kroll, 1990:152-153) reveals the paucity of data on how time constraints influence English Second Language writing. The results of this study validate Kroll's (1990:152-153) assertion that pupils "who do not know what constitutes good writing will never write well regardless of how much time they are allowed." However, more specific information is needed on the exact influences of time constraints on English Second Language writing.

6.4.6 Research design

Krapels (1990:51-53) discusses numerous problems that have been experienced with the design of research into writing. Problems with comparative analysis, generalizability, doubts about the credibility and validity of protocol analysis and the contradictory results of research findings thus far are some of the problems referred to. Research design itself should be the subject of investigation.

6.5 Conclusion

The findings of this study seem to indicate that writing more than one draft contributes to successful English Second Language writing. It was also clear from the results of the study that extensive rewriting of initial drafts is integral to successful English Second Language writing. Apart from the proven effectiveness of these two strategies no definite conclusions could be derived about whether a specific strategy of a combination or set or strategies contributes to successful English Second Language writing. It was, however, clear from the results of this research that writing strategies are only used successfully if the writer understands the purpose for using a strategy/strategies. Unlike less successful writers,

successful writers consider the reader when writing.

The ability to communicate extensively in writing is a defining characteristic of humankind. Successful written communication, many will testify, is not as easily accomplished as oral communication "Learning to write is no natural development like learning to speak" (Terblanche, 1903:6). However, the pen, even if it is rendered obsolete by the electronic word processor, will remain mightier that the sword.

SUMMARY

Keywords: strategies, writing, successful; unsuccessful; English second language, essays; compositions.

Title: Composing strategies of successful and less successful ESL writers: A comparison.

Research and practical experience have shown that grammatical competence and adequate vocabulary do not necessarily ensure that pupils become successful ESL writers. This raises the question whether successful ESL writers use different and/or more effective composing strategies compared to those used by less successful writers. The aim of this study was to research this quistion.

Once the literature on those strategies that are recommended within the Process Approach for improving writing had been surveyed, a questionnaire was compiled for the purpose of investigating the use of these strategies by successful and less successful ESL writers. The subjects selected comprised two groups of five grade 11 pupils - a group of successful ESL writers who regularly achieved B symbols for written work assignments and a group of less successful ESL writers who, as a rule, achieved E symbols for written work assignments.

The subjects were required to write an argumentative essay of ± 350 words and then to complete the questionaire. After that, the subjects were interviewed individually. The most important conclusions from the results of the investigation were that:

Successful ESL writers do not use different strategies from those used by less successful writers. Writers almost exclusively use only those strategies that they have been taught in the classroom. This seems to be the reason why successful and less successful writers use the same strategies. The reason for differential success in writing therefore, lies not in the types of strategies the writers use, but that successful writers have insight into the purpose for applying a strategy/strategies.

Certain strategies are not more effective than other strategies. (Teachers therefore, must allow for individual preferences when teaching the use of strategies). For example, the successful writers of this study used either the stategy *free writing* or *drafting* to achieve the same result. Unlike the less successful writers from this study, the successful writers were aware of the importance of taking the reader into account while writing. This finding was confirmation of the results of pioneering Process Approach research that the writing methods of successful writers only, entail "projective structuring", i.e. anticipating the interests of the reader.

Effective use of strategies is the result of writers' understanding of the purpose for which strategies are used. The successful writers understand the importance of applying strategies during the pre-writing phase to generate focal ideas. They are also aware of the importance of selecting and structuring ideas/information according to the interests of the reader. The successful writers are also aware of the importance of restructuring information during the rewriting phase. In contrast, the less successful writers apply strategies in ad hoc way. These writers are primarily concerned with generating enough ideas to be able to write the specified number of words. These writers are unaware of the importance of reader-based writing and are preoccupied with surface aspects of writing such as spelling and grammatical correctness.

The results of this study indicate that successful and less successful ESL writers use the same writing strategies but that only the successful writers understand the purpose for applying a stategy/strategies. Successful writers consider the interests of the reader when applying writing strategies while less successful writers are unaware that the purpose for applying writing strategies is to make writing comprehensible to the reader.

OPSOMMING

Sleutelterme: strategië; skryf; suksesvol; minder suksesvol; Engels tweede taal; opstelle.

Titel: Die skryfstrategië van suksesvolle en minder suksesvolle Engels Tweede Taal opstelskrywers; 'n vergelyking.

Navorsing en praktiese ondervinding dui daarop dat kennis van taalstrukture en voldoende woordeskat nie noodwendig verseker dat leerlinge suksesvolle Engels Tweede Taal skrywers word nie. Dit het die vraag laat ontstaan of suksesvolle Engels Tweede Taal skrywers ander en/of meer effektiewe skryfstrategië gebruik as minder suksesvolle Engels Tweede Taal skrywers. Die doel van hierdie studie was dan om hierdie vraag na te vors.

Nadat die literatuur oor daardie skryfstrategië wat volgens die proses benadering aanbeveel word vir suksesvolle Tweede Taal skryfwerk nagevors is, is 'n vraelys saamgestel om die toepassing hiervan te ondersoek. Twee groepe kandidate wat bestaan het uit vyf graad 11 leerlinge is saamgestel - die eerste groep is saamgestel uit leerlinge wat gereeld B simbole behaal vir Engels Tweede Taal skryfwerk terwyl die groep minder suksesvolle skrywers saamgestel is uit leerlinge wat as 'n reël E simbole vir hul Engels Tweede Taal skryfwerk ontvang.

Die kandidate is gevra om 'n opstel van ± 350 woorde te skryf waarna hulle die vraelys voltooi het. Daarna is individuele onderhoude met die leerlinge gevoer. Die mees belangrikste gevolgtrekkinge wat gemaak kan word van die uitslae van hierdie ondersoek was:

Susksesvolle Engels Tweede Taal skrywers gebruik nie ander skryfstrategië as minder suksesvolle skrywers nie. Die kandidate van hierdie studie gebruik amper uitsluitlik daardie skryfstrategië wat hulle in die klaskamer geleer is. Die rede vir geslaagde skryfwerk lê dus nie by die tipe strategië wat hulle gebruik nie, maar in die meer effektiewe toepassing van dieselfde strategië.

Sekere strategië is nie noodwendig meer effektief as ander strategië nie. (Onderwysers moet dus leerlinge toelaat om individuele voorkeure uit te oefen in die seleksie van strategië). Die suksesvolle skrywers van hierdie studie het byvoorbeeld twee verskillende strategië gebruik om dieselfde doel te bereik.

Anders as die minder suksesvolle skrywers van hierdie studie, was die suksesvolle skrywers bewus van die belangrikheid daarvan om die leser in gedagte te hou wanneer hulle skryf. Hierdie bevinding bevestig die gevolgtrekking van vroëre Proses Benadering navorsing dat slegs suksesvolle skrywers vooruitdink en hul skryfwerk sodoende aanpas sodat dit vir die leser verstaanbaar sal wees.

Die effektiewe aanwending van skryfstrategië word bepaal deur skrywers se insig vir die redes waarom skryfstrategië toegepas word. Suksesvolle skrywers is bewus van die belangrikheid daarvan dat strategië aangewend moet word gedurende die beplannings fase om kern gedagtes vas te stel. Hulle is ook bewus van die belangrikheid daarvan om inhoud te selekteer en te struktureer volgens die behoeftes van die leser gedurende die skryffase en dat herstrukturering gedurende die herskryf fase noodsaaklik is. Daarenteen, pas minder suksesvolle skrywers strategië op 'n ad hoc wyse toe. Hierdie skrywers is hoofsaaklik daarop ingestel om te verseker dat hulle genoeg idees het of om die voorgeskrewe aantal woorde te skryf. Hierdie skrywers is onbewus van die noodsaaklikheid dat hul werk lesers-vriendelik moet wees en is behep met tegniese aspekte van skryf soos spelfoute en grammatikale korrektheid.

Kortom: die uitslae van hierdie studie dui daarop dat suksesvolle en minder suksesvolle Engels Tweede Taal skrywers dieselfde skryf strategië gebruik, maar dat slegs suksesvolle skrywers die doel waarom strategië aangewend word, verstaan. Suksesvolle skrywers is ingestel op die belange van die leser terwyl die minder suksesvolle skrywers onbewus daarvan is dat die gebruik van alle skryf strategië gemik is op 'n leser-vriendelike produk.

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APPENDIX

This questionnaire has been set up to find out how you go about writing essays. So, there are no right or wrong answers. What is important is that you tell us what you do when you write.

Please read all the items carefully and make sure that you know what you are being asked, before you give your answer. If any item is not clear, please ask the teacher.

Answer as truthfully as possible - do not give answers that you think the teacher wants to get.

You may take as long as you like to complete the questionnaire - we would like you, please, to answer as accurately and thoroughly as possible.

RELAX

1.1 Do you ever write anything else apart from what you have to write at school?

Yes ☐

No ☐

1.2 If you answered yes please indicate with a X which of the following you write

Journals/diaries	☐	regularly	☐	now and then	☐
Private and business	☐	regularly	☐	now and then	☐
Poetry	☐	regularly	☐	now and then	☐
Stories	☐	regularly	☐	now and then	☐

Other (please specify, for example Pen Pals, School Magazine.)

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2.1 Do you do any of the following to get ideas for an essay?
[Mark with a (x)]

Ask/talk to your teacher ☐
Ask/talk to your friends/classmates ☐
Ask/talk to your parents/other people ☐

2.2 If you discuss ideas for an essay with your classmates - do you find it more helpful if:

A: You discuss in small groups ☐
B.: The whole class takes part in the discussion ☐
C.: A & B are equally helpful ☐

3.1 Many pupils at your school use mind-maps when they study. Do you find mind-maps useful in planning essays?

Yes ☐
No ☐

3.2 If you do use mind-maps to plan your essay - do you:

Simply write down the most important ideas ☐

OR

Write down the ideas in such a way that the connections between main ideas and supporting ideas are clear ☐

4. When you plan your essay - do you write down all the ideas that come into your head (good and bad) with the aim of sorting out the good and bad once before you start writing?

Yes ☐
No ☐

5. Imagine the following:
Your teacher gives you this task:
You have to write a letter to <u>apply for a job</u>. Do you think you will write a better letter if

A: The teacher gives you an actual advertisement from a newspaper for a real-life job.
☐

OR

B: The teacher simply tells you what job you have to apply for.
☐

Please give reason for your choice in the space provided.

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6. Do you find that you often use ideas in your essays which you got from reading books or magazines?
   Often ☐
   Now and then ☐
   Never ☐

7. Do you ever make notes to help you plan an essay, for example, notes on an article in a book/magazine or if you talk to/interview an expert?
   Often ☐
   Now and then ☐
   Never ☐

8. Do you ever get information for an essay by reading up about the topic? Yes or no. Please explain briefly.

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9. Do you find it useful to get ideas (when planning an essay) to ask questions such as: who, what, where, why?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Please explain briefly why you find it useful.

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10.1 Do you ever find that you have too many ideas for an essay?

Often ☐

Now and then ☐

Never ☐

10.2 If you do have too many ideas, how do you decide which to use and which to leave out? Explain briefly in the space provided.

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11. You have probably had more than one English teacher while at High School. Have you found that you write differently for different teachers? Please explain.

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12. Teachers often like to read pupils' work to the class. Do you keep this in mind when you write essays? Please explain.

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13. Is the order in which you use ideas in an essay important to you? For example, do you prefer to use your best ideas in the beginning of an essay or towards the end? Please explain.

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14. How dot you make sure that you do not start writing off the topic?

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You have now completed the most difficult part of the questionnaire. Thank you for keeping going. The questions that remain are all very easy to answer.

15.1 Before you hand in an essay – do you usually write 1,2 or 3 versions/forms/drafts of the essay?

One ☐
Two ☐
Three ☐

15.2 If you write more than one version of an essay, do the other versions look much like the first or do they differ quite a lot?

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15.3 Does it ever happen that you discover (while writing an essay) that what you have written is not what you meant to write? If so, how do you correct this?

Start all over from the beginning

☐

Cross out sentences or paragraphs that you want to change

☐

Leave the assignment and come back to it some time later

☐

16.1 Do you read through your work after you have written the first version/draft?

Every time ☐
Some times ☐
Never ☐

16.2 If you read through your work, do you find that you often have to change some (quite a lot) of what you have written? ☐
Change very little of what you have written ☐
Do not have to change anything at all ☐

17. When you read through a version of your work – do you get the impression that the reader will not understand what you have written?
Yes - ☐
Yes – now and then ☐
No – never ☐

18. Do you ever show what you have written to your teacher or a friend before you finish with the essay?
Yes – often ☐
Yes – now and then ☐
No – never ☐

19. Do you and your friends/classmates ever advise each other with what each of you has written before you complete you essays?
Yes – regularly ☐
Yes – now and then ☐
No – not at all ☐

20.1 Do you have a written list of things to check for when you read through your work?
Yes ☐
No ☐

20.2 If you have such a list, please explain what you have on that list and why.

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21. Finally, if you have a tactic, trick, method or strategy which you think works for you when you write essays, please tell us about it in less than 30 words.

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Thank you for your co-operation and may you one day also kiss the Blarney Stone!